



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 29, 2021

## The Athletic

### Hurricanes playoff predictions, Alex Nedeljkovic's RFA status explained, injuries: Bag of Jerks

By Sara Civian

Well, folks, the Hurricanes became the first team in the Central Division to clinch a playoff berth Monday night, and we've entered a strange new world in which they're the ones waiting on an opponent.

They just so happened to score five goals vs. Dallas the night after clinching, proving they aren't just going to coast into the postseason. Was this a pressure-off-type situation?

"I don't know," captain Jordan Staal said after scoring two goals. "I don't think it really changed a ton. I think we just had some better jump and guys were sharper tonight than the previous night. And vice versa for their team. It was nice to see that 'x' beside our name in the standings, but I don't think it changed a ton to the start of this game."

If nothing else, it fired up an old friend ...

Let's reflect on the majority of the regular season and look ahead to the playoffs in this month's Bag of Jerks.

I love the "next man up" philosophy, but at some point, you run out of top-level talent to go far in the playoffs. Have the Hurricanes been especially decimated with injuries this year compared to the league as a whole, or has everyone consistently had an entire top line's worth of talent on the IL? — Nathan J.

I raise you one Max McCormick in the middle of a two-game goal streak, and hey, the one and only Morgan Geekie seems to be heating up at the right time.

In all seriousness, you obviously raise a valid question, but the Hurricanes are definitely NOT alone in this aspect this season, and the leaguewide injury bug was always a threat during such a condensed schedule.

Take the Canes' most recent opponent, Dallas, for example. They're out No. 1 goalie Ben Bishop, star center Tyler Seguin and forward Alexander Radulov for the season, among others. Roope Hintz is also nursing something and even though he's always great, you can tell he isn't 100 percent in his skating.

I'd take the Hurricanes' situation over this any day, especially with Teuvo Teravainen's return Tuesday night.

"He'd been hinting at (returning)," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I talked to him yesterday and he kind of said, 'Well, let's see how I do in the morning.' He skated by himself, really, and then gave us the thumbs up. Obviously, that's huge for us. I thought he was good. Obviously, he had the one little gaffe there that I'm sure he'd like to have back. But other than that, I thought as long as he was out, he was good."

The Hurricanes haven't had it easy, and yeah, there are a few teams around the league that have had to deal with less injury adversity this season, but it's generally been worse than usual for most of the NHL. And you can bet there are dozens of players playing through minor injuries that might've sidelined them in a normal situation.

You have three rounds in the ring against Tripp Tracy. You each get to choose a weapon. What weapon do you choose and who wins? Same question but with Shane Trillis and Abby Labardown? — Andrew M.

I'm defeating Tripp with the precise Taco Bell order of:

1. Two Mexican pizzas
2. Three hard tacos
3. Three soft tacos
4. Three steak soft tacos
5. Three beef meximelts
6. One burrito supreme

I'm bringing LabarDown into a ring full of dirty dishes. She will simply get stressed out and distracted and wash them all and then I will attack.

Shane is the only one who genuinely scares me in this situation. If that man has a weakness, I have never seen it.

Those of us in the North will begin paying closer attention to the Canes come playoff time. What should we keep an eye on in Carolina? (Other than your excellent and funny writing, cheers) — Julian B.

Cheers, Julian!

A subscriber actually responded to this question in the mailbag saying, "Backcheck, forecheck and Trocheck," and I couldn't have said it better myself. The true danger of this team is in the reliability of its depth. Of course, you have your point-per-game Sebastian Aho, your elusive Martin Necas, your equal parts competitive and clutch Vincent Trocheck, your rookie goalie full of promise in Alex Nedeljkovic and your heating-up Andrei Svechnikov, but everything this team does starts with strong defense.

This has always been an extremely dangerous team at even strength, but now you also have the league-best 27.7 power-play percentage and No. 3 84.3 penalty-kill percentage.

There's not one specific thing you can point to as a far-and-away No. 1 reason for this team's success except for collective resiliency, and that's why I like their odds for a deep playoff run.

What is your bold prediction for most surprising Canes player of the playoffs? — Stephanie H.



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Well, maybe McCormick just needed to actually get in one (1) hockey game to be this guy, eh?

Maybe “surprising” isn’t the right word for this, but I have a feeling Svechnikov is going to have a great playoff run after his trials and tribulations this season. He’s had a pretty strong past three games with confident play and four assists. I just have a feeling that overcoming this regular season will give him a new sense of maturity and confidence. He’s been “fighting it” a lot this season and that’ll make you stronger eventually — if you let it.

Canes win the Cup! Jordan Staal snatches it from Bettman in honor of RB’A and screams as the crowd goes wild. He looks at his teammates and signals for a player to skate to him for the first handoff of the Stanley Cup. That player is ...? — Peter W.

Interesting potential scenario here. Barring unusual circumstances, this will usually be the most veteran player without a Cup, and James Reimer has meant a lot to this team regardless of how many games he may or may not play this postseason. There are not many “veteran” players on this team other than Reimer and Staal at this point. I’m guessing it will be Reimer.

Do you think the Hurricanes could re-sign Petr Mrazek and Nedeljkovic? If not, which one will they choose? — Taylor W.

Please explain the league rule/nuances affecting Ned, regarding how many remaining starts in net he needs for the Canes to make him an RFA? — Jeff T.

These questions tie into each other, and my short answer for the first question is, “Yes, they will be able to,” because of the long answer to the second question.

Nedeljkovic is in a relatively unique situation because of his age-to-professional minutes/NHL-minutes-played ratio and his expiring contract extension. As a 25-year-old goalie who has completed at least three professional seasons (consisting of at least 11 games while 18/19 years old and/or at least one game while 20 or older), he will become what is called a Group 6 Unrestricted Free Agent if he doesn’t have at least 27 NHL games with at least 30 minutes logged in each by the end of the season. (The usual number is 28, but the condensed regular season changed that — additionally, it now includes the slide year.) So, he will need to play at least 30 minutes in two more NHL games (playoff games count!) to stay under the Hurricanes’ control as a restricted free agent. Considering his consistently strong play this season — especially of late — this is an incredibly easy decision for the Hurricanes and will get done.

And there’s no reason in my mind (other than potentially money, but they should figure it out) why they couldn’t sign both Mrazek and Nedeljkovic in this situation and let their play decide who is the “No. 1” goalie. Besides, they can potentially expose Jeremy Helvig in the expansion draft.

In my opinion, Petr is too brittle to even be a reliable backup for Ned next year. What are the odds we target a washed-up starter (like McBackup a few years back) to be a 1B for Ned next year? — Matthew N.

Well, Matthew, he isn’t a gingerbread cookie! I know he’s had some bad luck with injuries this season, but watch that

video of the collision with McCormick again. I don’t think we can blame Mrazek or his thumb for needing surgery.

Then we have to think about everything we just discussed as Mrazek is currently dealing with a minor lower-body tweak. Why not let Nedeljkovic get in these games and avoid Group 6 UFA status?

Plus, Brind’Amour has said that Mrazek actually could play if he had to right now, but since the Canes have the luxury of Nedeljkovic’s breakout season and Reimer as extra backup, they haven’t had to rush him back. I’d also assume they’re trying to make sure Mrazek is 5,000 percent ready to go for the playoffs.

Perks of clinching with a few weeks left in the regular season?

I’m currently on team “Sign Mrazek and Nedeljkovic next season.”

When are people around the league going to start to acknowledge Ned? Like, I get it that he won’t possibly win the Calder, but he could get a mention, right? Is he a legitimately good goalie, or are there still too few games and too many unknowns? — Emily L.

I basically agree with your premise here. He definitely deserves a mention, but as you said, he’s played too few games to make a serious run at it. The fact that it’s only a regular-season award makes even less of a case for it, though, and the Hurricanes’ defense is so darn good that compared with the too few games, someone like Kirill Kaprizov, who is elevating his linemates, gets an edge.

You might enjoy this week’s article from our Dom Luszczyzyn that has Nedeljkovic very high in the Calder race.

Regardless of awards, I think it’s safe to say he’s a legitimately good goalie at this point. He’s had to prove himself over and over and he rarely fails a test.

Has Rod ever explained why he likes two defensemen on the second power-play unit? Feel like Jake Gardiner or Jake Bean could run it by himself. — Owen A.

I honestly just think the Canes have a lot of high-scoring defensemen, and why not put the potential high-scorers and known power-play guys on the power play? Simple as that.

If everyone is back and healthy, you can’t sit Steven Lorentz, can you? So, who sits: Warren Foegele, Brock McGinn or Cedric Paquette? — Craig T.

As difficult as it will be to rip a smile off Lorentz’s face, yes, you can sit him, especially knowing Foegele’s ability to elevate in the playoffs. Speaking of Foegele, I’ve been loving his play next to Staal, and I’d like to see that line combination continue. Sometimes I feel like Foegele bounces around the lineup so much that he doesn’t really get a chance to get comfortable. A player like him can grind on the forecheck super fast to complement Staal in the “difficult to play against” realm.

The Hurricanes acquired Paquette specifically for the playoff experience and grit for, well, for the playoffs.



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And finally, Craig, look me straight in the eyes and tell me you think Brind'Amour would bench McGinn in the playoffs.

This is a good problem — too many (good) men, and not the penalty. It's incredibly rare, if not impossible, that a team survives a playoff run uninjured, especially this season full of tensions flaring. You need guys like Lorentz and McCormick, who are almost too good to sit out, to be able to jump in when needed and not just tread water but potentially make an impact.

How important is the one seed to RB'A? Feels like the Mrazek move, along with others, is a tacit acknowledgment that the best record isn't worth having a pile of injured bodies once the playoffs begin. — Al H.

It's a fine line, but after clinching, Brind'Amour said the approach doesn't change drastically, and the Canes are still going to try to win every game. They proved that with five goals and dominance the next evening. Seeding should not be slept on in one of the toughest divisions in the league, but the Canes have the luxury of so much depth that they can afford to rest certain pieces at a time in their quest for the No. 1 seed.

You prioritize health over everything going into the playoffs, but I must admit the decision to keep three goalies on the roster is looking better and better.

What do you see as the team's current weaknesses as the season gets closer to playoffs? Obviously, the Canes are very good top to bottom, but are there any lingering issues (other than "playing the Red Wings") that stand out at this point? — Blake A.

Everyone take this moment to take a very deep sigh of relief, for we don't know much, but we do know the Carolina Hurricanes will not have to play the Detroit Red Wings in the playoffs.

If you're interested in a longer version of this, I just wrote a story including five of the biggest looming questions. Among them: What will Teravainen look like in his return? He looked

fine to me in his 16:32 of ice time Tuesday night, but we'll need a few more games to properly evaluate that. Will Svechnikov turn on the jets? Is a three-goalie rotation too crowded? Who is the best opponent?

Since the Hurricanes are such a complete team, I think the biggest concern will end up being something to do with the potential matchup. We'll be able to dive deeper into what the opponent will expose about the Hurricanes once we know who it is.

It's a copycat league, so after the Canes win the Cup, what part of the Carolina process is everyone going to try to rip off? — Brant G.

The Storm Surge, duh.

In all seriousness, maybe half of the NHL teams right now need to take a look at the Hurricanes' coaching approach and change their philosophies and/or hiring approaches. I've been saying this for two years at this point — Brind'Amour knows how to get through to millennials and Gen Z without being a complete pushover. He works with the players' strengths and customizes his strategy accordingly instead of trying to force guys into the older ways of thinking. He respects and seeks to understand differences instead of writing younger people off.

Hello Sara,

How do you intend to break my heart with this Bag of Jerks? Promising a kabuki-like series of posts only to stop after the 37th act? Refusing to answer my totally rational and completely reasonable question about how best to impress the Marley Drug woman? Letting Stormy co-write it? Continuing to offer no update whatsoever about how the ducks have fared during the pandemic?

The mind boggles at the possibilities ... — Keith R.

I have been Stormy the whole time.



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## Down Goes Brown: Connor McDavid's 100, Leafs vs. Habs, and six more things to root for down the stretch

By Sean McIndoe

We're headed down the stretch in the regular season, and there's a good chance that you know exactly what you're rooting for. If your team is fighting for a playoff spot, or first place in a division where that really matters, you're locked in. That's all you care about it, and rightly so. Having something to care about in a season's final weeks is all sorts of fun.

But what if you don't? Maybe your team has been out of the race for weeks, or months, or are the Sabres. Or maybe they're at the other extreme and have already clinched whatever spot you were hoping they'd earn. If that's you, you might find yourself staring down two more weeks without any real rooting interest.

I'm here to help. So today, I'll offer up eight suggestions for outcomes you can root for as the season winds up. It goes without saying that if any of these conflict with what your favorite team needs to happen, you go with your team. Loyalty trumps all. But if you're neutral, and just looking for one or two things to cheer along and/or get irrationally mad about, I've got you covered.

Idea 1: Root for Connor McDavid to get to 100 points

Let's start with the one that I feel like we can get close to unanimous agreement on.

When the NHL announced that the abbreviated season would be just 56 games long, fans knew that most of the major milestones would be out of reach for another year. Nobody would get to 50 goals, and even 40 might be a stretch. Hitting 100 points? That would mean scoring at a prorated 146-point full season pace. In other words, forget it.

But here's McDavid having a season for the ages, and he's got a chance. It's a slim one — the Oilers have nine games left, and he still needs 16 points to hit the century mark. For most guys, that's a once-in-a-lifetime heater. But for McDavid? It's very realistic, especially with all his remaining games coming against the Flames, Canucks and Canadiens.

Who's going to root against this? OK, maybe Calgary fans just out of spite, and we'll allow that. But everyone else should be on board. McDavid's brilliance means we're not getting an Art Ross race this year, or even a Hart Trophy debate. He can at least give us this, along with the ridiculous highlights the hot streak would surely generate.

Ultimately, 100 points is an arbitrary cutoff and it wouldn't be any less impressive if he finished the season with 99. But fans like round numbers, and it would be undeniably cool to see a player hit triple-digits in a season where it wasn't supposed to be possible. There hasn't been a player in a generation who's as much fun to watch as Connor McDavid. Let's see the kid go full-on beast mode for the rest of the year and hit the magic number.

Idea 2: Root for the Hurricanes to take the Central and set up an All-Florida matchup

I probably don't have to sell you too hard on cheering for the Hurricanes. They're a fun team, they've got a ton of skill, and

you know they'll cook up some sort of crazy celebration when it's all over. Who doesn't like that? OK, we can think of a few people, but most of us are on board, even if grudgingly.

But that's not even the best reason to hope Carolina takes the Central. Instead, it's because the Hurricanes as top seed would put the Lightning and Panthers in second and third, meaning we'd get the first All-Florida playoff matchup in NHL history. Despite being in the same division for almost three decades, the two teams have never met in the postseason. This might finally be the year.

In theory, there's nothing magical about geography. But in hockey rivalries, it tends to work. The Battle of Alberta was amazing. The Battle of Ontario had some great moments. The three-way Battle of California is mostly on hold, but it was amazing when it was cooking. The Battle of Florida could be next.

We might get fireworks. Or we might just get two really talented teams battling it out. That would be good too. So here's hoping the Hurricanes stay out of the way.

And since we've slotted in the top three spots in the Central, we may as well do the last one ...

Idea 3: Root for the Stars to get the last Central playoff spot

Again, this won't be for everyone, and Predators fans are obviously excluded. But in a season that isn't offering much in the way of down-to-the-wire playoff races, the Central race for the last spot is a good place to pick a side. And that side should be the Dallas Stars.

Nothing against Nashville, a decent team with a crazy-fun fan base. But the Stars have been through it this year, and it would be cool to see them emerge with a playoff spot. They were the first team to see their schedule disrupted due to a COVID-19 outbreak. Later in the season, their coach had a mid-game COVID-19 test scare. More games were postponed due to the Texas power outage. Their starting goalie and first-line center have both missed the entire season with injuries. And through it all, their playoff chances steadily dropped, dipping under 30 percent as recently as a few weeks ago.

I mean, if you were going to pick a random team to throw some support behind, you could do worse, right?

To top it off, it's not like the Stars are some plucky underdog that's destined to make the playoffs only to get swept in the first round. They went to the final last year, and gave the Lightning all they could handle once they were there, so give them a healthy roster and who knows what could happen. Mix in the Rick Bowness OGWAC factor, and it's an easy call. Go Stars go.

(And if you're a Nashville fan who's now mad at me, don't be. I've just given you a gift: The "everyone is against us" card. Nothing's more fun than that.)



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## Idea 4: Root for a Capitals/Penguins first-round matchup

I probably don't have to work too hard to sell you on this one. Caps/Pens pretty much always delivers. And after three straight years from 2016 to 2018 where whoever won their matchup went on to win the Cup, the rivalry has taken a bit of a postseason break, meaning it will feel fresh again.

Two great teams. Tons of star power. Crosby vs. Ovechkin. For the first time, the Caps going into the matchup with a Cup banner to negate those decades of playoff baggage. Oh, and did we mention that this time, Brian Burke would be involved? You're telling me you don't want to hear those postgame quotes? I'm already trying to figure out what Malkin isn't Russian for.

The beauty of rooting for this matchup in the East is that it could happen as a 1 vs. 4 or a 2 vs. 3. Either is fine. Maybe you want to throw in some support for the Islanders to push past both teams and finish first in their division for the first time since 1988. If so, go ahead and root for that too (although be warned that it's not looking great lately). Just as long as we get a Pens/Caps matchup.

But speaking of those East Division spots ...

## Idea 5: Root for the Rangers to make this a race

Right now, Dom has the Rangers with a 4 percent chance to grab the East's final spot. That's, uh, not great. And it's why I'm not going to tell you to root for them to make the playoffs. You'll just be setting yourself up for disappointment.

No, I'm just suggesting that you root for them to stay in the race for as long as possible, for two reasons. First, somebody has to, or else the East is basically already wrapped up aside from seeding with two weeks left to go (and seeding barely matters when the top four teams are all roughly interchangeable). And second, the Rangers are a young team that can be a lot of fun when things are clicking.

Things haven't been clicking for a lot of the season, which is why there's a 96 percent chance this all ends badly. But there's something about seeing a bunch of kids who are too young to know that they don't have a chance to run off a season-ending win streak. Give us two weeks where Adam Fox cements his Norris case, Igor Shesterkin locks in his Calder finalist credentials, and Alexis Lafrenière and Kaapo Kakko remember they were top-two picks. Mix in a few more of those random games where Mika Zibanejad looks like Phil Esposito, and just a handful of nervous glances in the rearview mirror from the Bruins or Islanders or whoever, and we're all set.

Then it can end badly. We're here for a good time, not for a long time.

## Idea 6: Root for the Golden Knights and Avalanche to stay healthy

Yes, of course, you should root for everyone to stay healthy, especially in a pandemic. This would be a good year to just go into the settings menu and turn injuries off if we could.

But let's really hope that Vegas and Colorado stay as healthy as possible because it's just about impossible not to look ahead at a potential second-round matchup between arguably the two best teams in the NHL.

Technically, we could still get the Avs and Golden Knights in the first round, but that would take a monster run to first place by the Wild. If that happens, awesome. But if we're trying to stay realistic here, we'll need to wait until the second round. And yes, that's probably still too early, and I know it will set off another round of arguing over playoff formats, but this is a weird year so let's take the matchups where we can get them. When we do, let's really hope that both teams are as close to full power as possible, so that they can deliver a classic.

(In related news, congratulations in advance to the Wild, whose first-round victory I've just assured by angering the hockey gods. You can thank me later, Minnesota fans.)

## Idea 7: Root for the Habs' second-half struggles to continue, right up until they face the Leafs in the playoffs

Originally, the idea here was to hope for a Montreal spiral that would open the door for the Canucks to make a miracle run. For many of the same reasons that we should get behind Dallas, a Vancouver push would be a great story. But for anyone hoping for the North to go down to the wire, Monday night was pretty much a disaster, and now our odds don't look great.

OK, so let's adjust. We'll still root for the Canadiens to flounder down the stretch because Montreal is one of those markets where it's always way more entertaining when the team is doing poorly. They've got eight games left, so let's hope they score five goals while everyone freaks out and the media calls for the firing of everyone employed in a five-mile radius around the Bell Centre.

And then, let's hope the Habs make the playoffs anyway, and face the Leafs.

It's the oldest rivalry in the league, and arguably still one of the best, but we haven't seen it in the postseason in over four decades. It's time for it to happen. Granted, this year isn't ideal — watching the Leafs and Habs in the playoffs without buildings full of dueling fans will be weird. But if you're talking about the first Toronto/Montreal matchup of your lifetime, you have to take what you can get.

Canadians don't need me to convince them on this one. But if you're south of the border, you should also get on board, because I can't oversell how crazy it will get up here if this matchup happens. You know all those Canadian fans you follow on Twitter? They seem pleasant, right? They are not pleasant, and you'll learn that roughly three seconds after a Leafs/Habs matchup is finalized.

That's where a Montreal slump comes into play. It goes without saying that any neutral fans should be rooting for a Leafs/Habs series with maximum chaos. And I'm not sure there's a better scenario than the Canadiens stumbling into the series, having all the smart people write them off against a stacked Leafs team, and then dropping a 45-save shutout on them in Game 1 while Freddie Andersen is getting beat clean from the blue line and everyone flips out. If it's Carey Price standing on his head, awesome. Jake Allen would work too. Cayden Primeau might be the funniest option of all, not counting any random Zamboni drivers, but we're not going to be overly picky here.



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The point is that the fan bases of the Leafs and Habs are tinderboxes at the best of times, and seeing them go head-to-head while everyone else subtly eggs them on would be great, right up until the entire country looked like the parking lot scene from Anchorman. Which would happen midway through the first intermission of Game 1. Let's do this.

Idea 8: Pay attention to Max Domi and the PIM race

We'll close on what's admittedly a weird one, and not exactly something you'll actually root for, but stick with me. Domi entered this week as the NHL's leader in penalty minutes, which is a little weird given he's only had one fight all season. It's been a run of misconduct penalties in recent weeks that's put him into the race, much to the consternation of Blue Jackets fans.

"Who cares?" ... you might wonder. There was a time when the PIM crown meant bragging rights in the NHL, but that's long past. You may not even know who led the league in recent years. (It was Evander Kane in each of the last two seasons.) Even with fighting up this year, caring about PIMs feels very 1990s.

So why bother paying attention to Domi's total?

Three reasons:

1. First, it would be sort of neat to see Domi take the crown that his dad once held. Somewhat surprisingly, Tie Domi only ever led the league once, in 1993-94 with 347 minutes. (He had four other years in the top three.) Max Domi isn't the same kind of player, and both father and son are probably

glad for that, but it would be mildly neat to see him bring the PIM crown back into the family.

2. As mentioned, Domi's current PIM problems are becoming a storyline in Columbus, so if he starts racking them up down the stretch there's a good chance John Tortorella will have a full-scale meltdown about it. Those are always amusing for the rest of us. Picture the time Tie got attacked by a Flyers fan in the penalty box, only this time it's his own coach coming over the glass.

3. And finally, there's a neat bit of history that reader Craig pointed out to me a few weeks ago, and it takes us back to where we started this post. Right now, McDavid's 84 points leads Domi's 71 PIMs, meaning the season could end with the leading scorer having more points than the most penalized player has PIMs.

Do you know how often that's happened in NHL history? Never. Not once, in 101 seasons.

We've come close, especially during the eras where crazy PIM totals were unheard of. Elmer Lach's 80 points in 1944-45 almost beat Pat Egan's 86 PIMs. The next year, Jack Stewart led the league with just 73 PIMs, but Max Bentley could only manage 61 points. Rocket Richard and Gordie Howe came close in 1952-53, and somewhat surprisingly it was the Rocket leading in PIMs (112) while Mr. Hockey handled points (95). And last year, Leon Draisaitl's 110 points kept it close with Kane's 122 PIMs.

We've been in the ballpark. But in over a century of history, points have never beaten PIMs. It might happen this year, which is worth watching, and maybe even rooting for.



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## Preview: Red Wings vs. Hurricanes

Canes close out season series against Detroit

By Michael Smith

After garnering nine of a possible 12 points on a six-game road trip and securing their third consecutive playoff berth, the Carolina Hurricanes return to Raleigh for a five-game homestand that begins with a one-off against the Detroit Red Wings.

The Match-Up

Detroit Red Wings (17-25-9, 43 points) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (32-10-7, 71 points)

Thursday, April 29, 7 p.m.

Watch: Bally Sports South, Bally Sports app

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

Numbers to Know

200: Rod Brind'Amour is set to coach his 200th career game in the NHL. Brind'Amour has amassed a 116-64-19 record, and he is the first head coach in franchise history to clinch a postseason berth in each of his first three seasons.

200: Andrei Svechnikov is set to become the first player from the 2018 NHL Draft class to playing in his 200th career NHL game.

400: Brett Pesce is set to play in his 400th career NHL game. Pesce has totaled 24 points (4g, 20a) this season, which ranks second among team defensemen.

7: After tallying a career-high two power-play goals in Dallas on Tuesday night, Jordan Staal now has seven on the season, a new career-best.

The Opposition

Last five games: 1-1-3, 5 points

On the road: 6-15-4, 16 points

CAR vs. DET: 3-3-1

Leading scorer: Dylan Larkin, 23 points (9g, 14a) in 44 games

Detroit has tallied points in three straight games, a stretch that began with a 7-1 shellacking of the Dallas Stars on Thursday. Since then, the Wings fell to the Stars in overtime and were blanked by the Columbus Blue Jackets in a 1-0 shootout final.

The Last Meeting

On the night of Staal's 1,000th career game in the NHL, the Canes stumbled in a 3-1 loss to the Red Wings. The game's four goals were all scored in the third period. After Detroit went up 2-0 early in the final frame, Nino Niederreiter got the Canes back within a goal, but 2-1 was as close as they'd come.

"Normally when we lose, I can come in and say, 'Give the other team credit, we played hard.' That, to me, is the one game - no disrespect to the other team because they played hard, but it's the one game where I'm like, that was gross. To a man, we were not good," head coach Brind'Amour said. "It was no good from start to finish, and we got what we deserved in that one."



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## Super 16: Golden Knights remain No. 1, Penguins climb NHL.com rankings

Hurricanes, Avalanche switch places; Islanders fall

By Dan Rosen

The Vegas Golden Knights are No. 1 in the NHL.com Super 16 power rankings for a second straight week, falling one voting point short of being the unanimous top choice among the 14 participating staff members.

The Golden Knights were ranked first by 13 of the voters. One had them at No. 2.

The Carolina Hurricanes moved up one spot to No. 2, knocking the Colorado Avalanche down to No. 3.

The biggest positive move of the week came from the Minnesota Wild, who jumped three spots to No. 8. The New York Islanders fell four places to No. 11.

The same 16 teams were ranked for a second straight week.

To create the NHL.com power rankings, each of the 14 participating staff members put together his or her version of what they think it should look like. Those were submitted and a point total assigned to each.

The team that was selected first was given 16 points, second got 15, third 14 and so on down to No. 16, which got one point.

Here is the Super 16:

1. Vegas Golden Knights (35-11-2)  
Total points: 223  
Last week: No. 1

The Golden Knights are first in the Honda West Division and have won five in a row on the road, where they play their next four games (two at the Arizona Coyotes, two at the Minnesota Wild). Vegas clinched a berth in the Stanley Cup Playoffs for a fourth straight season.

2. Carolina Hurricanes (32-10-7)  
Total points: 201  
Last week: No. 3

The Hurricanes are 5-0-3 in their past eight games and have not allowed more than three goals in regulation in any of them while giving up two or fewer in five. They have clinched a playoff berth for a third straight season and are first in the Discover Central Division.

3. Colorado Avalanche (31-12-4)  
Total points: 197  
Last week: No. 2

The Avalanche, second in the West Division, are 12-0-1 at home since March 10. They play their next two games at

home against the San Jose Sharks before going on a five-game road trip. Colorado clinched a playoff berth for a fourth straight season.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (33-14-2)  
Total points: 181  
Last week: No. 4

The Lightning, third in the Central, have won three games in a row and qualified for the playoffs for a fourth consecutive season. Forward Brayden Point has scored 12 points (five goals, seven assists) in his past nine games.

5. Washington Capitals (32-13-4)  
Total points: 159  
Last week: No. 6

The Capitals have won three in a row, all against the Islanders, by a combined 8-3 to move back into first in the MassMutual East Division. They lead the second-place Pittsburgh Penguins by one point and have one game in hand. Forward Alex Ovechkin (lower body) has missed the past two games.

6. Florida Panthers (32-14-5)  
Total points: 145  
Last week: No. 5

The Panthers are second in the Central and have made the playoffs in back-to-back seasons for the first time since 1996-97. They were eliminated by the Islanders in four games of the best-of-5 Stanley Cup Qualifiers last season. Forward Jonathan Huberdeau has scored 15 points (four goals, 11 assists) in nine games since April 13, including five points (two goals, three assists) in a 7-4 win against the Nashville Predators on Tuesday.

7. Pittsburgh Penguins (32-15-3)  
Total points: 139  
Last week: No. 9

The Penguins have more wins (20) and points (42) than any team since March 6, averaging 3.64 goals per game and 2.36 goals against per game. They are second in the East. Jeff Carter has scored three goals in five games. The forward had no points in his first three games after he was traded by the Los Angeles Kings on April 11.

8. Minnesota Wild (31-14-3)  
Total points: 123  
Last week: No. 11

Minnesota has clinched a playoff berth and is third in the West behind Vegas and Colorado. The Wild have three winning streaks of at least five games this season, which they previously accomplished in 2011-12 and 2014-15.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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9. Toronto Maple Leafs (31-13-5)  
Total points: 122  
Last week: No. 8

Frederik Andersen is practicing with the Maple Leafs, who are first in the Scotia North Division, and hopes to play before the end of the regular season. The goalie has not played since March 19 because of a lower-body injury related to issues with his knee. He's 13-8-2 with a 2.91 goals-against average and .897 save percentage in 23 games (22 starts).

10. Boston Bruins (28-14-6)  
Total points: 98  
Last week: No. 10

Taylor Hall has a point in six of nine games he's played since he was traded by the Buffalo Sabres on April 12. The forward has scored seven points (four goals, three assists) for the Bruins, who are fourth in the East Division, one point behind the third-place Islanders.

11. New York Islanders (29-15-5)  
Total points: 94  
Last week: No. 7

The Islanders were 0-2-1 in three straight games against the Capitals. They have been shut out twice and held to one goal six times in their past 14 games.

12. Edmonton Oilers (29-16-2)  
Total points: 80  
Last week: No. 13

The Oilers' final nine games are against the Calgary Flames (two), Vancouver Canucks (five) and Montreal Canadiens (two). They are a combined 10-9-1 against those teams: 5-3-0 against the Flames, 3-2-0 against the Canucks and 2-4-1 against the Canadiens.

13. Winnipeg Jets (27-19-3)  
Total points: 49  
Last week: No. 12

Nikolaj Ehlers is out the rest of regular season with an undisclosed injury, but the Jets are hopeful the forward (46 points; 21 goals, 25 assists in 47 games) can return for the start of playoffs. Winnipeg plays its next three games on the road, where it's won eight of its past 10.

14. New York Rangers (26-18-6)  
Total points: 32  
Last week: No. 16

The Rangers have won three straight games and are 11-3-2 since March 30. They are fifth in the East and four points behind the Bruins, who have two games in hand. They are five points behind the Islanders; they play a home-and-home on Thursday and Saturday.

15. Dallas Stars (21-16-12)  
Total points: 24  
Last week: No. 14

Jason Robertson set a Stars record for the longest point streak by a rookie (nine games) with his goal in a 5-1 loss to the Hurricanes on Tuesday. The forward has scored 13 points (four goals, nine assists) during the run. Dallas is fifth

in the Central, two points behind Nashville, with two games in hand.

16. Nashville Predators (27-22-2)  
Total points: 22  
Last week: No. 15

The Predators had a four-game point streak (3-0-1) end in their loss to the Panthers on Tuesday. Defenseman Ryan Ellis has scored five points (two goals, three assists), and forward Luke Kunin has scored four goals in the past five games.

Others receiving points: St. Louis Blues 8, Canadiens 7

Dropped out: None

HERE'S HOW WE RANKED 'EM

AMALIE BENJAMIN

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Washington Capitals; 5. Pittsburgh Penguins; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. New York Islanders; 8. Florida Panthers; 9. Minnesota Wild; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Toronto Maple Leafs; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. Dallas Stars; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. New York Rangers; 16. Nashville Predators

TIM CAMPBELL

1. Colorado Avalanche; 2. Vegas Golden Knights; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Florida Panthers; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Edmonton Oilers; 10. Minnesota Wild; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. New York Islanders; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. St. Louis Blues; 15. Montreal Canadiens; 16. Dallas Stars

BRIAN COMPTON

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Washington Capitals; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Tampa Bay Lightning; 7. Florida Panthers; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. New York Islanders; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. New York Rangers; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. Nashville Predators; 16. Dallas Stars

NICHOLAS J. COTSONIKA

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Minnesota Wild; 7. Toronto Maple Leafs; 8. Florida Panthers; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. New York Islanders; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. New York Rangers; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. St. Louis Blues

TOM GULITTI

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Washington Capitals; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Minnesota Wild; 7. Florida Panthers; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. New York Islanders; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. New York Rangers; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Nashville Predators



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ADAM KIMELMAN

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Pittsburgh Penguins; 7. Toronto Maple Leafs; 8. Florida Panthers; 9. Edmonton Oilers; 10. Minnesota Wild; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. New York Islanders; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. Dallas Stars; 15. Nashville Predators; 16. New York Rangers

ROBERT LAFLAMME

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Florida Panthers; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. Minnesota Wild; 9. Toronto Maple Leafs; 10. New York Islanders; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Winnipeg Jets; 13. Edmonton Oilers; 14. Dallas Stars; 15. Nashville Predators; 16. New York Rangers

MIKE G. MORREALE

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Tampa Bay Lightning; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Florida Panthers; 6. New York Islanders; 7. Washington Capitals; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Boston Bruins; 10. Toronto Maple Leafs; 11. Minnesota Wild; 12. Winnipeg Jets; 13. Edmonton Oilers; 14. New York Rangers; 15. Nashville Predators; 16. Dallas Stars

TRACEY MYERS

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Florida Panthers; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Washington Capitals; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8. Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. New York Islanders; 10. Minnesota Wild; 11. Boston Bruins; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. New York Rangers; 15. Nashville Predators; 16. Montreal Canadiens

BILL PRICE

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Washington Capitals; 6. Minnesota Wild; 7. Pittsburgh Penguins; 8.

Toronto Maple Leafs; 9. Florida Panthers; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. Edmonton Oilers; 12. New York Islanders; 13. Nashville Predators; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. Montreal Canadiens; 16. New York Rangers

SHAWN P. ROARKE

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Tampa Bay Lightning; 4. Colorado Avalanche; 5. Pittsburgh Penguins; 6. Toronto Maple Leafs; 7. Edmonton Oilers; 8. Florida Panthers; 9. Boston Bruins; 10. Washington Capitals; 11. Minnesota Wild; 12. New York Islanders; 13. St. Louis Blues; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Nashville Predators

DAN ROSEN

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Carolina Hurricanes; 3. Colorado Avalanche; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Minnesota Wild; 6. Washington Capitals; 7. Florida Panthers; 8. Boston Bruins; 9. Pittsburgh Penguins; 10. Toronto Maple Leafs; 11. New York Islanders; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. New York Rangers; 14. Winnipeg Jets; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Nashville Predators

DAVID SATRIANO

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Pittsburgh Penguins; 4. Carolina Hurricanes; 5. Tampa Bay Lightning; 6. Florida Panthers; 7. Minnesota Wild; 8. Washington Capitals; 9. Toronto Maple Leafs; 10. Boston Bruins; 11. New York Islanders; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. Nashville Predators; 14. New York Rangers; 15. Dallas Stars; 16. Winnipeg Jets

MIKE ZEISBERGER

1. Vegas Golden Knights; 2. Colorado Avalanche; 3. Carolina Hurricanes; 4. Tampa Bay Lightning; 5. Florida Panthers; 6. Washington Capitals; 7. Toronto Maple Leafs; 8. Pittsburgh Penguins; 9. Boston Bruins; 10. New York Islanders; 11. Minnesota Wild; 12. Edmonton Oilers; 13. Winnipeg Jets; 14. New York Rangers; 15. Montreal Canadiens; 16. Dallas Stars



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Central Division Weekly Roundup: Three playoff spots locked up, one remains

The battle for the final playoff position will come down to the Nashville Predators and the Dallas Stars

By Zeke Lukow

1. Carolina Hurricanes: .724 P% (32-10-7) 71 Points

The Carolina Hurricanes have clinched a playoff berth in three straight seasons for the first time in Carolina franchise history. This also means that the Canes have at minimum made the playoffs every season that Rod Brind'Amour has been the head coach of the team. The good news for the team is that Brind'Amour has created the new expectation that the minimum each season is reaching the playoffs, but playoffs will no longer be enough. The Canes will need to perform in the playoffs and act as true Cup contenders.

The Hurricanes also know that they are in a position to win the division and they need to do just that. It is a huge difference having to beat Tampa Bay and Florida to get to the semifinals compared to Nashville or Dallas, and either Florida or Tampa. Looking ahead they do have a favorable schedule with just two road games remaining. They also face the bottom three teams in all five of their remaining home games.

The Canes finally got some good news on the injury front when they got Teuvo Teravainen back last night. It is great to give him eight full games to get his sea legs back after not playing since early March. He was a bit rusty on the play that led to the Stars' only goal last night, but with more time he will settle in and hopefully be at 100% when the playoffs start in a couple of weeks.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning: .694 P% (33-14-2) 68 Points

The Lightning were the second team to clinch a playoff position last night with their own 7-4 win against the Chicago Blackhawks. This marks the fourth season in a row that they have clinched a playoff berth. With the same number of games left as the Canes, they are three points back, meaning they are over a full game behind the Canes.

They do have two games in hand over the Panthers and could easily overtake them in standings points to claim second in the division. They have seven games left in their season which includes three against the Stars and two each against the Red Wings and Panthers. Combined, the Lightning have a record of 11-6-0 against those teams.

3. Florida Panthers: .676 P% (32-14-5) 69 Points

With a 7-4 win last night the Florida Panthers clinched one of the four playoff spots in the Central Division. It has been good to see that the Panthers haven't missed a beat since losing Aaron Ekblad for the season with a broken leg on March 30. Since that time, the Panthers have been the

second-best team in the Central with an 8-5-1 record, which has only been bested by the Canes' 9-2-4 record. Losing a top-pairing defenseman would make you think the team would suffer, but the Panthers still have a 53.5% Corsi, which is the seventh highest in the league in this time.

Defensively, the Panthers have seen both MacKenzie Weegar and former Hurricane Gustav Forsling step up. They are the only two players on the team to average over 18 minutes of ice time per game in April and maintain a positive Corsi despite a negative offensive zone start percentage. Forsling's rise has been impressive in going from a waiver claim in the pre-season to a top-pairing defenseman. He certainly wouldn't have gotten the same opportunity with the Canes' stacked blueline, but it is pretty incredible that he was lost for nothing and is now an impact player.

4. Dallas Stars: .551 P% (21-16-12) 54 Points

The Calder Trophy has been all but awarded to Krill Kaprizov this season and has been for the last two months. Dallas Stars rookie Jason Robertson has largely flown under the radar, but has quietly had an incredible rookie season. Robertson was drafted by the Dallas Stars 39th overall in the 2017 Entry Draft. The 21-year-old forward has 15 goals and 25 assists for 40 total points. He sits just seven goals and a single point behind Kaprizov but has six more assists than the 24-year-old Russian.

Kaprizov will likely finish second in the voting in a year that could see the Calder voting rules changed. Robertson's goal last night means that he now has a nine-game point streak which sets a new Dallas Stars record for the longest point streak for a rookie. The record was formerly held by Jamie Langenbrunner. It is always good to get an opportunity to see the good young players around the league, and he certainly did not disappoint in the last two games. He could have had several more goals and points than he ended up with.

5. Nashville Predators: .549 P% (27-22-2) 56 Points

There was a lot made around the fact that Pekka Rinne didn't want to leave Nashville when the team was looking to sell. The 38-year-old goaltender's contract runs out at the end of the year, and he could very well retire after the season. If he does, it looks like he is leaving the Predators in good hands with Jusse Saros. At just 26 years old, Saros is an arbitration-eligible restricted free agent coming off a \$1.5-million contract. The Predators will want to protect Saros if he re-signs before the Seattle expansion draft.

Of all goalies who have played at least 10 games, Saros ranks third in the league with a .926 sv% behind only Alex Nedeljkovic and Andrei Vasilevskiy. Saros also leads the league in goals saved above average in 2021, which is five



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more than Vaskilevskiy, who sits in second. This means he has saved five more goals above average than the second-place goalie in this category and has saved 21 goals more than average over the course of 32 games played. To put that in perspective, Canes fans have loved Ned's play this season and he sits at just 13.72.

## 6. Chicago Blackhawks: .500 P% (22-22-5) 49 Points

The Chicago Blackhawks have now had their second player retire mid-season. Andrew Shaw, who was another one of the players to win multiple Stanley Cups with the Blackhawks, was forced to retire prematurely due to an accumulation of concussions. Shaw, who is 29 years old, always played a physical game and was never scared to drop the gloves to stand up for a teammate. Over 10 seasons he played 544 NHL games with the Blackhawks and Montreal Canadiens, recording 116 goals, 131 assists, and 573 penalty minutes.

There was some good news for the Chicago Blackhawks in the last week. It looks like Jonathan Toews could return for the 2021-2022 season. The Captain has missed the entire season with symptoms that have left him feeling lethargic. This has also been the first good news about Toews this season, so this piece of good news is huge for the team and their fans who have only seen their vets retire mid-season.

## 7. Detroit Red Wings: .422 P% (17-25-9) 43 Points

The Detroit Red Wings' insistence on beating the top teams of the division means that they are in danger of losing a top-five pick. They still have a game against the Canes and two games against Tampa Bay left and if we have learned from the past, they surely will win one or two of those games. Their biggest series remaining will actually be against the

Columbus Blue Jackets. They are locked in a battle for last in the division with Columbus and that spot will not be determined until the last game of the season. While it is not the typical battle fans would be paying attention to, this carries a huge swing in draft lottery odds.

With the Seattle Kraken also getting the third-best odds in the draft, the bottom-five battle between the two teams could mean a 5% difference in top-two odds and 3% in the top pick odds. Granted, the league does owe Detroit a lottery win after their recent years of bad luck and moving down in every draft in the past four years.

## 8. Columbus Blue Jackets: .412 P% (16-25-10) 42 Points

The Columbus Blue Jackets have announced that Joonas Korpisalo will miss the remainder of the season with a lower-body injury. The goaltender left Sunday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning in the third period. To replace Korpisalo, the Blue Jackets have recalled Matiss Kivlenieks from the taxi squad and have called up Daniil Tarasov from the AHL.

The Blue Jackets have been the anti-Predators this season. Whereas the Preds looked like early sellers and are now in playoff contention, the Blue Jackets looked promising and are now in the bottom five of the league. With a 1-7-2 record in their last 10 games, they have the second-worst record in the league over that span with only the 0-9-1 Devils being worse. They now sit at a 17.2% chance to move into the top two and an 8.5% chance to win the first pick. Due to the law that a Metropolitan Division team must with the lottery, they have the second-best chance behind the Devils to get into the top two.

### TODAY'S LINKS

- <https://theathletic.com/2549440/2021/04/29/hurricanes-playoff-predictions-alex-nedeljkovics-rfa-status-explained-injuries-bag-of-jerks/>
- <https://theathletic.com/2547331/2021/04/29/down-goes-brown-connor-mcdavids-100-leafs-vs-habs-and-six-more-things-to-root-for-down-the-stretch/>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-detroit-red-wings-carolina-hurricanes/c-324122574>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/super-16-nhl-power-rankings-april-28/c-324119264>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2021/4/28/22407109/central-division-weekly-roundup-4-28-21>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 29, 2021

## SportScan

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

1187420 Detroit Red Wings

'We're fortunate': Sam Gagner, Red Wings grateful to have had hockey season

Ted Kulfan

Somehow, somehow, the Red Wings will finish the regular season next weekend (fingers crossed), navigating through a campaign amid a pandemic.

Before it began, the NHL shortened the season to 56 games and formatted a division-only schedule. There have been hiccups along the way, but the NHL will head into its playoffs confident it will conclude and award a Stanley Cup.

Who gets the credit for the Wings, and the rest of the league, to motor through?

"There's been a lot of people behind the scenes that have really had to do a real good job for us to be able to play," said veteran forward Sam Gagner, who has been in the NHL since 2007 but agrees this season has been unique.

Be it a team's medical or training staff monitoring daily testing or treating injuries in a condensed, rigorous schedule, or equipment people or support staff, helping an NHL team get through this schedule has been a team effort.

"Looking back on it this year has been different than any other year," Gagner said. "I've always felt that every year kind of brings its different challenges no matter how you prepare, but this year has been definitely been special in that regard. It'll be a year we'll remember for a long time."

With the pandemic still causing much disruption on jobs and daily life in society, hockey players feel "fortunate," said Gagner, that they're able to complete a season.

"As players, we feel we're very fortunate that we've been able to do what we love to do," Gagner said. "There's a lot of situations out there where people have had to sacrifice what they love to do and we're still able to do it, obviously under different circumstances. Guys have had to really adhere to protocols and things like that, and it's made it stressful at times.

"But at the end of the day, we're playing hockey and we've enjoyed that part of it."

Tough road ahead

The Wings' next three games are against Carolina and Tampa, two of the top teams in the division.

These will be important games for the Hurricanes and Lightning, who are battling for seeding and home ice advantage.

It should be a good, stiff test for a young Wings roster.

"(Tuesday's) game (in Columbus) ended up being a good hockey game, but it started real loose, like two teams that were out of the playoffs. We can't play loose hockey like that heading into Carolina or Tampa," coach Jeff Blashill said. "Just with the firepower both of those teams have, and that's not disrespectful to Columbus, we're kind of both in the same boat in missing the playoffs.

"But we better tighten up as we head into Carolina."

OT difficulties

The Wings are 2-9 in games decided by overtime or shootout this season, following Tuesday's 1-0 shootout loss in Columbus.

Generally speaking, the extra sessions are a bit of a crapshoot, with a shred of good fortune as important for a team as anything.

It seems every season there is minor criticism of the entire overtime process, but nobody has a better way of breaking the tie and deciding a winning team quickly and efficiently.

"I don't know the answer," Blashill said of going away from the shootout, specifically. "I don't want a tie, for sure. Overtime isn't necessarily real hockey, either. It's 3-on-3 and you never get to 3-on-3 in regular hockey. Certainly nobody has the appetite to keep playing 5-on-5 forever in the regular season.

"I don't know if there's an easy solution. Ultimately everybody knows the rules at the beginning of the year and you have to play by them. If we don't like our record in overtime and shootout, then win the game in regulation time."

Red Wings at Hurricanes

► Faceoff: 7 p.m. Thursday, PNC Arena, Raleigh, North Carolina

► TV/radio: BSD-plus/WWJ-950

► Outlook: The Red Wings (17-25-9) and Carolina (32-10-7) face each other for the final time this season. ... Interestingly, the Wings lead the season series against the division leaders 4-3-0.

Detroit News LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187421 Detroit Red Wings

Michigan presence will dominate 2021 NHL Entry Draft

Ted Kulfan

Detroit — "With their first pick, the Red Wings select ..."

No, the Wings haven't infiltrated the NFL, nor will they be making a selection this weekend.

But for hockey fans, especially Detroit fans knee-deep in a rebuild, it's never too early to think about the NHL Entry Draft.

The NHL will hold the draft on July 23-24, approximately a month later than usual, because of the coronavirus pandemic and late start to the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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regular season. The NHL Draft lottery, it was announced earlier this week, will be held June 2.

Both of those events, as has been the case in recent years, will be important for the Wings, who will have another busy draft weekend this summer.

The Wings have 12 picks overall and seven in the first three rounds — their own and Washington's in the first; their own, Edmonton's and the New York Rangers' in the second; and their own and Vegas' in the third.

The Wings have their own pick in each of the first six rounds, and have Tampa's in Round 4 and Ottawa's in Round 5.

But here's the underlying issue for the Wings and the rest of the NHL scouting community. Because of the pandemic, junior and college season schedules have been altered or wiped out entirely, so some kids haven't played at all. And scouts haven't been able to travel nearly as much, if at all, to these games because of travel restrictions.

In total, the pandemic has made this particular draft class the most difficult to assess, maybe ever.

"It's been an interesting year as far as scouting," general manager Steve Yzerman said on a media Zoom chat at the trade deadline. "We don't know what next year is going to look like either right now. Kris Draper (Wings' amateur scouting director) and I talk a lot and I ask him about this year's draft and next year's draft. It's funny, next year's draft, we haven't even seen those kids yet. At least they're watching the majority of the kids for this year's draft, or they watched them last year.

"The draft is very unpredictable, hit and miss. It probably is more unpredictable this year. You can look at it two ways in that you just may get really lucky or you may get really unlucky. Time will tell.

"We've got a lot of picks and our guys have been doing the best they can. Our scouting staff is doing the best they can to evaluate and look for prospects."

The Detroit News took a look in December at the top 15 prospects at the time. Four months later, some things have changed and others haven't.

Namely, Michigan defenseman Owen Power remains the probable pick — and the Wolverines will be well represented on draft night.

With that, here's the second look at 15 prospects who could be there for the Wings picking up high, or mid- to late-round first round, in the 2021 NHL Entry Draft class:

► Owen Power, defense, Michigan: Power did nothing during his freshman season (16 points in 26 games) to discourage or erase projections that he is the No. 1 pick in the draft. At 6-foot-5 and 215 pounds, Power can be used in every situation, is an elite skater and scouts love his competitiveness. It's probably not fair to Power right now, but given the size and mobility and the way they play, it's natural to compare him lately to Tampa's Victor Hedman, which is lofty praise indeed.

► Dylan Guenther, left wing/right wing, Edmonton (WHL): Guenther had 12 goals and 12 assists in 12 games and solidified his status as an elite goal-scorer capable of scoring or setting up others. At 6-1 and 175 pounds, Guenther isn't afraid to stick his nose in the hard areas of the ice, and plays a hard game.

► Matthew Beniers, center, Michigan: Beniers had a fabulous freshman season with the Wolverines (10 goals, 14 assists in 24 games) and solidified himself as an early pick. What scouts rave about is the fact Beniers is so good at both ends of the rink, which is so important in today's NHL.

► Brandt Clarke, defense, Barrie (OHL): Clarke fits the recent mold of explosive offensive defensemen who can change a game around with his ability, skating and shot. Clarke (6-1, 181 pounds) played in Slovakia this season to remain active and build his game.

► Luke Hughes, defense, USNTDP: The younger brother of Quinn (Vancouver Canucks) and Jack (New Jersey Devils), Luke has bigger size (6-2, 180 pounds) than his brothers but the same level of skating and puck-moving ability. A foot injury ended his season prematurely.

► Simon Edvinsson, defense, Frolunda (Sweden): The mixed reaction in December has turned more to the fact Edvinsson (6-4, 180 pounds) could be a top-three pick in some scouts' estimations. The mobility is exceptional, but scouts feel there's a higher ceiling that Edvinsson could reach.

► Jesper Wallstedt, goaltender, Lulea (Finland): After a big season playing in juniors (2.23 GAA, .908 SVS), Wallstedt has moved up steadily in the minds of many scouts. It's always a risk picking a goaltender high in the first round, but the calmness and poise Wallstedt plays with has impressed folks.

► Kent Johnson, center, Michigan: Yet another Wolverine who did nothing to disprove he's a first-round pick this summer. Johnson had 27 points in 26 games and can produce jaw-dropping goals with his ability. He's not big (6-1, 165 pounds) but he can break open games.

Detroit News LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187422 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings lose goaltending duel with Columbus, 1-0 in shootout

By Ansar Khan

Thomas Greiss and Elvis Merzlikins were perfect through 65 minutes Tuesday in a goaltending duel that was decided in a shootout.

That is when Patrik Laine and Oliver Bjorkstrand scored for the Columbus Blue Jackets, lifting them to a 1-0 victory over the Detroit Red Wings at Nationwide Arena.

Merzlikins made 41 saves in regulation and overtime and denied Jakub Vrana and Adam Erne in the shootout. It was his second shutout of the season and seventh of his career.

Greiss, who was 4-0-2 in his past previous six starts, with a 1.91 goals-against average and .938 save percentage, made 33 saves but only one of three shots in the shootout. Still, he recorded his 14th career shutout and his first as a Red Wing.

The Blue Jackets (16-25-10) ended a nine-game winless streak (0-7-2), winning for only the third time in their past 19 games (3-14-2).

The Red Wings (17-25-9) remain one point ahead of last-place Columbus in the Central Division.

The teams meet two more times, in Columbus, the final two games of the season, May 7-8.

Detroit was shut out for the seventh time this season and dropped to 1-7 in games decided in overtime or a shootout.

Joe Veleno, the 30th pick in the 2018 draft, made his NHL debut for Detroit. He logged 14:59 in ice time, including a shift in overtime, had two shots and won 4-of-7 face-offs.

Vrana had five shots on goal, including a pair of breakaways, the later in OT.

Filip Zadina had a glorious chance to end it in the final seconds of OT during a three-on-one rush but missed the net.

An apparent goal by Bjorkstrand 1:23 into the game was overturned following a coaches challenge. Video confirmed that Eric Robinson was offside on the play.



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Michigan Live LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187423 Detroit Red Wings

How to watch Detroit Red Wings at Columbus Blue Jackets (4/27) - NHL Regular Season | Channel, Stream, Time

By Lauren Williams

The Detroit Red Wings are back in action after an overtime loss to the Dallas Stars. They face the Columbus Blue Jackets on the road and look to bounce back.

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

Detroit has averaged 2.4 goals per game across the past five games and will look to get plenty of shots up on Tuesday. They will look to take some of the load off Jonathan Bernier, who stopped a career-high 50 goals through regulation on Saturday.

Fans could also see Joe Veleno, who was recalled from the team's taxi squad on Tuesday.

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

What: NHL Regular Season

Who: Detroit Red Wings (17-25-8) at Columbus Blue Jackets (15-25-10)

When: Tuesday, April 27

Time: 7 p.m. ET

Where: Nationwide Arena -- Columbus, OH

TV Channel: Bally Sports Detroit Plus

Michigan Live LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187416 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets' GM Jarmo Kekalainen to help Finland at 2022 Beijing Olympics

The NHL's lone European-born GM will reprise role as Finland's assistant GM, which he did previously for the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and 2014 Sochi Olympics.

BRIAN HEDGER | The Columbus Dispatch

Jarmo Kekalainen is in his ninth season as the Blue Jackets' general manager, but his ties to Finnish hockey remain strong.

The third GM in Blue Jackets history, and longest-tenured, still spends a portion of his summers in Finland and keeps close ties on prospects and teams in the Finnish elite league (Liiga) throughout the year. Kekalainen is also the only European-born GM in NHL history, which puts him in a unique position to help his home country on the international stage.

His first knowledge of the NHL and its Finnish-born players is one of the reasons Kekalainen will travel to the 2022 Olympics in Beijing, China as the assistant GM for Finland's national team – his second Olympic experience in that role.

"It is an honor for me to be with the national team and work together with the coaching and management team," Kekalainen said in a statement released by the Finnish Ice Hockey Association on Wednesday. "The

Olympics is a great event and an opportunity to achieve something unique, because I think we can put a really tough group together."

Kekalainen is from Kuopio, Finland and rose up as a player there to play at both Clarkson University and in the NHL prior to starting his career as a hockey executive. He was the GM of Helsinki-based IFK in the 1990s, putting together a championship team in 1998 in Finland's top professional league, and later was the president and GM of the Jokerit program – IFK's Helsinki-based rival – prior to taking on the GM job for the Blue Jackets in 2013.

This is the third time Kekalainen will help construct a national team for Finland, after previously serving in the same capacity during the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and 2014 Olympics held in Sochi, Russia – where Finland won a bronze medal.

According to QuantHockey.com, there are 59 players in the NHL this season, including three on Kekalainen's roster: star forward Patrik Laine, goalie Joonas Korpisalo and defenseman Mikko Lehtonen.

Four other Finnish-born NHL players are averaging more than a point a game: Colorado Avalanche forward Mikko Rantanen (26 goals, 26 assists), Florida Panthers center Aleksander Barkov (24 goals, 28 assists), Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho (21 goals, 28 assists) and Dallas Stars forward Roope Hintz (14 goals, 24 assists).

Goaltending options are also enviable on a list that includes a variety of established NHL veterans like Nashville's Pekka Rinne, stars in their prime – like Boston's Tuukka Rask – and impressive younger netminders like Nashville's Juuse Saros, Korpisalo and Chicago Blackhawks rookie Kevin Lankinen.

"I believe we can do something special with the strong group we will be able to put together," Kekalainen told the Dispatch.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187417 Columbus Blue Jackets

Takeaways: A goalie duel, Elvis Merzlikins was everywhere and the Blue Jackets finally won

Nine-game winless skid ends on Elvis Merzlikins' 41-save shutout of the Detroit Red Wings, which included two more stops in a shootout. Merzlikins: 'It's what we needed.'

BRIAN HEDGER | The Columbus Dispatch

Overtime started the way all periods begin for Elvis Merzlikins.

The Blue Jackets' goalie tapped both goal posts with his stick. He gave the crossbar a smooch. He sent a couple requests skyward, toward the heavens via the rafters of Nationwide Arena. He then prepared himself for the fury of OT in a 0-0 game that was filled with near misses and great saves.

This time, his superstitions paid off in a 1-0 shootout victory against the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday night, along with 41 saves plus two more in the shootout. Merzlikins' efforts plus shootout goals by Patrik Laine and Oliver Bjorkstrand allowed the Blue Jackets to rid themselves of a winless streak that had grown to nine games (0-2-7) and prompted their emotional netminder to call it "embarrassing" last Thursday in Tampa, Fla.

It was about time they finally won one.

"It doesn't feel good in that locker room," Merzlikins said. "Now, after this win, it's really what we needed. It kind of cancels everything (from the) past and (we're) not thinking about that anymore and not even going there. Last game, it's a win ... so that's how we're going to prepare for the next game."



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That won't take place until Saturday in Raleigh against the Carolina Hurricanes, so the Jackets began their three-day break between games with a full off day Wednesday to enjoy a feeling they hadn't felt in three extremely long weeks.

"It feels really great," said Merzlikins, who drew rounds of cheers from fans who stuck around to see his Nick Foligno-less victory jump hug and postgame in-arena interview with TV analyst Jody Shelley. "I mean, really, it's what we needed and it really feels great. Everybody was really battling and fighting, so I'm really happy for the boys."

Mercifully, only five more games remain in the Blue Jackets' season.

Here are the takeaways from Tuesday's game:

Elvis' top stops

It was a busy night for both goalies, but Merzlikins tied an NHL career-high with 41 saves. That provided a lot of options for his top saves in the game, but a few stood out above the others.

The first was 1:13 into the game and was partially due to luck.

Vladislav Namestnikov tried a wrist shot aimed for the five hole, but was stopped by Merzlikins, who then kept the loose puck from crossing the goal line by spinning around in the crease.

He also made two huge saves against Jakub Vrana on breakaways in the second period and overtime before making back-to-back stops in OT that were arguably his best of the night. After kicking the puck into the high slot off a wrist shot by Valteri Filppula on a 2-on-1 rush, Merzlikins readied himself for a follow-up from Michael Rasmussen. He tracked it and soaked up the puck to stop play, causing Rasmussen to shake his head in disgust.

"Elvis played really good," Bjorkstrand said. "He made a lot of huge saves during the game, OT and in the shootout, so it's huge when he plays that way. He kept us in the game."

Goalie duel

Merzlikins and Detroit's Thomas Greiss matched each other's stellar work until the shootout, when the Blue Jackets were finally able to crack through with a pair of tallies.

Greiss also earned a shutout despite taking the loss, making 33 saves as the Red Wings outshot the Jackets 41-33 through 65 minutes. Combined, the goaltenders stopped 74 shots in the game and readied themselves for a whopping 125 attempted shots launched their direction prior to the shootout.

That's a heavy workload, physically and mentally, but Merzlikins enjoyed it.

"That's actually fun," he said. "It's funny, because you actually play against (the other goaltender). Greiss had a really great game, as well. Penalty shots are luck. This time the luck was on my side, so I was lucky. But I think he had a great game and I was just waiting for the moment when he's going to make, maybe a mistake or give up (a goal)."

Missed shots galore

Each goaltender got help from numerous missed shots and the Red Wings also blocked 16 of the Blue Jackets' attempts.

Greiss got more help than Merzlikins in the miss category, though, despite the Jackets' goalie also being spared by a couple Red Wings misses. Columbus missed the net 21 times in all, sending a number of attempts off scoring chances high, wide or pinging off the crossbar and goal posts.

Eric Robinson hit the post a little more than four minutes into the game, Max Domi rung a hard wrist shot off the crossbar in the second and Detroit's Namestnikov sent one off the post with 12 seconds left in the first. Asked about all the inaccuracy, Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella focused on the positives of the game.

"Yep," he said. "Both teams are trying, though."

The race to the bottom

The Blue Jackets finally got two points and a win, but it wasn't enough to pull them even with the Red Wings at the bottom of the Central Division standings. The shootout loss gave Detroit a point to stay one ahead of the last-place Jackets and the Red Wings also own the tie-breaker at the moment with more wins in regulation.

Columbus did, however, take a "loss" by winning. The victory pushed them back in front of the Vancouver Canucks and Ottawa Senators in the NHL's overall standings, which means they're now saddled with the sixth-worst record in the league. That's important when it comes to the draft in the summer, which uses a lottery system with odds to win the No. 1 overall pick determined by the order teams finish.

The Seattle Kraken, who open their inaugural season next year, will get the third-best lottery odds and are guaranteed one of the top six picks. That means the Jackets' victory Tuesday dropped their lottery odds from fifth-best to seventh.

The Canucks and Senators each have more games left, though.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187401 Chicago Blackhawks

Adam Boqvist might not need surgery on his broken right wrist, Chicago Blackhawks coach Jeremy Colliton says

By PHIL THOMPSON

Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Adam Boqvist might be able to recover from a broken right wrist without undergoing surgery, coach Jeremy Colliton said.

"I don't think he's going to need surgery. Obviously that's a positive," Colliton said Wednesday.

Boqvist broke the wrist during a collision with Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Černák at the 4-minute, 57-second mark of the second period of the Hawks' 7-4 loss Tuesday at the United Center.

The wrist injury not only costs Boqvist the remaining seven games of the season, but also delays his offseason program. For how long remains uncertain.

"It's going to put a bit of a crimp in his workout plans, but he's got to do everything he can to improve his conditioning so that he can play at his highest level for longer," Colliton said. "He's improved a lot this year. The overall fitness that he can bring, that's going to help him a lot."

Blackhawks defenseman Adam Boqvist sits alone on the bench after a 3-1 loss to the Predators on April 23, 2021, at United Center. Boqvist suffered a broken right wrist Tuesday against the Lightning, ending his season.

Boqvist also missed 14 games this season because of separate stints in the COVID-19 and concussion protocols.

Colliton elaborated on his desire to see Boqvist build his durability.

"The biggest thing is his ability to play more minutes, have a 30-second shift and then still have enough to start the power play after we draw a penalty," he said.

Despite the fits and starts of Boqvist's season, Colliton said the 20-year-old showed progress.

"Both offensively and defensively, he's done a good job of using his legs to get body position, get stops in the defensive zone, close quicker, and



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that's allowed him to be more dynamic offensively," Colliton said. "You know, win the puck and then move it ahead, join the rush, join the attack.

"He's building confidence on the offensive blue line. I still think he has more to give there when you look at what he can do."

Boqvist averaged 52 seconds per shift this season, tied for sixth on the Hawks, and averaged 19.7 shifts, sixth among Hawks defensemen and 11th overall.

His average ice time was 16:59, including 3:23 on the power play. Last season he skated 16:13 per game and 2:10 on the power play. He had a goal and seven assists on the man advantage this season.

"Power play, I think he's improved there," Colliton said. "He's been big part of the success we've had there. When he hasn't been on the power play, it's affected us.

"He's still a very young player in terms of defensemen in the rest of the league. He's really just getting started. A lot of guys aren't even close to making their debuts, and he's got almost 80 games."

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187402 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Dylan Strome maligns low production as long-term role comes into question

Strome has scored only 13 points in 35 games this season — including only six at even strength — and was healthy-scratched for crucial games twice last week.

By Ben Pope Apr 28, 2021, 4:07pm CDT

Dylan Strome has dealt with inexplicably low scoring this season.

While the Blackhawks played two crucial games last week, Dylan Strome sat in dress clothes in a United Center suite, a healthy scratch in favor of a seventh defenseman.

That scenario would've been hard to believe over the last two seasons, during which Strome cemented himself as an integral top-six forward. But that's how 2021 has been for Strome.

"It's never fun sitting out," Strome said Wednesday after returning to the lineup Tuesday. "It sucks to have to watch. But [I've] got to play better, got to produce more. They wanted to go with seven 'D.' I played 10 and 11 minutes the two games before that, so they thought they could find my minutes somewhere else."

Strome, a self-described "big stats guy," knows the numbers.

After scoring 89 points in 116 games the last two seasons with the Hawks, he has scored only 13 in 35 games this year. He knows merely six of those points have come at even strength: four goals, one primary assist and one secondary assist.

But he also knows much of that precipitous drop-off in production isn't his own fault. His points should theoretically be holding steady or even increasing, based on his shot rates.

His shot attempts have increased from 9.5 per 60 minutes to 10.0 this season. So have his shots on goal (6.0 to 6.3) and scoring chances (5.9 to 6.1). And since returning from a concussion March 18, he has averaged 11.4 shot attempts, 7.3 shots on goal and 8.5 scoring chances per 60.

"It's weird," he said. "I have one secondary assist this year, where sometimes you make a pass and a guy makes a pass and it goes in. The last couple years, those were going my way. This year ... [there's] not much puck luck."

He doesn't intend to exempt himself, though.

"There's been five or six times this year where I've missed grade-'A' chances or back-door [chances]," he added. "You turn eight goals into 13 or 14. Stats are one thing, but you've got to keep getting the chances ... and find a way to bear down."

The Hawks' seven remaining games don't mean much from a wins-and-losses standpoint but remain crucial for individual players hoping to prove something to the front office entering what could be a big offseason of trades.

After defenseman Nikita Zadorov, Strome headlines that list. Coach Jeremy Colliton scratching the 24-year-old forward for those two games was a wake-up call, demonstrating how far he has fallen down the depth chart. With as many as 22 forwards currently in contention for roster spots next year, that's a concerning sign.

Strome's inability to adapt from a center to wing is a problem, too. He did center a line Tuesday with Dominik Kubalik and Pius Suter, but it was one of relatively few such opportunities he has received.

"We've got some good centers on this team, [but] I feel like I can be one of those centers and hopefully I can prove it," Strome said.

"He would prefer to play center," Colliton said Tuesday. "We've talked about that before. I try to put guys individually in the best situation we can for them to have success. But ultimately I have 23 [players] I need to do that for ... Part of the game is you don't always get the role you want to have and it's up to you to make the most of it."

Minutes earlier, talking about fellow center-wing flip-flopper Philipp Kurashev, Colliton said the Hawks "like that flexibility, that he can do it in both positions, as we build our team." So there's no question Strome's positional rigidity reduces his value.

Virtually everything else this season has reduced Strome's value, too. Only he can turn it around.

"[This year] hasn't been what I wanted, but sometimes that's how it happens," he said. "This year hasn't been fun for a lot of people."

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187403 Chicago Blackhawks

Chicago Blackhawks' deteriorating goalie situation and more

John Dietz

With the playoffs all but out of reach for the Blackhawks, it seems like a good idea to offer up some Five Thought pieces a bit more often.

So away we go ...

Cracks showing?

The first concern is between the pipes.

Although Kevin Lankinen (16-13-4, .910, 2.95) has put together a fine rookie season, there have been some troubling signs of late. And it's not just the recent numbers, which are quite ugly (.856 save percentage, 4.39 GAA in his last six starts).

Lankinen, so strong early on, has yielded quite a few soft goals. Look no further than Erik Cernak's shot from the right faceoff dot that slid right between Lankinen's legs 28 seconds into Tampa Bay's 7-4 victory Tuesday at the United Center. He needs to make that stop.

Tampa Bay's third goal, by Alex Barre-Boulet, came after Lankinen failed to clear a rebound.



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There are plenty of other examples over the last three weeks, including a 55-foot shot from Detroit's Troy Stecher that deflected off Lankinen, then bounced over his right shoulder and into the net.

So has the heavy workload been too much?

"It's probably not unexpected with how much he's played," coach Jeremy Colliton said. "He's had some good efforts here sprinkled in as well. It's just a tough grind, this league. A lot of our guys have gone through that."

While there's plenty of blame to go around -- especially when it comes to the wretched defensive coverage in front of the net -- it's also fair to wonder if Lankinen is truly a top-end goalie that can lead a team to the promised land.

Looking good:

Before the season, Ian Mitchell was the rookie defenseman everyone expected to shine. And while Mitchell had a decent campaign, it's Wyatt Kalynuk who has impressed most down the stretch.

In just 14 games, Kalynuk is tied with Duncan Keith with most goals among blue liners with 4. He's also shown good defensive awareness, is a sharp passer and adds some physicality when needed.

"He's come a long way since training camp," Colliton said. "He's made a lot of plays at our level, which is hard to do. He's made them with his legs but also moved the puck really well. Shown a willingness to jump in the play, (which has) added to our attack."

"Defending, he's making quicker reads so he can close out in 'D' zone, which again helps him get going the other way, helps our team to get out and control the tempo."

More needed:

It's been a rough campaign for Dylan Strome, who was in concussion protocol for a month and scratched in two games against Nashville last week. Strome (8G, 5A in 35 games) returned to the lineup against Tampa Bay, playing center. He looked sharp in the first period, taking 3 shots on goal and nearly scoring in the waning seconds.

Still, he knows the consistency has been lacking.

"There's been five or six times this year where I've missed Grade A chances or back doors," Strome said Wednesday. "(That would) turn 8 goals into 12 or 13 or 14. ..."

"I feel like I had a lot of good chances last night and have for a while now. I've got to find a way to bear down, and when I get a chance to make a good pass, I've got to put it there and hopefully they put it in."

"Lots of things I can work on, but just capitalizing on my chances and obviously being out there for positive shifts."

Killer decision:

Adding Alex DeBrincat and Kirby Dach to the penalty kill has really worked out. They are a big reason the PK has killed off 19 of 20 power plays over the last six games.

"It makes (the opponent) uncomfortable, no question," Colliton said. "You can't really settle in as much in the offensive zone (and) you've got to be careful on the offensive blue line ... because you know you have a long stick with great instincts in a guy like Kirby. Brinksy's quickness, he can jump on it and create a 2-on-1. ..."

"They can use those instincts and the speed and the reaction that they have to create things the other way."

You can go home again:

After not registering a single point in nine games with Florida, Vinnie Hinostroza has 2 goals and 7 assists in 10 appearances with the Hawks. The Bartlett native has certainly proven he still belongs in the NHL, his speed and tenacity on display every night.

Hinostroza will be an unrestricted free agent this off-season. Seems like a no-brainer to bring him back on a cheap one-year deal.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187404 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Adam Boqvist ruled out for season

BY CHARLIE ROUMELIOTIS

The Blackhawks have been plagued by injuries since before the 2020-21 season even began and the bad luck continued on Tuesday.

Adam Boqvist, who left the game in the second period after taking a hit from Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak, sustained a broken right wrist and is done for the rest of the season.

"I don't know what the timeline is, but he has a broken wrist," head coach Jeremy Colliton confirmed following a 7-4 loss. "Certainly, he's not coming back for this year."

Not good: Adam Boqvist goes straight to the locker room holding his right wrist/forearm. #Blackhawks pic.twitter.com/d2XMEPzev8— Charlie Roumeliotis (@CRoumeliotis) April 28, 2021

It's an unfortunate blow for Boqvist, who has been sidelined on numerous occasions this season. He missed nearly one month towards the beginning of the season because he tested positive for COVID-19 and was also out for more than a week earlier this month while in the NHL's concussion protocol.

Now, a broken wrist has ended his season early. He finished the campaign with 15 points (two goals, 13 assists) in 35 games while averaging 16:59 of ice time.

"It's been unfortunate that his momentum has been stopped a few times by having him miss time when he's been rolling and playing well," Colliton said. "But that's part of his development as well into a pro, finding a way to be a bit more durable and play more games. He's improved away from the puck, his confidence on the puck, and I like the direction he's headed. Just unfortunate he's going to miss some games here."

Kirby Dach suffered a similar injury in December and was put on a four-to-five-month timetable. Boqvist is likely to be on a similar timeline, but it's not ideal that he'll spend a large portion of his offseason rehabbing.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187405 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks or Bruins? On fandom, ambivalence and who's had it better the last 12 years

By Mark Lazerus Apr 28, 2021

It's a thought that pops up in my mentions a few times every month. Has for years. It's expressed in the comments section every time I write a story about the good old days, which is, I'll freely admit, a lot. It's even come up among the Blackhawks themselves, in private conversations at the rink in the lazy hours before and after a practice. I once brought it up to Marcus Kruger and he said he and Brandon Saad were talking about it just "the other day."

That thought? Should have been four.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There should have been four Stanley Cups in the Blackhawks' golden age, not "just" three. It's a thought that gnaws at Chicagoans and Blackhawks fans across the globe. As much as fans swell with pride about 2010, 2013 and 2015, they dwell inside on 2014, a season that ended in overtime of Game 7 of the Western Conference finals.

If only the Blackhawks could have made a 4-3 third-period lead in Game 7 against the Kings stand up. If only Nick Leddy's jersey had fitted him a little more snugly. The Rangers wouldn't have stood a chance in the Stanley Cup Final, the thinking goes. The Blackhawks still would have won the following year, is the assumption. The first and only three-peat in the salary-cap era was theirs for the taking.

That's fandom, right? You're never satisfied. You always want more. Whether you're a player, a season-ticket holder or a casual observer, it's so much fun to win that you get greedy. You get addicted to the relentless cycle of tension and release that comes with playoff series, with endless overtimes, with pivotal Game 5s and unendurable Game 7s. Hell, the exquisite agony of the hours leading up to an elimination game are almost as good as the giddy hours that follow a successful one. And you just want more and more and more. It's natural, all part of the fun.

Now, strictly speaking, only Penguins fans can say they've had as good a run as the Blackhawks have in the cap era. The Blackhawks' core won three Cups, the Penguins core has three Cups. That the Penguins are still in position to make a run at another one surely gives their fans the edge, but Blackhawks fans really have no right to complain, right?

Well ...

There's another thought I've seen pop up in my mentions more and more lately, particularly since it became evident a few years ago that the Blackhawks needed to move on from the glory years. It shows up in the comments sections once in a while, too. I even talked about it with Patrick Kane a couple years ago, and he admitted to some envy.

Why can't the Blackhawks be more like the Boston Bruins?

The same Bruins who retooled around a veteran core and barely dipped at all, missing the playoffs in just 2014-15 and 2015-16, but doing so with 96 and 93 points, respectively. The same Bruins who have supplemented the likes of Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand with David Pastrnak and Charlie McAvoy. The same Bruins who, through savvy roster management, team-friendly contracts and an aggressive mindset, have been buyers at the trade deadline year after year after year.

The same Bruins who've won one Stanley Cup in ... \*checks notes\* ... four decades? Who haven't won one in 10 years? Those Bruins? Yeah, those Bruins.

All of which brings me to another thought, one that I haven't seen expressed on Twitter, in the comments, or among NHLers themselves. Maybe that's because it's mildly insane. But if you had the choice, would you rather have been a Blackhawks fan since, say, 2008, or a Bruins fan?

Blackhawks, right? Three Cups is more than one Cup. End of discussion. Right? I mean, what fan in their right mind would give up the delirious joy of the Chicago hockey renaissance, skipping work or school to attend the 2010 parade and tracking the week-long Cup crawl through Chicago's so-called Viagra Triangle? What kind of person would be willing to give back the comeback against Detroit and #17Seconds in 2013? What kind of lunatic would turn away the eruption of joy that accompanied the first Cup celebrated on Chicago ice in 77 years in 2015?

To be on the other side of #17Seconds, no less?

But fandom isn't about the destination, right? It's all about the journey. All that aforementioned unbearable fun and excruciating joy. It's about sweating out Big Games with your friends, living and dying with every shot and save. But more than anything, it's about hope — believing you might win, you can win, you will win. That hope sustains you through the offseason. It carries you through training camp. It buoys you through the dog days of the regular season. And it fuels you during the playoffs.

Bruins fans have that hope, every night, every year. For 12 consecutive years, Bruins fans had reason to believe, reason to sweat, reason to agonize over every game, every goal, every coaching decision, every roster move. For 12 consecutive years, they were in the game. Their team mattered.

Blackhawks fans haven't had that hope, really, since the eighth-seeded Predators swept them out of the first round four long years ago. They haven't truly earned a playoff spot since. First, they tried clinging to the past, like so many former champions do. Didn't work. Then they tried retooling with veterans, like Boston and Pittsburgh did. Didn't work, either.

Now they're trying to rebuild with youth, like they did themselves in the mid-2000s. But it takes time. There's hope, but it's long-term hope. Even before the Blackhawks were all but eliminated from playoff contention last week, nobody was really living and dying with every game because nobody really thought this team had any realistic chance at a championship. It's still fandom, but it's a softer fandom, more relaxed. The highs aren't nearly as high, the lows aren't nearly as low. It becomes more a hobby, less an obsession. It's healthier, sure, but not nearly as fun.

Since the last Blackhawks' championship, there's been nothing but stagnation. Since the last Bruins championship, there's been nothing but contention, including two more trips to the final. Boston sports fans have been hilariously spoiled over the last couple of decades, so maybe they're the wrong group to appreciate what they've had in the Bruins. But the point remains: The Bruins keep mattering. The Blackhawks are taking the long way back to mattering.

So what's better? Burning hotter or burning longer? Six or seven unbelievable years or a dozen-plus really good ones? Chicago's peaks tower over Boston's (the difference between winning a Cup and losing in the final might be just 17 seconds, but it feels like 17 lifetimes). But Bruins fans have wrung more relevance and gotten more of their fix of that sweet, sweet hope and despair that makes sports so simultaneously soul-crushing and soul-replenishing.

Ask any fan, and they'll surely tell you they'll take the titles. No Cubs fan would give back 2016 for more of this second-tier contention they've had since. And the fact is, once you win it all, nothing else can ever live up to it. But there is something to be said for the Bruins' more, let's say, tantric fandom.

Because while the Blackhawks play out the string on this pleasant but ultimately fruitless season and Chicagoans turn their attention to the Cubs, White Sox and (deep sigh) Bears, the Bruins are gearing up for another playoff run. Bostonians are plotting potential matchups, stressing over second-round showdowns, stocking up on Sam Adams and bracing themselves for up to two more months of glorious misery. Sounds great, doesn't it?

What's my point? Honestly, I'm not sure I have one. It's just a thought that's been rattling around in my brain the last few weeks as fans have started to tune out another lost Blackhawks season a few weeks before the end, and as giants of modern Blackhawks history such as Corey Crawford, Brent Seabrook and Andrew Shaw keep stepping away from the game for good. I'm old enough to remember when April and May (and sometimes June) were the most exciting times to be a Chicago sports fan. Maybe I just miss those days, and miss writing about Big Games the way so many of you miss stressing over and celebrating them.

That's sports, right? The highs are unbeatable, the lows are unbearable. And being somewhere in the middle? Well, in the emotionally heightened fantasy world that is sports, ambivalence is the worst feeling of all.

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1187532 Websites



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The Athletic / Is NHL's ESPN-Turner partnership good for hockey? League executives weigh in on financials and more

By Sean Shapiro Apr 28, 2021 151

NBC has an important legacy with the NHL.

When the league missed the entire 2004-05 season due to a work stoppage and the NHL's overall value and marketability crashed to an all-time low, NBC had just returned as a national television partner. In 2008, the NHL introduced an NBC brainchild, the Winter Classic, a Jan. 1 fixture that put the sport on the map on a day normally dominated by college football. The outdoor spectacles have become the league's most successful and most-viewed regular-season games.

But now NBC is out of the picture. Turner Sports officially secured the second part of the NHL's national TV deal in the United States on Monday, paying \$1.57 billion for a seven-year deal, an average annual value of \$225 million. ESPN has the A package, confirmed in March in a deal worth \$2.8 billion.

Five team executives, who asked to remain anonymous so they could speak more freely, said Tuesday that the move away from NBC would be good for the NHL.

"It was time to move forward with forward-thinking TV partners," one NHL executive said.

Multiple executives said there was optimism that the new deals would lead to a boost in creativity in promoting the game to a wider audience. One source noted that more could be done to sell the sport by better highlighting player personalities, especially during pre-game coverage.

In short, the NHL wanted what the NBA has.

Culturally, the NBA's prominence in American sports goes beyond the hardcore fans, and the programming plays into that. A typical NBA pregame show focuses on more than just the Xs and Os of the sport, for example.

"I think we can learn a lot from the NBA's broadcasts and we have partners now in Turner and ESPN that understand that," one NHL executive said. "We need to have broadcasts that focus on the people, ones that find more ways to connect because you can enter NBA fandom from multiple avenues. That hasn't been the case in hockey."

NBC has declined to comment on all matters related to the NHL's deal at this point.

The deals with ESPN and Turner represent an important shift for the NHL. Executives were excited about the potential of increased visibility when the ESPN deal was finalized in March. Hockey was back onto the "sports bar default" channel and would finally move back into the A block of SportsCenter programming. Getting on ESPN alone would have made the new TV deal a win, but Turner Sports making the late push and ultimately landing the rights added to the excitement.

Multiple executives mentioned how they view Turner Sports as a channel that attracts a younger audience. While ESPN presents ancillary benefits being owned by the Walt Disney Company, Turner Sports parent company, WarnerMedia, has similar benefits that excite NHL executives.

"I think an underrated part of this deal, which more people should be talking about, is the Bleacher Report element," a high-ranking team executive said. "They've done well connecting with and promoting things to a young audience, and the NBA has thrived on things like that. Look at what they've done with House of Highlights."

The hope, according to this executive, is that Bleacher Report and its House of Highlights video brand will focus more energy into creating viral hockey content.

While most NHL executives expressed approval about the deals with ESPN and Turner Sports, questions were raised about what could have been.

Before the pandemic, according to sources, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman laid out plans to bring in closer to \$750 million per season in American media rights. Landing around \$645 million per season isn't a small number, but it's more than \$100 million less than some owners were expecting; over the course of seven years, it's a total of more than \$700 million less in expected TV revenue.

The pandemic was a factor, but the NFL may have played a bigger role in preventing the NHL from landing Bettman's initial goal of \$750 million and maybe even flirting with closer to \$1 billion per season for both packages combined.

"We ended up doubling, and then some, the TV money but could it have been tripled? I think it could have if not for the NFL," one NHL executive said. "It's just a reality of it, I suppose."

The NFL recently announced a \$100 billion TV rights package split between Amazon, CBS, ESPN/ABC, Fox and NBC, which runs through 2033. Networks are paying more than \$2 billion per season to the league for the right to broadcast what are consistently the most-watched programs on television.

Having TV rights expire the same year as the NFL is a blessing and a curse for the NHL. The NFL is the rising tide when it comes to sports media rights, it sets the bar and puts an emphasis on how much networks were willing to pay for live sports coverage. But the rights for the NFL cost so much that networks had to make difficult decisions, and suitors and resources were possibly directed to football rather than the NHL.

"The NFL sets and impacts everything," one source said. "That's just a reality of being in the sports business in the United States."

Some executives indicated the length of the deals was also a bit longer than ideal. The NHL has faced criticism over the 10-year deal it inked in 2011 with NBC. Critics said the term of that deal locked in a rate that limited earning potential — and devalued the NHL's product — in a changing industry. These deals are shorter, but there is still uneasiness that more money could have been on the table down the line.

"A four- or five-year deal would have been better for the league," an NHL executive said. "This is good for the NHL, but this is better for the TV networks getting that rate for seven years, who knows what rights would cost and the higher value that could be there in five years."

What wasn't much of a concern to NHL executives is that in three of the next seven years, the Stanley Cup Final will be a cable-only production on Turner Sports and therefore not available on an over-the-air channel. Of the executives interviewed for this story, only one even considered it a potential worry.

"The TV world is changing, I don't think that's something that's important anymore, and streaming and those elements have replaced that when it comes to importance, in my mind," one executive said. "It's about thinking about what works moving forward, not about what has been a must in the past."

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The Athletic / Joe Thornton and Gord Downie: Inside a friendship that changed an NHL star and inspired a music legend

By Joshua Kloke 322

It is September 2016, and the sun has set on Toronto's Withrow Park. Two men are standing near the site of the park's outdoor rink, and they are smiling.

One man is one of the greatest hockey players of his generation.

Beside him stands the other man: an adored Canadian rock musician, regaling him with exploits from the hundreds of games of shinny he's



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played as a goalie on that rink. The hockey player wakes up the sleepy park with his boisterous laugh as the musician describes his game.

The two friends share laughter because they have to: the musician is in a bout with terminal brain cancer. And the hockey player knows this meeting, which he kept private from his teammates, might be the last with his friend.

The Tragically Hip's final tour had finished months earlier. Gord Downie's family, led by his brother and newfound caretaker, Patrick, were not necessarily open to regular visits from anyone who wanted to wish Downie well. Instead, they created an environment where Downie could rest when he needed to, focus on being around his children and make more music, as were his wishes.

But those rules didn't apply to Joe Thornton, Downie's favourite hockey player, who over time became a close friend.

"There was always an open door for Joe," says Patrick.

And in those meetings, Thornton both grew closer with Downie, and became a changed man.

In a rare interview on a topic he has often declined to address, Thornton said he was thankful to have Downie in his life. The musician helped him find a better path, one that eventually led him to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

And, Thornton says, "He made me a better person."

Gord Downie and Joe Thornton at the corner of Hampton and Hogarth avenues in Toronto. (Courtesy of Joe Thornton)

Though moments like this are rare, Joe Thornton is unsettled.

The normally easy-going, and immensely talented playmaker is sitting in the Civic Arena in Pittsburgh, a building that has since been demolished. He has just been selected by the Boston Bruins as the first overall pick in the 1997 NHL Draft and has been thrust into the spotlight. Sitting with an interviewer, producers and camera people, Thornton is a little overwhelmed and in need of a question that will put him at ease. He gets it when the interviewer asks: What music do you like?

Thornton's wide smile, already his trademark, flashes and he says: "The Tragically Hip."

"Oh, you like that band?" the interviewer asks.

"My favourite," Thornton replies.

The Tragically Hip was played in his minor hockey locker rooms when he was as young as 12, he says, around the time 1991's "Road Apples" was released.

The interviewer points behind him, to a man clad in black holding a boom mic.

"That's Gord Downie's brother," the interviewer says, and Thornton's smile grows wider.

When the interview finishes, Thornton and Patrick Downie connect. Patrick is a lifelong Bruins fan who lives in Boston. He works for the team, doing everything from producing interviews to DJ'ing games. Thornton, a wide-eyed teenage fan of the band at heart, asks about Gord Downie and Patrick details his favourite singer's obsession with the Bruins. He said he and his brother talk nearly every day about their favourite team, a fact highlighted in Downie's 2017 song and ode to his brother, "You, Me and the B's."

The Downie family obsession with the Bruins began at a young age. Harry Sinden, then the team's general manager, was a family friend. As a minor league coach, Sinden also worked in real estate and sold the Downies their home in Amherstview, outside of Kingston, Ont. Downie's parents asked Sinden to be godfather to their children.

"Back in the day, we supported every move Harry made," Downie told Bob McKenzie in his book "Hockey Confidential" of his Bruins fandom.

Thornton sat stunned as he glimpsed into the life of his favourite singer. The singer who adored the team he was now playing for, in part, because of the man who drafted him.

It follows then that Gord would appreciate Thornton, too, given that Sinden selected him. Thornton provided hope for a franchise that had just missed the playoffs for the first time in 30 years.

And when Thornton first took the ice for the Bruins, Gord's appreciation for his game swelled.

By 1997, The Tragically Hip had become the most popular band in Canada, partly on the strength of Downie's wild creativity on stage, his body-contorting dancing and unchained poetic musings.

Downie was a different breed, and in Thornton, Downie saw someone who also made a name for himself by breaking from the mould.

"What he sees, and what he executes, is like a different game," said Patrick of what Gord liked in Thornton's sometimes daring playmaking.

Thornton and Patrick would remain friendly, stopping to chat whenever they passed each other at TD Garden. And Patrick always made sure to sneak in an extra Tragically Hip song or two during a game for Thornton, even if Thornton's favourite, the slow, drunken stumble of "Long Time Running" wasn't fit for a raucous arena.

Not long after Thornton began with the Bruins, he travelled to Toronto for a Tragically Hip concert and afterward, met his idol backstage.

"Overwhelming," says Thornton of seeing Downie in person. "I don't really get nervous around people, but he was probably one of the only guys I ever got nervous around."

It took, in Thornton's estimation, "about three seconds" into the conversation before he felt at ease.

"You know the movie Avatar where the one character plugs into (another)? You just knew who you are as soon as you hugged. An instant connection," says Thornton.

Thornton, of course, wanted to talk about the concert. Downie, as he would often do, wanted only to feed his Bruins obsession.

Thornton was enamoured by Downie's ability to quell the noise around him. He hung on Thornton's every word.

"Joe was our first real Bruin friend," says Patrick, laughing.

The kinship between Gord and Joe was cemented by what Patrick calls a "rock and roll magnetism" in both men.

As Patrick describes what brought Thornton and his brother together, it's easy to imagine he's describing Gord, too.

"He's able to capture the imagination of a lot of people. The guy just lights up rooms. The room is a better place even after he's left it," Patrick says.

It did not take long for Thornton to earn a special place for Downie: He became his favourite player, a designation Patrick stresses didn't come lightly.

Their friendship grew, but Thornton's role with the Bruins became more and more tenuous, questions arising about whether his easy-going persona was the right fit for the Bruins dressing room.

Downie thrived off Thornton's persona, though, gravitating to his laugh, his larger-than-life spirit, his magnetism. He would describe Thornton in a way only a poet could: "Loose as ashes, and twice as dusty."

In November 2005, Thornton was controversially traded from the Bruins to the San Jose Sharks. Bruins general manager Mike O'Connell, who took over from Sinden in 2000, didn't get the kind of return many expected. Thornton went on to win the Hart Trophy that season.

The trade crushed Downie, as he highlighted in "You, Me, and the B's," when he sang of the "constant concern" over the trade.

But even after the trade, Downie and Thornton stayed in touch.

They were getting older, having children, and connecting over their families. Both began moving away from the primes of their careers. Thornton might not have been the All-Star that he was earlier in his career, and The Tragically Hip's influence in Canadian pop culture began to wane.



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But still, both persevered at their craft.

Thornton played his 1,000th career NHL game in 2011, a landmark achievement for players normally at the end of their careers. The year before, Downie released his well-acclaimed solo record "The Grand Bounce."

The two friends were enjoying success on their own terms. And that only brought them closer.

"We truly loved what we did and we never took anything for granted," Thornton says. "And I think that is a huge similarity: the passion that we have for both of our arts. I call what I do art, and I think we're both very similar in that way."

It was the conversations with Downie that helped Thornton see his game in a different light, as he became re-assured in his approach.

"He liked my art," says Thornton, when asked why he was Downie's favourite player. "I've always explained it like, you're an artist: You have your brushes and your canvas and then you go from there. It's a unique way to look at it, and it's how I look at it. You're the painter and here's your brushes, and here's your canvas, what are you going to do with it? It's like that, every hockey game."

Thornton's career is littered by the kind of no-look, behind-the-back passes few players in NHL history had the brains, or the audacity, to try. Thornton remains the active leader in NHL assists, and is seventh all time.

He got there by sticking to this credo: "Safe is dead."

During one of their many hangs, Thornton casually dropped the phrase in conversation.

Downie stopped in his tracks.

"Wait, what?" he asked, stunned. "Safe is dead?"

Thornton began likening his approach to Downie's intense and uninhibited onstage persona.

"It's like you, Gord, when you're up on stage; nothing you do is safe. Safe is dead, man," he said.

Having never heard the phrase before, it stuck with Downie, both as a lyricist and a person.

After that conversation, Thornton received frequent text messages from Downie asking for more insight into what "Safe is dead" meant to Thornton.

"He just kept on going back to it," Thornton says. "I had no idea what he was going to do with it. Like an artist, he heard something and he had to learn more and dig further."

Thornton assumed his credo had piqued Downie's interest, and that was the end of it, until the release of "Introduce Yourself," Gord Downie's sixth and final solo record.

"Every song is about a person," Downie said. Some song titles speak for themselves ("My First Girlfriend"), but the inspiration for the majority of the songs remains a mystery.

"Safe Is Dead" was one of those mysterious tracks. It crystalized his friendship with Thornton and it hit hard. "Very humbling," he says now.

The opening lyrics capture Downie's surprise at hearing the term, and then speaks to their friendship: "Wait, what/Safe is dead/The dark previews/Who'd miss this fear/A damn silence/Exiles meet."

On the morning of May 24, 2016, the news of Downie's terminal brain cancer was announced by the band.

The following night, Thornton came out buzzing, grabbing the primary assist on the Sharks opening goal less than four minutes into Game 6 of the Western Conference final. The Sharks would win 5-2 over the St. Louis Blues, sending Thornton to his only Stanley Cup Final.

Through the cancer treatments that had preceded the announcement of Downie's diagnosis and their upcoming final tour, Thornton had received

near-daily updates and photos from Downie's 30 straight days of cancer treatment.

In every one of the photos, Downie wore the same outfit: a denim jacket over a Boston Bruins jersey with Thornton's name on the back.

"His coat of armour," says Patrick. "That was the best he could do to protect himself."

"It took my breath away," says Thornton.

During his treatment, Downie began growing an unkempt beard. It was at this time that Thornton began growing his now trademark grey beard, too. A coincidence, sure, but an opportunity to bond all the same.

While Thornton and the Sharks would lose the Stanley Cup Final to the Pittsburgh Penguins, that summer still changed Thornton's life forever.

The band's final tour solidified their place as Canadian icons. Throughout every sold-out show, they dipped into their 30-year catalogue of songs, each of which created a uniquely Canadian cultural language. Close to one-third of Canadians watched their final concert in their hometown of Kingston. Justin Trudeau, the Canadian Prime Minister, was in attendance for the teary-eyed goodbye.

Thornton attended the tour and stayed connected with Downie as he delivered emotional show after show throughout Canada. And his resurgence made him a surprise selection for Canada's World Cup of Hockey roster that September in Toronto. The tournament was more than an opportunity to remind the hockey world of his talents. Thornton, 37, treated it as a chance to make career-defining visits with his friend.

In the months that followed that final tour, Downie's health worsened. Patrick had moved into Downie's Toronto home full-time to care for him.

And so on afternoons between morning skates and games, and on the nights off, Thornton would travel east along Bloor Street to Toronto's Riverdale neighbourhood, nestled in between the Don Valley Parkway and Withrow Park, to visit his friend.

The visits were kept secret from his Team Canada teammates.

"I didn't need to say anything to anybody," he says.

In a dark time, Thornton's spirit lifted Downie's.

"Joe was always himself," Patrick says. "He lightens up every room he comes in. You feel it. It's totally infectious. He's not a perfect human being. None of us are. I think he knows what a touch he has with people."

"Being able to talk to him then was a privilege," says Thornton. "It's something that I never took for granted."

Together, they'd walk the Riverdale streets. Downie would take Thornton for dinner at Allen's, one of his favourite Toronto pubs.

"When it comes to Toronto, Gord had some very serious pride for this city," Patrick says.

Thornton would love to hear Downie go down memory lane with stories throughout the band's career, including their stop on "Saturday Night Live," when Downie was struck by nerves in the band's opening song. He was trying to give his nephew, who had just turned 11, a sign from the broadcast. As he sang the opening lines to "Grace, too," he brought his two index fingers together.

When they were in public together, Downie was routinely approached by fans who just had to share their personal love of the band.

And every time, Thornton was struck by how Downie treated these fans the same way he had treated Thornton: with intense appreciation and devoted interest.

"To give people the time of day," Thornton says of what he learned from Downie. "Walking throughout Toronto like we did, everybody knew Gord. And he would always stop."

Thornton mimics Downie's booming "Hello," famously heard in the opening seconds of the band's seminal 1997 live record, "Live Between Us."



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"He made everybody feel very important. For a guy of his stature, that's very rare," he says.

Thornton tried to put the lessons he learned from Downie into practice, as he did before a Sharks game in Toronto, when he met for 10 minutes with a family who had named their son after Thornton.

As the 2016 World Cup of Hockey came to an end, Thornton visited Downie and they would make what was their last walk together through Withrow Park.

"I cherish those memories forever," Thornton says.

Downie cherished them too.

Patrick says his brother tried to live his last year without self-pity. He made just two public appearances in 2017, looking far more ill than he had in 2016.

Still, Thornton's mantra, "Safe is dead" stuck. He spent the final year of his life largely in private, recording music whenever possible.

"It was just the inspiration he needed, and something he tried to live by late in his life," Patrick says.

Downie died of brain cancer on Oct. 17, 2017.

"Tough one," Thornton, his voice cracking, told reporters after learning of Downie's death.

He thinks about Downie and the conversations they had in Toronto every single day.

Those conversations were brought into focus in October 2020, when Thornton was a free agent.

He had been coveted by the Leafs, as well as other teams.

Downie's final solo record, "Away is Mine," was released on Oct. 16, 2020. On that day, Thornton called Patrick to gauge his thoughts on him possibly signing in Toronto.

Patrick said he'd be thrilled, but Thornton also wanted to know what his brother might have felt. The two men agreed that Gord, the ardent Bruins fan, would wear a wry smile at the thought of Thornton as a Leaf.

Thornton told Patrick he was "99 percent there."

Patrick advised him to play "Away is Mine" and make a decision.

A few hours later, Thornton signed with the Leafs.

"The Downies will take credit," Patrick says, chuckling, "for the 1 percent."

Did those visits lead Thornton to believe that signing in Toronto would be the right move for him?

"I think so," Thornton says.

Toronto is a fitting landing spot for Thornton, the Tragically Hip fan. Scotiabank Arena housed more Tragically Hip concerts than any other room. Hand-written lyrics to "50 Mission Cap" are hung just outside of the Leafs dressing room.

And of course, there is Downie's music, still regularly played during breaks in games.

"He just seems to pop into your head. 'Boom,' it's there. You don't know why, it's just there," Thornton says.

In Toronto, it is impossible for Thornton to escape the memory of his friend.

And he would not want it any other way.

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Sportsnet.ca / Thornton, Spezza make history as Maple Leafs cruise to playoff berth

Luke Fox@lukefoxjukeboxApril 29, 2021, 12:58 AM

Jack Campbell is not taking his position for granted.

No, we're not talking about Campbell's position as the starting goaltender for the first Canadian division team to secure a playoff berth. (Although we could be.)

And no, we're not talking about him becoming the first Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender in five seasons to surpass Frederik Andersen in wins — a feat Campbell accomplished by securing a 4-1 victory Wednesday at Bell Centre, improving his record to a shiny 14-2-1. (Although we could be talking about that, too.)

We're talking about Campbell coming to work every day in awe that he's punching the clock alongside icons.

"You know, you're having a coffee with Jumbo or Spezz, and I find myself just chuckling in the car after practice because I'm like, 'Wow, Jumbo and Spezz are my buddies. It's pretty cool,'" Campbell says. "And then you hear about the records or milestones they meet, and it truly is incredibly special. Not only are they historic hockey players, but they're historic teammates."

Make that historic linemates. In the latest incarnation of Sheldon Keefe's lineup, the coach has flanked rookie call-up Adam Brooks with "a couple of living legends," as Auston Matthews describes them. That unlikely trio has worked hard to craft an identity and struck up some fine chemistry.

From top-two draft picks to charismatic role players, Joe Thornton and Jason Spezza are buzzing around like a pair of the most joyful and determined fourth-line grinders you'll ever meet.

On a Montreal night, Spezza notched two assists and climbed into a tie with Maurice Richard for the 99th-most points in NHL history (966). Incredibly, the minimum-wage employee has amassed more goals (10) and points (26) through 47 games than he did in 58 games with the Leafs last season. Spezza is more productive at 37 than he was at 34.

Thornton made history in Winnipeg Saturday when he became the eldest Maple Leaf to score a goal. For Wednesday's encore, he registered his 1,100th career assist, joining Wayne Gretzky, Ron Francis, Mark Messier, Ray Bourque, Jaromir Jagr and Paul Coffey as the only players to do so.

Yes, he'll keep the puck for his collection. No, he won't get all sappy about it.

"I don't look at them, but I've got quite a few. But that's just a lot of hours of playing street hockey with my brothers and pond hockey and been lucky enough to play with a lot of good goal scorers. It's been fun so far," says Thornton, the league's oldest forward chugging.

Adds Morgan Rielly: "He gets these achievements, and it seems like nothing for him — he just keeps going. We're lucky to have a guy like that."

The history Thornton and Spezza are scripting along this ride, what may be a final pitch at an unrealized dream, is not lost on those battling alongside them.

"In fact, I had one of those moments tonight," admitted a grinning Keefe, who hasn't been overly prone to sentiment during post-game Zoom pressers.

"Those guys were in the offensive zone snapping the puck around to each other, and it's a cool thing. Those guys have accomplished a great deal. They've been elite, elite players for a very long time. And to have them teaming up for us in that role and being such great leaders for us, it's outstanding. Very cool for them to have their own moments here today. They're both very special, of course. Eleven-hundred assists is a lot of assists. I was telling Joe, 'I don't think I touched the puck 1,100 times in my time in the NHL.'"

Spezza and Thornton's ascent up the all-time offence charts is happening in concert with Matthews and Mitch Marner's own marks as franchise pillars.



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With an assist, Marnier became the first Maple Leaf to record three 60-point campaigns before his 50th game of the season.

And Matthews' highlight-reel winner gives him 35 on the year and strengthens his grip on the Leafs' first-ever Rocket Richard Trophy.

Remaining Time -0:45

Matthews knocks puck out of midair to himself before sniping past Allen

"He's just elite. He's the elite of the elite. His release is incredible," Thornton says. "He's the prototypical power forward that can just do it all right now."

Team history, of course, is the primary objective.

But after 96 days atop the North Division, a clinched playoff position was never in doubt for a Leafs lineup loaded with talent of all ages.

A first-round collision with these same Habs feels destined, finally, for the first time since the year Thornton was born: 1979.

Toronto has seven games remaining to iron out kinks, heal wounds and figure out lines.

Fans will have plenty of time to sweat and scrutinize come mid-May.

In the meantime, it's OK to make like Jack Campbell or Auston Matthews — to enjoy a couple of legends snap it around and do their thing.

"It's pretty awesome at this stage in their career how passionate they are about the team, about winning, about performing every night," Matthews says.

"To witness them accomplish what they've accomplished — obviously, tonight was a big night for both of them."

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1187535 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Adaptable Oilers proving they can beat opponents any way they want

Mark Spector@sportsnetspec April 29, 2021, 1:35 AM

EDMONTON — General manager Ken Holland just didn't have the cap space or the draft ammunition to really impact his Edmonton Oilers roster at the trade deadline. So he settled for a No. 4-5 defenceman in Dmitry Kulikov, and left the improvement up to the guys he already had.

Enter third-line centre Ryan McLeod, who has gone 62 per cent in the faceoff circle in two games. At six-foot-three, he skates so well that you can see him as this team's 3C for a decade to come.

How about Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who is doing his best to rescue a lousy offensive season while back on Leon Draisaitl's left side? He had a goal and an assist Wednesday in a 3-1 win.

And Jesse Puljujarvi, whose game has reached the point that he and Connor McDavid can make it work with whomever ends up as their left winger. Even Dominik Kahun.

"I liked the way Kahun has played there," said head coach Dave Tippett.

On Monday the Oilers won a wide open, free-wheeling game by a 6-1 score. It was a Connor McDavid highlight reel, with all six Edmonton goals coming at even strength.

Two nights later, they flipped the switch. It was a defensive slog-fest with zero space, against a Winnipeg Jets team hellbent on not letting the Oilers lord a six-game winning streak over the Jets when Round 1 of the playoffs opens. So, Edmonton scored twice on the power play, and watched backup Mikko Koskinen make 29 saves before a Draisaitl empty-netter sealed a 3-1 win.

However you want to play, the Edmonton Oilers can play that way. When's the last time we've been able to say that about this organization?

"It's a lot more fun winning than losing," chuckled Nugent-Hopkins, the longest-serving Oiler. "We had a bit of a shaky start to our season (3-6) but we didn't get down on ourselves. Ever since then, we've kind of been rolling. This is the time we want to be speaking. Things are going well for us right now."

They win when the score is 6-1, and they win when the score is 2-1.

They win whether it's Mike Smith between the pipes, or if it's Koskinen. They win at even strength, or they'll beat you with their special teams, killing a crucial Kailer Yamamoto penalty late in this one.

"Our power play got a couple of big goals for us, and it was just kind of a slugfest after that with guys just trying to find space out there," Tippett said. "Lots of corner play, wall play... (His players showed) a combination of physical play and being able to make a play in a tight situation. Our guys hung in there and we found a way to win."

If you didn't see the highlights on TV, that's because there weren't any. This was hand-to-hand combat against a Jets team that has now dropped five straight and lost touch of second place in the North. They'll be much better when Adam Lowry and Nik Ehlers return for sure, but by then they'll be boarding a plane to open Round 1 in Edmonton.

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CHOOSE PLAN

"It's a fresh start in the playoffs," said Nugent-Hopkins, who rifled home a powerplay wrist shot. "They'll be fired up to play, we'll be fired up to play. Who knows if we'll play them?"

The only way Edmonton won't play the Jets in Round 1 is if they somehow catch Toronto for the North Division lead, which seems ridiculous the way the Leafs are playing. But, just for fun...

Of Edmonton's nine remaining games, only two — against Montreal — are against playoff teams. There's a two-game set at home against Calgary starting tonight, and five more with a dispirited Canucks team that was embarrassed by Ottawa on Wednesday.

The Maple Leafs have seven games left and a seven point lead on Edmonton. They've got Vancouver twice, Montreal three times, an Ottawa and a Winnipeg.

Tippett won't be looking at the standings over the final nine games. Not as much as he'll be looking at his roster.

"We're trying to get our team ready," he said. "If we continue to build our team game the way we hope, the standings will take care of themselves."

"All the little parts of the game that need to be clicking at the right time? That's what we're working on every day."

Give Tippett and his staff some credit.

They stuck with struggling defenceman Ethan Bear and he has found his game, making those smart, quick plays in his own zone that result in multiple zone exits per night. And they've realized the value in depth winger Alex Chiasson, who screened Connor Hellebuyck on Tyson Barrie's power play goal — a goal that doesn't happen without Chiasson's work, even though he went pointless in the game.

They've been unafraid to use McLeod, whose size and speed remind of Lowry. When healthy, Juhar Khaira falls right into his wheelhouse as a rugged fourth-line centre, and Edmonton is set up the middle.

Barrie, with a goal and an assist, became the highest scorer among NHL players who switched teams in the off-season, and with another three-point night McDavid did something that has been done once in the NHL in 15 years, notching his fourth consecutive game of three points or more.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 29, 2021

But it's the team around McDavid and Leon Draisaitl — despite their nightly production — that has given Edmonton the fourth-best winning percentage in the NHL since their 3-6 start.

"It's been a unique year that way," began Tippett. "You've got this taxi squad all around, so you've got a good selection of guys you can pick from. There are some veteran guys who probably haven't played as much as they'd like, but we're trying to find the right mix.

"McLeod's had such a good (AHL) year, we wanted to give him a look. Kulikov's come in and ... he's a good veteran player. It's a different year — you're carrying 30 players on the road in the regular season, and that's usually a playoff (roster).

"We've got lots of options, and we're probably going to need that depth."

Options.

That's a new one here in Edmonton.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187536 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' inability to shake bad habits puts playoff readiness in question

Eric Engels@EricEngelsApril 29, 2021, 12:21 AM

MONTREAL—It's the question that has to be asked, with eight games left in a schedule Phillip Danault referred to earlier on Wednesday as the biggest grind he's ever been through. He's played five 82-game seasons—with missed time due to injury in some of them—but this 56-gamer has taken its toll on his body and mind, and he's clearly not alone in that.

How much will this regular season take out of him and these Montreal Canadiens?

You look at the roster and say it's built for playoff hockey, anchored by several hardened veterans like Danault who haven't had the incentive to burn it playing three games in four nights for weeks on end while a playoff spot has never really been under threat. Canadiens coach Dominique Ducharme said his players haven't taken anything for granted, but they haven't found a mode above survival over the last month.

If they don't find one soon, how will they build the belief they can play their best when it matters most?

As Ducharme said earlier on Wednesday, no one in the professional hockey world has ever faced having to play 25 games in 43 days while traveling across the country and through multiple time zones, and we're not bringing that up to excuse the way this team has handled all that; we're merely wondering what the true cost of not handling it all that well will be.

Because losses like the one the Canadiens suffered against the Toronto Maple Leafs at the Bell Centre affect the psyche, and the Canadiens have suffered too many of them of late. This was their ninth since Brendan Gallagher went down to injury 13 games ago—another energy-sapping slog made categorically more difficult by the way they beat themselves—and if they don't start regularly experiencing something different, what will they have to pull from to convince themselves they can hang with the division-leaders in a seven-game series?

"We've got to play a full 60 minutes against those guys," Nick Suzuki said after scoring the only goal in the playoff berth-clinching 4-1 win for the Maple Leafs. "If we do meet them in the playoffs, a game like that won't win us any games."

The problem is, win or lose, that's the game the Canadiens have brought on most nights since their torrid 7-1-2 start to the season. A game where they "showed glimpses," as Suzuki put it, but failed to "manage," as Ducharme said.

The coach says it's mental, and we agree.

His team knew it was in tough to begin with against the Leafs. It knew that with Gallagher sidelined with a fractured thumb, Carey Price recovering from a concussion, Jonathan Drouin on an indefinite leave of absence for personal reasons and Paul Byron and Tomas Tatar nursing lower-body injuries, this was going to be a monumental challenge—especially after a grueling trip to Alberta that ended with a crucial win over the Calgary Flames and a red-eye flight home on Monday night.

But the Canadiens made it impossible for themselves right off the hop on Wednesday.

Tyler Toffoli hauled down Alex Galchenyuk on the game's second shift, sending the talented Leafs to the power play on fresh ice.

Remaining Time -0:50

Allen whiffs on puck behind the net, gives up goal to Brooks

Sure, Toronto has struggled there of late, but it was able to pull off a perfect passing play to open the scoring on its first shot of the game, 1:38 into the action.

Less than seven minutes later, Auston Matthews made a play few players not named Auston Matthews are capable of and he extended his team's lead on its second scoring chance.

From there, the Canadiens became unglued despite there being more than 50 minutes left of it to play.

"We tried to force the game early as if it was the end of the third period already and we needed to score two (with) five minutes (left) in the first," Ducharme said.

It wasn't some new phenomenon that emerged out of the blue. It's been a feature of the Canadiens' game for too long, and it's something they have to get away from before it's too late.

"You've gotta come out and compete for these next eight games," said Josh Anderson, whose effort was unimpeachable, with a team-leading six shot attempts and six hits. "We've just got to find ways to win. I know some guys are not going to have it every night. You just have to compete, battle together and put it together and good things are going to happen."

Suzuki said morale has been good all along, despite the inconsistency and all the tough losses. Anderson repeated several times that his belief in the team is as strong as it's been since Day 1, and that it's strong enough for him to say they can beat the Leafs or anyone else.

But the actions need to start following now.

"It's sticking with your game," Ducharme said. "It's not giving gifts to the other team. It's about managing moments. It's about many things. Obviously we address all that, but we'll keep working on things and we won't give up on that. We've got to be stronger, and we'll do it."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187537 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks unable to overcome physical, mental fatigue in loss to Senators

Iain MacIntyre@imacSportsnetApril 28, 2021, 10:27 PM

91

The Vancouver Canucks were trying to catch the Montreal Canadiens, but instead have reeled in the Ottawa Senators.

Starting an unprecedented 14 games in 22 nights, and just six games into their return from a COVID-19 crisis, the Canucks' 6-3 loss Wednesday to the Ottawa Senators sure felt like the end of something.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 29, 2021

Hope? Belief? The chance to actually still make the Stanley Cup Playoffs?

Maybe all of the above.

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### CHOOSE PLAN

In their biggest game of the season, the Canucks looked tired and careless as the Senators finished off a four-game series against Vancouver with their third win, passing their opponents on points and dumping the Canucks into last place in the Canadian division.

The Canucks, of course, have played seven fewer games than the Senators and at the final horn Wednesday, still had four games in hand on the Canadiens, who were 10 points ahead of Vancouver and playing in Toronto.

But the way they've looked the last couple of games, the Canucks could have 14 games left and it still wouldn't be enough.

The more Canuck players and staff try to push past talk about the team's recent health crisis, the more their play spotlights it. This team of COVID survivors – 19 players from their NHL roster tested positive for the virulent P.1 variant as the calendar flipped to April from March – looks spent.

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And the more tired they play, the more fragile they become mentally.

Mostly, you just feel sorry for the Canucks and what the players and their families have endured. But they look done. Even with 13 games to go, Wednesday looked like the end.

"I thought we looked a little tired tonight, to be honest, physically," coach Travis Green said. "I thought we look mentally tired, too. But there's no rule in the league that you can't win when you're tired. I actually thought we showed a little bit of mental weakness in the beginning of the second period with some of the plays we made. The first three goals, we just kind of handed them (to Ottawa) with bad passes, bad turnovers, bad coverage, and all of a sudden six minutes into the period, we've given up three. We might have been tired, but you can still win when you're tired.

"You've got to be smart, you got to do the right things, you got to make the right plays. You can pass the puck on the tape when you're tired. You can make a good decision and get a puck behind them and not turn it over and not make hope-plays when you're tired. But that's being mentally strong as well. That's understanding that, hey, maybe I've got to play a little simpler game, maybe I've got to play directly, maybe I've got to put a puck behind them (because) I don't quite have my jump. We kind of gave into it a little bit, and sometimes we do that when we get down as a team because I know our guys want to win so bad. I've seen it before, when we get down a little bit earlier. . . where we start to really chase the game and push to try to make plays out of nothing. And that usually doesn't end up well in our favour, and it didn't tonight."

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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When a coach is as good as Green was in his post-game Zoom call, it's often an indication of how badly his team played.

The Canucks registered six of the first seven shots on net before getting outshot 32-16 by the Senators over the final 55 minutes.

Victor Mete scored on Ottawa's first shot, making it 1-0 at 2:04, after skating unchecked through a Grand Canyon-sized hole between defencemen Tyler Myers and Olli Juolevi. Interestingly, Myers, who was more out of position than Juolevi, pointed out that it was a Canuck forward's responsibility to pick up Mete, a defenceman.

Needing a push to start the second period, the Canucks instead surrendered goals 32 seconds apart to Chris Tierney and Josh Norris to fall behind 3-0 by the 1:10 mark.

The first was bad luck as Ryan Dzingel's shot hit Vancouver defenceman Alex Edler and fell perfectly for Tierney, but the second was plain awful as J.T. Miller, the Canucks' best forward with Elias Pettersson out indefinitely due to injury, had a casual backhand, cross-zone pass intercepted near the Vancouver net. Miller then compounded his error with a flimsy attempt to check Brady Tkachuk, who skated the puck to the goal and set up Norris on a two-on-one.

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Green was so angry with his team he burned a timeout to get his players' attention by yelling at them.

Just 53 seconds after Myers got a goal back for the Canucks, Thomas Chabot made it 4-1 for the Senators at 6:36 after Vancouver defenceman Quinn Hughes fell with the puck inside the Ottawa blueline and created a four-on-two counter-attack.

Asked what went wrong, Green said there was "a bit of a list."

Asked about Miller's play, Green said: "J.T.'s a highly competitive guy. Does he make mistakes? Yeah, he does, every player does. And I'm not letting him off the hook; it wasn't a good play for sure. Sometimes J.T.'s will and competitiveness does get the best of him, and sometimes he tries to do a little too much. Much like when Hughes fell down. Here's a young guy that just wants to put his team on his back. I know that, I understand that. But that's that mental fortitude that you've got to stay strong and stay with the game.

"We talked about the type of game Ottawa is was playing right now. They don't give up a lot. They're waiting for us to make mistakes, and we're kind of trying to play the same way. I thought we gave into it a little. We cracked first tonight. We cracked for six or seven minutes there and it cost us."

It's too soon to say how much, but it looks like a lot.

The Canucks visit the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187538 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs will test playoff readiness against Habs

By Mark Masters

The Toronto Maple Leafs held an optional skate at the Bell Centre on Wednesday.

The Leafs and Canadiens have held the No. 1 and No. 4 seeds in the North Division since Feb. 19. The forever rivals are on a collision course to meet in the playoffs for the first time in what seems like forever.

"That will be pretty special if that's the case," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "But, that being said, we got to prepare for any possible matchup."

The Original Six clubs haven't met in the postseason since 1979.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"Trying to focus one game at a time," said winger Alex Galchenyuk, "but you always have those thoughts in the back of your mind that it could happen."

Both teams have a chance to send a message before a potential playoff showdown as the Leafs and Canadiens will meet four times over the next 11 days.

"They're very important [games]," said Rielly. "We did a good job when we played those two games against the Jets and we have some areas of our game that we're proud of that we want to build on. We want to make sure we're keeping focus on the process and we're playing the right way and playing these guys a bunch is a good opportunity to put that to the test. I think we'll be ready for it."

"I'm sure it's going to be playoff hockey," said centre Auston Matthews. "It's going to be tight, not a lot of room out there. You're going to have to earn your chances and stay patient all night."

Toronto has won four of six meetings with Montreal this season, including two of three at the Bell Centre.

"The games have been quite close," coach Sheldon Keefe cautioned. "They've had their way with us at different times, too. Each game is its own animal. We just have to make sure we're ready from the start today. We weren't the last time we were in this building."

The Leafs fell behind 2-0 and ultimately lost 4-2 on April 12 in Montreal only hours after general manager Kyle Dubas offered the group a big vote of confidence at the trade deadline. Jack Campbell suffered his first loss of the season that night, ending a record-setting run. He'll be back between the pipes tonight.

Keefe isn't expected to make any changes to a lineup that played with a lot of emotion during a pair of wins in Winnipeg last week. The physical element will be important against the Canadiens, who sit second in hits this season.

"We talked about competitiveness from day one," said captain John Tavares. "I know Sheldon has made that a big focus ... just how establishing physicality and competitiveness has got to be a big part of who we are and the way we want to play."

"There's been growth," said Rielly. "Part of that is new players coming in that play a certain style and just the group playing to our structure. That's an area that we talked about a lot in the off-season and, as the year has gone on, that's an area of our game we want to build on and grow into."

Leafs plan to get playoff-ready against their likely first round opponent

With four games remaining in the regular season against the Montreal Canadiens, the Toronto Maple Leafs recognize the importance of these contests as the Habs will likely be their first round opponents come playoffs. As they approach the playoffs, Defenceman Morgan Rielly wants to make sure the club is "keeping focused on the process and playing the right way."

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While the Leafs played well as a group in sweeping a pair of games in Winnipeg, Galchenyuk didn't like his game.

"I could've definitely [brought] more and done better," he admitted.

But the former Hab didn't want to go into detail.

"It's not like I'm going to sit here and overthink that I have to do this better or this better," he said. "I know I can bring more and play better than I did the last few games, so that's where my mindset is."

After practice ends, Alex Galchenyuk putting in some extra work before the flight to Montreal [pic.twitter.com/JCpxSldsUB](https://pic.twitter.com/JCpxSldsUB)

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) April 27, 2021

Despite playing almost exclusively in the top six since breaking into the lineup 18 games ago, Galchenyuk has just two goals and five assists with the Leafs. He's been playing on a line with Tavares and William Nylander of late.

"Just a little more [focus] with his details defensively," Keefe said when asked where Galchenyuk can improve. "I'm not overly concerned about anything offensively. John and Will have done a really good job of finding ways to produce consistently. Alex, on that line, he's got to do a lot of the work. He's got to really skate both ways, forecheck and be really responsible defensively."

Keefe had a lengthy chat with Galchenyuk at the end of Tuesday's practice.

"He hasn't played poorly by any means," Keefe stressed. "He was playing at such a high level for a really good stretch of time and that's a difficult thing to maintain. Most players come down from that, if not all players a little bit. We want to just make sure that he's focused and continues to know that we believe in him, but that we're looking to see him trying to get back to that level he was at."

Galchenyuk has been a minus player in five straight games.

Galchenyuk aims to be better after details slipped in Winnipeg

Alex Galchenyuk has been a minus player in five straight contests with one goal over that stretch and is looking to bounce back by focusing on the things that have made him successful during his time with Toronto. Head coach Sheldon Keefe isn't concerned about Galchenyuk's offence but would like to see him pay more detail to his game defensively.

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The Leafs penalty kill ranks 26th in the NHL this season at 76.6 per cent, which is down from 77.7 per cent last season when the team ranked 21st.

Those numbers, however, are misleading, according to the coach.

"To be honest, I haven't been concerned about the PK all season," Keefe said. "I know the percentages haven't been great, but I think it reflects strongly upon our goaltending and how that's gone. When our goalies have been really solid and consistent, our penalty killing has been great, and when our goaltending hasn't been, I think it's faltered a little bit. So that's part of it for sure."

In short-handed situations, Frederik Andersen owns an ugly .882 save percentage, which down from .911 last season. Jack Campbell has been even worse at .833, which is down from .875 last season. Overall, Toronto's short-handed save percentage ranks 28th in the NHL this season, which is down from 22nd last season, per NaturalStatTrick.

"The process of our penalty kill and how it's gone in limiting shots and chances against on the kill, I think it's been quite strong all season for us and something that's a pretty solid foundation for it," Keefe said. "If we stay with that we think the percentages will equal out."

The addition of Nick Foligno will also help the group and Keefe confirmed that element was something the organization targeted ahead of the trade deadline.

"He's done that throughout his career and takes a lot of pride in it," Keefe noted. "With [Zach] Hyman out we've given him even more opportunity."

Foligno enjoys getting 'behind the scenes' look at Matthews-Marner magic

Nick Foligno has registered two assists in the two games he has played since joining the Maple Leafs, playing alongside Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner. Now as a teammate of the duo, Foligno admitted to enjoying seeing how his linemates' minds operate, and how they plan on what to do every shift.

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The Marlies returned to practice on Wednesday for the first time since being shut down due to COVID protocols on April 14.

"You could see the smiles underneath everybody's masks," said head coach Greg Moore. "Once we got into practice, you could tell the guys were having fun. Just really thankful we get to do what we love again."

"It just makes you appreciate how lucky you are to be able to play hockey," said forward Kenny Agostino. "A lot of excitement today. Guys were excited to be out of their places for a bit."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Marlies have 13 games scheduled over a 20-day stretch starting on Saturday.

Marlies return from COVID shutdown; grateful for financial help from Leafs

With the Toronto Marlies returning to practice after a lengthy COVID-19 pause, Coach Greg Moore said "you could see the smiles under everybody's masks" as the players were excited to get back. Marlies' captain Rich Clune was overwhelmed by Jason Spezza and the Leafs' gesture of helping the Marlies out financially saying the move was "world class."

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Projected Leafs lineup based on Tuesday's practice:

Foligno - Matthews - Marnier

Galchenyuk - Tavares - Nylander

Mikheyev - Kerfoot - Simmonds

Thornton - Brooks - Spezza

Rielly - Brodie

Muzzin - Holl

Sandin - Dermot

Campbell

Rittich

TSN.CA LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187539 Websites

TSN.CA / Seven years into Treliving's tenure, Flames still seek playoff success

By Salim Valji

As the Calgary Flames attempt to stave off playoff elimination during an underachieving season, general manager Brad Treliving marks his seven-year anniversary at the helm of the team.

The Flames were coming off a fifth straight non-playoff season when he was hired, finishing second last in the Western Conference. Jiri Hudler led the team in scoring, Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie patrolled the blueline, and a quartet of goalies fought for the starting job following Mikka Kiprusoff's retirement.

Perhaps that otherwise-futile 2013-14 season's most important moment was its final game, when a rookie named Johnny Gaudreau scored his first NHL goal in his debut.

A year later, in the spring of 2015, led by Gaudreau and a young core brimming with seemingly limitless potential in Sam Bennett, Mikael Backlund, Sean Monahan and Giordano, the Flames shocked the Vancouver Canucks and won their first playoff series since their run to the 2004 Stanley Cup Finals.

As Treliving begins his eighth calendar year leading the franchise, that playoff victory against the Canucks remains the peak of his tenure. Since then, the Flames have been in that class of teams that are good enough to make the playoffs, but unable to make an impact once they get there.

The Flames have made the playoffs in four of six seasons under Treliving (not counting this year), winning 11 total games (22nd in the league in that span) and that one series in his first season.

Treliving has developed a reputation during his tenure as one of the most active NHL general managers when it comes to inquiring about the availability of players and making transactions. His approach has been

rooted in the belief that the core was a handful of moves away from becoming a legitimate Cup contender.

It's why he swung for the fences in dealing for defencemen Dougie Hamilton and Travis Hamonic, and signed goalie Jacob Markstrom and blueliner Chris Tanev last off-season.

Some transactions have paid dividends. In previous years he's gotten top-60 picks for the likes of Hudler, Kris Russell, and Sven Baertschi. Among the players selected with those picks: blueliner Rasmus Andersson and winger Dillon Dubé. Under Treliving, the Flames have found forward Andrew Mangiapane and highly touted goalie Dustin Wolf in the sixth and seventh rounds, respectively. This season, Tanev has been one of the team's best defenders.

At this year's trade deadline he was able to turn Sam Bennett into a second-round pick and prospect Emil Heineman, who has drawn comparisons to versatile Maple Leafs winger Zach Hyman.

Arguably his best trade was acquiring defenceman Noah Hanifin and centre Elias Lindholm from Carolina in exchange for Hamilton, Micheal Ferland and unsigned prospect Adam Fox (who now leads NHL blueliners in scoring with the New York Rangers after refusing to sign with Calgary), and then inking the pair to team-friendly contracts.

Trading draft picks for Hamilton and Hamonic propelled the team to regular season success, including their second-best point total in franchise history, but nothing of consequence in the postseason.

The additions of Tanev and Markstrom have resulted in a team with a 3.8 per cent chance of making the playoffs, according to hockeyreference.com. Treliving's signing of James Neal to a five-year, \$28.75 million contract turned out to be a mistake, with the winger fitting in neither on the ice nor off it, and the team was forced to absorb Milan Lucic's deal to move on from him. (To Treliving's credit, Lucic has since turned into a serviceable player for the Flames).

Led by Treliving, the Flames have had fewer draft picks (50) than all but five teams since 2014.

In that same time span, Calgary has also had fewer first-round picks than every team except Pittsburgh, Tampa Bay, and Washington. The major difference, of course, is that those teams have leveraged that draft capital into sustained playoff success and Stanley Cups.

Treliving has – so far – been unable to find the right coach for this core of Flames players. Darryl Sutter is the fifth bench boss for the team under Treliving since he was hired in 2014. Only three NHL teams have had more head coaches in that span. One of Treliving's hires was Bill Peters, who resigned after instances of abuse and racism predating his arrival in Calgary were revealed by former NHLers Michal Jordan and Akim Aliu, respectively.

As the disappointment in Calgary has continued, the perceptions about a flawed team culture have only grown. For all the ugly truths this failed season has revealed for the Flames, one stands out: turning the Flames into perennial Stanley Cup contenders may require more than a handful of transactions.

Major decisions lay ahead for Treliving, who is under contract through the 2022-23 season, and the organization.

Gaudreau's no-trade clause kicks in this off-season, and every passing day brings him closer to unrestricted free agency at the end of next season. Giordano, the team captain, could be exposed in the expansion draft. A year from now, the Flames face another franchise-altering decision with the under-performing Matthew Tkachuk, who is a restricted free agent next summer with arbitration rights and a \$9-million qualifying offer in a flat cap world.

First, however, the Flames will conclude a season that began with playoff expectations and appears destined to end prematurely.

"It's on all of us," Treliving, addressing this year's disappointment, said in an interview on April 7 with TSN ahead of the trade deadline.

"It starts with myself. I'm in charge of the hockey department so it starts with the manager and we all take our piece of it. When you are in the position that we're in at this time of the year, we all have to own it and so it starts with myself, the players, everybody involved in the hockey



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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department. You own what your record is and so like I said, I accept responsibility as well as everybody else within the hockey department.”

TSN.CA LOADED: 04.29.2021

1187540 Websites

USA TODAY / Split Stanley Cup Finals? 'Inside the NHL?' What we know about the NHL's new media rights deals

CHRIS BUMBACA | USA TODAY

Starting next season, NHL games will air on network properties no longer affiliated with (or on) NBC, whose exclusive broadcast rights deal with the league will expire at the end of this year's Stanley Cup Final.

The NHL knew the right business decision would be to partner with multiple broadcast entities. NBC is no longer one of them, as ESPN (more broadly, the Walt Disney Company) and Turner Sports (more broadly, Warner Media) are the rightsholders.

Each partner brings visibility — and pays hundreds of millions of dollars yearly — to a league in need of just that.

“We've had ongoing conversations for the last several months and the last few weeks it raised to a new level,” WarnerMedia news and sports chairman Jeff Zucker said Tuesday during a joint announcement with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

To better understand how this changes consumption of the league, here's what you need to know:

The breakdown

Both the ESPN and Turner deals are for seven years and will expire after the 2027-28 season.

ESPN has the upper hand and might be considered the “primary” broadcast partner in this arrangement because ABC will air four of the next seven Stanley Cup Finals every other year, beginning in 2022.

Turner will broadcast the three Stanley Cup Final in the years between.

Before the Cup Final, the two networks will split the first two rounds of the playoffs and the conference finals.

Turner will have the broadcasts for the annual Winter Classic on New Year's Day.

NHL STRETCH RUN: Can Connor McDavid hit 100 points?

LIGHTNING: Check out the defending champions' Stanley Cup rings

Twenty-five regular-season games will air on either ESPN or ABC, while an additional 75 games will stream on ESPN+ and Hulu. Every out-of-market game previously available through NHL.TV will be on ESPN+, which will replace NHL.TV.

Turner has rights to 72 regular-season games.

When will games air?

With nearly three times as many games going on linear TV compared to ESPN, and a robust sports programming schedule already (MLB, NBA, AEW), Turner must figure out which night of the week it wants to emphasize NHL coverage.

But Zucker offered little information on that and said those decisions will be made in the coming weeks.

The NBA currently airs on Tuesday and Thursday nights. The MLB playoffs shouldn't provide many hurdles, but the introduction of Tuesday night games certainly will. AEW currently owns Wednesdays on TNT.

Of course, Turner also has TBS at its disposal and will be putting plenty of games there.

On the ESPN side, a weekend day contest on ABC makes sense, as does a midweek offering for the cable channel.

How much money are the deals worth?

Neither network is going to shout, and the NHL wants to be coy.

“It's good (for the league),” Bettman said, although he would not disclose the terms of either deal.

According to the New York Post, the Disney deal is around \$400 million per year, while Turner pays about \$225 million annually.

“We think the arrangements we have now are much more reflective of the value we bring as compelling content,” Bettman said.

How will the money affect the salary cap?

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, likely not much, at least in the short term.

Bettman said the salary cap will remain flat until the money placed in escrow, a condition in the six-year CBA agreed upon last year as part of the “return to play” plan, is paid off. The increase in money might shorten the timeframe of the cap remaining stagnant, though.

The digital aspect

With ESPN placing games on ESPN+, its direct-to-consumer platform, Turner could do the same with HBO Max under the WarnerMedia umbrella.

Zucker explained that won't be the case in 2021, but the option exists.

“That will happen in the years to come as HBO Max continues to grow and as it becomes a bigger home of these kind of events,” he said. “For now, the focus will be on the Turner networks.”

Turner also plans on leveraging its digital properties through the deal, since Bleacher Report and House of Highlights have gained access to NHL highlights through the deal.

“We've got a real fire hose with Bleacher Report and House of Highlights to reach younger viewers in a way that is pretty unique in the sports landscape,” Zucker said. “Bleacher and HoH and their social reach is unparalleled. That's something we're very excited about in this construct.”

Inside the ... NHL?

Turner's NBA coverage, especially studio show “Inside the NBA,” has garnered praise over the years and the Emmy awards are proof of success.

It won't happen overnight — and the personalities available to them won't rival the likes of Shaquille O'Neal, Charles Barkley and Kenny Smith — but both the league and Turner are aware of the value that organic programming can provide for viewership and popularity overall.

“It's the sensibility and the style that we approach our coverage with that we will also bring here,” Zucker said. “And I think that's innovative, fun and dynamic, and I think, again, that's widely recognized with our NBA coverage, so that's what we want to do with the NHL.”

Bettman interjected: “That's what we're excited about. We're counting on it.”

Zucker had no announcements regarding any hosts or analysts for those future shows.

ESPN, Turner already share NBA rights

Disney and WarnerMedia are the two network broadcast partners for the NBA, so there's a level of familiarity and institutional knowledge that exists.

That will make the scheduling easier, and there will be opportunities for cross-promotion.

“I know Adam Silver is incredibly excited to have the NHL as part of this family as well,” Zucker said. “I've spoken to him and he has expressed that. I think everybody feels good about it and the history bodes very well for this.”



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Current NBC deal won't be affected

Bettman was clear he had assurances NBC would honor its end of the contract and wouldn't diminish the caliber of the broadcasts.

"NBC has re-confirmed that to me," he said. "We should expect no difference in the treatment that we are going to get compared to what we've gotten over the length of our relationship.

"We part as friends and look forward to the future, with each of us understanding why we made the decisions we both made to reach this point."

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