



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 1, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Concussion recovery has been a 'tough time' for Hurricanes forward Teuvo Teravainen

By Chip Alexander

Concussions can be unpredictable, fickle, confounding and at times maddening.

Defenseman Brady Skei was concussed, missed four games, then returned to play and score a goal Thursday in the Canes' 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings at PNC Arena.

"Concussions," Skei said after the game, "are definitely a scary thing. Each concussion is different. Some go by quick. Some last a while."

Forward Teuvo Teravainen also scored and had an assist Thursday. Named the game's first star, he went through a postgame interview on the Canes' bench with a broad — likely relieved — smile.

After suffering a concussion Feb. 19 against the Chicago Blackhawks, Teravainen sat out seven games before coming back to play March 4 against the Red Wings. He quickly sensed that was a mistake.

"I just didn't feel right, especially the next day," Teravainen said on a media call Thursday. "I was having the symptoms, so it was not the right feeling. It just took more time."

A lot of time.

Teravainen was out the next 25 games, leaving many to wonder when he would be able to play again. And beyond that, play like Teuvo Teravainen again.

He resumed limited off-ice work. He was skating on his own and then rejoined the team in recent weeks for a few practices. But there were no games as the days passed.

"It was a tough time," Teravainen said. "Everybody helped me a lot, maybe even too much. They asked me how I feel every day, and that's kind of annoying."

Teravainen's symptoms began to ease. But NHL games are a different animal, with the speed and physicality. The Canes' medical people and coach Rod Brind'Amour remained cautious.

"The concussion things are the great unknown," Brind'Amour said Friday.

For much of Brind'Amour's playing career, concussions were considered being "dinged up." Once the "fog" would pass he'd quickly be back on the ice. Former Canes coach Kirk Muller once said there were times he'd bang his head during games and tell his linemates to be sure he was headed to the right bench when the shift ended.

"I look back on my career and there was some worry at the end," Brind'Amour said. "I'm like, 'Holy moly, I probably had 100 of them.' But we just didn't know back then."

"Now we err towards caution, for sure. A guy gets a little dinged up, obviously they yank him out of the game. If there's a little something, he's out for a week. They really take care of these guys as best they can and that's a great thing."

There's the specter of CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), a degenerative brain condition that can be caused by repeated blows to the head. Some pro athletes have retired prematurely after sustaining multiple concussions — including former Carolina Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly — to lessen the risks later in life.

Teravainen was missed when he was out, even as the Canes won games and led the Central Division. He's a player the team counts on at even strength and on special teams, and one of the its best defensive forwards with his instincts and quick hands.

Brind'Amour got him back into his first game Tuesday against the Dallas Stars on the road, giving him 16:32 of ice time in the 5-1 win. He had 16:16 on Thursday, including a small slice of penalty-killing time. That could soon increase, the coach said.

Teravainen, playing on Sebastian Aho's line with winger Andrei Svechnikov, assisted on Skei's goal in the second period that gave the Canes a 1-0 lead. In the third, he forced a Wings turnover, took a pass from Sebastian Aho and scored his third goal of the season — his 300th career NHL point.

"I knew he was going to be fine," Aho said.

Brind'Amour said Teravainen had become sick of just practicing and wanted to play. He needed some games before the playoffs began to get back to game speed, feel the puck, build his stamina, be a contributor again.

"I think he thinks the games are easier than the practices and everything that goes into getting ready to play," Brind'Amour said. "He's a gamer."

Skei was injured April 20 against Tampa Bay, his head smacking into the glass after a hit from behind from the Lightning's Blake Coleman. He tried to continue to play but couldn't and entered the concussion protocol.

"It's weird because your body feels fine," Skei said Thursday night. "Physically you're all there. But the biggest part of your body, your brain, is the thing you've got to let heal. After the hit, most of it was in my eyes. That kind of went away a couple of days later and I started to feel a lot better on that third and fourth day."

"You've got to be patient and you've got to wait until you feel 100 percent," he said.

Carolina Hurricanes vs Columbus Blue Jackets

When: Saturday, 7 p.m.



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Where: PNC Arena, Raleigh.

TV: BSSO (Bally).

The Athletic

NHL power rankings: Whoa, someone knocked the Avs out of first place?!

By Sean Gentile and Ryan S. Clark

As of six weeks ago, The Athletic has weekly NHL power rankings. Yes, it happened. Yes, we're using this exact same lede in each one. It'll be 69 weeks in and we'll still say "As of 69 weeks ago." Calm down. We're back with another installment, and we'll be back every week until we're old and grey and tired of ranking teams ... or until one of us goes on vacation.

This week, that was Dom. Taking his place is the great Ryan S. Clark, who is somehow doing elite work on the Seattle Kraken, a team that does not yet exist.

Here are the basic ground rules.

- The methodology here is as simple as it gets. We each rank the teams, from 1-31, then take the average, and voila. (Dom made a dedicated spreadsheet for this because of course he did.) It's not going to be based solely on past performance, current hot streaks or future potential. Numbers will figure into it prominently, but if you want stat-model stuff, we've got you covered elsewhere. This is something different.
- From there, we'll choose 10 or so teams to go back-and-forth on; that might be because we disagree on the placement. It might be because we each have something meaningful to say. It might be because we each want to make jokes about the teams, or each other. We'll see.
- We want this to be fun, and we're not locked into a format beyond going from No. 1 to No. 31. Some rankings might have themes. Some of those themes might be unexpected. If you have ideas — or just suggestions on how to make this a destination for you, each Friday — we'd love to hear them. You're why we're doing this in the first place.
- If two teams are tied, the team with the better local airport gets the nod. Sometimes we might add new rules as we see fit. For example, we added the tie-breaker rule because ties are stupid and don't belong in this sport. It'll change every week.

1. Vegas Golden Knights

Last week: 3
Record: 35-11-2, 72 points
Ryan rank: 1
Sean rank: 1

Ryan: It's a little bit like in "Friday" when the neighborhood heard that noisy bike and they knew Deebo was coming. Right now, the Golden Knights are like Deebo. Winning 10 in a row does that. Yet what might stand out more than anything is the fact they have the consistent goaltending a team like the Avalanche are struggling to find at the moment.

Sean: Ah, what a wonderful week for Dom to blow off our little thing here. We'd have figured out how deep his commitment to the "Colorado is better than everyone, don't bother" bit could've gone. It's borderline impossible to go with anyone other than the Golden Knights this morning, right? Ten in a row, including a 5-2 win over the Avs on Thursday night that may have provided the blueprint for derailing that train: "Get insane goaltending." Marc-Andre Fleury made 35 saves on 37 shots, and the result held despite Vegas getting outshot 37-26, out-attempted 65-47 and out-chanced 41-26. Goaltending counts, and the Golden Knights have it.

Gotta say though — at the end of "Friday," something happens to Deebo, and it ain't good.

2. Colorado Avalanche

Last week: 1
Record: 31-12-4, 66 points
Ryan rank: 3
Sean rank: 2

Ryan: Let's start here. This tie was broken by the notion that the Denver International Airport was deemed to be better than the Raleigh-Durham International Airport. Yes, DIA has some oddities about it. Such as the statue of the "Blue Mustang" affectionately known as Blucifer for the fact it is a giant blue mustang with glowing red eyes that has a rather unsettling past. But DIA does have its advantages.

Beyond that? Getting a healthy Philipp Grubauer is expected to make a massive difference when it comes to what this team could do in the postseason. The Avs know what life is like when Grubauer is out of the lineup. Even then? Finding consistency in the options behind Grubauer will be critical considering it has consistently served as a major issue throughout the season.

Sean: So I'm down with dropping the Avs a spot this week. We've been over that. They went 0-3 this week; they've got the third-best point percentage in the league; the team ahead of them is doing work. All great reasons. It's just as viable to say, though, that the vibes are off a little bit, and it's because of the goaltending. They dropped those games, despite being top-three for the week on expected goals percentage and shot attempts, because Devan Dubnyk and Jonas Johansson aren't good. In their last five games, the two backups have combined to go 2-3-0 with an .874 save percentage. Grubauer is coming back. That's great news for him — and his team. They get to cover up that Achilles' heel. We thought it was there before, and now we know.

3. Carolina Hurricanes

Last week: 2
Record: 33-10-7, 73 points



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Ryan rank: 2
Sean rank: 3

Sean: You might've been surprised to see that the Hurricanes were the first team from the Central Division to clinch a playoff berth. Not me, the lifelong Carolina believer. Nice little bonus here: They got sweetheart Teuvo Teravainen back in the lineup for his second time in nine weeks. I feel like we say something similar about them each week, but it's worth reiterating: they've been Corsi gods for a while, and now the other aspects of the game — guess who's got the best power play in the league — are taking them over the top. Also, I learned this week that they call Alex Nedeljkovic "Ned." That's nice!

4. Tampa Bay Lightning

Last week: 4
Record: 34-14-2, 70 points
Ryan rank: 4
Sean rank: 4

Ryan: This might be the dumbest thing ever said about the Lightning. They're a team that was built as if you played GM mode on NHL 21, took notes on the good prospects and where they went in the draft and then decided to re-do the draft so you can take that talent. And if that is the case, then, we've reached the point of the dynasty where you're simming games just to reach the playoffs and you'll start playing again when it really matters: The Stanley Cup playoffs. Oh, and in true gaming fashion, of course you lose two of your best players to injury but still find a way to win.

Sean: I'm gonna jump in here for Dom and make the point he'd have hammered here. Victor Hedman? Kinda butt this year, relatively speaking. The kid can't help himself from posting, even on vacation.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs

Last week: 6
Record: 32-14-5, 69 points
Ryan rank: 5
Sean rank: 5

Ryan: Poet Laureate Aubrey Graham once said, "I guess you lose some and win some. Long as the outcome is income." This is more than just some GTA lyric, at the risk of making this deeper than what it is. The Leafs go on these stretches when they either win everything in sight or make people wonder what is wrong. But will it really matter if they make a long playoff run that ends with reaching either the next level of their path, rather than the final level all teams aspire to achieve?

Sean: Ah, look, Auston Matthews scored again. I did a little cross-multiplication and notice that he'd be on pace for 65 goals in an 82-game season. The one on Thursday against Vancouver wasn't an all-time highlight reel job like his one the night before, but that's fine. He's been the most productive goal scorer in the league since the start of the 2019-20 season, and it hasn't been particularly close. Good thing he didn't hurt himself when he took out Nick Foligno in practice earlier this week. What a load.

6. Boston Bruins

Last week: 5
Record: 29-14-6, 64 points
Ryan rank: 6
Sean rank: 6

Sean: This week's big series against the Penguins was a wash; each team got two points, and each basically dominated one game. That's a recipe for holding steady. Worth shouting out Jeremy Swayman here. The young goalie has a .946 save percentage, a 1.57 goals-against average and a 5-2-0 record in his first seven games. According to MoneyPuck, Swayman has saved 0.541 goals above expectation per 60 minutes. Among goalies with seven-plus appearances, only Petr Mrazek and Andrei Vasilevskiy have negated goals at a higher rate. There's a bunch more good stuff about him in Fluto Shinzawa's recent profile, too.

In other news, David Krejci and Taylor Hall are starting to do this sort of thing together. That was the point of the trade, I suppose. Very shocking.

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Last week: 7
Record: 33-15-3, 69 points
Ryan rank: 7
Sean rank: 7

Sean: Same logic applies to the Penguins and the Bruins. Throw in a 5-4 OT win over the Capitals — clinching the playoffs for both, by the way — and you've got a second straight week in the same place. Thursday's game against the Capitals, sloppy as both teams were, was interesting for one primary reason. The Jake Guentzel–Sidney Crosby–Bryan Rust line wasn't particularly good. It was Jeff Carter's line doing the heavy lifting, with Kasper Kapanen scoring twice and the whole unit controlling the run of play. A depth win, essentially. Probably should make the rest of the East nervous.

8. Washington Capitals

Last week: 8
Record: 32-13-5, 69 points
Ryan rank: 8
Sean rank: 8

Ryan: We were about to make a big deal about how the Capitals went a few games without allowing a goal in 5-on-5 play. Then, Thursday happened. It still does not take away from the fact the Capitals can damn sure score. But you do wonder about what happens should they receive more consistent goaltending. Especially when you look at what could be at stake between the playoffs and the fact Vitek Vaneczek might be a potential Kraken target ahead of the expansion draft.

9. Florida Panthers

Last week: 11
Record: 33-14-5, 71 points
Ryan rank: 10
Sean rank: 9



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Ryan: Here's another one in which the tie went to the best airport. And it was tricky but we went with Fort Lauderdale International Airport. The Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport is a lovely place with a lot of options. But it can also be a problem if you're trying to get from gate to gate in a limited amount of time. Now, as for actual hockey? Let's take this time to discuss that Jonathan Huberdeau might arguably be the most underrated forward in the NHL. All this dude does is get points.

10. Minnesota Wild

Last week: 10
Record: 31-14-4, 66 points
Ryan rank: 9
Sean rank: 10

Sean: Dom isn't here, and the Wild's Twitter account refuses to acknowledge me. No write-up. We are in a fight. Just read this about Marco Rossi if you haven't and move on.

11. New York Islanders

Last week: 9
Record: 30-15-5, 65 points
Ryan rank: 12
Sean rank: 11

Ryan: Losing three straight to the Capitals was far from ideal. It's just not the end of the world either. But it does raise a question about how the Isles could fare in the playoffs considering they have lost their last seven games against teams that are projected to reach the postseason. Then again? None of this could matter at the end of the day.

12. Edmonton Oilers

Last week: 13
Record: 29-17-2, 60 points
Ryan rank: 11
Sean rank: 13

Ryan: Here's the obligatory Connor McDavid statement and/or factoid for the week. Let's take away the goals and McDavid just keeps the 56 assists he possessed coming into Thursday. Those assists alone would be tied for ninth in points.

Sean: This feels like the week that everyone decided that McDavid would be the unanimous Hart Trophy winner. It's not that he doesn't deserve it — he's having the ninth best scoring season in history, adjusted for era. It's that I fully expect someone to galaxy-brain themselves into voting for Sidney Crosby, or whatever. Don't overthink it, PHWA folks. I implore you. This man might have 100 points in a 56-game season.

13. New York Rangers

Last week: 14
Record: 26-19-6, 56 points
Ryan rank: 13
Sean rank: 12

Ryan: Really, there are two things that come to mind about the Rangers. No. 1: Imagine if they were in another division. They'd be a playoff team, and that just speaks to the gauntlet that is the East division. No. 2: Imagine what this team is

going to look like next year, two years and three years from now. The answer? It's called ... a problem.

Sean: Yeah, their biggest problem now is that they're almost out of rope. They're six points behind Boston with five games of their own remaining; the Bruins have two in hand. Their goals right seem like making that season-ending two-game series against Boston relevant, effectively keeping the Adam Fox Norris Bandwagon on the road and trying not to think what their season would've been like had Artemi Panarin been in the lineup for all of it. Even after getting stomped by the Islanders, they're 16-7-3 since he returned.

14. St. Louis Blues

Last week: 18
Record: 23-19-6, 52 points
Ryan rank: 14
Sean rank: 14

Ryan: Everything continues trending upward for the Blues. The last four games have seen them either fall behind to win or catapult out to a lead en route to victory. It is how they have won four straight games and entered Friday with a five-point lead with two games in hand for the final playoff spot in the West. This is not what you want to see if you're the Arizona Coyotes or whoever faces the Blues in the first round.

Sean: In one of the first installments here, we put the Blues on death watch. They were banged up, and their schedule was about to get hellacious. They've done the work, though, particularly against the Wild (10 of 10 possible points against Minnesota since April 9). Now they're on the verge of pulling it off.

15. Winnipeg Jets

Last week: 12
Record: 27-19-3, 57 points
Ryan rank: 14
Sean rank: 16

Sean: We've got a brewing case of "I told you so" in Manitoba, my friend.

All due respect to Stastny, but it hasn't been that tough to notice. The Jets have been in over their skis at 5-on-5 all season long; they're currently 26th in the league in expected goals percentage. They've been outscored 18-6 in their last five games against the Oilers, specifically. Barring something wild, that's going to be their first-round opponent. Not good.

Ryan: You make an extremely valid point about the inconsistencies that have plagued the Jets as of late. Where it gets even more concerning for the Jets is the fact they will have to face either the Oilers or Maple Leafs in the postseason. Of course, the Jets could turn it around and it may not matter. Still, it is something to keep an eye on going forward.

16. Nashville Predators

Last week: 16
Record: 27-22-2, 56 points
Ryan rank: 17
Sean rank: 15



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Sean: The Preds are still my pick to snag the fourth Central playoff spot, but it's tough to imagine them sticking around long, even if it happens. Adam Vingan had a nice piece outlining just how heavily they've relied on Juuse Saros, who's at .942 in his past 19 starts. Despite all that, Nashville is 5-16-1 against Tampa, Carolina and Florida with an average 3.65 expected goals against and 2.32 expected goals for. Brutal.

17. Dallas Stars

Last week: 15
Record: 21-17-12, 54 points
Ryan rank: 16
Sean rank: 17

Sean: I've spent most of the season wanting more for the Stars. I've been close to believing that they'll hang around long enough to make it all worth it ... and then they go and do stuff like stacking a 5-1 loss to the Hurricanes and a 3-0 loss to Tampa. They're out of the playoffs at the moment — albeit with a game in hand on the Predators — and they're 3-10 on the season against Tampa and Carolina. Saturday against the Preds is huge, obviously, but if they don't get a regulation win there, they're going to be on death watch.

Ryan: Here's to you Tyler Seguin, a nation turns its lonely eyes to you. Getting Seguin back into the lineup would certainly aid the Stars' push toward returning to the playoffs. But it also goes back to what Sean said about those score lines versus the Hurricanes and Lightning about finding more defensive consistency.

18. Montreal Canadiens

Last week: 18
Record: 21-18-9, 51 points
Ryan rank: 18
Sean rank: 18

Sean: We've been joking for weeks about the Canadiens' steadfast refusal to accept the playoff spot being gifted by the teams behind them, and I was all set to carry that bit into this week's rankings, but it feels a little hollow given Jonathan Drouin's situation. Can't do anything more than hope he gets whatever help he needs. I will say this: From a hockey standpoint, this was definitely not the ideal way to work Cole Caufield into the lineup.

19. Arizona Coyotes

Last week: 20
Record: 21-24-5, 57 points
Ryan rank: 19
Sean rank: 20

Ryan: They have six games remaining whereas the Blues have eight. They are five points out of a playoff spot while the Blues have won four straight. It all adds up to the fact the Coyotes' playoff chances are slipping away. Any last-ditch efforts start with a two-game series against the Golden Knights before playing the Los Angeles Kings and San Jose Sharks. The Coyotes would need to run the table while hoping the Blues slip in their remaining games against the Anaheim Ducks, Golden Knights, Kings and Wild.

20. Chicago Blackhawks

Last week: 19
Record: 22-22-6, 50 points
Ryan rank: 20
Sean rank: 19

Sean: The Blackhawks are last in expected goals percentage and 25th in actual goals percentage, and we're still here each week, talking about them as they hover in the 18-20 range. The Central is a wild place. We can't lose sight of what's important, though: The Blackhawks have lasted long enough, mathematically speaking, for the Bears to draft a quarterback. That's more than anyone could've expected.

21. Calgary Flames

Last week: 23
Record: 22-24-3, 47 points
Ryan rank: 21
Sean rank: 21

Ryan: They lose Noah Hanifin to a season-ending shoulder injury. They are an organization that appears to be facing some serious questions in the summer. Yet a win Thursday means they are four points out of the final playoff spot while the Canadiens have a game in hand. It's bizarre, but here we are.

22. Philadelphia Flyers

Last week: 21
Record: 22-21-7, 51 points
Ryan rank: 22
Sean rank: 23

Ryan: Getting into the Top 10 and trading with the Cowboys could be one of those moves that defines them for years to come. Whoops, wrong sport. In all seriousness, a team that had preseason playoff expectations has been eliminated in the same week they lost Carter Hart after losing two straight games to the Devils. This is going to be an interesting offseason in Philadelphia.

23. Vancouver Canucks

Last week: 22
Record: 19-22-3, 41 points
Ryan rank: 23
Sean rank: 24

Sean: It dawned on me earlier this week when I talked with Mike Halford and Jason Brough: Jared McCann is making the Canucks' season somehow worse ... from Pittsburgh. He's got 13 goals (seven on the power play) and 13 assists. Vancouver drafted him in the first round and traded him for, essentially, Erik Gudbranson in the span of one year. Makes sense that some of the fans would want that back, yes.

Ryan: Jesus, Sean. Haven't these people suffered enough between losing Jacob Markstrom, Christopher Tanev and Tyler Toffoli? Now you do this? That's so disrespectful. It reminds me of an ancient African-American proverb, "You don't have any home training."

24. Los Angeles Kings

Last week: 24
Record: 18-23-6, 42 points



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Ryan rank: 25
Sean rank: 22

Ryan: At this point, it is about the future for the Kings. Quinton Byfield made his NHL debut this week and his arrival marks the next step in the Kings' rebuild. His performances are only going to offer the Kings more insight into shaping him ahead of next season. Throw in the fact they are projected to have \$19.9 million in free agency? It gives the Kings options.

25. San Jose Sharks

Last week: 25
Record: 20-24-5, 45 points
Ryan rank: 24
Sean rank: 25

Ryan: Getting two straight wins over the Coyotes comes after losing eight straight. It's enough to state the Sharks are seven points out of the final playoff spot in the West with seven games remaining. But five of those seven games come against the ... Avs and Golden Knights.

26. Ottawa Senators

Last week: 27
Record: 19-27-4-42
Ryan rank: 26
Sean rank: 26

Ryan: Wins in five of their last six games? That slaps pretty hard if you're the Senators. Now take a look at how they reached that point. Drake Batherson would be on pace for a 28-goal campaign over an 82-game season. He has four points in as many games. Brady Tkachuk has six points in his last five games while Matt Murray was finding consistency before sustaining a lower-body injury.

27. Detroit Red Wings

Last week: 29
Record: 17-26-9, 43 points
Ryan rank: 27
Sean rank: 27

Sean: I made a joke about the Red Wings tanking — specifically, how they're not — and Wings Twitter got mad at me.

Dylan Larkin got checked in the neck. Of course, he's going to miss some time. Steve Yzerman didn't bother trading Luke Glendening. Of course, they're not tanking. We've been over all this. And honestly, it's all nice to see. It might screw their draft position, but it's nice to see.

28. Columbus Blue Jackets

Last week: 26
Record: 16-25-10, 42 points

Ryan rank: 28
Sean rank: 28

Sean: This is probably a bit of an overcorrection by me — the Blue Jackets have three points in their last two games, including a regulation win over the juggernaut Red Wings — but they deserve it. They've been in the tank since March 22. Three wins total. Dear Lord. I'm just glad Elvis Merzlikins has something to be happy about; I was starting to worry about the dude. Maybe they can let the players coach themselves for the rest of the season.

Ryan: We've reached the point in the power rankings in which the Blue Jackets remind themselves they have three first-round picks. Being a lottery team with that type of draft capital could bode well going forward.

29. Anaheim Ducks

Last week: 31
Record: 15-28-7, 37 points
Ryan rank: 30
Sean rank: 29

Ryan: Rising two spots AND they snap a five-game losing streak? That's progress.

30. New Jersey Devils

Last week: 28
Record: 16-27-7, 39 points
Ryan rank: 29
Sean rank: 31

Sean: We slotted them here before they beat the Flyers on Thursday. Again. They just lost 10 in a row. This is not effective tanking. Someone should inform them. Maybe start with Jack Hughes, who's posted positive expected goals percentages in 32 of 50 games this season.

31. Buffalo Sabres

Last week: 30
Record: 13-31-7, 33 points
Ryan rank: 31
Sean rank: 30

Ryan: William Borgen is healthy and he is receiving more minutes. His performances could be insightful for the Sabres and maybe even the Kraken.

Sean: I knew we were going to get a Kraken bit slipped in there. God, I want to get the Sabres into the 20s at some point, but that hole is just so, so deep. They're playing relatively well, and they're still last in points percentage and goal differential. Next week, maybe.



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Tweetmail: Who Will Score 20 Goals This Season?

By Michael Smith

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail presented by Segra. This is a regular feature on Hurricanes.com in which I answer your Twitter questions, which are mostly about the Carolina Hurricanes, but sometimes also about travel or television or life. It's a mailbag of tweets. It's Tweetmail. Maybe you learn a little something, and maybe we have some fun, too.

Let's get to it.

If you like it, you can take it, if you don't, send it right back: The Hurricanes will have three 20-goal scorers this season. I know this is normally a CanesCast thing, but I wanted to put it out there. - @Owhatdaheck

You're correct, Joey - this is usually a CanesCast bit, but I appreciate a good crossover. Plus, it makes for a tasty thought experiment!

The Canes already have one player who has crossed the 20-goal threshold: Sebastian Aho. He's now scored at least 20 goals in each of his first five seasons in the NHL. That's pretty good. And, if this was a typical 82-game season, he'd be tracking to reach the 30-goal mark for the third consecutive season. That's also pretty good.

Beyond Aho, the Canes have a few players within striking distance of 20 goals. Nino Niederreiter has 18, Vincent Trocheck has 17 and Jordan Staal has 16. Andrei Svechnikov has 13, so he'd have to go on a scoring tear in the final six games to reach 20. Staal is probably an outside shot, too, but he has a chance to at least get close.

I think Niederreiter and Trocheck can get to 20. Trocheck is scoring at a rate that would equate to 34 goals in an 82-game season, which would be a new career high. Niederreiter has rediscovered his early 2019 form, which is exactly what the Canes' offense needed this season.

So, I'll take the fact that the team will have three 20-goal scorers this season. That's pretty impressive given that 20 goals in 56 games is essentially 30 goals in 82 games. The last time the Canes had three 30-goal scorers was 2006-07 when Justin Williams (33), Ray Whitney (32) and Eric Staal (30) each reached that mark. In the words of Staind, "It's been awhile." (The grammatically correct song title and lyric should have been "It's been a while," but that's a discussion for another day.)

How is the NHL going to conduct the Stanley Cup semifinals and potentially the Final with three U.S.-based teams and one Canadian-based team? Crossing the border or basing the Canadian team in a U.S. city that they will call "home"? - @marcupjda19

The logistics of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs are a continually evolving puzzle. The first two rounds are easy enough since they'll be played within each division. It would probably make the most sense to play the first two rounds of the North Division playoffs in Canada.

But, then what?

A lot could change between now and June, but right now the most likely scenario is that the winner of the North Division would then have to play the semifinal round in the United States. It would probably make the most sense to house that team somewhere geographically convenient for the series, too. For instance, Toronto playing in Buffalo would make logical sense, right? But what if they have to face Vegas or Colorado in the semifinals? Instead of having both teams fly across the country however many times, Toronto could instead play "home" games in Arizona or somewhere more central for that series.

The hopeful alternative is that U.S.-Canada border restrictions might loosen in a couple months' time, but that doesn't seem the most likely scenario right now. It's something, though, that the league is actively monitoring, though.

Do you expect the whole team to be healthy come playoffs? - @NSfan83

The Canes' injury list swelled on their recent six-game road trip. Four players - Jesper Fast, Brady Skjei, Jordan Martinook and Petr Mrazek - were sidelined with various maladies, but the good news is that none should be long term. Skjei is already back in the lineup, and he scored the opening goal against Detroit on Thursday.

Fast has taken two recent morning skates but has still been unable to play, so it stands to reason he's fairly close to returning from a lower-body injury.

Mrazek has been skating, which is a good sign.

"I'm hoping that we'll ramp him up, and barring any setbacks, get him up to game speed quickly," Brind'Amour said on Thursday morning.

Martinook hasn't hit the ice just yet, but that's probably not too far off. Brock McGinn, who has missed the last 13 games with an upper-body injury, began skating again this week, which is a positive sign of progress.

So, barring any further injuries in the final six games, the Canes should be healthy by the start of the playoffs.

When a player travels with the team but doesn't play, what does their day look like? Do they come to the arena, still work out, etc.? - @Beth_Daniel21



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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I'll try to answer this as thoroughly and as succinctly as possible because there are so many dependent factors: the city, the schedule, the player, the injury, among others.

Let's lay out two scenarios. The first is specific to this season: the taxi squad player. This is basically an American Hockey League call-up at the ready. On a gameday, he goes about his business just like every other player with the exception of the afternoon, when he doesn't necessarily need a gameday nap or a ride to the rink on the early bus. The second scenario is an injured player. If the player is close enough to returning - say, Teuvo Teravainen on this last road trip - he'll travel with the team. He skates with the team during practice or the morning skate and spends a little extra time on the ice. He might do a little extra work out. On

the other hand, someone like Jordan Martinook, who was injured on the road trip and was not able to skate, is a bit more limited. He might be able to do some light stuff off the ice, but most of his day is getting treatment. He'll catch the late bus to the rink to watch the game with the taxi squad and whoever else might be injured or scratched.

Hopefully that gives you a good glimpse - their days honestly aren't much different than everyone else's; the timing is just a little off from their routine.

Will we trade for Aaron Rodgers? - @grahamr_9

The Canes would have to do some serious cap gymnastics to absorb that cap hit. And, "Jeopardy!" might have first dibs.

Preview: Blue Jackets vs. Hurricanes

Carolina and Columbus close out eight-game season series

By Michael Smith

With six games left to play in the regular season, the Carolina Hurricanes aim to move closer to locking up the first seed in the Central Division and possibly even the league when they host the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Match-Up

Columbus Blue Jackets (16-25-10, 42 points) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (33-10-7, 73 points)

Saturday, May 1, 7 p.m.

Watch: Bally Sports South, Bally Sports app

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

Numbers to Know

6: Sebastian Aho recorded two assists on Thursday against Detroit and now has points in six straight games (3g, 8a).

4: In addition to his six-game point streak, Aho also owns a four-game assist streak (7a).

10-2-4: The Canes earned points in 14 of their 16 games in April to finish the month with a 10-2-4 record and 24 points.

The Opposition

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

On the road: 7-17-3, 17 points

CAR vs. CBJ: 4-1-2

Leading scorer: Oliver Bjorkstrand, 38 points (15g, 23a) in 51 games

The Blue Jackets have been idle since Tuesday, when they snapped a nine-game winless skid with a 1-0 shootout victory over the Detroit Red Wings. Elvis Merzlikins posted a 41-save shutout, while Patrik Laine and Oliver Bjorkstrand netted goals in the shootout. The Blue Jackets, who sank to the bottom of the Central Division standings with a 1-7-2 record in their last 10 games, have five games remaining in the regular season, and tonight's game in Raleigh marks their road finale.

The Last Meeting

The Canes and Blue Jackets squared off four times in a row in the latter half of March. The Canes earned points in each of the four games (2-0-2), a mini-series that was capped with a 4-3 overtime win in Columbus. Martin Necas netted a dazzling wrap-around goal in regulation, and then he dished off to Sebastian Aho for the game-winner in overtime.

"It was two good teams playing the right way. Not a lot of room," Aho said. "Definitely were grinding games, every single one of them. We expect to win every single one of them, but these last two were big ones."



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SB NATION CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Hurricanes vs. Columbus Blue Jackets: Game Preview

The Hurricanes face off against the Blue Jackets for the final time this season.

By Sarah.A

Carolina Hurricanes (33-10-7) vs. Columbus Blue Jackets (16-25-10)

2021 Regular Season Game 51
Saturday, May 1, 2021 - 7 p.m. ET
PNC Arena — Raleigh, NC

Watch: Bally Sports Carolinas
Listen: 99.9 The Fan

SBN Opposition: The Cannon

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Is it just me or does it feel like every game is against the Blue Jackets?

Probably just me, I guess, but good news: after this, the Carolina Hurricanes don't have to face the Columbus Blue Jackets again this season. All of the questions about what's going on over there at Nationwide Arena and just how John Tortorella still has a job and oh wow they sure are misusing Patrik Laine — all those thoughts can at the very least be put on hold after the final buzzer.

The Blue Jackets are currently mired in their worst season since 2011-12, when they finished the season with 65 points and a 0.386 points percentage. This year, the Blue Jackets' 42 points and 0.412 points percentage is the fourth worst in franchise history, and as time winds down this year, things don't look to be getting any better.

The Blue Jackets just snapped a nine-game losing streak by picking up a win over Detroit, a goaltender's duel which ended in a 1-0 shootout win, which certainly isn't something you see happen every day. And while I think most Blue Jackets fans are just waiting for the season to end, the players are trying to salvage any sort of hope they can from their last five games of the season.

For one last time, let's see how these two teams stack up:

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Blue Jackets
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Category	Hurricanes	Blue Jackets
Record	33-10-7	16-25-10
Goals/Game	3.20	2.33
Goals Against/Game	2.36	3.27
Shots/Game	32.12	28.90
Face Off Win %	53.5%	45.5%
Power Play % (Rank)	27.1% (1st)	14.7% (28th)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	84.4% (3rd)	79.8% (14th)
ES Corsi For %	53.50%	46.41%
ES PDO	101.19	98.13
PIM/Game	07:25	07:18

Goaltender #1

Category	James Reimer	Joonas Korpialo
Record	15-5-2	9-13-7
Save %	0.906	.894
GAA	2.66	3.30

Goaltender #2

Category	Alex Nedeljkovic	Elvis Merzlikins
Record	13-4-3	7-12-3
Save %	.932	.916



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Category Alex Nedeljkovic Elvis Merzlikins

GAA 1.94 2.80

Goaltender #3

Category Petr Mrazek N/A

Record 5-1-2 N/A

Save % .939 N/A

GAA 1.60 N/A

Game Notes

- The Hurricanes are 4-1-2 against the Blue Jackets this season, with 26 goals scored and 20 against. James Reimer and Alex Nedeljkovic have two wins each against Columbus.
- Since the last time these teams met on March 25, the Blue Jackets have shut down goaltender Joonas Korpisalo and defenseman Zach Werenski for the season and placed forward Boone Jenner, who hasn't played since April 6, on injured reserve.

- Today's game is the second in a five-game homestand for the Hurricanes, before they head off to Nashville to close out the regular season.
- The secret to beating the Blue Jackets this season seems to be to score early and don't look back: Columbus is 1-11-2 when trailing after the first period.
- The league's worst road penalty kill (10.6%) meets the league's second best home penalty kill (90.5%) in case you're wondering how important special teams will be in this game.
- Patrik Laine has missed 10 games for the Blue Jackets, due to his time in Winnipeg pre-trade, and his quarantine time afterwards, but still leads the team in power play goals (4).
- Sebastian Aho will look to continue his points streak — he has points in six consecutive games and assists in four straight. He's tallied three goals and eight assists during the streak.
- In the month of April, the Hurricanes earned the most points in the NHL, earning 24 points with a 10-2-4 record. The Vegas Golden Knights do have the slight edge in points percentage for the month (0.767 for Vegas and 0.750 for Carolina).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Wolves' special teams prevail

Wolves score on the power play and penalty kill during contentious clash with Wild

The Chicago Wolves produced a power-play goal and a short-handed goal 88 seconds apart to fuel a 4-1 victory over the Iowa Wild on Friday night at the Wolves Training Facility.

Forwards Sheldon Rempal, Phil Tomasino, Sean Malone and Zach Solow delivered goals for the Wolves (18-5-1-2) in their first home game since April 3. Goaltender Beck Warm rejected 26 shots while Chicago killed all six Iowa power plays.

"I think that was one of our most complete games of the year," said Wolves head coach Ryan Warsofsky. "I thought our penalty kill was really good. That started with our goaltender. It was really good for our power play and penalty kill to step up. They can win you hockey games and they did that tonight."

Iowa defenseman Turner Ottenbreit opened the scoring with his first goal of the year. He bounced a shot from the right point that squeezed through traffic to give the Wild (12-12-4-0) a 1-0 lead at 11:39 of the first.

The Wolves got it back at 18:43 of the first as Rempal won an offensive-zone faceoff that David Cotton spun back to defenseman Max Lajoie, who launched a rocket from the left

point. Rempal rushed toward the crease and tipped Lajoie's shot past Iowa goaltender Joel Rumpel for the 1-1 tie.

The Wolves pushed their lead to 3-1 in the second period thanks to their special teams.

Tomasino ripped a shot from the right circle for a power-play goal at 8:27 — set up by perimeter passes from Tommy Novak and Joey Keane — then Sean Malone came through with a short-handed goal at 9:55 on his 26th birthday after Iowa committed an unforced turnover near its net. Rempal claimed it, drew the goaltender out of the crease and fed Malone flying down the slot for a one-timer into an open net.

Chicago earned an insurance goal at 10:40 when Jamieson Rees powered his way through the offensive zone and slashed toward the net, where he centered the puck to Solow for a redirect.

Warm earned his team-high sixth win for the Wolves while Rumpel (1-2-1) posted 28 saves for the Wild during a game that featured several scuffles and led to 80 penalty minutes combined.

The Wolves host Iowa at 7 p.m. Saturday as the AHL regular season moves into its final two weeks. Chicago caps the regular season May 15 with a visit from the Rockford IceHogs. All Wolves games are streamed on AHLTV.com

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1211146 Carolina Hurricanes

Concussion recovery has been a 'tough time' for Hurricanes forward Teuvo Teravainen

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 30, 2021 01:24 PM

Concussions can be unpredictable, fickle, confounding and at times maddening.

Defenseman Brady Skei was concussed, missed four games, then returned to play and score a goal Thursday in the Canes' 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings at PNC Arena.

"Concussions," Skjei said after the game, "are definitely a scary thing. Each concussion is different. Some go by quick. Some last a while."

Forward Teuvo Teravainen also scored and had an assist Thursday. Named the game's first star, he went through a postgame interview on the Canes' bench with a broad — likely relieved — smile.

After suffering a concussion Feb. 19 against the Chicago Blackhawks, Teravainen sat out seven games before coming back to play March 4 against the Red Wings. He quickly sensed that was a mistake.

"I just didn't feel right, especially the next day," Teravainen said on a media call Thursday. "I was having the symptoms, so it was not the right feeling. It just took more time."

A lot of time.

Teravainen was out the next 25 games, leaving many to wonder when he would be able to play again. And beyond that, play like Teuvo Teravainen again.

He resumed limited off-ice work. He was skating on his own and then rejoined the team in recent weeks for a few practices. But there were no games as the days passed.

"It was a tough time," Teravainen said. "Everybody helped me a lot, maybe even too much. They asked me how I feel every day, and that's kind of annoying."

Teravainen's symptoms began to ease. But NHL games are a different animal, with the speed and physicality. The Canes' medical people and coach Rod Brind'Amour remained cautious.

"The concussion things are the great unknown," Brind'Amour said Friday.

For much of Brind'Amour's playing career, concussions were considered being "dinged up." Once the "fog" would pass he'd quickly be back on the ice. Former Canes coach Kirk Muller once said there were times he'd bang his head during games and tell his linemates to be sure he was headed to the right bench when the shift ended.

"I look back on my career and there was some worry at the end," Brind'Amour said. "I'm like, 'Holy moly, I probably had 100 of them.' But we just didn't know back then."

"Now we err towards caution, for sure. A guy gets a little dinged up, obviously they yank him out of the game. If there's a little something, he's out for a week. They really take care of these guys as best they can and that's a great thing."

There's the specter of CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), a degenerative brain condition that can be caused by repeated blows to the head. Some pro athletes have retired prematurely after sustaining multiple concussions — including former Carolina Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly — to lessen the risks later in life.

Teravainen was missed when he was out, even as the Canes won games and led the Central Division. He's a player the team counts on at even strength and on special teams, and one of its best defensive forwards with his instincts and quick hands.

Brind'Amour got him back into his first game Tuesday against the Dallas Stars on the road, giving him 16:32 of ice time in the 5-1 win. He had 16:16 on Thursday, including a small slice of penalty-killing time. That could soon increase, the coach said.

Teravainen, playing on Sebastian Aho's line with winger Andrei Svechnikov, assisted on Skjei's goal in the second period that gave the Canes a 1-0 lead. In the third, he forced a Wings turnover, took a pass from Sebastian Aho and scored his third goal of the season — his 300th career NHL point.

"I knew he was going to be fine," Aho said.

Brind'Amour said Teravainen had become sick of just practicing and wanted to play. He needed some games before the playoffs began to get back to game speed, feel the puck, build his stamina, be a contributor again.

"I think he thinks the games are easier than the practices and everything that goes into getting ready to play," Brind'Amour said. "He's a gamer."

Skjei was injured April 20 against Tampa Bay, his head smacking into the glass after a hit from behind from the Lightning's Blake Coleman. He tried to continue to play but couldn't and entered the concussion protocol.

"It's weird because your body feels fine," Skjei said Thursday night. "Physically you're all there. But the biggest part of your body, your brain, is the thing you've got to let heal. After the hit, most of it was in my eyes. That kind of went away a couple of days later and I started to feel a lot better on that third and fourth day."

"You've got to be patient and you've got to wait until you feel 100 percent," he said.

News Observer LOADED: 05.01.2021

1211157 Columbus Blue Jackets



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Blue Jackets prospect Yegor Chinakhov ready to sign NHL deal, according to agent

Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

Egor Chinakhov plans to sign his first NHL contract soon with the Blue Jackets, who selected the Russian forward in the first round of the 2020 NHL draft. Chinakhov, a rookie in the Kontinental Hockey League this season, helped Avangard Omsk win that league's Gagarin Cup championship this week.

The Blue Jackets might be close to getting some good news soon, which is a welcome development in a challenging season.

According to a tweet posted Friday by agent Shumi Babaev, forward Yegor Chinakhov may sign an entry-level contract with the Blue Jackets soon. Chinakhov was selected by Columbus 21st overall in last year's draft, which was conducted remotely in late October.

The 20-year old Russian forward had a standout rookie season in the Kontinental Hockey League playing for Avangard Omsk and helped his hometown team win the league's Gagarin Cup championship earlier this week.

"He's done really well," Babaev told the Dispatch in a recent interview. "This guy has shown has (what it takes) and he's already a man. He can play in the NHL. He's played really good in the playoffs with his team. He's not playing like a young guy."

The Blue Jackets haven't released anything about signing Chinakhov, so nothing is official yet. Signing KHL players, even those drafted by NHL teams, can be a little tricky if their current teams decide to up the ante with lucrative contract extensions for players to stay put.

Blue Jackets defenseman Vladislav Gavrikov delayed his arrival in Columbus to stay a couple extra years and develop in the KHL prior to playing his first NHL game in the second round of the 2019 playoffs. The Blue Jackets are still waiting to sign Russian forwards Kirill Marchenko (2018, second round) and Dmitri Voronkov (2014, fourth round), who both signed extensions with their KHL teams after being drafted by Columbus.

Babaev also sent out a tweet written in Russian thanking Avangard Omsk for helping his client develop and prospect this season, so all signs are currently pointing toward Chinakhov signing with the Jackets.

It's unclear whether he could get a work visa completed in time to make his NHL debut this season, but getting the prospect's signature on a three-year ELC would be a victory. Chinakhov was a revelation this season for his KHL team, which was coached by former NHL coach Bob Hartley – who also coaches the Latvia men's national team.

Chinakhov, a winger with a great shot, had 10 goals, seven assists and 17 points in 32 games during the regular season as a KHL rookie and had a 5-2-7 scoring line in 21 playoff games. He'll have to make the adjustment to smaller rinks in North America and a sizable step up in talent level, but Chinakhov is a good skater and has a knack for scoring goals.

He played for Russia in the 2021 World Junior championship, as well, scoring one goal in five games and missing several games with an undisclosed injury that happened during the tournament. Chinakhov also missed the final two games of Avangard Omsk's title run because of an illness, but Babaev said his client is now on the mend.

"I think he's ready," said Babaev, who represents other players already in the NHL. "He's an NHL player. He's a 20-year old in the KHL and he (was) in the playoffs, and (during) the season he was the best young player in the KHL."

Blue Jackets general manager Jarmo Kekalainen stunned draft experts when he selected Chinakhov in the first round, causing at least a couple of television draft analysts to rifle through their notes trying to find anything they could on him. Most analysts didn't have Chinakhov coming off the board until the second round or later.

Kekalainen said the draft being held later because of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed scouts to get better reads on players who'd already begun to play this season in European leagues. They saw Chinakhov's breakout year from the start and grabbed him.

Even Babaev was surprised at the spot his client was picked, but Chinakhov's play since made it look much more like a steal than a reach.

"When he started to play in the KHL, he was (improving) day-by-day, so it helped him," Babaev told the Dispatch. "When he's playing with the better players, he's getting better. That's the main thing, you know? When he comes to play in the NHL, he will be a much better player."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 05.01.2021

1211158 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella says Andrew Peeke is sitting to protect his confidence

Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

Andrew Peeke (2) of the Blue Jackets defends against Dallas forward Roope Hintz in an April 17 game.

This is a time of evaluation for the Blue Jackets. But not for Andrew Peeke. At least, not in games.

Peeke, a 23-year-old defenseman with 31 games of NHL experience, hasn't played the past four games as a healthy scratch. He was the Blue Jackets' second-round pick in the 2016 draft after excelling in college at Notre Dame.

"I thought he looked a little overwhelmed when he was playing and those are the things we have to talk about," said coach John Tortorella, who is consulting with assistant Brad Shaw and general manager Jarmo Kekalainen on a plan for Peeke. "I don't want to hurt his development to continually trot him out there and have him struggle."

Before being scratched, Peeke played the first three games of a six-game road trip that concluded Sunday in Tampa. His one assist and a minus-2 rating in that span don't indicate that he was overmatched, but stats aren't everything. Tortorella and Shaw didn't like what they saw out of the young defenseman and don't want to ruin his confidence.

Peeke has three assists and is minus-5 in nine games overall, which is not much activity for a player who went nearly a full calendar year without playing in a game because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Shaw went over some things with him Tuesday before a game against Detroit, and Tortorella hopes to play Peeke again before the end of the season.

For the time being, at least, Gavin Bayreuther and Mikko Lehtonen are getting evaluation time ahead of Peeke. Bayreuther, 26, has played the past five games and has NHL 19 games. Lehtonen, 27, has played six games in a row and 14 of the 15. He's also in his first NHL season

As for Peeke, he would have been re-assigned to the Cleveland Monsters, but the NHL's limit of four minor-league recalls after the trade deadline is keeping him in Columbus.



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"There's a lot of things that come into that," Tortorella said. "It's not just saying, 'Well, he's supposed to be (a second-round pick).' I don't want to hear it. I want to watch him play and I don't want to hurt the kid by continuing to put him out there when there's some struggles. So, we'll see how we navigate through the rest of the year."

New goalie plan

Joonas Korpi's season-ending injury has created a goaltending vacancy the Jackets are figuring out how to fill. Elvis Merzlikins probably won't start all five remaining games, especially with a busy final week, and there are two interesting options to pick up games he doesn't play.

Matiss Kivlenieks, who handled the backup role Tuesday, is one of them. He impressed Tortorella in his NHL debut last season, but touted prospect Daniil Tarasov also is on the Jackets' taxi squad.

"I hear tremendous things about Tarasov," Tortorella said of the Russian, the Jackets' third-round pick in 2017. "I think there's a little bit of merit that comes into this also, when you have an injury, but I also have to defer to (Kekalainen) and get information from him and (goaltending coach Manny Legace). But I don't want 'Kivi' forgotten here because of the potential of Tarasov coming here and now the injury and there's an opening."

Bound for Beijing

The Finnish Ice Hockey Association announced Wednesday that Kekalainen will be Finland's assistant GM for the 2022 Beijing Olympics. It's the third time the Blue Jackets' GM has helped his country in that capacity. He was also Finland's assistant GM for the 2016 World Cup of Hockey and 2014 Sochi Olympics.

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

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 05.01.2021

1211147 Chicago Blackhawks

5 takeaways from the Chicago Blackhawks' 4-3 loss to the Florida Panthers in overtime, including progress for Kirby Dach and Vinnie Hinostroza continuing to perform

By PHIL THOMPSON

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

APR 30, 2021 AT 9:22 AM

Alex DeBrincat scored with 17.6 seconds remaining to send Thursday night's game into overtime, but ultimately it wasn't enough.

Sam Bennett scored with 52 seconds remaining in overtime to give the Florida Panthers a 4-3 win.

The Chicago Blackhawks got a point in the standings, but that probably is not going to be enough either. Not with them still six points behind the idle Nashville Predators with six games remaining in the season.

"It sucks," Kirby Dach said. "We're fighting for our lives right now and to not get two points, it sucks. We've got to find a way to get two points.

"It's nice to get one point and kind of claw back a little bit, but we've got to find a way to get two almost every night to give ourselves a chance."

Here are five takeaways from the game.

1. The Hawks had their chances in OT but ran into Spencer Knight.

It begs the question: Who the heck is Spencer Knight?

The 13th overall pick in 2019 was playing for Boston College a month ago. In overtime Thursday, he was fending off the Hawks during a 1½-minute stretch during which they had the Panthers hemmed in their zone and got three shots on goal.

"They were all over there us for a bit," Bennett said. "Knighter stood on his head and made some unbelievable saves. Kept us in it."

It was just Knight's third start.

"I said it before," Bennett said, "I'm shocked that he's only played a couple games in the NHL. He's so composed back there."

Hawks coach Jeremy Colliton said, "We had more than enough to score in overtime, so that leaves a sour taste not to get the two points."

2. Is it more significant the Hawks didn't quit or that they couldn't put a complete game together?

The Hawks were making great zone entries in the first period and sustaining offensive pressure. That has been the case many times this season before something in the second or third period breaks that reverses course.

In this case, it was Alex Wennberg's power-play goal that put the Panthers on the board.

"They used the power plays to get going," Colliton said. "They created quite a few chances and obviously they used that momentum."

The game was tied midway through the third when a Hawks defensive breakdown led to the Brandon Montour's goal from the slot.

"We could've killed the rush to begin with," Colliton said. "It was a 2 versus 4, so we'd like to take advantage of our numbers there. We need to pick up who's coming. Everyone was a little bit late to sort and obviously they ended up with a pretty good chance."

The Hawks could've packed it in but pulled Kevin Lankinen before DeBrincat sank a cross-ice pass from Patrick Kane back door.

"Pretty much all our games we've had some good and had some bad spurts," Vinnie Hinostroza said. "It just comes down to putting a full 60 minutes together.

"If we do that, we're harder to play against, we're harder to beat."

3. For a revenge game, Vinnie Hinostroza didn't seem very interested in revenge.

The Panthers traded Hinostroza to the Blackhawks on April 2, and he scored against his former team in the second period.

"Any time you score a goal in the NHL it's huge, no matter what team it is," he said. "I don't look at it as my old team, it's just another team in the NHL.

"I've been here a month, this is my team. This is where I want to be. I want to help this team win."

It was Hinostroza's third goal in the last four games, and he has 10 points in 11 starts for the Hawks.

He had no points while barely getting a sniff — just nine games — with the Panthers.

Panthers coach Joel Quenneville said he was "not at all" surprised about the start to Hinostroza's second stint in Chicago.

"It was a great opportunity for him," Quenneville said. "I know things weren't great for him there in Florida. He gets a fresh start, he gets an opportunity and he took right off from the get-go, so he took advantage of it. And good for him."

4. It was overshadowed but Kirby Dach had a nice showing.



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Dach won 83% of his faceoffs, including 6 of 6 against Aleksander Barkov. Dach had entered the game having won just 39.2% of his faceoffs.

Dach also had an assist on Hinostroza's goal and played 2:52 of penalty kill.

"No question, he did an excellent job in the faceoff circle, but his two-way game was much better tonight," Colliton said. "I gave him that responsibility to play against Barkov and it brought the best out of him.

"He competed hard and they definitely created their share of chances. Hopefully he can maintain that level the last few games of the season."

Dach has been playing through pain from his surgically repaired wrist, but has played 16 games since starting his season in late March.

"With an injury it's going to take time to get back into things and feel confident, using my body and my strength and my size," Dach said. "I've got to keep improving and keep helping the team push forward here and hopefully we can string together some wins."

5. Another start means another point for Adam Gaudette.

Gaudette had an assist April 19 against the Predators, a chance he received because Brandon Hagel was awaiting COVID-19 test results.

Gaudette got another chance Thursday when the Hawks sat Philipp Kurashev.

Gaudette opened the scoring in the first period when Dylan Strome got the puck to the crease and Gaudette scooped it in through traffic.

"He did well," Colliton said. "Made some plays, found a way to jump on some loose pucks, just like he did when he scored."

Here is more game coverage.

Alex DeBrincat tied Thursday's game with 18 seconds left, but the Chicago Blackhawks still lost to the Florida Panthers 4-3 in overtime at the United Center.

DeBrincat knotted it 3-3 — with assists from Patrick Kane and Wyatt Kaylnuk — but the Panthers' Sam Bennett scored the game-winner with 52 seconds left in the extra period.

While the Hawks (49 points) aren't yet eliminated from playoff contention, they couldn't take advantage of the fifth-place Dallas Stars (54) losing to the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-0 on Thursday. The fourth-place Nashville Predators (56) are idle until Saturday, when the Hawks also wrap up their season series against the Panthers.

Adam Gaudette put the Hawks on the board in the first period, scoring his first goal since being traded to the Hawks from the Vancouver Canucks on April 12. Gaudette knocked in a rebound off Dylan Strome's shot.

The Hawks and Panthers traded goals in the second period. Alex Wennberg scored on the Panthers' first power-play opportunity. About 3½ minutes later, Vinnie Hinostroza, another trade acquisition, scored against his former team.

Anthony Duclair tied it at 2 when Brandon Montour's shot bounced off Kevin Lankinen's leg to Duclair.

Late in the second, Alex DeBrincat and Brandon Hagel nearly cashed in on a two-man shorthanded rush, but DeBrincat was waved off because of a high stick.

Montour put the Panthers ahead in the third when he took a centering pass from Alex Wennberg and fired from the high slot as Aleks Heponiemi screened Lankinen.

Spencer Knight made 24 saves for the Panthers while Lankinen had 35.

1211148 Chicago Blackhawks

Finally healthy, Blackhawks' Gaudette focused on improving

John Dietz

Follow @johndietzdh

Updated 4/30/2021 5:40 PM

For a long time, newly acquired Blackhawks forward Adam Gaudette knew something just wasn't right physically.

He'd get sick in the morning and throw up all the time. He'd drink a shake after a game, then couldn't eat for hours.

He was losing weight and constantly tired.

This went on for years, with no one able to diagnose the problem.

Mentally and physically exhausted, Gaudette's performance on the ice was suffering.

Finally, he reached out to a nutritionist that he'd been working with since high school, telling her, "Hey, I have this blood work. I haven't had a chance to look at it with anyone. Can you check it out?"

Soon after, the problem was diagnosed. Turns out Gaudette, whom the Hawks acquired from Vancouver at the April 12 trade deadline for Matthew Highmore, was told he had a Candida overgrowth -- or yeast infection -- in his stomach.

He was prescribed medication, put on a vegetable-rich diet and began feeling better.

"I still add in red meat every now and then, but it's mostly chicken and fish, nuts, seeds, beans," Gaudette said. "Biggest thing is to stay away from added sugar: Gatorade, snacks. That's probably the hardest part, but I'm working my way through it."

Gaudette, who scored a blue-collar goal to open the scoring during the Hawks' 4-3 OT loss against Florida on Thursday, was drafted in the fifth round by the Canucks in 2015. The high-scoring forward, who hails from Braintree, Mass., poured in 56 goals in 75 games during his last two seasons at Northeastern while skating on the same line as former Hawk Dylan Sikura.

He quickly ascended the Canucks depth chart, scoring 5 goals in 56 games in 2018-19 and adding 12 more in 59 games in 2019-20.

This season was a rough one for Gaudette (5G, 4A in 35 games with Vancouver) as he was hit hard after being infected with COVID. Making matters worse, some fans made harsh comments on social media.

"There's a lot of (stuff) going on and a lot of disrespectful things that were said about me and my wife that were just not true," Gaudette said. "I have a great relationship with those guys (in Vancouver). I have a lot of close friends. Got along with everybody really well there. Coulda happened to anyone."

GM and president of operations Stan Bowman said the Hawks are trying to "recapture" some of Gaudette's success last season. The 24-year-old has played in two games thus far and certainly impressed at times against the Panthers while skating with Dylan Strome and Dominik Kubalik.

"He did well," said coach Jeremy Colliton. "Made some plays, found a way to jump on some loose pucks, just like he did when he scored. So happy that we were able to get him in."



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Gaudette will be a restricted free agent with arbitration rights this summer. He's looking forward to the off-season, one in which he can focus solely upon getting better on the ice.

"I'm really excited about it because I finally have this problem (solved) that I've been dealing with for years that I didn't even know (about)," Gaudette said. "Even this season I was able to put 10-plus pounds on while playing just because my diet was better. I had more energy; I was able to work out more. ...

This whole problem ... was a big mental battle and physical battle as well. Things are just going to come easier for me this off-season."

Then we'll find out just how sick he can make Hawks opponents next season.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 05.01.2021

1211149 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks draft board: 7 players who could be available in the first round

By Scott Powers

Apr 30, 2021

The Blackhawks are mathematically still alive to earn the Central Division's final playoff spot, but their hope is nearly extinguished.

Because they held that playoff spot or were in contention for it for much of the season, we haven't talked a whole lot about the NHL Draft. It figured to be such a major topic this season and just hasn't been because of their unexpected competitiveness. But now, as the playoffs are becoming less likely, it's worth exploring the subject again.

If the season ended today, the Blackhawks would have the 12th-worst record in the NHL. It's probably about where they'll end up, too. If you add in the Seattle Kraken to the draft and the Arizona Coyotes having to forfeit their first-round pick, the Blackhawks are most likely to pick at No. 12 overall as of now.

Of course, the ping-pong balls could bounce in or out of their favor. As always, I recommend playing around with Tankathon's lottery simulator. I did 20 simulations Thursday night, and the Blackhawks ended up with the 12th pick 18 times and the 13th pick twice.

So, if the Blackhawks were to pick at No. 12, whom might they be looking at? Let's dive into seven possibilities.

Chaz Lucius, center, 6-foot-1, 185 pounds, U.S. National Team Development Program (USHL)

The Blackhawks have a history of drafting players from the USNTDP. Just last draft, they took goalie Drew Comesso and winger Landon Slaggert from the program in the second and third rounds. They've selected at least one player from the program during the first three rounds in the last five drafts.

The Athletic's Corey Pronman really liked Lucius in his last rankings and had him No. 6, but most experts have him a little later. Bob McKenzie had him at No. 9 in his latest rankings.

Pronman wrote of him: "Lucius is a player with tremendous skill and goal-scoring ability. His goal-scoring ability isn't due to launching long-range bombs, but rather he is high end at creating around the net and slot and gets a ton of chances in that region because of his skill, compete and frame."

Pronman questioned his skating and explosiveness. One league source said Thursday he wasn't so sure Lucius was worth an early pick.

"He scores, but he doesn't do a lot else," the source said. "He'd be a scary proposition for me if I was drafting at No. 12."

Fabian Lysell, winger, 5-10, 172 pounds, Lulea (SHL)

Lysell has a lot of the pedigree the Blackhawks like in their forwards. The word "skill" is one of the most associated words with him.

The Athletic's Scott Wheeler wrote of him: "Watching Lysell is a thrill. His speed and puck skill allow him to play fast, regularly burning defenders out wide or pulling pucks through his feet to leap past them to the inside."

Wheeler and McKenzie have Lysell at No. 12 in their rankings and Pronman has him at No. 13, so it's safe to think of him in this range.

Pronman wrote: "Lysell is a dynamic forward. He's one of the most skilled players in the draft and beats defenders consistently with his puckhandling displays. That he's a great skater, with both good speed and edgework, and can make very skilled plays at full flight makes him a handful to defend."

Consistency is the area most analysts are pointing out with Lysell. He didn't produce much in the SHL this season, but that's not completely surprising for an 18-year-old.

Carson Lambos, defenseman, 6-1, 197 pounds, Winnipeg Ice (WHL)

You would think the Blackhawks would be eying the best player available on the board wherever they pick in the first round. I doubt they'll draft a goalie early after taking Comesso last year, but they could go with a forward or defenseman with their first-round pick. There are organizational needs everywhere.

Four defensemen — Owen Power, Brandt Clarke, Luke Hughes and Simon Edvinsson — are expected to go early in the first round. Lambos could be one defenseman teams look at beyond those four in the first round. McKenzie has him at No. 15, Wheeler at No. 11 and Pronman at No. 32. McKenzie described him as polarizing.

Pronman wrote: "Lambos has had a tough go this season, being OK in Finland before an unspecified medical issue caused him to only get a couple WHL games in before his season ended. Lambos' skating is good and he projects to be able to rush pucks in the NHL and stay with fast forwards defensively. He has good speed and excellent edges and is able to pivot quickly and escape pressure at a high level. Lambos is hard to play against and regularly punishes opponents physically. The main question is his offensive upside."

Wheeler wrote: "After an excellent age-adjusted season in a huge role as a 16-year-old in Winnipeg last season, Lambos joined JYP's junior program in Finland, where he was clearly the league's most well-rounded under-18 defenseman on a team where he could be measured against Valtteri Koskela and Aleksii Malinen, two decent 2021 defense prospects. And while Lambos doesn't skate like Hughes, or have the dynamic qualities that Clarke and Edvinsson possess, Lambos is a strong, powerful two-way defender with plus-level skating ability, a sturdy and physical defensive game, and more skill than he gets credit for."

Corson Ceulemans, defenseman, 6-2, 198 pounds, Brooks (AJHL)

Ceulemans is another defenseman the Blackhawks could consider in the first round. Pronman has him at No. 12, and McKenzie has him at No. 18.

Pronman wrote: "He is a complete defenseman as a 6-foot-2, right-shot defender who is mobile, hard to play against and has offensive ability. At the AJHL level, he showed great one-on-one skill and the ability to move the puck. He kills a lot of rushes with his skating and physicality and picks off a lot of passes. At the higher levels of play, I've questioned if his offense will translate at the top level, but I can see him becoming a tough-minutes, two-way defenseman with some offense in the NHL."

The Blackhawks could certainly use more of those. His size and right-handedness could be attractive traits to them.



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Wheeler isn't as high on him, though. He has him at No. 30.

Wheeler wrote: "Ceulemans' game does raise some red flags, though. He's got a propensity to make mistakes, misread his gaps, get burned to the outside because he's flatfooted, turn the puck over, and settle into a lackadaisical defensive posture. Some of those things should iron themselves out and the raw package is obviously really interesting, but I wouldn't be shocked if it took him some time to adjust to the NCAA's pace of play. His defensive game needs more work than his offensive game, and picking Ceulemans is a gamble on the potential of him putting it all together."

Cole Sillinger, center, 6-0, 190 pounds, Sioux Falls (USHL)

For what it's worth, my league source thought Sillinger could be the perfect choice for the Blackhawks if they were picking at No. 12.

"Sillinger's smart and he can score," the source said. "He needs to improve his skating. He'd be intriguing for the Blackhawks. I think he's a legit top-six center, and his timeline might fit well with Jonathan Toews' timeline."

Wheeler has Sillinger at No. 10.

Wheeler wrote: "Sillinger's got a 'wow' factor to his game that few prospects in this draft class have (outside of Johnson). He has been sensational with the Stampede in the USHL, using his slick hands and one-on-one to get to the home-plate area and his shot to finish."

Pronman has him at No. 25.

Pronman wrote, "His skating is an area of concern, and he likely won't be able to drive entries at the top level."

Mason McTavish, center, 6-1, 207 pounds, Peterborough (OHL)

McKenzie has McTavish at No. 11, a lot higher than The Athletic's analysts. Wheeler has him at No. 17, and Pronman has him at No. 24. It's usually smart to follow McKenzie's lead, though.

Wheeler wrote: "McTavish plays a physically engaged, push-and-pop style, relying on his heavy, often overpowering shot and good power game to create the bulk of his offense toward the net. His east-west vision still needs to open up a little more, and I'd like to see him support the play defensively a little better, but he can attack off of the wall with his balance over his feet, and he's got a sturdy frame. There are a ton of pro tools there that NHL clubs are drawn to. The question is whether his ceiling is as an impactful player near the top of a lineup or more of a complementary one in the middle."

Pronman wrote: "McTavish is a talented offensive player who scored 29 goals in the OHL last season and has been scoring a lot in Switzerland this season. He can attack defenses in numerous ways in the offensive zone due to his NHL-caliber skill, vision and shot. He is a creative player who tries to make things happen. He has the shot to score from range against pros. He works hard enough to win pucks but won't run guys over. The main flaw in McTavish's skill set is his skating, as he will be OK in the NHL in that regard but will struggle to create separation. McTavish hasn't played much this season but will get some games in Switzerland."

Raty was once considered the front-runner to be the No. 1 pick in the 2021 draft, but his stock has dropped over the past year. Most experts have him outside the top 10. McKenzie has him at No. 20, Wheeler and Pronman at 14.

Wheeler wrote: "Sometimes we have to re-calibrate away from the hope that once was toward the reality of what is. Raty is a strong, fast center with a powerful stride, a pro frame and quick hands. He's at his best when he's driving the middle lane in transition, attacking confidently off of the wall inside the offensive zone and working off of the puck to forecheck and win back possession. He's capable of playing with a lot of pace and attacking the interior. But his decision-making is often suspect, I don't think he processes the game particularly well, and his good overall skill hasn't turned dynamic in the last two years, muting his ultimate upside. He looks like more of a middle-six piece than a true top-of-the-

lineup driver at this point, and much of the shine has worn off even though he has looked better in my last few viewings than he did at the start of the season."

Pronman wrote: "Raty's a guy I talk about with scouts constantly because of how tough he's been to figure out. His season has been a major disappointment at the pro and junior levels, so the debate is how to balance his iffy campaign with his great toolkit and underage profile. He's a 6-foot-2 center who has very good skill and is a quality skater. His playmaking and shot are both solid and NHL quality, but neither are spectacular. He has some physicality to his game and brings energy to shifts. There are a lot of strong opinions about him on both sides of the spectrum in the scouting community."

The Blackhawks have drafted away from the norm in the past. Kirby Dach and Lukas Reichel come to mind in recent years. If the Blackhawks like Raty, this wouldn't be a surprising pick for them either.

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1211188 Nashville Predators

Predators-Stars showdown is about more than just a playoff spot — for both teams

By Adam Vingan and Saad Yousuf

Apr 30, 2021

Three of the four spots in the Central Division have been clinched. The outcome of Saturday's game between the fourth-place Nashville Predators and fifth-place Dallas Stars will most likely determine the final participant.

In mid-March, the Predators were among the worst teams in the NHL, but 16 wins in their past 23 games have put them in position to make the playoffs for the seventh consecutive year. One year removed from a Stanley Cup Final appearance, the Stars have stayed in the race despite dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak, a weather emergency and several significant injuries.

Predators reporter Adam Vingan and Stars reporter Saad Yousuf discuss the significance of Saturday's game for both teams.

The Predators' glow-up over the past several weeks has captured the imagination of their fan base.

For the past few years, the Predators have lacked an identity, but that is no longer the case. They have embraced a hard-nosed style of play, wearing down opponents with a strong forecheck. (It also helps to have a scorching-hot goaltender, Juuse Saros, who has a 1.93 goals-against average and .942 save percentage in his past 19 starts even after he allowed six goals in his most recent appearance.)

Asked recently to explain the Predators' turnaround, coach John Hynes pointed to the players' "commitment to play the game the way it needs to (be) played to win in the National Hockey League — competitive, fast, structured, no passengers, check the right way when we don't have possession of the puck.

"We didn't work and compete the way we are now. We haven't changed any systems. We haven't changed any tactics. What's changed is the commitment level that the players have put into what it takes to win. ... We have an identity that we wanted to have to start the year, which is a hard team to play against, and that's been more consistent. There's been more buy-in and belief to that."



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It calls to mind the scrappy, tight-knit 2016-17 Predators who came together and defied expectations by reaching the Stanley Cup Final. That run represents the high-water mark for the franchise, but since then, the Predators have been trending downward in the postseason, having been eliminated in the second round in 2018, first round (by the Stars) in 2019 and qualifying round last year inside the Edmonton bubble.

A failure to qualify for the playoffs this season would cap the Predators' fall from grace. It would also lead to intense criticism of general manager David Poile, who doled out expensive long-term contracts to underperforming players and took a risk at the trade deadline by not shipping out valuable assets.

"It just (made) more sense to me to keep the team together versus what I could have gotten — a couple of draft choices or what have you," Poile said earlier this month.

For Poile's decision to be justified, the Predators probably need to pull off a first-round upset against the Carolina Hurricanes, Florida Panthers or Tampa Bay Lightning. Of course, that requires making the playoffs.

Hyperbole is rampant in sports, but the Predators will host their biggest regular-game season in recent memory Saturday.

The significance of Saturday's game to the Stars

In the big picture, Nashville has more riding on this game than Dallas. With the twice compounded compressed schedule, and especially the injuries the Stars have had this season, they've never really seen their full potential in action on the ice. Whether or not this team makes the postseason, it doesn't alter much for what the immediate future has in store. The entire core of coaches and players will return next season, expectedly in better health, and make another run at the Stanley Cup. Recent history shows that unless your team has Sidney Crosby, you don't win the Cup the year after losing in the Stanley Cup Final.

The Stars don't care about any of that.

Dallas still believes it has the potential to make another deep run in the postseason, but in order to do that, they have to get there first. That's where the gargantuan importance of this game checks in. Whereas the Predators have two games against the Blue Jackets next week, Dallas goes through a gauntlet of a game against the Panthers and two games against the Lightning. Even if Dallas wins in Nashville on Saturday, the job will be far from finished, but a loss makes the postseason a daunting uphill climb.

Even though the Stars have had adversity this season, missing the playoffs would not be easy to shrug off, for a few reasons. While it can sometimes be lip service, the Stars truly do believe they have a chance to make a run if they make the playoffs and there is reason to believe them. Regardless of the opposition, Dallas been playing better in recent weeks as the injuries have subsided a bit and the lineup has been able to be fairly consistent. Top centerman Tyler Seguin should be in the mix soon and would also be a huge boost against top competition. Rookie Jake Oettinger's surprisingly quick rise in net and a Calder-worthy campaign for Jason Robertson has helped ease the blow of Ben Bishop and Alexander Radulov's absences and given this team a makeup similar to the 2020 roster that made the Stanley Cup Final run.

Aside from their prospects of a 2021 championship, simply making the postseason with this roster would be significant for the future of the organization. While the Stars have a veteran core, there is a group of young core players who haven't tasted a standard NHL postseason. Denis Gurianov starred during last season's Stanley Cup Final run, but obviously that all came in the unconventional Edmonton bubble. Rookies Jason Robertson and Oettinger are both part of the team's young core, so getting them postseason experience bodes well for next season and beyond.

The Stars have been through a lot this season but some players more than others. Top forward Roope Hintz has played all season with a nagging lower-body injury, waiting until the offseason to address it because it will require him to be shelved for some time. It's all in an effort

to punch a ticket to the postseason, something a regulation win in Nashville on Saturday would go a long way toward.

All four of the Predators' wins against the Stars this season have come in overtime. A regulation win Saturday would be preferable.

Filip Forsberg, who has missed the past 17 games with an upper-body injury, could return Saturday. He would provide a significant boost, especially on the power play, where he and sharpshooting rookie Eeli Tolvanen are constant threats from the circles.

Viktor Arvidsson did not complete the Predators' loss to the Panthers on Tuesday, missing the second half of the game. The team will practice Friday.

What to watch for from the Stars

For much of this season, "games in hand" has softened the blow for the Stars and given hope for the future. At this point in the season, that has all but gone away as the Stars now have only one game in hand on the Predators. There's no more clinging to hope for the future for Dallas, it's now squarely about the present.

The Stars likely won't have Seguin back yet. Head coach Rick Bowness said Thursday morning things are leaning toward the Stars forward making his season debut next week. Seguin has been skating with the team for a while now and the Stars are just awaiting his green light, so even though it's unlikely, it can't be ruled out that he plays on Saturday. But aside from Seguin, this is a Stars team finally hitting its stride in recent weeks. The lineup looks more consistent than it has at any point this season, and they just got one bit of reinforcements to their forwards group when they welcomed back Joel Kiviranta on Thursday. With Oettinger starting for Dallas on Thursday, Anton Khudobin may get the nod on Saturday in Nashville, an arena where he's had some of the most success of his career. Either goalie will give the Stars a good chance to win.

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1211256 Websites

The Athletic / Duhatschek notebook: Will Connor McDavid be a unanimous MVP choice? Appreciating Ryan Miller and more

By Eric Duhatschek Apr 30, 2021

In a normal year, NHL awards ballots are distributed to voting members of the Professional Hockey Writers Association in the week before the regular season ends, with the same general instructions:

To cast your ballot within a roughly 72-hour window that begins as soon as the regular season ends but before the playoffs begin. Otherwise, it counts as a spoiled ballot and is disqualified.

The timing will be trickier this year because of the uncertainty over when the playoffs will actually start. There is a possible scenario in which the final few games of the regular season (which at the moment would see the Vancouver Canucks play the Calgary Flames three times in a four-day span May 16-19) would overlap with the opening games of the 2021 playoffs, especially since the 24 U.S.-based teams are scheduled to wrap up the year by May 13, assuming no further COVID-19 related shutdowns.

Unless the Canucks or Flames make a magical surge in the next week or so, they are both destined to miss the playoffs. There is a school of thought that suggests the games should be cancelled if they are not going to impact the playoff race (and since neither team is admitting fans anyway, there's no revenue lost either).



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However, the league intends to press ahead and complete a full 56-game schedule for a variety of reasons: Player performance bonuses; draft lottery order; helping teams and players potentially meet expansion-draft eligibility requirements; and completing their television broadcast contractual commitments. In short, don't tell the league that these games are essentially meaningless; their position is just the opposite.

Still, if the start of the playoffs overlaps with the end of the regular season (which is a plausible scenario at the moment), then you're entering uncharted waters when it comes to trophy balloting for 2021.

Essentially, you have two choices:

One is to ask voters to cast ballots before the start of the playoffs, even if a handful of regular-season games are still to be completed.

Two is to delay the voting until the season is officially over, but then you risk having a handful of early playoff results creep into the voters' minds — especially if a team got down quickly in a series, could that sway a voter's ballot one way or another in a close trophy race?

By rule, major awards cover only regular-season play.

Some believe that if playoff games were included, the awards would be a truer indication of who is the MVP, the best defenceman, the best goalie or the best rookie — on the grounds that playoff performance matters more in the grand scheme of things than regular-season performance anyway.

Accordingly, it's a different year, with a smaller voting pool (only 100 ballots will be cast, 20 per division and 20 at-large voters from a national writers/broadcasters pool); and a lot of interesting races. One that's not in doubt is the biggie, the Hart Trophy, officially awarded to the player "adjudged most valuable to his own team."

The question there is going to be if the Edmonton Oilers' Connor McDavid will be the unanimous choice.

Until he was shut out by the Flames on Thursday night, McDavid had been on a run of four games in a row, with three points, which had him at 28 goals and 56 assists for 84 points in 48 games played. We haven't seen production like that since Mario Lemieux and Jaromir Jagr with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 1995-96. McDavid's lead over teammate Leon Draisaitl was 17 points, and it was a further five points back to Mitch Marner in third place at 62 points.

McDavid's current totals, projected over a full 56-game schedule, would see him finish just shy of 100 points. I raised this question a couple of times in past years: When would be the year McDavid pulled away, Gretzky-like, from the rest of the field in the NHL scoring race? The answer: This one.

Even though McDavid said himself this week that he isn't focused "a ton" on 100 points, you know that it matters to him to win the scoring title, matters to win the MVP, and matters most that the Oilers make the playoffs and then go on a long Stanley Cup run. That's what separates true superstars (a term that is hopelessly overused) from the ranks of the merely great.

Raw talent, a competitive engine that roars constantly and then those hard to quantify intangibles that leave you shaking your head, and asking yourself: How did he do that again? It isn't just that McDavid skates like the wind, but that he can also think the game at hyper-speed that makes him so unique.

There was a moment in the Oilers' Monday victory that perfectly illustrated the point. McDavid got in behind the Jets' defence, and in full stride, glanced over his right shoulder to gauge exactly how far he'd separated himself from the Jets' pursuit. Seeing he had lots of both time and space, McDavid made a slowdown move to freeze and ultimately deke the goalie.

Most players, in a similar situation, would simply barge forward as quickly as possible. Few would have the confidence, and the presence of mind, to sneak a peek over their shoulders; assess the options at full speed

and then pull the appropriate move out of their arsenals that resulted in the goal. And all of that — decision-making plus execution — completed in a split second. It's really a skill set we've never seen before in the history of the NHL because it blends Gretzky's hockey savvy with a Pavel Bure-like first-step acceleration.

The Oilers' Ryan Nugent-Hopkins was asked about McDavid Wednesday night and put it plain but succinct terms:

"He's having a special season and he's a pretty spectacular player."

Yeah, that pretty much sums it up.

The Selke chase

Colleague Shayna Goldman did a nice breakdown of the Selke Trophy race earlier this week, blending advanced stats with a series of observations from players and coaches and noted how the trophy voting evolved over time — from a focus strictly on players contributing defensively to its current iteration, which rewards players playing a 200-foot game.

The Selke came into being in 1978 and within the PHWA at that time, it was informally known as the Bob Gainey Award because Gainey won it in its first four years.

In 1982, Steve Kasper of Boston edged out Gainey, largely because of his prowess at shadowing and otherwise getting Gretzky off his game. The first hint of a change came the next season, 1983, when Philadelphia's great two-way star, Bobby Clarke, won the award, with the Oilers' Jari Kurri as the runner-up.

Kurri was still a relative newcomer to the NHL (in his third full season) and finished tied for ninth in the scoring race that year with 104 points.

The argument then in favor of Kurri's candidacy was that he was the defensive conscience of the Gretzky line and it seemed to work — that year. Weirdly, as Kurri became more adept (and a more accomplished scorer), he never came closer to winning the Selke than he did that season.

Instead, for a nine-year period, the focus went back to strictly on defensive specialists — Doug Jarvis, Craig Ramsey, Troy Murray, Rick Meagher. And three times, Guy Carbonneau.

The breakthrough — or shift, depending upon how you want to view it — came in 1993, when Doug Gilmour won.

I remember beating the drums on behalf of Gilmour's candidacy, arguing that he was the best defensive forward in the game, which is how he came through the ranks in St. Louis and he shouldn't be penalized for having an offensive component in his game.

Enough voters clearly felt the same way. Gilmour won, Sergei Fedorov was the runner-up and the next year the results were reversed, Fedorov winning with Gilmour finishing second. The shift was on. In 1995, the Selke went to Ron Francis, who was the league's fifth-leading scorer in the lockout-shortened season.

Over time, the voting seesawed back and forth. Michael Peca, Jere Lehtinen, John Madden and Kris Draper all eventually won it, but starting in 2006, the change has been complete. Since Rod Brind'Amour won the first of his two Selkes, a player needed an offensive component to win the award.

Just as with McDavid and the Hart, it's hard to imagine anyone other than Aleksander Barkov of the Florida Panthers winning the Selke this year; I say that with a little less conviction, though, because Selke trophy voting historically can be far more scattershot than Hart, Norris or Calder voting.

Sam's club

You know what else is hard to imagine? That at the beginning of April, either Sam Bennett or Sam Reinhart would be under consideration for NHL player of the month. Bennett was in Calgary and he'd voiced, through his agent, a wish for a change of scenery but it wasn't clear if



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that was happening — given that there'd been a coaching change and maybe the Flames wanted to see how he would adapt to life under Darryl Sutter.

Reinhart, meanwhile, was in the midst of the mess in Buffalo, where there'd also been a coaching change — to Don Granato from Ralph Krueger.

The Sabres were listening to trade offers on Taylor Hall and it was mostly assumed that Reinhart's regular center, Jack Eichel, would miss the rest of the season, further weakening an already thin line-up.

Bennett was eventually traded to Florida, where he's flourishing — the latest overtime winner Thursday night for a team that's already clinched the playoffs was his 11th point in eight games with the Panthers. The Sabres won't make the playoffs, but they've had a nice little run under Granato and a lot of it has been spurred by Reinhart's play.

Shifted to center, he has been scoring goals in bunches and as of this morning, is tied for 11th in the goal-scoring race, with 23. There are currently five players tied for sixth, with 24 goals (Barkov, Draisaitl, Alex Ovechkin, Alex DeBrincat and Max Pacioretty).

Who saw that coming? Bennett, meanwhile, has 16 points in April, and to put that in perspective, McDavid and Nathan MacKinnon have 21 apiece, Auston Matthews has 20 and Sidney Crosby has 17. Bennett entered the month with seven points in total. Now he has 23.

Miller's time

Speaking of Buffalo, Ryan Miller, the second-best goalie in franchise history after Dominik Hasek, announced his retirement Thursday after a distinguished 18-year professional career that included 390 NHL wins, a .914 career save percentage, the 2010 Vezina Trophy, and the 2010 Olympic MVP award, playing for Team USA's silver-medal winning team.

Goalies have a notoriously challenging time getting into the Hockey Hall of Fame and are vastly underrepresented there, considering the impact that they have on a team and a game. And even though I no longer vote for the HHOF, my spidey sense suggests that Miller will get in, once the mandatory three-year waiting period is done. Over the years, we had a number of great conversations — about hockey and about life — and Miller was always a go-to player whenever the subject of rules changes, and particularly how they related to the evolution of goalie equipment, came up.

NHL players, as a rule, don't really like to volunteer to sit on committees, but Miller was one of the players who served on the competition committee, providing an articulate, intelligent and necessary view from ice level.

But unquestionably my favorite conversation with Miller came just over a year ago, when two key international hockey anniversaries collided — the 40th anniversary of the Miracle on Ice, which Miller says inspired him to become a goalie (he was born in July, 1980, six months after Mike Eruzione scored the game-winning goal) and the 10-year anniversary of Canada's 2010 gold-medal win in Vancouver. There, Miller won both tournament MVP and was named best goalie playing for Team USA.

In the sudden-death extra period, Crosby — on a pass from Jarome Iginla — scored the golden goal to give the hometown team the victory, which resulted in an ear-ringing celebration, in the arena and in the streets of Vancouver.

It wasn't much consolation after the fact that Miller was voted the tournament's most valuable player — and his goaltending was one of, if not, the primary reason, the Americans did as well as they did. Still, the disappointment with the result lingered, even 10 years after the fact; and so, when I gingerly wondered where the silver medal might be, he answered:

"The medal is still in the sock drawer. My wife just yelled at me about it too. She said, 'you had a great tournament. You guys were not picked to finish so highly. It was supposed to be a transitional time for U.S.

hockey.' But we came together and had a great group and I'm very proud of what we did.

"It's just really hard to accept losing. I had a drug test after my interviews and I just kind of sat there and thought about what had just happened. We had missed the opening ceremonies; there was no chance we could walk in them; so, I'd told myself: 'If I'm still in town for the closing ceremonies, it means something cool is happening, so I'm going to walk in them.' After we lost, I just told myself, 'you're still going to do that; you're going to put a smile on your face and enjoy that moment.'

"It sunk in later, how close we were. Ever since, it's just constantly been like, 'man ...'

Miller indicated in his retirement Zoom call that he would like to eventually go into hockey management and there are probably very few players as qualified as him to eventually become an NHL GM. It's odd because so many ex-goaltenders go into broadcasting, but only a handful — Jimmy Rutherford, John Davidson, a few others — ever go into management.

Miller could be one of the rare successful exceptions. I assume expressions of interest will be made, as soon as Miller is ready to go.

Hart woes

There are any number of ways of assessing which have been the NHL's most disappointing teams, from the preseason betting odds, to the work we do here at The Athletic, canvassing staff for their opinions and projections. But probably right at the top of the list would be the Philadelphia Flyers, a team that some thought had the depth to challenge for the Stanley Cup. Instead, the Flyers are as close to the bottom of the Eastern Division as they are to the top (18 points behind Washington; 18 ahead of Buffalo) and had already been mathematically eliminated from playoff contention before the calendar clicked over to May.

Much of Philadelphia's troubles revolved around goaltending and the struggles of youngster Carter Hart who — in some minds — was a candidate to play goal for Canada in the 2022 Olympics. Hart is out for the season after suffering a strained MCL in his left knee. He finished the year at 9-11-5, with a 3.67 goals-against average and a save percentage of .877. It will be interesting to see if, starting fresh next year, he can work himself back into that Olympic conversation.

World championship watch

Reinhart might be a good candidate for the world championship; where this week, Canada completed its management team by naming Gerard Gallant as its head coach. Gallant overlapped for a number of years in Florida with Roberto Luongo, who was chosen as the team's general manager, and faces a daunting task in terms of player recruitment.

What will the appetite be for players to commit to a tournament scheduled between May 21 and June 6, even if it is in Riga, Latvia, one of the most popular destinations for players internationally? Getting players who've had a disappointing end to the season to commit is challenging most years.

In a year where COVID-19 put all sorts of restrictions on their movements and daily routines, it's likely to be even more of a grind.

Luongo will have the ability to dangle the Olympic carrot — he is part of the management team for Canada's 2022 men's Olympic team — but that would only work for players who are on the cusp of Olympic consideration.

The top two-thirds of the roster are going to feature the McDavids and MacKinnons anyway so there just aren't that many genuine openings. Luongo will need to be at his persuasive best to recruit a squad — and it may well be that it'll be a younger team, populated by players who haven't played as much as they would like this year and want to get some extra games in a high-profile setting.

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The Athletic / NHL power rankings: Whoa, someone knocked the Avs out of first place?!

By Sean Gentile and Ryan S. Clark Apr 30, 2021

As of six weeks ago, The Athletic has weekly NHL power rankings. Yes, it happened. Yes, we're using this exact same lede in each one. It'll be 69 weeks in and we'll still say "As of 69 weeks ago." Calm down. We're back with another installment, and we'll be back every week until we're old and grey and tired of ranking teams ... or until one of us goes on vacation.

This week, that was Dom. Taking his place is the great Ryan S. Clark, who is somehow doing elite work on the Seattle Kraken, a team that does not yet exist.

Here are the basic ground rules.

- The methodology here is as simple as it gets. We each rank the teams, from 1-31, then take the average, and voila. (Dom made a dedicated spreadsheet for this because of course he did.) It's not going to be based solely on past performance, current hot streaks or future potential. Numbers will figure into it prominently, but if you want stat-model stuff, we've got you covered elsewhere. This is something different.
- From there, we'll choose 10 or so teams to go back-and-forth on; that might be because we disagree on the placement. It might be because we each have something meaningful to say. It might be because we each want to make jokes about the teams, or each other. We'll see.
- We want this to be fun, and we're not locked into a format beyond going from No. 1 to No. 31. Some rankings might have themes. Some of those themes might be unexpected. If you have ideas — or just suggestions on how to make this a destination for you, each Friday — we'd love to hear them. You're why we're doing this in the first place.
- If two teams are tied, the team with the better local airport gets the nod. Sometimes we might add new rules as we see fit. For example, we added the tie-breaker rule because ties are stupid and don't belong in this sport. It'll change every week.

1. Vegas Golden Knights

Last week: 3

Record: 35-11-2, 72 points

Ryan rank: 1

Sean rank: 1

Ryan: It's a little bit like in "Friday" when the neighborhood heard that noisy bike and they knew Deebo was coming. Right now, the Golden Knights are like Deebo. Winning 10 in a row does that. Yet what might stand out more than anything is the fact they have the consistent goaltending a team like the Avalanche are struggling to find at the moment.

Sean: Ah, what a wonderful week for Dom to blow off our little thing here. We'd have figured out how deep his commitment to the "Colorado is better than everyone, don't bother" bit could've gone. It's borderline impossible to go with anyone other than the Golden Knights this morning, right? Ten in a row, including a 5-2 win over the Avs on Thursday night that may have provided the blueprint for derailing that train: "Get insane goaltending." Marc-Andre Fleury made 35 saves on 37 shots, and the result held despite Vegas getting outshot 37-26, out-attempted 65-47 and out-chanced 41-26. Goaltending counts, and the Golden Knights have it.

Gotta say though — at the end of "Friday," something happens to Deebo, and it ain't good.

2. Colorado Avalanche

Last week: 1

Record: 31-12-4, 66 points

Ryan rank: 3

Sean rank: 2

Ryan: Let's start here. This tie was broken by the notion that the Denver International Airport was deemed to be better than the Raleigh-Durham International Airport. Yes, DIA has some oddities about it. Such as the statue of the "Blue Mustang" affectionately known as Blucifer for the fact it is a giant blue mustang with glowing red eyes that has a rather unsettling past. But DIA does have its advantages.

Beyond that? Getting a healthy Philipp Grubauer is expected to make a massive difference when it comes to what this team could do in the postseason. The Avs know what life is like when Grubauer is out of the lineup. Even then? Finding consistency in the options behind Grubauer will be critical considering it has consistently served as a major issue throughout the season.

Sean: So I'm down with dropping the Avs a spot this week. We've been over that. They went 0-3 this week; they've got the third-best point percentage in the league; the team ahead of them is doing work. All great reasons. It's just as viable to say, though, that the vibes are off a little bit, and it's because of the goaltending. They dropped those games, despite being top-three for the week on expected goals percentage and shot attempts, because Devan Dubnyk and Jonas Johansson aren't good. In their last five games, the two backups have combined to go 2-3-0 with an .874 save percentage. Grubauer is coming back. That's great news for him — and his team. They get to cover up that Achilles' heel. We thought it was there before, and now we know.

3. Carolina Hurricanes

Last week: 2

Record: 33-10-7, 73 points

Ryan rank: 2

Sean rank: 3

Sean: You might've been surprised to see that the Hurricanes were the first team from the Central Division to clinch a playoff berth. Not me, the lifelong Carolina believer. Nice little bonus here: They got sweetheart Teuvo Teravainen back in the lineup for his second time in nine weeks. I feel like we say something similar about them each week, but it's worth reiterating: they've been Corsi gods for a while, and now the other aspects of the game — guess who's got the best power play in the league — are taking them over the top. Also, I learned this week that they call Alex Nedeljkovic "Ned." That's nice!

4. Tampa Bay Lightning

Last week: 4

Record: 34-14-2, 70 points

Ryan rank: 4

Sean rank: 4

Ryan: This might be the dumbest thing ever said about the Lightning. They're a team that was built as if you played GM mode on NHL 21, took notes on the good prospects and where they went in the draft and then decided to re-do the draft so you can take that talent. And if that is the case, then, we've reached the point of the dynasty where you're simming games just to reach the playoffs and you'll start playing again when it really matters: The Stanley Cup playoffs. Oh, and in true gaming fashion,



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of course you lose two of your best players to injury but still find a way to win.

Sean: I'm gonna jump in here for Dom and make the point he'd have hammered here. Victor Hedman? Kinda butt this year, relatively speaking. The kid can't help himself from posting, even on vacation.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs

Last week: 6

Record: 32-14-5, 69 points

Ryan rank: 5

Sean rank: 5

Ryan: Poet Laureate Aubrey Graham once said, "I guess you lose some and win some. Long as the outcome is income." This is more than just some GTA lyric, at the risk of making this deeper than what it is. The Leafs go on these stretches when they either win everything in sight or make people wonder what is wrong. But will it really matter if they make a long playoff run that ends with reaching either the next level of their path, rather than the final level all teams aspire to achieve?

Sean: Ah, look, Auston Matthews scored again. I did a little cross-multiplication and notice that he'd be on pace for 65 goals in an 82-game season. The one on Thursday against Vancouver wasn't an all-time highlight reel job like his one the night before, but that's fine. He's been the most productive goal scorer in the league since the start of the 2019-20 season, and it hasn't been particularly close. Good thing he didn't hurt himself when he took out Nick Foligno in practice earlier this week. What a load.

6. Boston Bruins

Last week: 5

Record: 29-14-6, 64 points

Ryan rank: 6

Sean rank: 6

Sean: This week's big series against the Penguins was a wash; each team got two points, and each basically dominated one game. That's a recipe for holding steady. Worth shouting out Jeremy Swayman here. The young goalie has a .946 save percentage, a 1.57 goals-against average and a 5-2-0 record in his first seven games. According to MoneyPuck, Swayman has saved 0.541 goals above expectation per 60 minutes. Among goalies with seven-plus appearances, only Petr Mrazek and Andrei Vasilevskiy have negated goals at a higher rate. There's a bunch more good stuff about him in Fluto Shinzawa's recent profile, too.

In other news, David Krejci and Taylor Hall are starting to do this sort of thing together. That was the point of the trade, I suppose. Very shocking.

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Last week: 7

Record: 33-15-3, 69 points

Ryan rank: 7

Sean rank: 7

Sean: Same logic applies to the Penguins and the Bruins. Throw in a 5-4 OT win over the Capitals — clinching the playoffs for both, by the way — and you've got a second straight week in the same place. Thursday's game against the Capitals, sloppy as both teams were, was interesting for one primary reason. The Jake Guentzel-Sidney Crosby-Bryan Rust line wasn't particularly good. It was Jeff Carter's line doing the heavy lifting, with Kasper Kapanen scoring twice and the whole unit controlling the run of play. A depth win, essentially. Probably should make the rest of the East nervous.

8. Washington Capitals

Last week: 8

Record: 32-13-5, 69 points

Ryan rank: 8

Sean rank: 8

Ryan: We were about to make a big deal about how the Capitals went a few games without allowing a goal in 5-on-5 play. Then, Thursday happened. It still does not take away from the fact the Capitals can damn sure score. But you do wonder about what happens should they receive more consistent goaltending. Especially when you look at what could be at stake between the playoffs and the fact Vitek Vanecek might be a potential Kraken target ahead of the expansion draft.

9. Florida Panthers

Last week: 11

Record: 33-14-5, 71 points

Ryan rank: 10

Sean rank: 9

Ryan: Here's another one in which the tie went to the best airport. And it was tricky but we went with Fort Lauderdale International Airport. The Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport is a lovely place with a lot of options. But it can also be a problem if you're trying to get from gate to gate in a limited amount of time. Now, as for actual hockey? Let's take this time to discuss that Jonathan Huberdeau might arguably be the most underrated forward in the NHL. All this dude does is get points.

10. Minnesota Wild

Last week: 10

Record: 31-14-4, 66 points

Ryan rank: 9

Sean rank: 10

Sean: Dom isn't here, and the Wild's Twitter account refuses to acknowledge me. No write-up. We are in a fight. Just read this about Marco Rossi if you haven't and move on.

11. New York Islanders

Last week: 9

Record: 30-15-5, 65 points

Ryan rank: 12

Sean rank: 11

Ryan: Losing three straight to the Capitals was far from ideal. It's just not the end of the world either. But it does raise a question about how the Isles could fare in the playoffs considering they have lost their last seven games against teams that are projected to reach the postseason. Then again? None of this could matter at the end of the day.

12. Edmonton Oilers

Last week: 13

Record: 29-17-2, 60 points

Ryan rank: 11

Sean rank: 13

Ryan: Here's the obligatory Connor McDavid statement and/or factoid for the week. Let's take away the goals and McDavid just keeps the 56 assists he possessed coming into Thursday. Those assists alone would be tied for ninth in points.



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Sean: This feels like the week that everyone decided that McDavid would be the unanimous Hart Trophy winner. It's not that he doesn't deserve it — he's having the ninth best scoring season in history, adjusted for era. It's that I fully expect someone to galaxy-brain themselves into voting for Sidney Crosby, or whatever. Don't overthink it, PHWA folks. I implore you. This man might have 100 points in a 56-game season.

13. New York Rangers

Last week: 14

Record: 26-19-6, 56 points

Ryan rank: 13

Sean rank: 12

Ryan: Really, there are two things that come to mind about the Rangers. No. 1: Imagine if they were in another division. They'd be a playoff team, and that just speaks to the gauntlet that is the East division. No. 2: Imagine what this team is going to look like next year, two years and three years from now. The answer? It's called ... a problem.

Sean: Yeah, their biggest problem now is that they're almost out of rope. They're six points behind Boston with five games of their own remaining; the Bruins have two in hand. Their goals right seem like making that season-ending two-game series against Boston relevant, effectively keeping the Adam Fox Norris Bandwagon on the road and trying not to think what their season would've been like had Artemi Panarin been in the lineup for all of it. Even after getting stomped by the Islanders, they're 16-7-3 since he returned.

14. St. Louis Blues

Last week: 18

Record: 23-19-6, 52 points

Ryan rank: 14

Sean rank: 14

Ryan: Everything continues trending upward for the Blues. The last four games have seen them either fall behind to win or catapult out to a lead en route to victory. It is how they have won four straight games and entered Friday with a five-point lead with two games in hand for the final playoff spot in the West. This is not what you want to see if you're the Arizona Coyotes or whoever faces the Blues in the first round.

Sean: In one of the first installments here, we put the Blues on death watch. They were banged up, and their schedule was about to get hellacious. They've done the work, though, particularly against the Wild (10 of 10 possible points against Minnesota since April 9). Now they're on the verge of pulling it off.

15. Winnipeg Jets

Last week: 12

Record: 27-19-3, 57 points

Ryan rank: 14

Sean rank: 16

Sean: We've got a brewing case of "I told you so" in Manitoba, my friend.

All due respect to Stastny, but it hasn't been that tough to notice. The Jets have been in over their skis at 5-on-5 all season long; they're currently 26th in the league in expected goals percentage. They've been outscored 18-6 in their last five games against the Oilers, specifically. Barring something wild, that's going to be their first-round opponent. Not good.

Ryan: You make an extremely valid point about the inconsistencies that have plagued the Jets as of late. Where it gets even more concerning for the Jets is the fact they will have to face either the Oilers or Maple Leafs

in the postseason. Of course, the Jets could turn it around and it may not matter. Still, it is something to keep an eye on going forward.

16. Nashville Predators

Last week: 16

Record: 27-22-2, 56 points

Ryan rank: 17

Sean rank: 15

Sean: The Preds are still my pick to snag the fourth Central playoff spot, but it's tough to imagine them sticking around long, even if it happens. Adam Vingan had a nice piece outlining just how heavily they've relied on Juuse Saros, who's at .942 in his past 19 starts. Despite all that, Nashville is 5-16-1 against Tampa, Carolina and Florida with an average 3.65 expected goals against and 2.32 expected goals for. Brutal.

17. Dallas Stars

Last week: 15

Record: 21-17-12, 54 points

Ryan rank: 16

Sean rank: 17

Sean: I've spent most of the season wanting more for the Stars. I've been close to believing that they'll hang around long enough to make it all worth it ... and then they go and do stuff like stacking a 5-1 loss to the Hurricanes and a 3-0 loss to Tampa. They're out of the playoffs at the moment — albeit with a game in hand on the Predators — and they're 3-10 on the season against Tampa and Carolina. Saturday against the Preds is huge, obviously, but if they don't get a regulation win there, they're going to be on death watch.

Ryan: Here's to you Tyler Seguin, a nation turns its lonely eyes to you. Getting Seguin back into the lineup would certainly aid the Stars' push toward returning to the playoffs. But it also goes back to what Sean said about those score lines versus the Hurricanes and Lightning about finding more defensive consistency.

18. Montreal Canadiens

Last week: 18

Record: 21-18-9, 51 points

Ryan rank: 18

Sean rank: 18

Sean: We've been joking for weeks about the Canadiens' steadfast refusal to accept the playoff spot being gifted by the teams behind them, and I was all set to carry that bit into this week's rankings, but it feels a little hollow given Jonathan Drouin's situation. Can't do anything more than hope he gets whatever help he needs. I will say this: From a hockey standpoint, this was definitely not the ideal way to work Cole Caufield into the lineup.

19. Arizona Coyotes

Last week: 20

Record: 21-24-5, 57 points

Ryan rank: 19

Sean rank: 20

Ryan: They have six games remaining whereas the Blues have eight. They are five points out of a playoff spot while the Blues have won four straight. It all adds up to the fact the Coyotes' playoff chances are slipping away. Any last-ditch efforts start with a two-game series against the Golden Knights before playing the Los Angeles Kings and San Jose Sharks. The Coyotes would need to run the table while hoping the Blues



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slip in their remaining games against the Anaheim Ducks, Golden Knights, Kings and Wild.

20. Chicago Blackhawks

Last week: 19

Record: 22-22-6, 50 points

Ryan rank: 20

Sean rank: 19

Sean: The Blackhawks are last in expected goals percentage and 25th in actual goals percentage, and we're still here each week, talking about them as they hover in the 18-20 range. The Central is a wild place. We can't lose sight of what's important, though: The Blackhawks have lasted long enough, mathematically speaking, for the Bears to draft a quarterback. That's more than anyone could've expected.

21. Calgary Flames

Last week: 23

Record: 22-24-3, 47 points

Ryan rank: 21

Sean rank: 21

Ryan: They lose Noah Hanifin to a season-ending shoulder injury. They are an organization that appears to be facing some serious questions in the summer. Yet a win Thursday means they are four points out of the final playoff spot while the Canadiens have a game in hand. It's bizarre, but here we are.

22. Philadelphia Flyers

Last week: 21

Record: 22-21-7, 51 points

Ryan rank: 22

Sean rank: 23

Ryan: Getting into the Top 10 and trading with the Cowboys could be one of those moves that defines them for years to come. Whoops, wrong sport. In all seriousness, a team that had preseason playoff expectations has been eliminated in the same week they lost Carter Hart after losing two straight games to the Devils. This is going to be an interesting offseason in Philadelphia.

23. Vancouver Canucks

Last week: 22

Record: 19-22-3, 41 points

Ryan rank: 23

Sean rank: 24

Sean: It dawned on me earlier this week when I talked with Mike Halford and Jason Brough: Jared McCann is making the Canucks' season somehow worse ... from Pittsburgh. He's got 13 goals (seven on the power play) and 13 assists. Vancouver drafted him in the first round and traded him for, essentially, Erik Gudbranson in the span of one year. Makes sense that some of the fans would want that back, yes.

Ryan: Jesus, Sean. Haven't these people suffered enough between losing Jacob Markstrom, Christopher Tanev and Tyler Toffoli? Now you do this? That's so disrespectful. It reminds me of an ancient African-American proverb, "You don't have any home training."

24. Los Angeles Kings

Last week: 24

Record: 18-23-6, 42 points

Ryan rank: 25

Sean rank: 22

Ryan: At this point, it is about the future for the Kings. Quinton Byfield made his NHL debut this week and his arrival marks the next step in the Kings' rebuild. His performances are only going to offer the Kings more insight into shaping him ahead of next season. Throw in the fact they are projected to have \$19.9 million in free agency? It gives the Kings options.

25. San Jose Sharks

Last week: 25

Record: 20-24-5, 45 points

Ryan rank: 24

Sean rank: 25

Ryan: Getting two straight wins over the Coyotes comes after losing eight straight. It's enough to state the Sharks are seven points out of the final playoff spot in the West with seven games remaining. But five of those seven games come against the ... Avs and Golden Knights.

26. Ottawa Senators

Last week: 27

Record: 19-27-4-42

Ryan rank: 26

Sean rank: 26

Ryan: Wins in five of their last six games? That slaps pretty hard if you're the Senators. Now take a look at how they reached that point. Drake Batherson would be on pace for a 28-goal campaign over an 82-game season. He has four points in as many games. Brady Tkachuk has six points in his last five games while Matt Murray was finding consistency before sustaining a lower-body injury.

27. Detroit Red Wings

Last week: 29

Record: 17-26-9, 43 points

Ryan rank: 27

Sean rank: 27

Sean: I made a joke about the Red Wings tanking — specifically, how they're not — and Wings Twitter got mad at me.

Dylan Larkin got checked in the neck. Of course, he's going to miss some time. Steve Yzerman didn't bother trading Luke Glendening. Of course, they're not tanking. We've been over all this. And honestly, it's all nice to see. It might screw their draft position, but it's nice to see.

28. Columbus Blue Jackets

Last week: 26

Record: 16-25-10, 42 points

Ryan rank: 28

Sean rank: 28

Sean: This is probably a bit of an overcorrection by me — the Blue Jackets have three points in their last two games, including a regulation win over the juggernaut Red Wings — but they deserve it. They've been in the tank since March 22. Three wins total. Dear Lord. I'm just glad Elvis Merzlikins has something to be happy about; I was starting to worry about the dude. Maybe they can let the players coach themselves for the rest of the season.



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Ryan: We've reached the point in the power rankings in which the Blue Jackets remind themselves they have three first-round picks. Being a lottery team with that type of draft capital could bode well going forward.

29. Anaheim Ducks

Last week: 31

Record: 15-28-7, 37 points

Ryan rank: 30

Sean rank: 29

Ryan: Rising two spots AND they snap a five-game losing streak? That's progress.

30. New Jersey Devils

Last week: 28

Record: 16-27-7, 39 points

Ryan rank: 29

Sean rank: 31

Sean: We slotted them here before they beat the Flyers on Thursday. Again. They just lost 10 in a row. This is not effective tanking. Someone should inform them. Maybe start with Jack Hughes, who's posted positive expected goals percentages in 32 of 50 games this season.

31. Buffalo Sabres

Last week: 30

Record: 13-31-7, 33 points

Ryan rank: 31

Sean rank: 30

Ryan: William Borgen is healthy and he is receiving more minutes. His performances could be insightful for the Sabres and maybe even the Kraken.

Sean: I knew we were going to get a Kraken bit slipped in there. God, I want to get the Sabres into the 20s at some point, but that hole is just so, so deep. They're playing relatively well, and they're still last in points percentage and goal differential. Next week, maybe.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens regain footing in tight North-Division race with win over Jets

Eric Engels

April 30, 2021, 11:36 PM

MONTREAL— This is what the Montreal Canadiens needed—a resilient and galvanizing win that got them six points clear of the Calgary Flames and four points back of the team they beat at the Bell Centre on Friday.

Because, lately, everything has conspired against the Canadiens achieving that outcome, from the mentally- and physically-taxing schedule to the injuries to key players forcing them to just "manage the game," as coach Dominique Ducharme put it after Wednesday's loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs, instead of just going out and grabbing it by the throat.

The Canadiens seemed prepared to do that on Friday, in spite of this being their 17th game in the last 30 days and in spite of having to play it without captain Shea Weber, starting goaltender Carey Price, heart-and-soul winger Brendan Gallagher and top-nine forwards Paul Byron, Tomas Tatar and Jonathan Drouin. They came out in dominant fashion and forced the Winnipeg Jets back on their heels, notching 15 scoring chances.

Not only were they not rewarded, but Paul Stastny also capitalized on one of the few scoring chances the Jets had in the opening frame to make it 1-0.

The second period started and Canadiens leading scorer Tyler Toffoli missed an open look before Trevor Lewis stormed down the ice and made it 2-0 Jets.

A goal from Montreal's Nick Suzuki narrowed the gap. A horrible gaff from teammate Erik Gustafsson, who whiffed on a faceoff drawn back his way and allowed the Jets to skate a 2-on-1 rush the length of the ice, widened it.

At 3-1 Jets, the Canadiens had every reason to throw in the towel.

A team that had scored more than two goals in just two of its last 13 games, one that had lost nine of them, wouldn't have been forgiven for doing so. But it would've been understandable if they did, with nothing going right and another game on deck Saturday.

Instead, the Canadiens fought back, Artturi Lehkonen, Joel Armia and Suzuki scored the rest of their goals in this 4-3 win, and they achieved something in the process.

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

It might not propel them to a run over the last seven games of the season—they're still facing the same frenetic schedule, and the infirmary is still overcrowded—but this win will do much for their psyche.

"Being able to come back into the game and come back and win it in the third is a boost of confidence for our guys," said Ducharme. "And we've done that before...It's just that lately..."

Lately, the Canadiens appeared to be in a death spiral, with no one finding a way to pull them out of it.

Adversity can be a good thing, unless you face too much of it and fail to prove you can overcome it. Teams even welcome it at times, but they never ask it to make itself at home.

For too long, adversity has had a seat at this team's table, and it wasn't so important for the Canadiens to prove to everyone else they could rid themselves of it so much as it was vital they prove it themselves. They've been in a playoff spot from wire to wire and are likely to be there when this season wraps, they're likely going to get reacquainted with adversity again when it matters most, and it's important to be able to not only believe they can overcome it but to also to know from experience they can.

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

It's important to have a frame of reference, and this win—under very adverse conditions—provided one.

"These points are so important you have to stay in the fight every game," said Ben Chiarot, who had an assist and played arguably his best game of the season stepping up in Weber's absence. "There's no kind of, 'Yeah, you know, this one they're up two,' kind of taking a back seat; we have to keep continuing to push forward no matter what the score is. And it's a good lesson for us.

"Going forward, there's going to be games we get down by two goals again. If we get into the playoffs, it's another thing (where) you're going to be down two goals (and) you have to continue to stay in the game, stay in the fight, continue to push. And I thought our guys did a great job of



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that tonight—not kind of feeling sorry for ourselves, we're down two goals and shutting it down. We continued to push and kept playing and I was proud of the way we responded after that."

And it wasn't just Chiarot, or Suzuki, or Lehtonen, or Armia; it was everyone—from Jeff Petry, who had an assist and played close to 23 minutes, to Cole Caufield, who only played 10:59 but still managed a team-high seven shot attempts.

The Canadiens needed this kind of game. The kind of game they haven't been able to play for weeks.

"To be honest, we haven't had many of those games in recent memory," said goaltender Jake Allen, who made 19 saves, including some big ones in the final minutes. "It's great for our morale, it's great for our confidence. We stuck with the program. It wasn't a pretty halfway through the game, 3-1. We were in a spot. But I think we all just dug our heels in."

Because they did, the Canadiens have a more secure hold on the fourth and final playoff spot in the North Division. And they've got a game in hand on the Jets, who have now suffered losses in seven of their last nine games and are loosely holding onto third place.

Up next are the Ottawa Senators, who have five of eight games against the Canadiens this year. Some more resilience is in order.

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Oilers' James Neal could be key weapon in playoffs

Mark Spector

April 30, 2021, 4:12 PM

EDMONTON — The old standard tells us that Father Time is undefeated. But on a team where 39-year-old Mike Smith is having a career season, you can forgive James Neal for wondering if that old cliché applied to everyone, or just to him?

Neal's feet tell him he's getting older. And he is, at age 33.

The Edmonton Oilers coaching staff voted with their lineup sheets, sequestering the 33-year-old on the taxi squad for much of the season.

But when you look at the crop of Edmonton wingers who have played above him for most of this season, it is fair to wonder if Neal can't provide an upgrade as his favourite time of year arrives?

As things begin to get real, it appears, The Real Deal is ready and raring to go.

"I've played a lot of playoff games (108), and I've played a lot of big games (two Cup Finals)," Neal said. "I've been through those runs and I know what it takes to get there, what it takes to score in the playoffs, and how you've got to win.

"As we go here, I'll just continue to get better."

You've got to fight for your space, come playoff time. You've got to soften up opposing defencemen on the forecheck, whenever you get a chance.

Physicality becomes a bigger part of things, and when you look at the Oilers' left-wingers — Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Dominik Kahun, Devin Shore, Joakim Nygard, Tyler Ennis, perhaps Gaetan Haas when Jujhar Khaira returns — it's fair to say Edmonton is light on the left side.

Enter Neal, who was one of the better Oilers forwards in that disastrous four-game loss to Chicago in the bubble.

"He's a playoff-style player," head coach Dave Tippett said. "We'll tinker with our lineup as we go through here, but he's putting a push in to try and get himself ready."

Neal is expected to be in the Edmonton lineup on Saturday night against the Calgary Flames, in what would be his fourth consecutive start. It's been a long haul this season for the veteran, who missed training camp after a bout with COVID-19, a wicked blow for an aging player.

"It's hard, for sure," he admits. "The way guys come into camp, they're full-throttle and in amazing shape. When you come in and you're behind, it's tough."

So Neal went to work on the taxi squad, a veteran player making big money (an AAV of \$5.75 million for this season and two more), swallowing his pride and busting his rear end every day to try and reclaim an NHL roster spot he had previously held on 843 nights.

"You've got to deal with it, and I have enjoyed the grind of getting back to where I need to be," he said. "In the end, I think I know what kind of player I am, and what kind of player I've been in the past. I love the playoffs and I love big games.

"We have a great opportunity as a group to do something special here, and my focus is just to get better each day, and when I have a chance to grab hold of it. These last three games in a row here have been good for the confidence. I'm starting to feel like I'm coming here."

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

There was talk he struggled with COVID during the season, and that was at the root of his failure to grab a roster spot. We haven't confirmed that, but injuries have nagged at Neal.

When you get older, and slower, it becomes more difficult to be impactful if a player is anything less than 100%. A league that just keeps getting faster and faster exacerbates the aging process, leaving Neal like a salmon swimming upstream.

"He's struggled with some injuries and stuff this year, but I'll give him credit," said Tippett. "He's worked to try and push his way in. He wants to get in the game and have an impact. That's what he's done his whole career. We'll see if we can get to that place this year."

Neal has hands that a Kahun or Nygard will never have. You don't score 293 career goals — or have 11 20-goal seasons — by mistake.

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He's waited patiently for the time of year when the game comes towards him. When a clutch goal from a third-line left-winger means even more, and a big body comes in mighty handy.

"It's funny how things work out," Neal said, after rifling a wrist shot under the arm of Jacob Markstrom in Thursday's 3-1 loss for just his fourth of the season. "You're waiting for your opportunity, you're on the taxi squad getting in a game here and there. It's tough. Each day you just try to stick with it, be a good teammate, help guys out and be a leader around the room. When that opportunity comes you have to be ready.

"I'm getting an opportunity now. I want to be a factor in the playoffs and help this team win.

"I've got lots left in the tank. I'm feeling better and better."

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Sportsnet.ca / Should Maple Leafs be concerned about special teams for the playoffs?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Justin Bourne

April 30, 2021, 1:12 PM

There's a stat I'm familiar with hearing about from my time playing and coaching that oddly isn't a part of the public conversation, which is simply "combined special teams." No need to overthink this one, it's just a snapshot of "how are our special teams?"

If you combine your power player percentage with your penalty kill percentage, there's a clear baseline in that a total above 100 is good, and below it is bad. So if your PP scores 20 per cent of the time and your PK keeps the puck out of the net 80 per cent of the time you're ... fine. Nothing to see there, that's a combined 100.

Of course, the top teams have more talented players, so their PP will exceed that 20 per cent number. Certain teams have great personnel for keeping pucks out while down a man and so they exceed 80 per cent. The best teams can do both.

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This is an area where the Toronto Maple Leafs have been outplayed in the post-season in the past. Not last year, where the Blue Jackets had the fifth-worst PP in the NHL and showed it in the post-season, but in the previous three playoff series that went the distance, special teams may have made the difference. Here are playoff power play goals by year:

2017: Washington: 5, Toronto: 3, total -2.

2018: Boston: 7, Toronto: 4, total -3

2019: Boston: 7, Toronto 3, total -4.

As you can see, it was the PK burning them, not the PP.

Against Columbus the Leafs managed to finish with two power play goals for and none against, which was aided by that aforementioned fortuitous draw. During that regular season the Leafs were 21st in the NHL on the PK (77.7 per cent), but Columbus was weak enough (they had a 16.4 per cent success rate) they couldn't take advantage there.

To get back to the whole "combined special teams" thing, in 2019-20 the Leafs sat at 100.8, thanks to a PP that clicked along at a 23.1 per cent rate. This year after a hot start to the power play they've struggled a great deal, at least in terms of actual goals (more on that later). Their combined special teams total currently sits at 98.3, with a 21.7 per cent power play and 76.6 per cent penalty kill.

If you sort the NHL table by points percentage, here are the combined special teams of the top-10 teams in the NHL right now.

Vegas: 104.2

Carolina: 111.6

Colorado: 104.2

Tampa Bay: 105.9

Washington: 103.8

Toronto: 98.3

Florida: 100.9

Pittsburgh: 99.7

Minnesota: 100.8

Boston: 107.3

Only Pittsburgh joins the Leafs below 100 in the top-10, and the next four teams exceed 100 as well. Expanding it to the top 15 in points percentage, the next five look like this:

Islanders: 102.1

Edmonton: 105.9

Winnipeg: 105.6

Rangers: 104.3

Nashville: 92.9

North Division playoff teams, then:

Toronto: 98.3

Edmonton: 105.9

Winnipeg: 105.6

Montreal: 96.1

The quick and dirty on all this is the Leafs' special teams have been kinda bad compared to the good teams, which is all that's left standing in the post-season. I could've saved us a lot of time here and just started with that.

This year's first round draw may yet be good to the Leafs as well, in that Montreal sits 21st in the NHL on the PP with a 19.1 per cent rate (Calgary is 17th). That would take some pressure off their flailing PK. But if they hope to move on from the North, they're going to have to face one of Edmonton or Winnipeg, who sit third and fourth on the PP in the entire NHL, scoring 26.3 and 25.4 per cent of the time, respectively. That should give Leafs fans some vivid flashbacks to the pain incurred by the Bruins in previous years.

So, how much of a problem is this, and what should we expect in the post-season? Could this be a weak spot that derails the Leafs?

Here's the good news: the Leafs' special teams are likely as bad as they could statistically be, and I expect them to get better. Their underlying numbers are better than their actual outcomes right now on both sides of the coin.

I'll be quick on the power play, because I don't think fans look at this group and see a team that's not going to be able to convert on the power play. What they see is a group that seems like it should score every time they get out there based on the name bars involved, so expectations get crazy-high, and when they struggle at all it's baffling.

We'll look at "per 60" numbers to keep the field level. On the power play the Leafs generate the seventh-most shot attempts in the NHL, the fourth most actual shots, the most scoring chances and the most high-danger scoring chances in the NHL. Great, talented units like the Oilers and Avalanche don't generate as many opportunities.

Despite all their talent, on the PP Toronto's scoring chance shooting percentage is in the bottom-10, and only a dozen teams have a worse overall shooting percentage on the power play. Toronto has too much shooting skill for that to continue, let alone get worse.

It's not worth much more breath – the Leafs' PP has been flawed, they had a long run of baffling ineptitude, but they create a ton, they've scored in three of their past five games (where they've got PP attempts), they're just outside the top-10 in actual PP percentage, and I wouldn't be overly worried about this side of things come playoffs.

The penalty kill is obviously more cause for concern because it's been a persistent issue (they've been in the league's bottom half since 2018-19), but also because Winnipeg and Edmonton loom in Round 2, and because just about any team that gets into Round 3 will certainly have an elite PP1.

However, there's reason to believe Toronto will be better in this category, too. Their underlying numbers here are a little more chipper than you'd expect, and that hasn't always been the case with their weaker PKs in the past.



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

In terms of shot attempts against (per 60), the Leafs are fourth-best in the NHL, just a hair behind the Boston Bruins in third. They're inside the league's best-10 teams in actual shots against, expected goals against, and high danger attempts against. They sit 12th in overall scoring chances against.

Not bad for a PK just outside the league's bottom-five.

Where things go off the rails here has been simple: they've got truly terrible goaltending on the PK, particularly from Freddy Andersen. There's good news for Leafs fan there, too.

One is that Freddy hasn't typically been an awful PK goaltender, and him getting healthy and back to form should improve things. They've been getting better PK goaltending of late from Jack Campbell (no goals against in his past four starts), so things have trended better on the PK.

Some general regression should be expected based on their ability to limit dangerous attempts against. Combine that with the addition of Nick Foligno to the forward group, and potentially Riley Nash, and you could see a team that gets stronger on the PK heading towards the post-season. It may not become a strength, but all the arrows point in the right direction, at least.

Nothing about what the Leafs do on either the PP or PK is systematically remarkable, and it by and large comes down to execution. On the PK that means work ethic, commitment to stops and starts, and the willingness to get in lanes, block shots, and win battles. On the PP that means being crisp, deceptive and, let's face it, talented. You're asking guys to take what's there and create. You can't coach every aspect of it.

While they haven't scored or kept pucks out at a rate in line with the best teams in the league, Toronto's underlying special teams numbers imply they can hang with the better half of the league in those categories. If the results fall closer in line with their processes to date, what looks like a team weakness may not be such a problem after all.

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