



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 26, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

How the Hurricanes are battling through adversity in the stretch run of the season

By Chip Alexander

It's on to Dallas for the Carolina Hurricanes.

The Canes are limping a little, feeling the effects of four physical road games against the Tampa Bay Lightning and Florida Panthers. But they're still in first place in the Central Division with nine games remaining in the regular season.

The Canes (31-10-6) took away six of eight possible points from two-game sets with the Lightning and Panthers. Losing a two-goal lead in the third period Saturday and then losing in overtime 4-3 against Florida was a stinger, but they earned a point and remained in first.

"Coming in here with the injuries we have, we had great efforts from our top guys," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "They gave us everything they had. (The Panthers) were better than us tonight for sure but somehow we managed to get a point out of it. That says a lot about this group."

The back-to-back against the Dallas Stars that begins Monday will have the Canes playing the six games on their road trip in nine days. That's a lot of hockey, a very condensed schedule. That's asking a lot of the group.

Brind'Amour said Saturday morning that his lineup had a lot of "moving parts" and he wasn't sure what it might be Saturday night. Defenseman Brady Skjei and forward Jordan Martinook were injured and out, and forward Jesper Fast then was a late scratch — "He didn't feel right," Brind'Amour later said.

Add in goalie Petr Mrazek missing some games after "tweaking something," according to Brind'Amour, and forward Teuvo Teravainen not yet giving Brind'Amour a thumbs-up that he's free of concussion symptoms and ready to play, and it figures to be an interesting nine-game stretch to the regular-season finish line.

The Canes dodged a few injuries, too. Martin Necas took a big open-ice hit against Tampa Bay and Andrei Svechnikov was hammered into the boards Saturday on a dangerous hit from Patric Hornqvist of Florida. Neither Necas nor Svechnikov was injured but both hits were scary for the Canes.

With Fast out Saturday, Brind'Amour moved Steven Lorentz from the fourth line to Sebastian Aho's line. With Martinook out, Cedric Paquette was moved to Jordan Staal's line. The

fourth line had Drew Shore centering Morgan Geekie and Max McCormick.

Brind'Amour was going with three lines by the third period — Geekie had two shifts in the third and Shore and McCormick one each. And the Panthers, a strong third-period team against Carolina this season, kept coming, tying the score 3-3 and then winning quickly in overtime on Aleksander Barkov's goal.

Brind'Amour's decision to shorten the bench loaded up more minutes for others: Aho played more than 21 minutes, and Staal and center Vincent Trocheck almost 21. Then there were the defensemen: Jacob Slavin and Brett Pesce both logged more than 51 minutes in the two games against Florida, a nice chunk of it penalty-killing.

Brind'Amour was asked again Saturday morning about the balance between trying to win games, get into the Stanley Cup playoffs and win the division while trying to have a fresh, energized team for the playoffs.

"It's a concern, that's for sure, and a consideration," he said. "We've got to get in first and there's only one way to do it and that's the right way. It's hard to sit here and go, 'Oh, we're not going to play these guys.' Then you just pick up bad habits, do different things. Guys get out of rhythm.

"I think where you have an advantage is in a situation where a guy's a little nicked up, maybe we don't play him. I think that's where we can afford to do. We've done it with the goalies, because we have three good ones. But I really think you've got to play it the right way."

There will be no letup in Dallas. The Stars (20-15-12) are trying to climb into the fourth playoff spot in the Central, beating the Detroit Red Wings 2-1 in overtime Saturday. Dallas was two points behind the fourth-place Nashville Predators after Saturday's games but with two games-in-hand on the Preds.

"We just need to play our game and be ready for every battle and every shift," Svechnikov said Saturday.

Carolina Hurricanes vs Dallas Stars

When: Monday, 7:30 p.m.

Where: American Airlines Center, Dallas.

TV: NBCSN.



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The Athletic

DGB weekend rankings: The Canadiens' spot slips away, while the Central race is down to two

By Sean McIndoe

Look, we're not saying it's going to happen. We're not even saying it's likely to happen.

Still, you're a little nervous about missing the playoffs, right Habs fans?

OK, probably not. Being "a little nervous" was two weeks ago when the Habs were refusing to close this thing out even as the Flames were spiraling and the Canucks were sidelined. By last week, we were asking how worried the Canadiens should be, and the answer their fans kept offering was "A whole lot, but thanks for asking, really glad you brought that up right now."

Here's where we're at in the North: The Leafs just took two from the Jets in games that saw Winnipeg pull its star goalie and bench its best forward, so even though we've been here before, it's feeling pretty safe to say Toronto will finish first unless they collapse. That will give us an intriguing Jets/Oilers matchup in the first round, with lots of old-school Smythe Division baggage to unpack.

So who gets fourth? For most of the second half, that's been Montreal's spot to lose. It still is, but man, they're working on it. They've won three of their last 11, they can't score, and Carey Price and Brendan Gallagher are both out. They can't use Cole Caufield because they don't have cap space, and they don't have cap space because of how Marc Bergevin approached the deadline, and here we are.

But despite it all, they enter this week with an opportunity to put the whole thing to bed. A five-game Alberta trip featuring three against the Flames was a chance to knock out Calgary with a win or two, at which point it would just be about holding serve long enough to outlast the Canucks.

Instead, the Habs split two with the Oilers and then dropped the first two of the Calgary series, both in regulation. That moved the Flames to within four points, which is still a big gap. If Montreal win the finale Monday, then that's probably about it for Calgary. But if the Flames finish the sweep? Hoo boy.

Meanwhile, the Canucks are lurking, even with Elias Pettersson unlikely to return this year. They're eight points back but with five in hand, including two more this week against the Senators. Dom has Vancouver's odds at 19% and the Flames at 11%, which leaves the Habs sitting well north of "probably" but nowhere close to "sure thing."

The bottom line is that Montreal is still running this show. They've got 10 games left including tonight and if they win, let's say six of them, we're pretty much done. Winning six of 10 isn't too much to ask. It's pretty much the baseline expectation for a playoff team.

Is that what the Canadiens are? We're not sure. We've got 10 games to find out.

Road to the Cup

The five teams with the best chances of becoming the first team in history to win a Stanley Cup in July.

Don't worry Leafs fans, I won't put Toronto back in the top five and curse them to another losing streak. But I will give them mention, if only because this story about them helping their AHL squad was pretty cool. Jason Spezza seems like a good dude.

5. Pittsburgh Penguins (32-14-3, +32 true goals differential*) – Ah why not, let's use the revolving door of the five-spot to get the Penguins their first appearance of the season. Three straight wins against the Devils don't tell us all that much because [gestures at Devils], but Sunday's 1-0 win over the Bruins was impressive. Maybe not entertaining, but impressive. With the Islanders losing twice to Washington and the Caps missing Alexander Ovechkin, you could make a case for the Pens as the division's best bet right now. Would it be a good case? Eh, good enough.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (32-14-2, +35) – After ranking first or second every week all year, the Lightning slide all the way down to fourth. Should we be worried that they had a tough time with the Blue Jackets Sunday? No. About how they haven't had a three-game win streak in over a month? No. That they're still missing Steven Stamkos? Nah. That we're not completely sure Nikita Kucherov will be back at 100 percent for the first round? Not really. That the Panthers and Hurricanes won't go away, and the path out of the division looks brutal? Maybe, but maybe not. How about all of those things being true at the same time? Yeah, that's enough to make me worried, if only just a little.

3. Carolina Hurricanes (31-10-6, +37) – They earned three of four points in a pair of two-game series against the Lightning and Panthers, and now they're done with those teams. It's just nine straight against the Central also-rans to close out the season, which should be an opportunity to bank some points and get everything aligned for a long playoff run.

2. Colorado Avalanche (31-10-4, +54) – They're back, resuming a four-game series with the Blues by splitting a pair. They'll finish the set tonight, in what could be a first-round preview.

By the way, if you missed it last week, be sure to check out this profile of Nathan MacKinnon. If only for the dance video.

1. Vegas Golden Knights (34-11-2, +58) – I really don't love having two teams from the same division in the top two spots, since we know at least one of them will be out by the end of the second round. We've still got a few weeks to sort that out before the season ends, but for now the Knights



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have to be number one. They've got nine straight wins, seven by three goals or more, so they're peaking at just the right time.

It's hard to overstate how important the race for top spot in the division will be; it's the difference between playing the third-place team in the first round or a fourth-place team that might be 20 points worse. The Knights and Avs are going to have to go full throttle down the stretch, including a head-to-head on Wednesday. And the Wild aren't out of it yet.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Dallas Stars and Nashville Predators – There was a time when the battle for the last playoff spot in the Central looked like it could be a four-team race that came right down to the wire. That four-team part won't end up happening, as the Blue Jackets threw in the towel at the deadline to turn it into a three-team dance, and now the Blackhawks are all but out after the Predators took five of six points against them in this week's showdown series. But down to the wire? That part's looking good. Nashville vs. Dallas, who you got?

We've spent some time talking about the Predators, who morphed from the final boss battle of trade deadline sellers to playoff contenders over the course of March. They've cooled off a little since then, winning seven of 12 in April, but took care of business against the Hawks. With just seven games left on their schedule, they're holding down the division's last spot by total points.

But the Stars are right there, continuing to fight their way through a condensed schedule. They're two points back with two games in hand, which means this is basically a coin flip. (For what it's worth, Dom's model has the race as 50/48 in favor of Dallas.) And they may be getting some help down the stretch, as Tyler Seguin is nearing a return from that offseason hip surgery. He's unlikely to be an impact presence right out of the gate, but once he shakes off some rust he could make the difference in a game or two, and right now that might be enough to decide the race.

Once Seguin is back in the lineup, this Stars team looks a lot more like the one that went on a run last year. That team gave the Lightning a tough go in the Final, which is worth remembering as Tampa stands in the way of anyone looking to make it out of the division. There was a time earlier in the year when it looked like the Stars' slow start had just left them with too much hill to climb, but they've clawed their way back in. Now they just need to finish.

This week was a golden opportunity, with four straight against the Wings. They took three of four, which isn't running the table but will do. Saturday was almost a disaster, with the Stars shelling the Wings with 52 shots and still needing overtime to get two points, but they got them.

This is where the remaining schedule starts to loom large. The Stars and Predators only face each other once down the stretch, in Nashville on Saturday, so the race will be decided by the rest of the slate. That's not good news for Dallas. They've got nine games left, of which six are against the division's big three of Tampa, Carolina and Florida, including the Hurricanes Monday and Tuesday. The only positive for

the Stars is that they wrap up with a pair against the Hawks, which should give them a chance to cross the finish line with some wins. The Predators are done with Tampa, but do get the Panthers Monday and Tuesday and close with two against Carolina. The easy points on their schedule, as much as there ever is such a thing, would be a pair against the Blue Jackets next week.

It's not a four-team battle, but there's something to be said about an old-school two-team race to the finish. First prize is a chance to go through two of the league's best teams to get out of the division. Good luck.

The bottom five

The five teams that are headed towards the best lottery odds and trying to figure out if we should call this an Owen Power Ranking.

I don't really have anywhere else to put this, so we'll do it here since this is kind of the lottery section and lotteries are about landing good prospects who'll turn into great rookies.

So, the Calder debate. It started with some folks wondering if Jason Robertson was catching up to Kirill Kaprizov and making this a race. He is, although it's probably not enough given Kaprizov's highlight reel. But then the question morphed into whether Kaprizov should be eligible at all, given that he's 23 and has years of high-level pro competition in the KHL under his belt.

That's a good debate! It's worth having. I'm honestly not even sure which side I'm on, although if you forced me I'd probably lean towards tightening the rules a little. But let's just be clear: If you have a Calder vote this year, your job is to vote based on the criteria you've been given. The NHL has told us what a rookie is, and whether they're right or wrong, it's their call. You shouldn't be moving Kaprizov down your list, or even off your ballot altogether, based on what you think the rules should be. That's not your job. This isn't a situation like the Hart Trophy where there's some ambiguity about what exactly we're voting for; the Calder is pretty cut-and-dried. If you think Kaprizov had a better rookie season than Robertson (and so far he has), then he's your first-place vote. There's no degree-of-difficulty component here, so don't go and invent one.

5. Columbus Blue Jackets (15-25-10, -48) – Oh man. It's just that... I mean... how can we even do this when...

[Pours one out for the Detroit Red Wings.]

We'll miss you, boys. Thanks for the memories. We'll always have those 52 straight weeks in the bottom five. And also this. Rebuilding teams, man. They just grow up so fast.

Oh right, the Blue Jackets. Yeah, they're terrible.

4. Ottawa Senators (17-27-4, -40) – We were so close!

By the way, with the Red Wings finally out of the bottom five, it's worth pointing out that the Senators have been here even longer. Their streak dates back to March 2018, when they returned after a one-week absence. Over three years and 67 columns later, they're still here. To give you an idea of how long ago that was, the Sens had just welcomed Erik Karlsson back to the lineup, they were trying to figure out if they should give that year's first-round pick to Colorado, and Don



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Cherry had thoughts on the team moving to Quebec City. It was so long ago that the Predators were ranked as the best team in the league. And the worst team was... well, it was the Sabres. I guess some things never change.

Honestly, at the rate they're going (and other teams are imploding), it wouldn't be a shock to see the Sens off the list by the end of the year too. Maybe the end of the week.

3. Anaheim Ducks (14-27-7, -50) – Four straight losses, all in regulation, although three came against the Golden Knights juggernaut so what are you going to do. They've got a four-game series with L.A. coming up, which gives them a chance to extinguish the faint flickering hope of a Kings playoff push. Hey, it's not much, but it's something.

2. New Jersey Devils (14-27-7, -48) – The Devils went into yesterday's action with a chance to slip past the Sabres into 31st place. They didn't, but they did collapse late to lose their 10th straight, although they at least earned a point in the process. You don't take the Sabres' spot from them without earning it, but the Devils sure do seem to want to earn it.

1. Buffalo Sabres (13-29-7, -50) – Last week: A series against the Bruins, and one against the Rangers. This week: One against the Rangers, and a series against the Bruins. Look, Sabres fans, you said you wanted some consistency.

Meanwhile, a fan-voted award to recognize the player who "best embodies what it means to be a Buffalo Sabre" is a cool idea, even as it has some real Boaty McBoatface potential.

Not ranked: Chicago Blackhawks – The Blackhawks used to hang out in the section, spending the first four weeks of the rankings in the bottom five, drifting as low as number two.

But as the year wore on and they hung around a playoff race that few of us thought they'd be a part of, they escaped in mid-February, never to be seen again.

I'll admit, I was kind of rooting for them, partly because they were a great story and partly because them making the playoffs would have thrown the prediction contest into total chaos. The sight of a team that went into an unwanted rebuild season without their best prospect or their beloved captain or any goalies anyone had heard of making a "screw you" run would have been all sorts of fun.

They nearly pulled it off. They still could, theoretically, since they're not mathematically eliminated. But this week's series against the Predators was a disaster, and the news gets worse when you look at the upcoming schedule, with their next six coming against the Lightning, Panthers and Hurricanes. They needed to bank those points at the expense of the Predators, and they just ran out of steam.

So now what? Mark Lazerus took a deep dive on that, covering concerns ranging from Dylan Strome (a healthy scratch down the stretch) to Kirby Dach (good but not great as a sophomore) to whether there's enough help on the way for the blue line. Those are concerns worth talking about, but as far as the sort of problems we thought the Blackhawks might be facing this season, they're manageable.

The Blackhawks outperformed expectations this year. This being the NHL, that's a double-edged sword, because it means the rebuild won't benefit from a high pick in this year's draft. But for now, let's just recognize a team that surprised us, and almost pulled off a near-miracle. For a young team entering a new chapter, that's got to be worth something.



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Preview: Hurricanes at Stars

Canes aim to clinch playoff berth against climbing Stars

By Michael Smith

DALLAS - The third and final leg of a six-game road trip brings the Carolina Hurricanes to Dallas to face off against the Stars on back-to-back nights.

The Match-Up

Carolina Hurricanes (31-10-6, 68 points) at Dallas Stars (20-15-12, 52 points)

Monday, April 26, 7:30 p.m.

Watch: NBCSN

Listen: 99.9 FM The Fan, Hurricanes.com/Listen, Hurricanes app

Numbers to Know

600: Dougie Hamilton is set to play in his 600th career NHL game, and he'll become the 13th defenseman in franchise history to do so. Hamilton netted two goals against Florida on Saturday and has recorded 28 points (7g, 21a) in his last 28 games.

1: The Canes are a point away from clinching a berth in the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The Opposition

Last five games: 4-0-1, 9 points

At home: 12-6-8, 32 points

CAR vs. DAL: 5-1-0

Leading scorer: Joe Pavelski, 43 points (20g, 23a) in 47 games

The Stars are creeping up the standings in search of the fourth seed in the Central Division. After firing a season-high 52 shots on Jonathan Bernier, Dallas outlasted the Red Wings for a 2-1 overtime win on Saturday night to draw closer to Nashville in the standings. The Stars, who are 7-1-2 in their last 10 games, sit just two points out of fourth place with two games in hand on the Predators.

The Last Meeting

Petr Mrazek made his return to the crease and stopped all 28 shots he faced to earn his third shutout in his fifth start of the season on April 4. Jordan Martinook scored a breakaway goal, the lone tally in a 1-0 win for the Canes.

"That's just what Raz does. He's a gamer," Martinook said. "It was good to see him back in there. The results speak for themselves. He played phenomenal. Big saves when we needed them. A great game by Raz."



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Push for the Playoffs: Key battles for Central Division top four spots

By James O'Brien

Push for the Playoffs will run every morning through the end of the 2020-21 NHL season. We'll highlight the current playoff picture in both conferences, take a look at what the first-round matchups might look like, see who's leading the race for the best odds in the draft lottery and more.

With the Panthers facing the Predators and the Hurricanes squaring off vs. the Stars, Monday features key Central Division matchups with plenty on the line. The difference is that one team in each match wants to thrive (Panthers, Hurricanes) while their opponents are desperate to survive (Predators, Stars).

The Stars and Predators look likely to be locked into a very tight battle for the final playoff spot in the Central Division. Players aren't denying that they're eyeing the scoreboards and standings, either.

"We don't have a lot of time left, and we're doing a bit of standings watching, but we know we've got to take care of business in our end," defenseman Ryan Ellis said, via Field Level Media.

The Panthers won the last four consecutive games vs. the Predators, so Nashville indeed needs to "take care of business" in their end.

As you can watch on NBCSN at 7 p.m. ET (NBCSN livestream), the Hurricanes can clinch their playoff spot on Monday, depending upon how things go against a desperate Stars team.

When you're nearing that clinch level this soon, it's probably a matter of time. So, ultimately, the Hurricanes are most interested in building their lead for the Central Division title. Currently, Carolina holds a game in hand over Tampa Bay, and two more than Florida. With 68 standings points, the Hurricanes also hold a one-point advantage over the Panthers, and two more than the Lightning.

Overall, the Hurricanes are in a strong position — unless they can't exploit those games in hand. The Stars have even more on the line, and both teams have been hot, so this should be a real test for both teams.

We could see some of the better moments of this Push for the Playoffs.

IF PLAYOFFS STARTED TODAY (matchups by total points)

EAST DIVISION

1. Penguins vs. 4. Bruins
2. Capitals vs. 3 Islanders

NORTH DIVISION

1. Maple Leafs vs. 4. Canadiens
2. Jets vs. 3. Oilers

CENTRAL DIVISION

1. Hurricanes vs. 4. Predators
2. Panthers vs. 3 Lightning

(NOTE: Dallas currently holds a better points percentage than Nashville — .553 to .551.)

WEST DIVISION

1. Golden Knights vs. 4. Coyotes
2. Avalanche vs. 3. Wild

(NOTE: St. Louis currently holds a better points percentage than Arizona — .511 to .490.)

TODAY'S KEY GAMES

- Canadiens vs. Flames, 6:30 p.m. ET
- Avalanche vs. Blues, 7 p.m. ET
- Hurricanes vs. Stars, 7 p.m. ET (NBCSN livestream)
- Panthers vs. Predators, 8 p.m. ET
- Oilers vs. Jets, 9 p.m. ET
- Coyotes vs. Sharks, 10:30 p.m. ET

PLAYOFF PERCENTAGES (via MoneyPuck)

- Penguins – 99.99%
- Capitals – 99.94%
- Islanders – 97.4%
- Bruins – 94.5%
- Rangers – 7.5%
- Flyers – 0.2%
- Devils – eliminated
- Sabres – eliminated

PLAYOFF PERCENTAGES (via MoneyPuck)

- Maple Leafs – 100%
- Jets – 99.7%
- Oilers – 99.6%
- Canadiens – 72.3%
- Flames – 21.2%
- Canucks – 7.2%
- Senators – 0%

PLAYOFF PERCENTAGES (via MoneyPuck)

- Hurricanes – 100%
- Panthers – 100%
- Lightning – 100%
- Predators – 60.2%
- Stars – 38.5%
- Blackhawks – 1.3%



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Red Wings – 0%
Blue Jackets – eliminated

PLAYOFF PERCENTAGES (via MoneyPuck)

Golden Knights – Clinched
Avalanche – Clinched
Wild – Clinched
Blues – 50.4%
Coyotes – 38.6%
Kings – 7.7%
Sharks – 3.3%
Ducks – 0%

DRAFT LOTTERY PICTURE (via MoneyPuck)

Sabres – 17.2%
Ducks – 13.1%
Devils – 10.8%
Blue Jackets – 10.1%
Senators – 8.7%
Red Wings – 7.5%
Sharks – 6.3%
Kings – 5.6%

Canucks – 4.5%
Blackhawks – 3.2%
Coyotes – 2.6%
Flames – 2.5%
Flyers – 2.1%
Blues – 2%

ART ROSS TROPHY RACE

Connor McDavid, Oilers – 77 points
Leon Draisaitl, Oilers – 64
Nathan MacKinnon, Avalanche – 59
Mitch Marner, Maple Leafs – 59
Patrick Kane, Blackhawks – 58
Auston Matthews, Maple Leafs – 58

ROCKET RICHARD RACE

Auston Matthews, Maple Leafs – 34 goals
Mikko Rantanen, Avalanche – 26
Connor McDavid, Oilers – 25
Brad Marchand, Bruins – 25
Alex Ovechkin, Capitals – 24
Tyler Toffoli, Canadiens – 24



Carolina Hurricanes at Dallas Stars: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Hurricanes head to Dallas hoping to get separation from the Florida teams.

By Zeke Lukow

Carolina Hurricanes (31-10-6) vs. Dallas Stars (20-15-12)

2021 Regular Season Game 48
Tuesday, April 26, 2021 - 7:30 p.m. ET
American Airlines Center — Dallas, TX

Watch: Bally Sports South
Listen: 99.9 The Fan

SBN Opposition: Defending Big D

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The banged-up Carolina Hurricanes head to Dallas to take on the Stars after picking up six out of eight possible points in Florida. The Hurricanes look to finish up their penultimate road trip with success. The Canes had a day off yesterday to hopefully allow some of the six injured players from their last game to heal up.

With the Tampa Bay Lightning winning last night, the Canes have just a one-point advantage over the Florida Panthers and a two-point advantage over the Lightning. Carolina has a

game in hand over the Lightning and two over the Panthers. While the Canes have some breathing room, wins in Dallas would go a long way in separating the Canes from the teams in Florida.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Stars
Record	31-10-6	20-15-12
Goals/Game	3.17	2.83
Goals Against/Game	2.38	2.45
Shots/Game	32.17	30.23
Face Off Win %	54.0%	51.3%
Power Play % (Rank)	27.3% (1st)	23.9% (7th)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	84.5% (3rd)	79.5% (16th)
ES Corsi For %	53.31%	52.87%



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Category	Hurricanes	Stars	Category	Petr Mrazek	Spencer Knight
ES PDO	100.93	100.11	Save %	.939	.971
PIM/Game	07:40	07:10	GAA	1.60	1.00

Goaltender #1

Category	James Reimer	Anton Khudobin
Record	14-5-1	11-9-6
Save %	0.907	.910
GAA	2.68	2.35

Goaltender #2

Category	Alex Nedeljkovic	Curtis McElhinney
Record	8-2-2	3-3-1
Save %	0.929	0.88
GAA	2.05	3.16

Goaltender #3

Category	Petr Mrazek	Spencer Knight
Record	5-1-2	1-0-0

Game Notes:

- Tonight's game is the seventh of eight games the two will play in the regular season. So far the Canes are 5-1-0 against the Stars this season. The Canes are 2-0-0 at the American Airlines Center this season.
- The Hurricanes are also starting their eighth of nine back-to-back sets. They are 4-2-1 in the first game of back-to-backs and 5-2-0 in the back half of the sets.
- Brett Pesce scored his fourth goal of the season on Saturday. He now ranks second on the team in goals (4), assists (19), and points (23) by a defenseman. The only player that ranks higher in all three is Dougie Hamilton who had two goals in the same game.
- Saturday also marked the first time the defensemen combined for three goals for the Canes this season.
- Jamie Benn Ranks first on the Dallas Stars in goals (13), assists (14), and points (27). In his five games against Carolina this season, he leads all stars in the same categories with two goals, and two assists.
- Stars rookie Jason Robertson is on quite a tear with 14 goals and 23 assists for 37 total points in just 42 games played this season.



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Wolves can't catch Monsters

Wolves pull within one twice, but can't claim the equalizer in Cleveland

Rookie forward Tyler Angle scored two goals for the second day in a row as the Cleveland Monsters secured a 4-2 victory over the Chicago Wolves Sunday afternoon at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

Defenseman Max Lajoie and forward Anthony Richard scored for the Wolves (15-5-1-2), who twice pulled within one goal but could not find the equalizer. Goaltender Connor Ingram (0-2-1) stopped 19 of 22 shots.

Cleveland (13-7-1-0) jumped to a 2-0 lead in the opening seven minutes as the hosts scored twice in a 39-second span. Forward Tristan Mullin found an open spot in the lower part of the left faceoff circle and ripped home a pass from Zach Jordan at 5:38.

Shortly thereafter, veteran forward Brett Gallant sneaked behind the Wolves defense and scored on a breakaway to make it 2-0 at 6:17.

The Wolves responded with a strong two minutes on their first power play. One second before their man-advantage

expired, rookie Zach Solow set up Lajoie for a blast from the high slot to cut the deficit to 2-1 at 16:14.

The Monsters regained their two-goal lead when Angle, the late man on the rush, collected Liam Foudy's pass in the high slot and fired to secure a 3-1 advantage at 13:08 of the second period.

Chicago sliced the lead to 3-2 when Richard buried a shot on a 3-on-1 rush with 4:04 remaining in regulation. Defenseman Frederic Allard intercepted a pass in the neutral zone and moved it ahead quickly to allow Richard to catch the Monsters napping.

The Wolves kept up the pressure and removed Ingram with 1:52 left to get the extra attacker on the ice, but Angle posted an empty-net goal with 1:40 to go to clinch matters.

Monsters goaltender Matiss Kavaleniks (6-1-0) notched 28 saves to earn the win.

The Wolves wrap up three games in three days with a visit to Grand Rapids at 6 p.m. Monday. Chicago's next game at the Wolves Training Facility happens 7 p.m. Friday against the Iowa Wild.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 26, 2021

SportScan

Articles from outlets covering the Hurricanes' upcoming opponents and league-wide news

1210671 Dallas Stars

Believe it or not, the Dallas Stars are back in the playoff hunt. Here are 5 reasons why

By Matthew DeFranks 5:08 PM on Apr 25, 2021 CDT

The Stars enter the final nine games of their season squarely in the Central Division playoff race, a position that seemed farfetched two months ago but has become a reality thanks to a strong stretch of play since the start of the month.

Dallas is 9-3-2 since April 1, a .714 points percentage that is the sixth-best in the NHL during the month. It began the month seven points back of Nashville with four games in hand. It enters Monday's home game vs. Carolina just two points behind the Predators with two games in hand.

So how have the Stars done it? Why is Rick Bowness' crew back in the thick of the hunt in the Central? Here are five reasons.

1. Top line production

Roope Hintz and Jason Robertson have been the team's most dynamic and electrifying players for most of the season, but especially in April, when they have been two of the best players across the entire league. Since April 1, Hintz ranks fourth in points per 60 minutes at 5 on 5 (3.9) while Robertson (3.63) checks in at sixth.

Only one other team in the NHL has two players in the top six. Toronto's Auston Matthews and John Tavares are third and fifth, respectively.

Hintz and Robertson have been joined by Joe Pavelski on the top line, and the three of them have given the Stars and Bowness a bona fide top line that they lacked in the first half of the season before Robertson's emergence and amid Tyler Seguin's absence.

The Stars have looked to Hintz and Robertson for production, and they've delivered in a big way.

2. Improved goaltending

Anton Khudobin and Jake Oettinger were never the main problem for the light-scoring Stars during the first 21 1/2 months of the season. They were fine, but they weren't spectacular in stealing games often like Ben Bishop and Khudobin were in the past two seasons.

Both have been near the top of the league in April.

Among goalies with at least six games played in April, Oettinger ranks seventh in the NHL with a .930 save percentage, a sizeable jump from his .909 mark through March 31. Khudobin is 12th since the start of the month with a .923 save percentage, an improvement from .906 at the end of March.

Dallas and Vegas are the only two teams with two goaltenders under a 2.00 goals against average in April.

3. Jamie Benn's resurgence

Bowness moved Benn to center on April 8 in Chicago, and the Stars captain has thrived in the middle. Bowness said Benn is skating the best he's seen him skate during the coach's three years in Dallas, and Benn has helped drive a second line that also includes Jason Dickinson and Denis Gurianov.

Benn has been a force in the faceoff circle and picked up his power-play scoring, resulting in nine points in 10 games since the move to center. He won Saturday's game in Detroit with an overtime goal just 32 seconds into the extra period.

4. Best penalty kill in the league

The Stars' penalty kill is 25 for 27 since the start of April, a 92.6% success rate that is the best in the NHL during the month. Part of that is the improved goaltending from Oettinger and Khudobin, but the Stars killers have also done a good job of limiting shots from opposing power plays, ranking fifth in shot suppression across the same period (40.1 shots on goal per 60 minutes).

Dallas has gone six straight games without surrendering a power-play goal and hasn't given up two PP goals in a game since March 11.

At the end of March, the Stars penalty kill ranked 25th in the league. It is now up to 16th.

5. The schedule

The Stars feasted on the bottom feeders of the Central Division in the last week, going 5-1-0 against Columbus and Detroit. They were even able to squeeze out a pair of wins in overtimes/shootouts against the Red Wings.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210672 Detroit Red Wings

World U18 hockey report: Clarkston's Ty Gallagher scores goal in pre-tourney victory

The Detroit News

Gallagher is a 6-0, 190-pound defenseman who had 10 goals and 11 assists for 21 points in 41 games with the National Team Development Program this year.

A national champion with the U14 Compuware team in 2018 and a 2022 commit to the University of Notre Dame, the 18-year-old Gallagher had 22 points (11 goals, 11 assists) in 49 games with the U17 NTDP last year.

Gibson Homer (Grand Rapids, Mich.) and Kaidan Mbereko (Aspen, Colo.) split the game in net and Northville resident Sasha Pastujov had an assist for Team USA, which will begin the tournament on Monday against Russia at 9 p.m.

The 2020 tournament was scheduled for USA Hockey Arena in Plymouth before the event was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Plymouth was set to host again this year as a do-over but with Michigan's stricter COVID guidelines, USA Hockey moved the tournament to the Dallas suburbs at the Comerica Center in Frisco and the Children's Health StarCenter in Plano.

This year's U18 worlds feature players born in 2003 and earlier and is the last major tournament for draft eligible players prior to their first year of draft eligibility.

The Red Wings lead the NHL with 12 picks in the 2021 draft, including eight picks in the top 100 and five in the top 60. Buffalo is second with 10 picks followed by Montreal, Minnesota and Columbus with nine picks.

The U.S. enters the tournament having medaled in a record 16 consecutive tournaments, including six golds in the past 10 events.

Twenty-three of the 24 players on Team USA's roster are from the NTDP, including Gallagher, Homer, Mbereko and Pastujov.

World U18 tourney glance

What: 2021 IIHF Under-18 Men's World Hockey Championship

When: Monday-May 6

Where: Frisco and Plano, Texas

U.S. schedule: Monday vs. Russia, 9 p.m., Tuesday vs. Germany, 9 p.m., Thursday vs. Czech Republic, 9 p.m., Saturday vs. Finland, 9 p.m.

Playoffs: Quarterfinals on Monday, May 3, semifinals on Wednesday, May 5, final on Thursday, May 6

TV: Playoffs on The Hockey Network, preliminary games streamed on HockeyTV.com.

Detroit News LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210673 Detroit Red Wings

After rough start, goaltending emerging as strength for Red Wings

Ted Kulfan

Detroit — There was a belief the Red Wings' goaltending would be a consistent area of strength before the season began.

And, after some minor blips and downturns — and an injury — that level of consistency has arrived.

It's getting to the point where the Red Wings are likely expecting Jonathan Bernier and Thomas Greiss to come through with an elite game.

Which isn't easy — but they keep doing it.

It was Bernier's turn Saturday, stopping a whopping 50 shots in a 2-1 overtime loss to Dallas.

"He was excellent," coach Jeff Blashill said.

Saturday's 50-save game was the first for a Wings' goalie since Jimmy Howard did it on Jan. 7, 2010 in Los Angeles.

Bernier became the seventh Wings goaltender to reach 50 saves in a game, joining a pretty impressive list: Howard, Terry Sawchuk, Glenn Hall, Roger Crozier, Jimmy Rutherford and Roy Edwards.

Bernier could feel as the night went on, that was seeing pucks well and extremely sharp.

"I know I'm on my game when I'm at the top of the crease and I see pucks from the point," Bernier said. "They have some really good

defensemen who get the puck through. They were shooting from everywhere tonight, for sure."

Bernier appreciated the praise and comments from teammates after the game, but it didn't take away the bad taste.

"They were happy for me, but for me, it's finding a way to get a win, and I wasn't able to," Bernier said.

An unrestricted free agent this summer, Bernier was believed to be one of general manager Steve Yzerman's best bargaining chips at the trade deadline.

But the Wings decided to keep Bernier — who returned to health just before the deadline after missing several weeks with a lower body injury — and it's likely the organization will sign him to a new contract at some point.

With a 9-9-1 record, 3.02 goals-against average and .912 save percentage, Bernier has for the second consecutive season been among the best Wings in the lineup.

After a slow start, Greiss (6-15-7, 2.95 GAA, .904 SVS), hasn't lost in regulation time in his last six decisions (4-0-2).

Greiss stopped 43 Dallas shots Thursday, as the Wings earned their only win during the four-game series, 7-3.

"He's done a good job in the last stretch for sure," Blashill said.

"(Thursday) was as clean a game as he's had. That first period, we played fairly good, it was fairly even, and we gave up two real chances and he made big saves. Now, you walk out of the period up 3-0 (which the Wings did) and it could have been 2-1 them.

"That's just the difference a goaltender can make."

Cholowski impressing

Could defensemen Dennis Cholowski be making a statement he's ready for a full-time NHL job?

In his 10th game this season Saturday, Cholowski arguably had one of his best, scoring the Wings' lone goal and being a presence with the puck.

"The last two games were his best two," Blashill said. "He really had command of the puck. He was probably our best breakout guy, and was probably our best neutral zone transition guy.

"He did a real good job."

Grinding through

With forwards Dylan Larkin, Tyler Bertuzzi, Robby Fabbri, Frans Nielsen and Bobby Ryan all out of the lineup, the Wings are going through a difficult stretch as the season winds down.

But Blashill isn't making excuses, and views it as an chance for younger players to establish themselves.

"It's been a hard run lately," Blashill said. "It happens some years. Unfortunately for two years in a row we've been hit. The significance of the injuries and where those players fit within your team definitely have a big impact.

"A year ago we missed (Danny) DeKeyser basically for the whole season and that was a huge loss. This year we missed Bert (Bertuzzi) for a lot of the year. Then you start getting into guys like Fabbs (Fabbri) and Larks and Bobby Ryan and Nielsen and it becomes a lot.

"But it also gives a chance for the group that's getting an opportunity to play to show what they're all about. One thing that's allowed our team to have success this year is when we've been that elite group of work ethic and competitiveness. It's a calling card for our team and guys have bought into it."

Detroit News LOADED: 04.26.2021



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1210674 Detroit Red Wings

How to watch Detroit Red Wings vs. Dallas Stars (4/24) - NHL Regular Season | Channel, Stream, Time

Updated Apr 24, 6:57 PM; Posted Apr 24, 3:00 PM

By Lauren Williams

The Detroit Red Wings and the Dallas Stars have played three games so far this season. The Stars have a 2-1 advantage. So the Red Wings are looking to even the series in the fourth and final game on Saturday.

The game will take place at Little Caesars Arena and will air on Bally Sports Detroit. Fans can stream it on AT&T TV.

Detroit had a strong showing against Dallas on Thursday, thanks in part to the four-goal night from Jakub Vrana. It was much needed as the Red Wings have lost several of their offensive weapons due to injury.

The Red Wings still have Filip Zadina, who has 18 points through 42 games this season.

Here's how to watch Saturday night's game.

What: NHL Regular Season

Who: Detroit Red Wings (17-25-7) vs. Dallas Stars (11-7-4)

When: Saturday, April 24

Time: 7 p.m. ET

Where: Little Caesars Arena -- Detroit

TV Channel: Bally Sports Detroit

Live Stream: AT&T TV

Michigan Live LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210665 Columbus Blue Jackets

Takeaways: Eric Robinson nets a pair, but Blue Jackets' plight worsens in latest loss

Brian Hedger

Following the Blue Jackets' practice Saturday, a melancholy John Tortorella described what it's like for his team going through a brutal eight-game stretch without a victory.

"We haven't won any games," the Jackets' coach lamented. "It can't get any worse. If you're not at least putting a couple of wins in the (game) situations to feel good about yourselves, that grinds you."

It's also testing their patience, because things actually did get worse Sunday night at Amalie Arena. Not only did the Blue Jackets' winless skid grow to nine straight games with a 4-3 overtime loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning, but it also cost them one of their top two goalies.

Joonas Korpisalo left the game at 2:41 of the third period with a lower-body injury and didn't return, ending his night prematurely after he'd kept the Blue Jackets in the game while they were dominated during the second period. His status is unknown — Tortorella didn't provide an update — and the Lightning literally added insult to injury by tying the game seconds after it happened.

Korpisalo appeared to strain something attempting to move right-to-left in his crease on a missed shot by Alex Barre-Boulet and wasn't able to move back to his right to contest the rookie forward's second attempt from the left wing. That one ripped into a wide opening of the net as Korpisalo watched, giving Barre-Boulet his first NHL goal and the Jackets' netminder a limp.

Korpisalo headed straight back to the locker room and didn't return. Elvis Merzlikins played well coming off the bench cold to replace him, but he couldn't stop a shot by star defenseman Victor Hedman 10 seconds into overtime.

It's gone that way for much of this season and throughout this winless slide, which has dropped the Blue Jackets uncomfortably into last place of the Central Division. It's a vantage point that Tortorella hopes they don't forget.

"We're trying to keep it as loose as we possibly can, when we do have our practice days, but you can't forget about the feeling," he said. "I don't want them to forget about the feeling that they have right now and that they're going to have here for a couple more weeks."

Here are more takeaways:

Robinson nets two

Eric Robinson hadn't scored since April 1 against the Lightning, a drought of 11 games that ended Sunday with a pair of goals.

Robinson gave the Blue Jackets leads of 2-1 at the end of the first period and 3-2 at the start of the third, but neither one held up. Regardless, the 25-year old forward again flashed skills that give him potential to stick around the NHL for a while.

The goals pushed his total to seven in 50 games, which is the same number he scored last season in the same number of games. Robinson has two more assists this year for 14 points, but his ceiling could be higher considering his speed, size, strength and improving shot.

"The puck always follows him," Tortorella said. "He puts pressures on teams with his skating. There's a lot more that he needs to improve ... but he's around it. It follows him. He's involved in it."

Grigorenko ends drought

Mikhail Grigorenko tied it 1-1 late in the first period with a nice snap shot from the slot off an even better feed by defenseman Vladislav Gavrikov. It was Grigorenko's first goal since Feb. 2, which ended a goalless span of 14 games that stretched over absences of 19 games and three games as a either a healthy scratch, part of the taxi squad or sick with a "non-COVID illness."

Grigorenko hadn't played since the second game of the six-game trip in Dallas, returning to action while rookie Kole Sherwood sat out. The 26-year old forward was nearly a point-a-game player the past two years in the Kontinental Hockey League, playing for CSKA in Moscow, but his return to the NHL has been a disappointment with three goals, seven assists and 10 points in 26 games.

Like some other Blue Jackets, Grigorenko is now likely playing to earn another one-year NHL contract for next season.

Another struggle in the second

It's gotten to the point where the Blue Jackets might consider it a success if they only allow a goal or two in the second period of their remaining games.

That was certainly the case Sunday, when Mathieu Joseph's tying goal for the Lightning was the only one that got past Korpisalo despite Tampa Bay building a 16-5 edge in shots. The Blue Jackets have been outshot 584-485 and outscored 64-34 in the second period this season, which is something they've struggled with all year.



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It could've been much worse Sunday had it not been for Korpisalo, who made 15 of his 23 saves in the middle period and stopped Blake Coleman on back-to-back shots off a shorthanded breakaway.

"He played well," Tortorella said. "We played a decent first period. We just stopped getting above the puck in the second and there were so many odd-man rushes. That's where he gave us an opportunity to stay in the game."

Quick hits

— Jack Roslovic won 12 of 15 face-offs for an 80% success rate, but Domi was Tortorella's option to start overtime at center. Domi had two assists and played stronger game overall, which Tortorella factors into his OT decisions, but he also went 6 for 17 on draws (35%) and lost the opening face-off in OT against Brayden Point. Nine seconds later, Point hit Hedman with a pass for the winning goal.

— Patrik Laine skated 15:22 on 20 shifts and almost finished with a clean slate of zero additional numbers on the stat sheet. The towering winger was assessed one giveaway and nothing else. No shots. No attempted shots. No hits. No takeaways. No blocked shots. No face-offs. It's nearly impossible to make a positive impact that way.

— Gavrikov logged quite a game. The second-year defenseman had an assist on Grigorenko's goal, spent 4:41 killing penalties, was credited with three hits and six blocked shots and skated a total of 20:57 on 22 shifts. He also finished with a plus-1 rating.

— Bjorkstrand also notched two assists to push his team-leading point total to 38 on team-highs of 15 goals and 23 assists. He also extended a point streak to five games and has a scoring line of 1-5-6 in that stretch.

— Mikko Lehtonen also assisted on Grigorenko's goal for his first point in 13 games with the Blue Jackets, who acquired him in March from the Toronto Maple Leafs for goaltending prospect Veini Vehvilainen.

— Point, Ondrej Palat and Hedman all finished with seven points in the eight-game season series against the Blue Jackets, which tied them for most among Lightning scorers. Point had three assists Sunday, while Hedman had a goal and assist to go with Palat's goal and two assists. Palat also scored the winning goal in the third period of Tampa Bay's 3-1 victory Thursday in Tampa.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210666 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets can't overcome poor luck, Korpisalo's injury in ninth straight defeat

Brian Hedger

The way it ended Sunday night at Amalie Arena was almost perfect.

Perfectly awful, that is, after the Blue Jackets had another gutsy performance become their ninth straight winless effort in a 4-3 overtime loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

This time, star defenseman Victor Hedman delivered the final blow, lifting the Lightning to victory just 10 seconds into the 3-on-3 OT period with a hard shot past goalie Elvis Merzlikins.

"It's good to be doing the right things and make sure you're playing the right way, but it's hard – when you're not getting the result – to stick with it," said Blue Jackets forward Eric Robinson, who recorded his first two-goal NHL game. "I thought we did a good job these past two games (in Tampa) of sticking with it during tough times and I think if we keep going with it, we'll see a result here soon."

The loss concluded another brutal six-game road trip for Columbus, which will now play five of its final six games on home ice at Nationwide Arena. That's little consolation for a team trying to end a frustrating losing skid while also playing out the string in a lost season.

It's a different story for the Lightning, who are bound for the playoffs to defend their Stanley Cup title. Tampa Bay wasn't as sharp as usual, but still got goals in regulation from Ondrej Palat, Mathieu Joseph and Alex Barre-Boulet plus a three-assist effort from Brayden Point. Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy earned a win with 19 saves.

Robinson and Mikhail Grigorenko scored for the Blue Jackets (15-26-9), who got a pair of two-assist games from Oliver Bjorkstrand and Max Domi plus 23 saves from Joonas Korpisalo — who left with a lower-body injury at 2:41 of the third period. Seconds before allowing Barre-Boulet to tie it 3-3 on a power play, the Jackets' netminder was injured moving right-to-left on a missed shot by the Lightning forward.

It was Grigorenko's holding minor that preceded the goal that irked Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella most – along with three other penalties that led to his team's penalty-kill units going 3 for 4 against the Tampa Bay man-advantage.

"We take too many penalties," Tortorella said. "We can't take that many penalties, but it is what it is as far as 'Korpi' being hurt right prior to the cross-ice pass (to Barre-Boulet)."

The Jackets were also felled by poor luck, starting with Korpisalo leaving.

After appearing to pull a muscle or tendon on Barre-Boulet's missed shot, the Jackets' netminder was unable to push back to his right to attempt a save on the Lightning forward's second attempt. That one hit the back of the net to knot the game just 1:46 after Robinson scored his second of the game just 55 seconds after the period began.

Korpisalo skated off gingerly and limped to the locker room. Merzlikins entered the game cold off the bench and helped the Jackets earn at least a point in the standings. He went 7 for 7 on saves in the remaining 17:19 of regulation, but couldn't stop Hedman's wrist shot from between the circles in OT.

More misfortune for the Jackets preceded Hedman's goal, which beat Merzlikins to the stick side. Prior to Hedman getting the puck from Point, the Lightning won two key puck battles off the opening face-off. Ondrej Palat got inside position on Seth Jones right after the puck hit the ice, tapping the puck into the Columbus zone, and Point overcame Jones' diving swat to nix a potential breakaway by gaining possession against Domi on the right wing.

Domi, the Jackets' center, lost his footing trying to stop near the boards and tumbled to the ice. That left Point free to skate below the goal line, spot Hedman open in the slot and send a pass before Jones could break it up.

The game was over a second later and the Jackets' winless skid was extended.

That's how it's gone for them most of this season, especially during 3-on-3 overtime periods. The Blue Jackets are now 2-7-0 in games that end in OT, which has contributed to their drop to the bottom of the Central Division.

"We haven't really talked about that," said Bjorkstrand, who was also on the ice in OT. "From my point of view, you've got to go out there and, obviously, try to make something happen. But it just hasn't really happened for us this year."

The bright side is they haven't stopped trying.

Despite being outplayed for much of the first period, the Jackets only trailed 1-0 on Palat's goal before Grigorenko and Robinson scored late for a 2-1 lead. Grigorenko tied it 1-1 with his third goal of the season, scoring with a snap shot off Vladislav Gavrikov's pass with 2:44 left, and Robinson tied it with 31 seconds left on a wraparound.



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Those goals provided a late boost, but the Jackets' maddening habit of getting outplayed in the second happened again. Joseph tied it 2-2 at 6:09 in the middle period to cap a 2-on-1 rush, but the upside for Columbus was that his goal was the only one the Lightning scored despite a 16-5 edge in shots.

The Blue Jackets didn't get a shot against Vasilevskiy until 11:00 into the second period, but stayed in the game thanks to Korpisalo — who thwarted multiple odd-man rushes and made back-to-back saves on Blake Coleman's short-handed breakaway.

Korpisalo's night just didn't last much longer and the Jackets' mind-numbing winless streak did.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210667 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets' coach John Tortorella laments lost season: 'No one wants to be irrelevant'

Brian Hedger

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella looks on during a timeout against Carolina on March 20. Said Tortorella: "Our locker room has not been good this year, and it's under my watch."

The Blue Jackets are officially an also-ran.

They've been mathematically eliminated from the playoffs for the first time in five years and have six games remaining after concluding a season series against the rival Tampa Bay Lightning on Sunday.

Coach John Tortorella hopes his team stamps this loathsome period of time into its collective memory bank.

"No one wants to be irrelevant," he lamented. "And that's what we are, at this time of year ... and no one wants to be in this situation."

The next words Tortorella uttered, separated by a couple of pauses, landed every bit as heavy as goalie Elvis Merzlikins' heartfelt repine two days earlier about losing sleep and feeling embarrassed about a winless slide that moved to eight straight games Thursday in a 3-1 loss to the Lightning.

"This is," Tortorella began, pausing. "Uh ... this is a bad one. This has been a bad year. I don't think anything's really worked out, throughout it, for quite a long time. But you can't look backward. You've got to look forward."

It should be noted that Tortorella doesn't have a contract to remain in Columbus beyond this season and there is a growing contingent of hockey "insiders" who now expect that he and general manager Jarmo Kekalainen will part ways after this season.

If so, Tortorella will end his tenure with the Blue Jackets as the most successful coach in franchise history. If not, he certainly doesn't want to go through another season here like this one, which was fraught with controversy and pitfalls from the start.

"You've got to try and learn from some of these things that happened, I think, as a coach, as a player, as an organization, as a manager — all the way through," he said, canvassing everything from off-season moves that didn't pan out to disgruntled former center Pierre-Luc Dubois requesting a trade to the underwhelming performance of Patrik Laine following that deal. "I think everybody has to look at what happened here and learn from it. ... That's the greatest lessons you can take out of it."

That doesn't start on the ice.

Tortorella's comments were about the winning culture that was instilled after he took over as coach in 2015, which provided building blocks for things the Jackets had never done before.

They set a franchise record in 2016-17 with 108 points and qualified for the playoffs the past four seasons. Their most notable achievement was probably the stunning sweep of a record-setting Lightning team in the first round of the 2019 playoffs, eliminating the NHL's Presidents' Trophy winners for the team's first series triumph.

This season has made that feel like eons ago.

Nick Foligno, the Blue Jackets' revered captain, is a Toronto Maple Leaf now. David Savard, another franchise pillar, is on the other side of the burgeoning Columbus-Tampa rivalry.

Artemi Panarin is a New York Ranger. Josh Anderson is a Montreal Canadien. Dubois is a Winnipeg Jet. Ryan Murray is a New Jersey Devil. Riley Nash, though injured, is also a Maple Leaf. Alexander Wennberg, Markus Nutivaara and Anthony Duclair are Florida Panthers along with Sergei Bobrovsky and first-year Panthers' GM Bill Zito, who was Kekalainen's former right-hand man.

The Blue Jackets have also lost Zach Werenski and Boone Jenner to season-ending injuries and haven't had Gustav Nyquist (shoulder surgery) all year. Those losses look mountainous in hindsight, and Tortorella said the crushing weight of them was felt primarily in one place this season — which began with Foligno, Savard, Dubois and Nash still wearing the Jackets' crest on their jerseys.

"We have spent so much time in that locker room the past six years, before the on-ice product is shown, and I think it goes in that order," Tortorella said. "You can look at skilled guys, you can look at all the things that look nice on the ice. If you don't have a foundation of having a solid locker room, you are going to go through what we've gone through this year."

It has gnawed at Tortorella relentlessly with every stomach-churning loss.

"Our locker room has not been good this year, and it's under my watch," he said, noting that it wasn't just young players in the Blue Jackets' room who needed to work on professionalism. "It's my responsibility and it's a big frustration of mine that I have not been able to corral that room. And the integration of new players that happened here, some of the (things) that went on at the beginning of the year, as far as a player wanting to leave and all that stuff, we've done it now two of the past three years.

"We've had a lot of things go on in that room, but we've been able to tamp it and get it back together. Through my leadership, my responsibility, I have not been able to do that this year, and I think that's a big reason why you don't get an on-ice product."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210668 Columbus Blue Jackets

Playing 'like a rat' helped Powell's Carson Meyer earn NHL deal with Blue Jackets

Brian Hedger

Forward Carson Meyer of Powell, here at a Blue Jackets development camp in 2019, is the Cleveland Monsters' second-leading scorer with six goals, eight assists and 14 points in just 16 games.

Carson Meyer wanted an NHL contract and the Blue Jackets wanted to see his game change before offering one.

That, essentially, is how Meyer earned the NHL entry-level contract he signed with the Jackets on April 17, which highlighted an impressive



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professional debut with the Cleveland Monsters. Meyer, 23, is the Monsters' second-leading scorer with seven goals, nine assists and 16 points in just 17 games during an American Hockey League season that's been shortened and challenged by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

"At this point, it's worked out better than I could have hoped," said Meyer, 23, a talented forward who is from Powell and is another professional alum of the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets program. "(The Blue Jackets) felt like I wasn't in a position where I had shown enough NHL potential at the end of my college career, and I think they were right."

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Meyer had a strong senior year with Ohio State. He led the Buckeyes with 17 goals and added 14 assists for 31 points, including a five-point effort with four goals and an assist in a 9-1 quarterfinal victory against Wisconsin during the Big Ten tournament.

It just wasn't enough to earn an NHL deal from the Blue Jackets, who selected Meyer in the sixth round of the 2017 draft. The missing ingredient, according to Blue Jackets director of player personnel Chris Clark, had nothing to do with goals and assists. It was more about grit and annoying opposing players with relentless physical play, which Clark, who's also the Monsters' general manager, relayed during Meyer's collegiate development.

"Clarky would always say to me, 'You've got a great shot and a knack for scoring, but how do I notice you when you're not scoring goals?'" Meyer said. "He always emphasized, 'Play kind of like a rat.' Get under guys' skin, finish every check, go hard to the net ... stuff like that. I think I've done a pretty good job of that this year."

Often, he can hear the proof.

"I'm trying to finish every check and get guys chasing me around the ice, yelling at me," Meyer said, chuckling. "I got away from it for a couple years when I was in college. I just feel way more engaged when I'm running around trying to hit guys as hard as I can and, you know ... guys are chasing me around the ice screaming things at me. It's more fun for me."

It's reminiscent of his days with the Ohio AAA Blue Jackets.

Meyer played four years with the Tier 1 developmental program in Columbus, starting at age 14, and became a force for coach Ed Gingher on the program's 18-and-under squad in 2014-15. His scoring line of 21-30-51 in 32 games was impressive, and it was a memorable year skating on a forward line with long-time friends Jack Roslovic and Kole Sherwood, who are now with the Blue Jackets.

"It really is a crazy story, isn't it?" Meyer said. "It's not only that we're all Columbus-born and played AAA Blue Jackets growing up, but we were all the same birth year, as well. It's pretty wild. Hopefully I can make that next step, too, with them."

Roslovic, who the Blue Jackets acquired along with Patrik Laine in a Jan. 23 trade with Winnipeg, is the furthest along. His 30 points (10 goals, 20 assists) are third on the team in scoring and he's one of the Jackets' top options at center.

Sherwood, meanwhile, is getting an opportunity to show he's ready for a larger NHL role during a frustrating end to the Blue Jackets' season, and Meyer is making strides with the Monsters. His two-way NHL contract will start next season.

After a challenging collegiate career that included a sophomore season at Miami University ravaged by a tapeworm, he remains driven to become the sixth AAA Ohio Blue Jackets alum to play in the NHL — preceded by Roslovic, Sherwood, Sean Kuraly (Boston Bruins), Connor Murphy (Chicago Blackhawks) and Keifer Sherwood (Colorado Avalanche).

It will be quite a photo op if it happens in Columbus with Roslovic and Sherwood.

"I can't even imagine that," Meyer said. "Ed Gingher would have to have glass seats that night."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.26.2021

1210669 Columbus Blue Jackets

What's next? Don't ask. Blue Jackets lose Joonas Korpisalo to injury in OT loss

By Aaron Portzline Apr 25, 2021

COLUMBUS, Ohio — When mired in a torturous hellscape of losses, offensive ineptitude and patchwork lineups, it is only natural to wonder what else could possibly go wrong. And that is the worst thing to do, because the hockey gods always have an answer.

You want a lower rung of hell, Blue Jackets? It happened Sunday in a 4-3 overtime loss to Tampa Bay.

Blue Jackets goaltender Joonas Korpisalo was injured early in the third period while making a hard right-to-left move across the crease early in the third period. Seconds later, Tampa Bay's Alex Barré-Boulet scored into the side of the net that Korpisalo couldn't reach in his hobbled state.

That's how the Blue Jackets lost a 3-2 lead and lost their goaltender. Korpisalo skated off under his own power and went directly to the Blue Jackets' dressing room, a painful end to one of his better starts in weeks.

The Blue Jackets got a point for their pesky if imperfect performance against their favorite opponent. Tampa Bay's Victor Hedman scored only 10 seconds into the overtime period for a 4-3 Lightning win.

With six games remaining in the season, Korpisalo joins forward Boone Jenner (broken finger), defenseman Zach Werenski (abdominal hernia) on the injury list.

"It sucks," Blue Jackets right winger Oliver Bjorkstrand said. "It's not fun to see when guys go out of the game like that. It's not fun at all."

The Blue Jackets didn't have a postgame update on Korpisalo, but it won't be a surprise if his season is finished. And with the Jackets expected to trade a goaltender — either Korpisalo or Elvis Merzlikins this summer — it's possible that Korpisalo has played his last game for Columbus.

It's such a kick in the crotch for the Blue Jackets, especially after they'd survived one of their signature Wile E. Coyote second periods — they were run over, blown up, driven off a cliff, etc. — and were somehow tied 2-2 after two periods.

Eric Robinson, whose scoring chance-to-actual-goal ratio has been a source of much frustration in Columbus the last two years, had the first two-goal game of his NHL career. The second goal, only 55 seconds into the third, put Columbus ahead 3-2.

What could possibly go wrong now? Ugh.

The Blue Jackets are now 0-7-2 in their last nine games, a winless streak that matches the longest in franchise history. They've done it three times previously:

from Oct. 24 to Nov. 11, 2014, the early stages of a season when they set a franchise (world?) record for man-games lost to injury.

from Dec. 10 to Dec. 26, 2009, when they were just starting to realize that new coach Scott Arniel was in over his head.

and from Dec. 4 to Dec. 23, 2004, when GM Doug MacLean was in the early stages of not having a center to play with franchise great Rick Nash.



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Yes, the 2020-21 Blue Jackets are keeping that kind of company.

Robinson takes advantage

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella put Robinson, typically a fourth-liner, in a second-line role for Sunday's game — he skated on the left side of a line with center Max Domi and right winger Oliver Bjorkstrand, the Jackets' leading scorer.

This was his fourth multi-point game in 114 NHL games, but his first with two goals. He also set a career high with 18:49 of ice time, third-most among forwards.

"The puck always follows him," Tortorella said. "Since he's been here, the puck follows him, and he puts pressure on teams with his skating.

"There's a lot more that he needs to improve at, understanding the checking part of (the game). And his strength on pucks, as far as such a big man that he is, he's got to work at that. But he's around it. It follows him, and he's involved in it. It's been that way all year long with him."

Robinson scored at 19:29 of the first period to give the Blue Jackets a 2-1 lead, beating Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy with a wrap-around.

His second goal was nifty, too. He pounced on a deflected puck in the left circle and may have benefited from Bjorkstrand skating across Vasilevskiy's line of sight just as he shot. The puck went inside the far post for a 3-2 lead.

"(Robinson) brings a lot of speed," Bjorkstrand said. "He's more reliable out there. That's what you have to go through when you come here to this team, make sure you make the right plays at the right time, and I think he's been doing that this year.

"He's taken a big step. I like how he skates with the puck and pushes the D back and wins battles. It's fun playing with a player like that."

Robinson is tied for sixth on the club with seven goals, only three behind Patrik Laine.

Snacks

- Tortorella brought up a good point postgame. The Blue Jackets lost five penalty-killing stalwarts in the last two weeks: Nick Foligno, Riley Nash and David Savard were traded, and Boone Jenner and Zach Werenski are injured. "We're teaching penalty-killing on the fly here with our lineup," Tortorella said.

- Alexandre Texier (4:03) and Cam Atkinson (3:58) have taken on bigger roles with the penalty kill, as have Michael Del Zotto, Mikko Lehtonen and forwards Nathan Gerbe, Stefan Matteau and Robinson.

- With Korpisalo injured, the Blue Jackets will need to recall a goaltender before Tuesday's game against Detroit. On Sunday, Matiss Kivlenieks was sent to AHL Cleveland from the taxi squad so that he could start Sunday's game with the Monsters. Prospect Daniil Tarasov was recalled from AHL Cleveland to the taxi squad.

- The OT loss on Sunday allowed the Blue Jackets to avoid matching the longest regulation road losing streak in franchise history. The Jackets lost nine straight early in the 2005-06 season. But the club's nine-game road winless streak is tied for the fifth longest in franchise history.

- Mikhael Grigorenko scored the Blue Jackets' first goal at 17:16 of the first period. It was his third goal of the season and his first since Feb. 2.

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Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets Sunday Gathering: The keys to 'reloading,' and Yegor Chinakhov's arrival

By Aaron Portzline Apr 25, 2021

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A collection of notes, insights, ruminations and did-you-knows gathered throughout the week that was for the Blue Jackets:

Item No. 1: Shaky pillars

General manager Jarmo Kekalainen vowed earlier this month, just after a difficult NHL trade deadline had passed, that the Blue Jackets wouldn't be down for long.

"Reload, not rebuild" is how Kekalainen said it, perhaps the catchiest utterance by a Blue Jackets executive since former club president John Davidson rolled out "brick by brick" when he joined the franchise in 2012.

The hiring of Davidson almost a decade ago gave the wayward franchise a clean reset, and his words resonated, calming an angered, impatient fan base and buying Davidson and the rest of the front office a grace period to reposition the franchise.

Kekalainen, who arrived in Columbus less than a year after Davidson and is now at the top of the club's hockey operations staff, isn't asking for a grace period, which is probably wise.

He has said he expects the Blue Jackets to be competitive again next season, citing the club's copious salary-cap space and three first-round draft picks, two of which were acquired at the trade deadline.

But Kekalainen's words aren't resonating like Davidson's did.

Kekalainen's intentions are good, to be sure, and he has earned a level of trust with the Blue Jackets' fan base after leading the franchise to five Stanley Cup playoff berths in nine seasons, including a string of four straight before this year.

And the good news is that Kekalainen has three pillars on which to prop up his "reload": a Norris Trophy-level defenseman (Seth Jones), a 40-plus-goal-capable forward (Patrik Laine) and a young No. 1 goaltender (Joonas Korpisalo or Elvis Merzlikins).

But the reason many view Kekalainen's impending "reload" with a touch of skepticism — and why some around the league believe this is going to be a rebuild after all — is that all three of those pillars are planted in unstable ground.

Let's look at each, starting with Jones, who basically holds the franchise's short-term fate in his hands this summer when he decides whether to sign a contract extension.

The 2021-22 season will officially begin July 28, but it's unclear exactly when players heading into their final year can begin signing extensions. Typically those dates are one and the same, but the NHL and NHL Players' Association have yet to agree to this date.

Whatever date they agree on, it'll be a huge one for the Blue Jackets organization.

Kekalainen and staff will likely make a long-term sweetheart offer to Jones, hoping he not only signs on to anchor the back end for the next several seasons but also, with the stroke of a pen, stops the staggering exodus of top-end talent from the organization in recent years.

If Kekalainen gets Jones under contract, it's a huge "get" and would make it easier to sign some much-needed free agents and re-sign other players with expiring contracts (hello, Zach Werenski after 2021-22), and it would also make younger Blue Jackets players feel better about their future with the franchise.

It's possible Jones would be named the seventh captain in franchise history if he commits long-term.

But if Jones doesn't want the Blue Jackets' money — if he looks at the current situation and decides he'd like a change of scenery — Kekalainen will have no choice, essentially, but to trade him, and trade him quickly.



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It would be devastating enough for the Jackets to lose Jones. But to allow the entire NHL to continue with the “nobody wants to play in Columbus” narrative for another summer would be highly damaging, in a way that might take years to overcome.

As painful as trading Jones might be, the Blue Jackets would get a mammoth return. But they'd be taking a step backward by losing the best player on the roster, and it's suddenly harder to call that a “reload.”

Next is Laine, who has been a major disappointment since he arrived in the early-season trade with Winnipeg.

Laine is a restricted free agent this summer, so the Blue Jackets can protect his rights simply by extending a qualifying offer. And he has certainly made it easier (in regards to being cheaper) to sign him with his struggles this season.

In 39 games with Columbus, Laine has 10-8-18 and a minus-26 rating. Maybe he will thrive under a new coach next season — John Tortorella is in the final year of his contract and is likely moving on — but major changes are required here, within and around Laine.

If he truly wants to be “the guy,” and that's what those close to him insist, Laine needs to find an entirely new level of passion and energy and deliver it on a nightly basis. Is he wired to do that?

The Blue Jackets can help him get there by completely overhauling their group of forwards. It's important that Laine plays with a playmaker, sure, but he also might need an exceptional defensive player on his line to help cover his play.

Laine's shot is a game changer. It's worth the price of admission. A 50-goal season is not out of the question. But, as seen this season, that booming shot is not worth much if Laine's not truly engaged on a line with exactly the right linemates.

Is Kekalainen certain he can create this situation for Laine within the next two seasons while the Blue Jackets still have some measure of control over Laine as a restricted free agent? If he can, the “reload” is on. If he can't, the search is on ... for high-end skill and scoring.

Finally, the goaltenders.

Kekalainen has a huge decision to make in the coming months: Does he trade Korpisalo or Merzlikins? Both goaltenders are UFAs after next season, and both are seen as NHL starters.

Holding on to both goalies into next season and risking losing one of them for nothing next summer can't be an option, and it's highly unlikely either goaltender would sign up for more years in the current timeshare.

So whom does Kekalainen keep, and whom does he trade? It's possible, even likely, both will go on to have fine careers, but it's a decision that will stick with Kekalainen for a long time, good or bad.

If the goalie the Blue Jackets keep becomes a consistent, No. 1 starter next season, the Blue Jackets will be set in goal for the next five or six seasons, maybe longer. But if the guy they keep can't elevate his game or handle a starter's workload ...

Kekalainen is heading into perhaps the most consequential offseason this franchise has ever known, which is really saying something given its volatile nature over the last two-plus decades.

If he can get Jones to sign a contract extension, build up Laine and his supporting cast and trade the right goaltender, the Blue Jackets will have three foundational pieces around which to shape a roster.

Only then can it truly be called a reload.

Item No. 2: The missing wave

There's actually another issue with the Blue Jackets that argues against Kekalainen being able to “reload.”

The Blue Jackets' slow slide toward the bottom of the NHL standings would be easier to accept if there was a wave of elite, young talent

earning and learning their way at the game's highest level. Look at Ottawa, New Jersey and Los Angeles, for instance.

But there's not much of a wave on the horizon for the Blue Jackets.

Get this: Unless a rookie scores a goal between now and the May 8 season finale, this will be the first season in Blue Jackets history — 20 years — in which a rookie hasn't scored.

Only two NHL clubs this season haven't had a goal scored by a rookie, according to the NHL.com database: Columbus and Washington. The Capitals are headed to the Stanley Cup playoffs again.

The Blue Jackets' top defenseman prospect, Andrew Peeke, has been a healthy scratch in recent games and has played only nine NHL games over the last calendar year, in part because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The club's top North American forward prospect, Liam Foudy, is currently playing with AHL Cleveland.

Alexandre Texier and Emil Bemstrom were rookies last season, but they've taken major steps backward in 2020-21.

Texier hasn't scored since Jan. 26, a span of 38 games. Bemstrom hasn't scored all season and has been out of the lineup with an injury since March 18.

Item No. 3: Chinakhov coming?

Blue Jackets prospect forward Yegor Chinakhov is two wins away from hoisting the KHL's Gagarin Cup. His club, Avangard Omsk, is tied 2-2 with CSKA Moscow in the best-of-seven series. Game 5 is Monday.

It's what happens after the Gagarin Cup that most interests Blue Jackets fans, however.

Chinakhov was the Blue Jackets' first-round draft pick (No. 21) last summer, and his current contract with the KHL expires April 30. Most young players have chosen to stay in Russia and develop, rather than come to North America and play in the AHL, but Chinakhov might have different plans.

The 20-year-old right winger will decide after the Gagarin Cup if he's ready to take a shot at the NHL.

“We'll make a decision right after the last game,” his agent, Shumi Babayev, told The Athletic this weekend.

Asked whether he believed Chinakhov was ready to play in the NHL, Babayev responded, “100 percent ready.”

Chinakhov has 5-2-7 in 20 playoff games. He scored the first goal of the Gagarin Cup on April 18, sending Avangard to a 4-1 Game 1 win.

Snacks

- RW Cam Atkinson is one point shy of 400 in his career. He has 212-187-399 in 620 career games. Only Rick Nash (289-258-547) has scored more points for the organization.

- The Blue Jackets are rumored to be pursuing 28-year-old forward Justin Danforth, who has excelled the last three seasons playing in Finland (two seasons) and Russia (one). Danforth was never drafted, played four seasons at Sacred Heart University in Connecticut and played most of his North American pro hockey in the East Coast Hockey League before leaving for Europe. Danforth, a 5-foot-9, 180-pound winger, had 23-32-55 in 58 games with Podolsk Vityaz of the KHL this season. His contract in Russia expires April 30.

- Oliver Bjorkstrand leads the Blue Jackets with 15 goals. If he holds off Atkinson (14), he'd be the only Blue Jackets player other than Nash to lead the club in scoring in consecutive seasons. Nash led the Blue Jackets in scoring in eight consecutive seasons (2003-04 to 2011-12), a mark that might last a while in Columbus.

- Forward Grégory Hofmann and his EV Zug club in Switzerland are through to the semifinals in the Swiss National League playoffs, where



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they'll face Rapperswil-Jona. It assures that Hofmann, whose rights were traded from Carolina to Columbus in late February, won't arrive in Columbus until training camp in the fall.

- Forward Tyler Angle continues to sizzle in the AHL. He has 3-3-6 in his past four games with AHL Cleveland, including a two-goal outing Saturday. Meanwhile, Carson Meyer has points in 10 of his last 11 games, putting up 5-6-11 in that span.

- Forward Kale Howarth, a fifth-round pick (No. 148) in 2017, is leaving the University of Connecticut after three years to turn pro. But instead of signing a contract and going straight to AHL Cleveland, Howarth is rehabbing a knee injury, suffered against Providence in his final collegiate game. "At first they thought it was a torn ACL," coach Mike Cavanaugh told The UConn Blog. "I don't think that's the case, but there might be an MCL issue he's got to deal with there."

- Goaltender Peter Thome, a sixth-round pick (No. 155) in 2016, is transferring from the University of North Dakota after four seasons as the backup. Thome, who turns 24 next month, will spend his fifth year of NCAA eligibility at the University of St. Thomas, a small school in St. Paul, Minn., which is joining the Division I ranks next season as a member of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association. Former Miami U. coach Rico Blasi has been hired to coach St. Thomas.

- Defenseman Robbie Stucker, a seventh-round pick (No. 210) in 2017, is transferring from the University of Minnesota after three seasons in the Big Ten. He's off to the University of Vermont.

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1210747 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Gretzky reflects on McDavid's quest to defy odds with 100-point season

Mark Spector

April 25, 2021, 4:38 PM

EDMONTON — They told Wayne Gretzky it couldn't be done, too. And then they gave up telling him anything.

Whether it was 92 goals, 215 points or scoring 50 in 39 games, Gretzky did what was thought to be impossible. Slowly but spectacularly, he taught us to reshape our definitions of what could and could not be accomplished in a National Hockey League season.

So, as we prepare to follow Connor McDavid's quest for 100 points in a 56-game season — something many believed could not be done — we should be cautious when we say things like, "Well, how's he going to average over two points per game in his final 11 games?"

Or, "C'mon. How many different players have averaged the 1.79 points-per-game needed to register 100 points in 56 games?"

The answer: Nine players have done it on 25 different occasions, including Gretzky 11 times, Mario Lemieux six times, and Phil Esposito twice.

Can McDavid join that group over the next 11 games?

"It wouldn't surprise me if he gets more than 100 points," Gretzky said this week. "Just to show people he's capable of doing it."

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Sadly, there will be no travelling media circus following McDavid around the North Division over Edmonton's final 11 games, the way they did when Gretzky was chasing down a record. The stories that live on from the time Esposito was following the Oilers as Gretzky chased down his record of 76 goals in a season were legendary, and Gordie Howe spent some time on the road as Gretzky annihilated his single-season points records as well.

McDavid's chase will be limited to must-see TV and a nightly board on Sportsnet Central, as the hockey world follows his progress right down to the final point.

"It's more stressful than people think, because you know the whole world is watching," said Gretzky, one of the very few who can speak from experience. "But the other side of it is, that's what motivates you.

"It pushes you. When you're in the limelight, and you're always being watched, you want to show people what you can do," Gretzky said. "He's taken the city on, the team on, and quite frankly a big part of the league on his shoulders. Obviously Connor is watched every single shift, every period, every game."

When this shortened season began, the two questions Canadian fans were asking were: Can McDavid reach 100 points, and can Auston Matthews score 50? Matthews' injury derailed his quest, and the Montreal Canadiens did their best to torch McDavid's hand.

But just when you thought Montreal had split the atom, holding McDavid to a mere two assists and no goals in their first five meetings, McDavid busted out with a pair of three-point games against Montreal last week.

"I was watching the game the other night, and they showed how the Habs were a team he struggled against," Gretzky said. "That's just part of the game. I had teams I struggled against. And he ended up with six points in two games.

"Those are the kind of things that motivates great players. It pushes you internally to show people that you CAN do it."

So what do we need to know, as McDavid hits the home stretch on what would be his fourth career 100-point campaign — double the amount of 100-point seasons since 2016-17 than any other NHL player (Leon Draisaitl and Nikita Kucherov have had two each)?

Well, in 45 games McDavid already has more points than anyone had in the 48-game shortened season of 1994-95. But it's really points-per-game that provides the best comparison. Like we said, he's currently at 1.71 points per game — the highest production in McDavid's career — and needs 1.79 to have 100 in 56.

So, with the help of Sportsnet Stats, we tried to characterize that level of production historically, among players who played over 40 games in a season:

- Among players with 40-plus games in a season, 1.79 points per game would be the highest since 1995-96 when Mario Lemieux had 2.30 points per game (161 points in 70 games played), and Jaromir Jagr had 1.82 points per game (149 in 82 games played). It would be the highest by an Oilers player since 1987-88, when Gretzky had 2.33 points per game (149 points in 64 games played).

- 29 times in NHL history a player has recorded 100-plus points through the first 56 team games of a season. Most recently, it was in 1995-96, when both Lemieux (116) and Jaromir Jagr (104) did so.

- The most points through the first 56 team games of a season in NHL history is 153 by Gretzky in 1983-84 and 1984-85.

"What he's doing is once in a generation, and what he's doing today is a lot tougher than I did," Gretzky said. "Although I'm proud of what I accomplished, all the things we did, these players today are coached differently, the equipment is better, they're coached different.

"It's tougher to play. I'm the first guy to tell you that."



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Then Gretzky said something that made our memory ping, bringing back a voice every Edmonton Oilers fan has heard as they watched the Gretzky years fade into obscurity, and a team that has accomplished less than little in the past 30 seasons.

"What he's doing," Gretzky warned, "I hope all the fans in Edmonton are really enjoying, really appreciating, watching this player. I hope people just sit back and realize that is really unique. Something we may never see again. He does things that I have never seen any other player ever do.

"It's once in a lifetime."

Or twice, if you're lucky.

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Sportsnet.ca / 'Phenomenal' Sandin making case for Maple Leafs' playoff lineup

Luke Foffo

April 25, 2021, 12:33 AM

Blake Wheeler underestimated Rasmus Sandin.

The savvy 6-foot-5, 225-pound Winnipeg Jets captain barreled in on a 31-game rookie retrieving a dumped puck from his own corner. Wheeler spotted a 21-year-old defenceman six inches and 40 pounds smaller and reached for a forecheck, figuring either (a) Sandin would move his feet and try to skirt contact or (b) if the two men were to collide, the bigger one in full stride wouldn't be harmed.

Bam.

Surprise.

Sandin held his ice and delivered a clean, hard reverse hit, sending Wheeler reeling. He immediately faced retaliation from Kyle Connor, who rushed to his dazed teammate's defence. Sandin drew the penalty, earning his team a power-play.

Remaining Time -0:59

Wheeler slow to get up after taking hard hit from Sandin

Combine that sturdy shoulder with a smooth 4-on-4 breakout pass that ignited a William Nylander-to-John Tavares rush goal, plus a little peek on the top power-play unit, and the Toronto Maple Leafs' most prized defence prospect is making his presence felt. Loud.

"I feel stronger overall," Sandin said. "I have a little bit more pop overall in my legs during the whole game. I don't feel that I get tired as quick as I did before. Down in the corners, I think I can battle and handle guys a lot better than I could last year."

What a time to come alive.

Following the Maple Leafs' 4-1 victory in Winnipeg Saturday, the club has a scant eight games remaining before its opening night playoff roster needs submission.

Sandin — appearing in just his fourth NHL game in the past 410 days — may be late to the party, but he looks every inch a crasher.

Enter Sandman.

"Sandy's phenomenal," Tavares said. "He's got a little bite to his game. He's able to hold his own. When you've got a lot of guys forechecking on you as a D-man, that's important to have. Even for a guy who's not the

biggest, his ability to hold the zone, take the pressure, absorb it and give it back a little bit is fantastic."

Mitch Marner is taken by how seamlessly Sandin has filled the void.

"He played his first game in a crazy amount of days, and he was perfectly in sync. I think he fits our system very well and plays responsibly and plays smart with the puck," Marner said. "He makes a lot of great decisions coming up the ice with the puck and makes it hard on forwards to put their finger on where he's going."

On an evening in which the Maple Leafs dressed five left-shot defencemen, the eager Swede shone with a plus-2 showing, an assist, and the (legal) hit of the night.

It feels like a forgone conclusion that the Maple Leafs, now eight points up on the rest of the country, will claim the top seed in Canada. Yet the bottom of the club's playoff lineup is very much in flux, and Zach Bogosian's shoulder injury has opened the gates of opportunity.

Partner Travis Dermott will get some run on his unnatural right side and the penalty kill, while Sandin makes his case by pitching in on the power play.

Eyebrows raised Saturday when he was given a shift in Morgan Rielly's usual spot, quarterbacking the Leafs' loaded top unit 5-on-4.

"The power play is a big part of his game. He's got great confidence there. I've seen him from a very young age at the American League level take over a power play," head coach Sheldon Keefe said. "We knew when we had him in the lineup we wanted to introduce him to the power play and give him an opportunity.

"The way he moves the puck with his confidence that he has at 5-on-5 really helps us. He doesn't get rattled by much at all. He's a competitive guy. He's getting better and better every game, and that's really what you want to see with a young player."

"I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Waiting in the wings is deadline acquisition Ben Hutton, who has cleared quarantine but has yet to suit up for his new club.

"Sandin is more of a priority for us right now, to get him up and going," Keefe said this week.

At the very least, we are seeing a preview of the Leafs' future, as entry-level contributors like Sandin are integral to success in a flat-cap world.

But the 2018 first-rounder speaks and acts like a player ready to win the job yesterday.

Sandin was already patient watching Toronto try out KHL import Mikko Lehtonen early in the season. Then he endured weeks of rehab after suffering a broken foot during a Marlies stint. He's twiddled his thumbs on the taxi squad.

"I'm a guy that wants everything quick. I want it now," Sandin said, reflecting on his road back to the show. "You know, it's been a long time since I've played a game. The last couple games overall have been really fun getting back into it."

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Joe Thornton talks about how well-liked Sandin — a called-up kid surrounded by established stars — is by his teammates, how well he skates, and how much he likes Sandin's edge.

"The boys love him, and he's playing real well," Thornton said.

"He's only going to get better."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks keep pressure on in playoff race as Holtby finds his game

Iain MacIntyre

April 25, 2021, 2:15 AM

VANCOUVER – A trend has been detected. And we may be crazy, but this seems important.

In the three games the Vancouver Canucks have won since their COVID-19 crisis, they've had the better goaltending. The game they lost, the other team had the better goalie.

On Saturday, Braden Holtby outplayed the Ottawa Senators' two-man goaltending entry of Matt Murray and Marcus Hogberg, and the Canucks won 4-2 to keep the pressure on the teams they're chasing in the National Hockey League playoff race.

This trend, of course, has been around as long as water has been frozen for hockey.

But what's new about the Canucks' trend is that they now have two goalies contributing: Holtby and starter Thatcher Demko, who lost to the Senators 3-0 on Thursday through no fault of his own and rested Saturday.

Demko has been excellent most of this season. Holtby has been largely excellent for most of the last decade – but not so much this season until the Canucks went more than three weeks without playing due to a schedule break and an outbreak.

In three games since, Holtby has stopped 98 of 105 shots and gone 3-0.

"I don't want to speak for him, but ... he just looks freer to me," coach Travis Green said. "I'm not a goalie expert by any means, but he definitely looks confident, he looks freer, things look easier for him."

After leaving the Washington Capitals for the Canucks before this season, Holtby has been trying to incorporate some technical changes under new goaltending coach Ian Clark. The transition was made more difficult by the loss of the starting job this season to Demko.

Saturday marked the first time since January that Holtby played three times in a week. His last win before the COVID-19 crisis was Feb. 17.

"It's not the reason for success or failure," Holtby insisted of his workload. "You've just got to show up every day and be ready to play, try and win games as best you can. Obviously, this stretch here has been a little difficult to us. We've had some success by grinding it out. We've got through the nice part of our schedule so it's even more (important) that we come together and get that rhythm as a team to get everyone on board to play games."

"Rest is going to be key ... not just to play our best, but to just stay healthy and not have any long-term effects. I think it's going to take everyone to manage that. Thatch and I know that — that for us to make the playoffs, we're both going to have to find ways to win games."

Holtby was at his best Saturday in the middle period when a tight-checking game opened up.

The Canucks generated as many scoring chances in the first four minutes of the second period as they did in the opening 20 minutes. None of them turned into goals, but one was still significant.

When Jake Virtanen steered a rebound wide and tried to chase the puck behind the net, Murray, the Senators' starter who had blanked the Canucks on Thursday, got his stick between the Canuck's legs and

tripped him. The play caused Murray to twist sideways on his knees, and when he was penalized, he skated straight to the Ottawa bench and left the game.

Marcus Hogberg, rushed into the lineup when Ottawa backup Anton Forsberg was injured in the warmup, went in cold at 4:27 and exactly nine seconds later robbed Bo Horvat on a redirect from the slot.

He wasn't as successful on the next shot he faced because at 4:36 Brock Boeser broke a 1-1 tie by lasering a wrist shot in the short-side top corner that Hogberg couldn't see through Tanner Pearson's screen.

In danger of taking advantage of a goalie who had one start in the previous two months, the Canucks levelled the playing field by taking more penalties. Quinn Hughes took a tripping penalty at 7:36 after giving away the puck, and at 11:27 Virtanen took a double-minor for high-sticking Ottawa rookie Tim Stützel.

Vancouver's best penalty killer was Holtby, who made several strong saves. But his biggest one came at 15:51 when Alex Formenton was awarded a penalty shot when he was slashed on the shoulder by Tyler Myers after an up-ice giveaway by Nils Hoglander.

Holtby stopped Formenton's deke on the initial breakaway, then rejected the Senator's penalty shot with a blocker save.

The Canucks could have extended their lead during a two-minute 5-on-3 power play that began at 8:11 of the third period, but Hughes, Boeser and J.T. Miller were fixated on trying to set up a one-timer for Miller, and Hogberg had to make only one actual save.

Less than three minutes after the dismal two-man advantage, Ottawa tied it 2-2 at 11:52 when Evgenii Dadonov's knuckling shot from the left-wing boards handcuffed Holtby.

But Pearson saved the Canucks by scoring with a wrist shot on a 3-on-2 at 13:45, before Miller scuffed a shot into an empty net from Tyler Motte's feed.

The last Canuck regular to return from COVID, Motte's 16:59 of ice time included 7:15 of penalty killing as Ottawa's power play finished 0-for-6.

"We did a lot of good things tonight," Green said. "Our game was solid in a lot of areas. I just thought we almost shot ourselves in the foot a little bit tonight. We have to play a little bit smarter at certain times. We can't take that many penalties. And then we kill off a penalty and we turn over a puck (Hoglander's giveaway that led to Formenton's breakaway) that you just can't do. That's a little bit of youth sometimes in our group. Not only do you get the penalty shot save (from Holtby), but you get the save on the breakaway."

The teams travel Sunday to Ottawa for games Monday and Wednesday, the start of a stretch that will see the Canucks play their final 14 games over 22 days. It will be good to have two goalies.

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Sportsnet.ca / Scheifele's response to benching will help determine how far his Jets go

Ken Wiebe

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WINNIPEG - Mark Scheifele was sent a strong message and how he responds to it could ultimately go a long way toward determining where the Winnipeg Jets finish in the North Division standings and how far they go when it matters most.



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The sight of Scheifele sitting at the end of the bench with his stick flipped over is an unfamiliar one, but there was no mistaking the intention of Jets head coach Paul Maurice when he chose not to play his top centre for the final 13:01 of the second period and opening 3:59 of the third period of Saturday's 4-1 loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

This wasn't a simple reduction of ice time after a tough shift, this was an outright benching, one that lasted for 17 minutes.

The move was made after Scheifele stayed on for 88 seconds during a four-on-four situation when it was still a one-goal game.

But when Scheifele coasted to the bench for a line change after joining the rush late in the shift prior to John Tavares giving the Maple Leafs a 3-1 advantage, Maurice took the type of action he generally prefers to avoid.

That Maurice made the move during a nationally-televised game reinforces why it was so important the message not only be delivered but received.

Scheifele is an elite scorer, a talented player who has spent the bulk of this season in rarified air, holding down a spot in the top 10 of the NHL as he continues a fifth consecutive campaign producing at a rate of a point per game or better.

In order for the Jets to go on any sort of run, Maurice needs Scheifele to be a play driver and a force in all three zones.

The last time Scheifele was benched in this fashion was back on Nov. 25, 2016 in a game against the Nashville Predators.

After a 34-second shift with Blake Wheeler and Patrik Laine to open the third period, the entire Scheifele line didn't see the ice again in what turned out to be a 5-1 loss.

That move came early in a season, not 10 games away from the Stanley Cup Playoffs, with a pair of games against the Edmonton Oilers looming.

"We have some things that we value as a group. Mark's a real competitive guy. Sometimes that gets the best of him, I think. We just need to adhere to our core values," said Maurice, who also tackled a question about how Scheifele and the team responded to the decision.

"I liked the emotion on our bench. I liked our third period. Connor (Hellebuyck) got pulled the other night, he's clearly one of our leaders. And that doesn't sit well with those guys.

"We just have to adhere to those things. Now is the time to make sure we get it right. Now is the time to dial in those parts of our game, especially when you lose three in a row, this is the perfect time to handle your problems, to deal with it when you're going into the stretch."

Of course it can be a risky proposition to staple a franchise player to the bench for that length of time, especially in a game of this magnitude.

Star players are often given some latitude when it comes to certain aspects of the game, but Maurice felt it was necessary to hold Scheifele accountable for his actions.

Instead of letting the situation fester, Maurice gave Scheifele an opportunity to go out and respond during the third period.

The early indications were that the message was received loud and clear, as Scheifele - who didn't speak to reporters after the game - had some extra jump in his step during his seven shifts in the third period.

"I think that's a better question for coach," said Hellebuyck, asked specifically about the message benching Scheifele sent to the Jets players. "For me, when you see that, you want to play hard for him. You want to play harder for him and pick him up. It's a message that no one's safe, that you have to prove yourself every night and bring your A-game, or at least bring your battle intensity every night."

This can't just be a temporary jolt either.

The Jets need Scheifele to be playing at an optimal level during the stretch run and into the post-season.

Scheifele brings a critical component for this group, as shown in the Jets' run to the Western Conference Final in 2018 and the early departure from the qualifying round series with the Calgary Flames in 2020, when he was knocked out due to injury and limited to only three shifts.

"Yeah, I mean (Scheifele) is a huge part of our team and always plays with an edge, plays hard. We need him out there to have success," said Wheeler. "I thought he did a good job with it. If Paul (Maurice) cares to elaborate on that, I'll leave that up to him. Little nuances of why things happen within our group, that belongs within the dressing room."

By sweeping the two-game series over the Jets, the Maple Leafs built an eight-point cushion over the Jets in the battle for top spot.

The race for second is definitely on, with the Oilers one point behind the Jets while holding two games in hand.

The competitive spirit in this game was high once again, with Kyle Connor dropping the gloves with Maple Leafs defenceman Rasmus Sandin after a reverse hit on Wheeler — who left the game momentarily late in the first period but came out to start the second and finished the contest.

There were also a couple of heated exchanges between Joe Thornton and Nikolaj Ehlers (who scored the lone goal for the Jets just 39 seconds into the contest) in what was the ninth of 10 meetings between the two teams.

"The playoffs are right around the corner. Everyone is ramping up, either to try to jockey for position in the standings or try to get your game ready for the playoffs. That's what this time of the year is all about," said Jets defenceman Josh Morrissey. "Considering there (are) no fans in the building or anything like that, I thought the intensity was right there in this game and it's been ramping up in our rivalry.

"We play a team 10 times, you're bound to kind of get some intensity in the series, or at least you should. That's what makes the game fun. A large part of the game is fun. And that's what you've got to try to do to win this time of year. They're trying to do it and we're trying to do it to have our game in a place that can win these important games down the stretch and a playoff series down the line."

The Jets have shown plenty of resilience in bouncing back from defeat all season long and this is simply the latest test on what has occasionally been a bumpy road.

Navigating those potholes is an important part of the job.

"This is the right time for us to deal with this. We haven't had it this year," said Maurice. "And that's a real positive thing, right. You've been resilient, you've been able to come back. We haven't had that stretch, fortunately, knock on wood, where we've had a run of injuries or had bad, negative feelings sitting in our room. You hate losing hockey games, but you got an opportunity to deal with it now and talk about it and get it out there and get our energy level right.

"(The Maple Leafs) just lost five, so they had it right when they came in here for their two games. We're going through it now. Edmonton did earlier in the year when Toronto ran three on them at home. So this happens to every team, it just hasn't happened to us yet. So here it is now. The next three will be against playoff teams, and we got to find our way out of it."

Having a strong inner belief is an essential quality and that's been part of the foundation the Jets have worked to establish through the first 46 games.

"This is going to be a big character build for us as a team. You never know how much adversity you go through, and we seem to keep going through little spurts of adversity," said Hellebuyck, who responded to being pulled on Thursday by making 33 saves. "Hopefully, we come back



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from this stronger. We have the character to do that and it's time for us to learn and prove it.

"That's their playoff game. Now we know what we're going to see in the playoffs if we run into them. We've got to be ready for that."

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