



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 3, 2021

## The Athletic

### DGB weekend rankings: Predators up, Jets down and getting excited about potential matchups

By Sean McIndoe

So about those furious playoff races down the stretch. Uh, never mind.

As far back as the final rankings of March, we worried about whether most of the races would be already decided by now. And sure enough, that's pretty much what's happened. Ten teams have mathematically clinched, and a few more are solidly in "unless there's a miracle" territory. The East is done, with four teams locked in and only seeding to play for. The Blues' surge combined with a Coyotes cold streak has all but ended the West race. In the North, the Habs' late-season wobble opened the door, but the Flames and Canucks said "No thanks, we're fine," meaning we're pretty much set there too.

If you enjoy a good late-season bubble watch, you're down to the Stars and Predators in the Central. That's pretty much it. And even that race could be done within days.

Ah well. This is hockey, and all we can do is adjust on the fly. So let's do that, by turning our attention to the matchups we might get in Round 1. There's some good news there, because man, the first round might be amazing.

Emphasis on "might," because if you've been a fan long enough you know how this goes. A matchup looks like a sure thing, you let yourself get hyped for it, and then something weird happens on the season's final week that blows it. We've all been there. I've sure been there. And I am ready to get hurt again, so let's do this.

We covered a few of the matchups we should be rooting for last week, including the potential for the first-ever Battle of Florida. That one's looking more likely, as the Hurricanes are in good shape to run out the clock on the division title. That would give us a Florida/Tampa Bay matchup that would be all sorts of fun, not to mention pairing Carolina with either Dallas or Nashville, both of which would be sneaky cool matchups of non-traditional markets that we normally couldn't get in a conference-based format. The Central looks good.

The West seeding might come down to the wire, and there's a temptation to view their first round as the undercard to an inevitable Golden Knights/Avs showdown in Round 2. Maybe it works out that way, but we know enough not to get ahead of ourselves, so let's focus on the appetizer of one of those powerhouses facing a very good Wild team while the other tries to figure out a Blues team that looked awful for most of the season but has recently flipped the switch. By the way, the Blues have never played the Knights in the playoffs and somehow haven't faced the Avalanche in 20 years, so if you're a "fresh matchup" sort of fan, you'll get your wish.

The East matchups remain up in the air, but there really aren't any bad ones in play. We're rooting for that Pens/Caps

matchup, although that's looking a little less likely now than it did a few days ago. No worries, though, because even if it doesn't happen, we'll get something cool. Caps/Bruins? It's the Zdeno Chara revenge series. Penguins/Islanders? All sorts of Patrick Division baggage, plus some cap era bad blood. Penguins/Bruins? One of the most underrated rivalries in modern history. You can do this for just about any series that's in play. OK, maybe Bruins/Islanders doesn't have a ton of history, but we could at least make fun of Mike Milbury. The East should be great.

And then we get to the North, and the big one: the first Leafs/Canadiens matchup in over 40 years. We're not locked in yet, because the Jets have decided to put third place back in play (and honestly, having the one team nobody in Canada hates be the one to blow a Toronto/Montreal series would be a great heel turn). But at this point, it's at least likely that we'll finally get the first Leafs/Habs series in a generation, which will splinter families and end friendships, the way all great hockey rivalries should. Mix in an Oilers/Jets reunion three decades after their one-sided Smythe rivalry, as we get to see if Connor McDavid can break the postseason scoring record in one series, and the North will be must-see TV unless they figure out a way to blow this.

I mean, just about all of that sounds pretty great. And sure, some of it might fall through, or end up being pushed back to the second round. Like we said, don't get too invested. But it's OK to start looking forward a little, if only because outside of Dallas and Nashville, we don't have much to get excited about over the final two weeks.

#### Road to the Cup

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

It wasn't exactly unexpected, but the most historical news of the weekend was Friday's announcement that we can finally say that we officially have a 32nd team.

Condolences in advance to all the GMs out there whose entire long-term roster-building strategy will be completely wrecked by the possibility of losing their backup goalie or third-line left winger in an expansion draft, you guys had a good run.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs (33-13-5, +38 true goals differential\*) – I know, I know, every time I put them here they go on a losing streak, and I'll probably get yelled at by diehard Leafs fans. But Toronto has all but clinched top spot in the North, and their path out of the division isn't any tougher than the other top seeds will have, and might be significantly easier. I do think whoever wins the North will be facing a very tough task if they have to go on the road for the remainder of the postseason, and there's a case that nobody in the division



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should be in the top five for exactly that reason. I'll chew on that for a week, but for now, the Leafs are rolling and I really don't have a choice.

4. Tampa Bay Lightning (35-14-3, +42) – They started off the week well, running their win streak to four before losing in a shootout to the Red Wings on Saturday night, which you can't even really get mad about it when the other guys are doing stuff like this:

They followed that with a rematch win over the Wings yesterday. All in all, a good week, but one where they didn't gain much ground on the Hurricanes, and they're running out of time to get back into first. Of course, if you're hoping for that Panthers matchup, that's just fine.

One more note about that potential Battle of Florida first-round matchup: The two teams face each other in the final two games of the regular season. If Carolina can hold onto top spot, those games could determine home-ice advantage. Or they may just be about setting the tone for the real thing.

3. Carolina Hurricanes (34-10-7, +43) – Hurricanes fans, how nervous are we getting about the Rod Brind'Amour situation? Everyone's always kind of assumed he'd be back, and based on Elliotte Friedman's report, that's still the most likely outcome. But it's not done yet, and if he wants his staff taken care of, that could complicate things.

It's worth noting that nobody who follows the Hurricanes closely seems especially worried, and nine times out of 10 these situations get resolved and we all forget about them. Those one out of 10s can get messy, though.

2. Colorado Avalanche (33-12-4, +52) – This week brought the first three-game losing streak of the season, as injuries seem to be catching up to a team that had been rolling. Nothing that a series against the Sharks couldn't fix, though.

1. Vegas Golden Knights (36-12-2, +59) – They took the top spot last week, and then held serve by beating a depleted Avalanche team in this week's head-to-head matchup. The two teams face each other once more in the regular season, a week from tonight.

Meanwhile, be sure to check out Pierre's interview with Bill Foley, which includes the news that the Knights are hoping to have a full arena by June 1. I really don't think NHL fans and media have fully processed the extent to which discrepancies in fan capacity could impact the playoffs, and if Vegas can get to 100 percent that quickly then you have to think it has the potential to give them a nice boost in a short series.

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

Not ranked: Nashville Predators – The biggest game of the weekend was Saturday night's showdown between the Stars and Predators, and the two teams delivered ... well, not a classic, but at least a close game, with the Predators taking it 1-0 in overtime.

The win wasn't quite the dagger that it could have been, since it came in overtime and the Stars still got a loser point (their league-leading 13th of the season). But it did put the Predators three points up in the race for the final Central

spot; Dallas has a game in hand, but Nashville will almost certainly own the regulation wins tiebreaker. The teams don't play again this season. With the Predators moving on to face the Blue Jackets twice this week while the Stars have to take on the Panthers and Lightning and Nashville already at 77 percent to take the spot, this one could be over soon.

The bottom five

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

We don't know a lot about the Jake Virtanen situation yet, although we do know that he's been accused of sexual assault and placed on leave by the Canucks. Thomas Drance has more on what we know and what happens next.

5. Ottawa Senators (19-27-5, -37) – They continue to show signs of improvement down the stretch, and have been flipping standings spots with Detroit for the last few days. It would feel cruel to put the Wings back in the bottom five after finally setting them free last week, so Ottawa keeps a spot for the 68th straight week. But it's the end of the season, which means by next week these rankings will basically just be the standings, so if the Senators want out they know what they have to do.

And since it came against Ottawa, we can use their section to drop in a mention of this:

The Cole Caufield era begins. Pretty solid celebration game too.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets (16-25-11, -49) – There isn't much left to play for down the stretch, aside from lottery odds and waiting to see if John Tortorella can figure out a way to bench himself. The big stuff will come in the offseason, and Aaron got to sit down with team president Mike Priest on what the future might hold, including whether this is still a reload and not a rebuild.

3. New Jersey Devils (17-27-7, -37) – This week saw them snap their 10-game losing streak in style, with three wins in a row against Philadelphia powered by 15 goals scored. Does that tell us more about the Devils or the Flyers? You know what, maybe don't answer that.

2. Anaheim Ducks (16-29-7, -49) – This has been a season short of genuinely feel-good moments, so Saturday night's Ryan Miller show in the final home game of his career was welcome.

Here's Eric Stephens on Miller's career and legacy.

1. Buffalo Sabres (13-32-7, -59) – After a brief bout of optimism a few weeks ago, the Sabres' home stretch is going from bad to worse.

Not ranked: Winnipeg Jets – So at what point is a slump not a slump? That sounds like a philosophical question, and it kind of is, but when you get to this point in a season it starts to feel important. Slumps come and go, after all, and while you never want to have one at the wrong time, they end. Unless they're not slumps, but something worse.

So, the Jets. A little over two weeks ago, on April 15, they chased Jack Campbell early and beat the Maple Leafs to



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move within three points of first place. It was their fifth win in six games. Life was good.

Six games later, life is not good. The Jets were shut out by the Oilers in their next outing, then dropped two straight to the Maple Leafs to put to rest any hopes of a division title. Two more losses to the Oilers and one to the Canadiens ran the regulation losing streak to six.

And now, the unthinkable is in range. No, not missing the playoffs — the Jets are one of those teams that's in barring a miracle. But a drop all the way down to fourth in the division is suddenly very plausible, with Montreal just two points back (but the Jets holding the tiebreaker). That would mean a matchup with the Leafs, and at this point maybe that's the best option, since the alternative is facing an Oilers team they've lost to six games in a row. Nobody can stop Connor McDavid, but the Jets really can't stop him, giving up multiple points in all nine meetings, including seven points in two games this week.

Those losses were part of an ongoing slump for Connor Hellebuyck, one that's cost him any hope of contending for a second straight Vezina. Nikolaj Ehlers is out for at least the rest of the regular season, Mark Scheifele got benched, and Kevin Cheveldayoff whiffed on significantly upgrading the blue line at the trade deadline. This suddenly looks like a very flawed team.

Of course, you always look like that during a slump, so if that's all you think this is, you're not too worried. They're still going to the playoffs, they still have a dangerous top six (assuming Ehlers is back), and they should have a goaltending edge over either Edmonton or Toronto. Oh, and if you believe in knowing how to win, you'll note that the Jets will also be the only team in the North Division bracket that's actually won a real playoff round in the last three years.

They should be fine. They just need to end the slump. Assuming, you know, that it is just a slump.



## Preview: Blackhawks vs. Hurricanes

Canes riding 10-game point streak (7-0-3)

By Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes and Chicago Blackhawks conclude their eight-game season series with three straight games in Raleigh.

The Match-Up

Chicago Blackhawks (22-23-6, 50 points) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (34-10-7, 75 points)

Monday, May 3, 7 p.m.

Watch: Bally Sports South, Bally Sports app

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

Numbers to Know

1: Alex Nedeljkovic made 31 saves on 32 shots and recorded his first career NHL point with the primary assist on Dougie Hamilton's game-winning goal in overtime against Columbus on Saturday night.

7: Sebastian Aho has recorded at least a point in a season-high seven consecutive games (3g, 9a).

10: The Canes are riding a 10-game point streak (7-0-3), which is the longest active in the NHL and the third-longest in the league this season. It's also the team's longest point streak the franchise-best run of 13 games in March 2017 (9-0-4).

The Opposition

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

On the road: 10-12-3, 23 points

CAR vs. CHI: 3-2-0

Leading scorer: Patrick Kane, 62 points (15g, 47a) in 51 games

The Blackhawks posted a 5-7-1 record in the month of April and dropped a 5-4 decision to the Florida Panthers at home to begin May. This three-game trip to Raleigh marks Chicago's final road trip of the season.

The Last Meeting

Jesper Fast broke a 3-3 score with just 28.9 seconds left in regulation to lift the Canes to a 4-3 victory over the Blackhawks on April 4. Warren Foegele tallied twice, while Vincent Trocheck recorded a goal, plus the primary assist on Fast's game-winning tally.

"I got a little weird bounce. I almost missed the puck, too, but lucky it went in," Fast said. "I'm very happy with that."



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## Nedeljkovic among inexperienced goalies making most of NHL chance

Vanecek, Kahkonen, Lankinen also performing after developing in minors, Europe

By Tom Gulitti

Alex Nedeljkovic began this season on waivers, not knowing where, when or if his chance to play regularly in the NHL would finally come.

After going unclaimed, Nedeljkovic has played his way into contention to be the Carolina Hurricanes starting goalie when the Stanley Cup Playoffs begin, making his long wait well worth it.

"I've had a few spurts here and there over the years of coming up (to the NHL) and playing in a few games, but it feels different now," Nedeljkovic said. "I feel more relaxed, more confident, just kind of like I'm playing the game again. It's been exciting."

Nedeljkovic, who played six NHL games (four starts) over three seasons from 2016-20, is among a group of goalies each playing well in his first extended opportunity in the NHL after bidding his time developing in the American Hockey League, ECHL or Europe. Nedeljkovic and Vitek Vanecek of the Washington Capitals each is seeking to be his team's playoff starter as a 25-year-old rookie, as Jordan Binnington did when he helped the St. Louis Blues win the Stanley Cup in 2019.

"Always everybody is talking about experience and then he was a rookie and then he does it," Vanecek said of Binnington. "So that's good he showed everybody you can win the Stanley Cup if you are a rookie goalie."

Although Kaapo Kahkonen likely will begin the playoffs backing up veteran Cam Talbot for the Minnesota Wild, the 24-year-old rookie will be a coach's decision or an injury away from getting that chance. Chris Driedger isn't a rookie, but the 26-year-old Florida Panthers goalie also will be looking to make his NHL playoff debut, likely backing up Sergei Bobrovsky, after eight seasons of paying his dues.

Before this season, Driedger had played 75 ECHL games, 139 AHL games and 15 NHL games with the Panthers and Ottawa Senators, and not a single postseason game since turning pro in 2014.

Vanecek, who was selected by Washington in the second round (No. 39) of the 2014 NHL Draft, spent five seasons in the minors, playing 141 regular-season games and eight playoff games with Hershey in the AHL, and 34 regular-season games and 11 playoff games with South Carolina in

the ECHL before making his NHL debut against the Buffalo Sabres on Jan. 15.

"We wait pretty long. That's true," Vanecek said. "But in the NHL, there's always the best goalies. So you feel in the AHL, you are ready, you are ready, but if you look up, there's still great goalies. So it's really hard."

Vanecek, who leads NHL rookies in wins (18-9-4) with a 2.75 goals-against average, a .908 save percentage and two shutouts in 33 games (32 starts), was third on Washington's depth chart before Henrik Lundqvist announced Dec. 17 a heart condition would prevent him from playing this season. When Ilya Samsonov entered NHL COVID-19 protocol Jan. 20, Vanecek became the Capitals No. 1 goalie and started 13 consecutive games before settling into a rotation since Samsonov's return Feb. 28.

The door opened for Nedeljkovic, Carolina's second-round pick (No. 37) in the 2014 draft, when Petr Mrazek injured his right thumb Jan. 30 and needed surgery. After beginning the season on the Hurricanes taxi squad, Nedeljkovic is 14-4-3 and ranks first in GAA (1.89) and save percentage (.934) among NHL goalies who have played at least 20 games this season.

Nedeljkovic spent five seasons in the minors, playing 154 regular-season games and 23 playoff games with Charlotte in the AHL, and 15-regular-season games and seven playoff games with Florida in the ECHL.

"The only thing that you can do is show up to the rink every day whatever level you're at and focus on getting better and somebody's going to take notice of it eventually," he said. "An opportunity is going to come through a trade, through waivers, free agency, an injury, something. An opportunity is going to come, and when that opportunity arises, you have to be able to make the most of it."

Kahkonen got his opportunity with Minnesota when Alex Stalock was sidelined at the start of this season. Stalock, who was claimed on waivers by the Edmonton Oilers on March 1, told The Athletic he was recovering from a heart condition stemming from contracting COVID-19.

A fourth-round pick (No. 109) in the 2014 draft, Kahkonen has pushed Talbot for playing time by going 15-7-0 with a 2.69 GAA, a .909 save percentage and two shutouts in 22 games (21 starts). Aside from a five-game stint with the Wild last season, Kahkonen spent the past two seasons with Iowa in the AHL after three seasons in Liiga, the top professional league in his native Finland.



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Kevin Lankinen of the Chicago Blackhawks followed a similar path. The 26-year-old rookie played four seasons in Liiga and two seasons in the AHL with Rockford before working his way up from the taxi squad to help the rebuilding Blackhawks remain in playoff contention in the Discover Central Division for much of the season.

Lankinen went 9-3-3 with a 2.55 GAA, a .924 save percentage and one shutout in his first 15 games, sparking Chicago to a 12-7-4 start, and is 16-14-5 with a 3.04 GAA, a .908 save percentage and two shutouts in 36 games.

"These guys, whether you're looking at the NHL or the American [Hockey] League, they're skilled. They're physically skilled," Capitals goaltending coach Scott Murray said. "The other thing you're finding out about these guys is they're pretty fearless."

Driedger, Ottawa's third-round pick (No. 76) in the 2012 NHL Draft, began last season with Springfield in the AHL, before going 7-2-1 with a 2.05 GAA, a .938 save percentage and one shutout in 12 games with the Panthers. Prior to

sustaining a lower-body injury against the Nashville Predators on Monday, Driedger was 13-6-3 with a 2.17 GAA, a .923 save percentage and two shutouts in 22 games this season.

Calvin Petersen's breakthrough with the Los Angeles Kings also came last season after Jack Campbell was traded to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Feb. 5, 2020. This season, Petersen is 8-15-4 with a 2.90 GAA and .913 save percentage in 29 games (27 starts) sharing the net with Jonathan Quick, and the 26-year old has helped the Kings take the next step in their rebuild.

"There's only 62 (goalie) jobs in the NHL and there's a lot of really good goalies around the world, especially at the AHL level," Petersen said. "I think sometimes you don't get the benefit of the doubt because you're in the AHL and not the NHL, so there must be some reasons for it. But sometimes it's just kind of a numbers situation and you have to wait for your turn to show what you can do."



## In competitive Central, the Lightning aren't the only heavyweight anymore

By Marisa Ingemi

For the past few seasons, the Lightning have been the top team in their division. They've been the club the Bruins had to (hypothetically) get past; the team in the way of Toronto, the President's Trophy winner, and last year, the Stanley Cup champions.

This season, they were projected to be that top team again, but this time away from Toronto and Boston.

Instead, they've had their work cut out for them; Carolina is in their weight class, and Florida might be as well.

The Hurricanes have a better goal differential; both they and the Panthers are difficult to beat at home. And it's not a given Tampa Bay will have home ice in the first round, even with a game in hand over Florida after their win over Detroit on Sunday.

Carolina has the best power play in the league at 27 percent and fourth best penalty kill at 84.6 percent. They've separated themselves as one of the elite clubs in the entire league with some of the best depth.

Florida has hung around after a quick start and the additions of Sam Bennett and Brandon Montour seems to have invigorated the Panthers even further.

Neither of them are going to roll over for the perennially dominant Lightning.

Tampa itself is not less dominant than past years. It's 53.19 expected goals percentage for this season is not far off from its 53.51 a year ago. A difference is Florida, at 50.59 a year ago and now at 54.06.

It's nearly inevitable the Bolts will face Florida in the first round, whether that be on home ice or opening in Sunrise. Where it takes place might depend on the result of their upcoming back-to-back two-game set.

The good news for Tampa Bay is, no matter where and who they play, Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov should give a boost to the lineup. There's an argument to made to rest the other veterans a bit as the season comes to a close, with no possibility of dropping into the fourth playoff spot.

That's especially good news after they could only garner one win in the two-game set this weekend with the lowly Red Wings. It could have been worse, though, too. Another loss to the Red Wings and garnering a home-ice series in the first round would have been even more difficult.

Whether they rest up or play out these final games for a push for home ice, the Lightning aren't that run-away favorite anymore. One could argue that belongs to the Hurricanes at this point, just two years removed from an Eastern



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Conference Finals appearance, and playing one of their best seasons ever in 2021.

It's going to make for a fascinating playoff in the Central, which looks a lot different than anyone would have expected. Aside from a potential Lightning road start to the postseason, their Stanley Cup foe from last year's bubble, Dallas, is likely on the outside looking in, and Florida's presence at all is another curveball.

Tampa Bay might not be the favorite this time around, but they shouldn't be overlooked, either. Potentially the competition makes them stronger, too. Look at two years ago

when they were the obvious favorite and were swept away by Columbus in the first round.

They already chased away those demons with their Cup victory a year ago, and maybe it's naïve to think the Cup experience alone — with their injured guys returning — doesn't make them the favorite.

The Lightning are dangerous, but to get out of their own division, everyone else they face is going to be pretty dangerous, too.



### Chicago Blackhawks at Carolina Hurricanes: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Carolina Hurricanes kick off their final back-to-back set against the Chicago Blackhawks tonight.

By Zeke Lukow

Carolina Hurricanes (34-10-7) vs. Chicago Blackhawks (22-23-6)

2021 Regular Season Game 52  
Monday, May 3, 2021 - 7 p.m. ET  
PNC Arena — Raleigh, NC

Watch: Bally Sports Carolinas  
Listen: 99.9 The Fan

SBN Opposition: Second City Hockey

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The Carolina Hurricanes enter tonight's game against the Chicago Blackhawks with a 10-game point streak and 7-0-3 record in their past 10 games. The Canes enter the game two points higher than both the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Florida Panthers for the top position in the Central Division.

The Canes have just five games left, three of which come against the Blackhawks, and their final two come against the Nashville Predators. Tonight also marks the start of the Canes' final back-to-back series. The Canes have gone 4-2-2 in the front half of back-to-backs thus far in the season

Both Florida teams have played at least one more game than Carolina, so the Canes still control their own destiny. According to The Athletic, the Canes still have a 93% chance to win the division but nothing can be taken for granted.

#### Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Blackhawks
Record	34-10-7	22-23-6
Goals/Game	3.18	2.82
Goals Against/Game	2.33	3.23
Shots/Game	32.14	29.67
Face Off Win %	53.7%	46.8%
Power Play % (Rank)	27.0% (1st)	22.8% (8th)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	84.6% (4th)	76.6% (27th)
ES Corsi For %	53.52%	46.71%
ES PDO	101.17	99.23
PIM/Game	07:21	06:46

#### Goaltender #1

Category	James Reimer	Kevin Lankinen
Record	15-5-2	16-14-5



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Category	James Reimer	Kevin Lankinen
Save %	0.906	.908
GAA	2.66	3.04

## Goaltender #2

Category	Alex Nedeljkovic	Malcolm Subban
Record	14-4-3	6-7-1
Save %	.934	.905
GAA	1.89	3.03

## Goaltender #3

Category	Petr Mrazek	Collin Delia
Record	5-1-2	0-2-0
Save %	.939	.863

Category	Petr Mrazek	Collin Delia
GAA	1.60	5.00

## Game Notes:

- Tonight's game is the sixth matchup of the season for these two teams. The Canes have a record of 3-2-0 in their first five games of the season. They look to secure three more wins moving forward.
- With an assist in the last game, Sebastian Aho has extended his point streak to seven games. In those games, he has had three goals and nine assists. In his last 16 games, he has had five multi-point games and three game-winning goals.
- Alex Nedeljkovic's assist on the game-winning goal two nights ago marked the first time since March 30, 2019 that a Canes goalie earned a point. His overtime assist was just the third such goalie assist in franchise history.
- Chicago was able to pot six goals against the Canes on February 4th. That is their second-highest offensive performance of the season. Patrick Kane recorded a season high, four-point in that game with one goal and three assists.



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## CHL Sunday Spotlight – 5 Questions with Winterhawks' Seth Jarvis

A smaller stature has not held back Seth Jarvis.

Seeing an astounding 59-point improvement with the Portland Winterhawks last season, the then second-year centre was the league's best breakout star who ultimately finished a dominant sophomore campaign with a team-leading 98 points that counted 42 goals with 56 assists and ranked second in the WHL scoring race.

A diminutive dangler who is equally effective at setting up teammates as he is at finding the back of the net himself, Jarvis was one of the top-ranked talents entering the 2020 NHL Draft who later heard his name called 13th overall by the Carolina Hurricanes. Shortly thereafter, Jarvis then began the year in the pro ranks, suiting up for nine contests with the Hurricanes' top farm club where he dazzled to the tune of seven goals and four assists for 11 points before returning to the Winterhawks for further seasoning.

Jarvis reflected on his play with Portland, offered his advice to fellow undersized skaters, and more in the latest edition of the CHL Sunday Spotlight presented by WINMAR:

What do you attribute to your offensive breakout last season?

Last season, I had a lot more confidence in my game and I was gifted a bigger role. I think I played with great teammates like Jaydon Dureau and he and I really clicked. With the mix of that and the coaching staff helping me out in a bigger role, it all kind of fell into place.

What are your goals for this season?

I think my goal and the team goal this season is to catch Everett. They are a few points ahead of us in our division. That is everyone's No. 1 goal, to catch them and make it interesting in these final games.

How often are you in communication with the Hurricanes?

I talked to them fairly often. I was in Carolina for a while before the season. Now it is probably biweekly that I talk to someone from the organization, whether it is a player development guy or a scout, just checking in and seeing how I am doing and giving me little things to work on in every game.

What advice would you give to other undersized players?

My advice to an undersized player would be to just not look at it as a disadvantage. Obviously, it is nicer to be a bigger player, but as an undersized guy, you definitely have advantages, whether it is speed, quickness, you can get under guys because your centre of gravity allows for it. There are definitely a lot of advantages to being a little bit smaller and being able to get into the dirty areas and use your body a little bit more than somebody who is a little bit bigger.

Which NHL player do you model your game after and why?

I try to model my game after Brayden Point from Tampa Bay. He is someone who I have looked up to these last couple of years. He has really taken off in the NHL and has really put himself into a superstar category. He is someone who I look at who is a little bit smaller but who makes a huge impact on the game, not only offensively but defensively as well.

### TODAY'S LINKS

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 3, 2021

## SportScan

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

1211456

Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes star Vincent Trocheck on hockey, playing piano and having his own candy

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MAY 02, 2021 07:00 AM

Editor's note: This is part of a continuing series of profiles on the Carolina Hurricanes' players and staff designed to give people a better look at the players behind the pads. We'll be asking them about hockey, of course, but also about life — hobbies, interests, special moments — to better understand what makes them tick.

The Carolina Hurricanes would be hard-pressed to pick a most valuable player in what has been a special season, but no one can overlook the play of Vincent Trocheck.

The center, whom the Canes acquired last season from the Florida Panthers, is used in every situation by Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour this season. A competitive guy who once said he hasn't made many friends among opposing players in the NHL, Trocheck is always lurking around the opposing net, making life miserable for the other guys.

Trocheck also has made the Panthers pay for sending him away. He scored a goal in each of the first six games against his former team this season in the Central Division.

In an exclusive interview with The News & Observer's Chip Alexander, Trocheck talked about the trade, the season, his love of golf and Pittsburgh, and a life lesson learned from his mom:

Chip Alexander: What do you like most about being a player in the National Hockey League?

Vincent Trocheck: I think the competitive nature of the game. I mean, every night is a battle. I think people are seeing that even more this year, with a tighter schedule and how much every game matters a little bit more. I just think it's having that competitive edge and going out there every night and having to fight for every inch.

CA: When people ask me why Vincent Trocheck is having such a good year, my answer has been it seems you are playing with so much confidence. Let me ask you, why are you having such a good year?

VT: I'm sure confidence has been a little bit of it and plays into it. Confidence is a very important mental factor every game for all players. I just think the fit I have here is part of the reason, being able to fit in in perfect spots with my linemates and jelling well with them, jelling well with the power play. Being on the same page as Roddy (Brind'Amour). It just all kind of goes into it.

CA: Having played with the Panthers for seven years before being traded, how concerned were you about the fit with Carolina. Was there any apprehension?

VT: Yes, of course. I had never been traded before. It was a first time. It was a little different, and I wasn't sure what to expect, if I would be able to fit in right away. It took a little bit of an adjustment period coming last season at midseason. But it has been a great fit ever since.

CA: You once said that a competitive nature is in every hockey player's blood. Has it always been in your blood?

VT: Yeah, definitely. From a very young age. I was competitive, not just as a hockey player but in just about everything I was doing, whether I was playing cards against my sister or on the ice.

CA: Did you have a temper or just very competitive?

VT: I don't know. Maybe a little bit of both.

CA: I heard Nino Niederreiter say there was trash-talk going on in a recent game. That can be a part of competitiveness. Were you a part of that?

VT: Yeah, I'm sure I was. I get involved in all aspects of the game.

CA: Would you call yourself a car guy? Do you still have the BMW M4 you bought way back when, the one that you called your "baby"?

VT: "I don't have the M4 anymore. About a year and a bit ago, I sold the M4 and I've got an M8. But, yeah, I'm definitely into cars."

CA: Your dad was a musician and can play a number of instruments. You play the piano, but is it true you can't read music?

VT: I used to be able to read music, and it wasn't something that I thought I would forget, but sure enough I did. Learned when I was young, forgot, ended up taking piano classes in high school and relearned how to read music. And then after high school, going to play hockey and not being around a piano for a while I kind of just kind of lost it. I'd like to get to learning how to read again but don't have the time to get somewhere where I have my piano there and could kind of settle in with it.

CA: One of your former teammates said you are a good singer who could imitate anybody? True?

VT: I don't have a great voice but I like to sing. I do like to sing.

CA: I know you love to play golf, true?

VT: Oh yeah, big golf fanatic.

CA: What's your handicap now and your lowest 18-hole round?

VT: Four, and 73.

CA: Favorite golf course you've played and the one course you'd like to play?

VT: Laurel Valley in Ligonier, Pa., and Augusta National.

CA: And what about a dream foursome for Vincent Trocheck?

FILE - Tiger Woods watches his tee shot on the fourth hole during the final round of the PNC Championship golf tournament in Orlando, Fla., on Dec. 20, 2020. "Tiger," a two part documentary about Woods premieres Jan. 10 on HBO. Phelan M. Ebenhack AP

VT: Tiger Woods, Mario Lemieux and maybe Adam Sandler.

CA: Best golfer on the Canes?



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VT: Brady Skjei.

CA: Are you still a big cereal guy?

VT: Yeah I am. I'm a little odd. I like Raisin Bran Crunch, which is basic. And then I like Puffins, like peanut butter Puffins. They kind of taste like Cap'n Crunch. Pretty good.

CA: When you were with the Panthers, "Sweeties Trochex Mix" was being sold. It was a collection of your favorite candies. Can you still buy Trochex Mix?

VT: I have no idea. Good question. I think I still have a couple of boxes at my house back home in Pittsburgh.

CA: I've asked this question of others on the team who have kids. What's the best thing about being a father?

VT: "Man, I don't really know if it's one thing. It's the smile they put on your face every time they do anything. It's pretty awesome when I come home and the excitement my son has whenever he sees me walk in the door. It's always something that brightens up my day, no matter what's going on in life. Just watching him grow is awesome.

CA: Think he'll be a hockey player? You started at a pretty young age.

VT: Yeah, he has a pretty big obsession with hockey already, so I don't think there will be much of a choice there. I tried to put a golf club in his hand but he keeps going back to the hockey stick.

CA: I read a few stories about your mom, Rita, and read that you said, "She taught me there's no problem too big." I know she had some serious health issues. What kind of an inspiration has she been?

VT: When she was going through her colon cancer, the way she carried herself you would never even know she was going through anything or that she was sick. She just went about her business and always had a positive attitude and was happy and it was like nothing bad was going on. I think that taught me a lot about life, that there's no problem too big you can't get through it, and that a positive attitude can do a lot.

CA: You've had some serious injuries. Did that help you get through those?

VT: Definitely. I may not have been as strong as she was when she was going through her sickness, but it definitely taught me a lot. I was able to stay positive and focus on post-injury and family and trying to make sure I was as happy as I possibly could be even though I was going through some stuff that was keeping me off the ice, which was a big part of my life.

CA: I know you're a proud Pittsburgh guy. What about your loyalties? Still a big Steelers fan, Pirates fan?

VT: Yep, big Pirates fan, Steelers fan. Still loyal to the Pirates although they may not be the greatest team in the world. I go back to Pittsburgh every summer. It's home. I'll always have that.

CA: A few hockey questions. You've been around a number of hockey coaches. What do you like best about Rod Brind'Amour's coaching style?

VT: I think it's how competitive he is. You can tell how much he wants to win and he brings that into his coaching style.

CA: What do you like best about this Canes team, looking at its strengths?

VT: The balance. I think we have so much balance. From line 1 to 4, and D pairs 1 to 3, we have a ton of balance. And we have three goaltenders who this year have all played phenomenal hockey. And everybody wants to win. Everybody comes to the rink with the same attitude, and we all have that same goal, to win the Stanley Cup, and every single guy in our locker room has that competitive nature that we're not going to be denied. That can be one thing that separates us.

News Observer LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211457

Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks goalie Kevin Lankinen's late-season slump doesn't ruin impressive season

By Ben Pope May 2, 2021, 12:28pm CDT

Kevin Lankinen's dream season has received a dose of reality over the last month.

The Blackhawks' breakout rookie goalie watched his numbers crash in April, his performance worn down by a workload he has never handled before.

But his late-season slump shouldn't ruin his impressive season.

Considering how low expectations were for the Hawks' goaltending unit in January, Lankinen's emergence with long-term No. 1 potential — even if that proposition doesn't seem quite as certain as it did — remains one of the most heartening outcomes of the Hawks' season.

First, however, comes an analysis of his recent downturn. Since the start of April, Lankinen has gone 3-6-1 with an .872 save percentage in 11 starts.

Digging deeper into the numbers — and narrowing them to solely even-strength data — doesn't provide a much prettier picture.

Among 64 qualifying goalies during that span, Lankinen ranks 59th in save percentage. He's last in goals saved above average (GSAA), a holistic stat that calculates the difference between a goalie's actual save percentage and an average goalie's expected save percentage against the same quantity and quality of shots.

He's also last in the difference between actual and expected goals allowed. And he's 53rd in save percentage against high-danger shots.

"It's not unexpected with how much he's played," Hawks coach Jeremy Colliton said last week. "He's had some good efforts here sprinkled in, as well. It's just a tough grind, this league, and a lot of our guys have gone through that. We believe in him, and we've got to help him through it."

Colliton has maintained his belief in Lankinen, who turned 26 last week, by playing him consistently.

Lankinen has started 11 of the Hawks' 14 games since the start of April, including the last three straight. He looked slightly better Thursday and Saturday against the Panthers and made a hefty 72 saves in the two games combined, but he still finished with save percentages below .900 — an easy "quality start" dividing line — in both.

"We wanted to give him the opportunity to bounce back," Colliton said before Lankinen's start Saturday. "He had a couple games where he didn't reach his normal level. [Thursday's] game was a step in the right direction, so it's a chance to build on that."

Yet Lankinen's overall season numbers are still very good, even when including his awful April. After all, most goalies endure rough stretches at some point.

He ranks 20th among 64 eligible goalies in even-strength save percentage, 25th in save percentage against high-danger shots and 29th in the difference between actual and expected goals allowed.

Most encouraging, he ranks 14th in GSAA — above Anton Khudobin (18th), Jordan Binnington (21st), Tuukka Rask (22nd), Robin Lehner (24th), Carey Price (25th) and Connor Hellebuyck (27th).

And Lankinen has done it despite handling the fifth-most minutes of any goalie and playing behind a subpar Hawks defense prone to poor marking and frequent turnovers.



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The average distance of the shots he has faced this season is 32.51 feet, the second-shortest of any goalie (backup Malcolm Subban has faced the sixth-shortest average distance at 33.23). The game Saturday exemplified that. Four of the five goals Lankinen allowed were scored by Panthers forwards left unguarded in front of or around the net.

Lankinen almost certainly will be the goalie the Hawks protect in the expansion draft this summer, and he almost certainly will enter next season penned into the starting role. Four months ago, the Hawks couldn't pen — or even pencil — anyone into that.

So Lankinen's season can be deemed nothing short of a success, even as he falls back to earth down the stretch.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211458 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackhawks' Adam Boqvist entering crucial offseason of rehabbing wrist, improving stamina

By Ben Pope May 2, 2021, 6:30am CDT

Only three NHL defensemen under 21 have played in at least 35 games this season.

Blackhawks youngster Adam Boqvist, 20, is one of them — and it's not even his first time. He was one of five to do so in 2019-20, playing 41 games as a 19-year-old rookie.

That stat provides important context when analyzing the first two years of Boqvist's career, the second of which ended when he broke his right wrist against the Lightning on Tuesday.

"He's really just getting started," coach Jeremy Colliton said. "A lot of guys [his age] aren't even close to making their debuts, and he's got almost 80 games."

The Hawks believe Boqvist won't need surgery (unlike Kirby Dach) and should be fully healthy in time for training camp next season. The break will only put a "crimp in his workout plans" rather than seriously disrupt his development, Colliton said.

That's not to say Boqvist's workout plans this summer aren't important. In fact, they're a key element in fixing a critical area of weakness: his stamina. Colliton has repeatedly discussed Boqvist's need to improve in that regard.

"[It] takes time to learn how hard you have to train and what kind of condition you need to be in to defend at a high level," Colliton said. "When he's playing on the power play, a lot of times he's going to play a 40-second shift, and then we want him to go right back out and play 1:10. So there's a different level of conditioning that he needs to get to."

"You want to be able to be 50 seconds into your shift and get a stop, and then be able to skate the puck out of trouble. That's the type of fitness we need."

Boqvist's minutes per game increased from 16:13 last season to 17:43 (excluding two games he left early) mainly because he became the staple defenseman on the team's first power-play unit.

He had 16 points (two goals, 14 assists), up from 13 last season. At even strength, his underlying stats were nearly identical to last season: His shot ratio ticked up from 48.2% to 49.0%; his scoring-chance ratio ticked down from 49.1% to 49.0%.

But Boqvist looked more confident, assertive and seasoned this year.

He learned how to read NHL plays, identifying where the puck was going to go — rather than where it was at the time — and positioning himself in

the correct spot to disrupt it. And he realized he could defend better one-on-one if he focused on footwork and stick movement rather than body - contact.

"From last year, I've been better overall out there," Boqvist said in late March. "I feel comfortable. And obviously when the coaches trust you, it makes you more -confident."

Colliton indeed trusted him more.

"Both offensively and defensively, [he improved]," Colliton said. "He's done a good job of using his legs to get body position, get stops in the defensive zone, close quicker, and that's allowed him to be more dynamic offensively. . . . He's building confidence on the offensive blue line. I still think he has more to give there when you look at what he can do."

His season unfortunately was dotted with absences. He missed 11 games recovering from COVID-19 and three more in -concussion protocol and will miss the last eight with the broken wrist.

None of those things was within his control, but his ability (when healthy) to handle a big role without fatiguing is. The Hawks hope he'll master that before his third year.

"[He'll] get an early start on his summer, and it's not going to be perfect as far as training goes, but he can definitely . . . focus on his conditioning," Colliton said. "We're excited about what that transformation might mean for his game next season."

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211459 Chicago Blackhawks

Still lessons to learn for Blackhawks

Barry Rozner

Updated 5/2/2021 5:47 PM

It's going to be a tough final week for the Blackhawks as they play out the string, but it isn't unimportant as they finish the season.

How they play matters, as the younger guys watch how the veterans perform, whether they play for the team -- or merely themselves.

You can learn much about a player's character from how they finish a season when structure can be difficult to maintain, but abandoning the plan because the playoffs are no longer possible only teaches the more impressionable that winning is optional.

This does not advance the program.

It brings back a conversation I had with Jeremy Colliton last fall, when the young head coach was insistent that he would ask of the players only what he believed they ought to be able to deliver.

"The commitment to play the right way was the highest it was all year, in the playoffs, but still not where we need it to be to compete against those top teams," Colliton said last October. "We showed that we could do it for long stretches of the (Vegas) series and we played them evenly for those stretches, but every game there was a 10- or 15-minute window where their depth or compete level or their skating ran us over."

"We need to develop more depth so that it's easier to hold everyone accountable, where we have guys at every position for every role and for every situation that can do the job."

Colliton has preached for more than two years that forwards must be a part of the defensive answer, that if there is a question on a 50-50 play,



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think defense and being on the right side of the puck, instead of cheating the other way.

"If Player A is not willing to play the way we need him to play, then Player B will do it," Colliton said. "We're not there yet, so we need to develop young players. Part of that is opportunity and then once they get the opportunity, it's accountability, which can come in different ways.

"It can come through verbal feedback, video in one-on-one meetings, and it can come through ice time, but that needs to be for everybody, not just for young players.

"With more depth, you can spread minutes out and you're comfortable they can get the job done. It's easier for everybody. It's going to help everybody. Everybody plays better when they're held accountable."

Colliton has spoken many times about proper changes and shorter shifts, not leaving the next line in an impossible spot where they're chasing for an entire shift.

Staying too long when unreasonable is both selfish and a loser's mentality.

"It's an easy sell. That's what leads to winning, but we have to build those habits," Colliton said. "As young players come in, we have to make sure they have the habits. That takes time. I believe we've made progress there. It's not where we need to be, but I don't sense pushback on that."

It's not easy to be relentless on the puck, especially when a game or season is out of reach, but habits are formed not only in games you win. They are formed in difficult times, as well.

Desperation is necessary if you want to win. Connor Murphy, who sounds like a captain every time he speaks and could someday find himself in that role, talks about it all the time.

"We want to hunt the puck when we don't have it," Colliton said. "We want to have numbers back to defend so we can get it back as quickly as possible. We want to attack as quickly as we can once we get it back. We want that up and down the lineup.

"That will help our defensemen. It's easier to hold the gap when you have back pressure. Well, you gotta have guys who are willing to work and push the puck from underneath so that the defense can hold the gap and force turnovers there.

"Every part of our team has to work together."

It has not been an easy year with so many new players introduced to the lineup, some big names absent and the constant changing of the roster while young players have been given an opportunity.

But there are games left on the schedule and while meaningless in the standings, they are not meaningless as an evaluation tool.

In that sense, the games absolutely matter -- and how players choose to approach these games could be crucial down the road.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211460 Chicago Blackhawks

10 observations: Blackhawks drop fourth straight

BY CHARLIE ROUMELIOTIS

The Blackhawks fell to the Florida Panthers 5-4 on Saturday at the United Center.

Here are 10 observations from the loss:

1. The Blackhawks lost four in a row for the third time this season and finished the campaign with a 2-4-2 record against the Panthers. They have five regular-season games left — three on the road against Carolina and two at home against Dallas. The most the Blackhawks can finish with is 60 points and it just won't be enough to secure a playoff spot.

2. The Blackhawks gave up 39 scoring chances during 5-on-5 action, according to Natural Stat Trick. It's the most scoring chances they've given up in a game all season. Their previous high was 35 against Tampa Bay on March 5.

3. The Panthers came flying out of the gates. They recorded 32 shot attempts, 17 shots on goal and generated 16 scoring chances (15 at even strength) in the first period. They also had 2:57 of offensive zone possession time compared to the Blackhawks' 1:27, according to Sportlogiq.

4. Anthony Duclair had a sensational game against his former team. He scored twice, registered a secondary assist, prevented a high-quality shorthanded scoring chance on Vinnie Hinostroza with a terrific backcheck and finished with five shot attempts (three on goal).

5. The Blackhawks were getting outplayed in the second period but got two quick strikes when Connor Murphy and Alex DeBrincat scored 52 seconds apart to pull their team into a 2-2 tie. But the excitement was short-lived.

6. The Panthers potted three goals in a span of 1:06 and that essentially sealed the deal: Aleksander Barkov scored with 6.8 seconds remaining in the middle frame and Duclair and Owen Tippett scored within 31 seconds of each other in the first minute of the third period. The Panthers went up 5-2 before the Blackhawks had a chance to even build on their momentum.

7. Looking for a positive? Here's one: The Blackhawks' fourth line of Brett Connolly, Mike Hardman and David Kampf generated five scoring chances and allowed only two against at even strength in the first two periods. The other three lines allowed a combined 20 scoring chances and generated only six.

8. Kirby Dach torched Barkov at the faceoff circle in Game 1 by winning 10 of his 12 draws. Barkov won only 6 of 17. Barkov was much better in the second game, winning eight of 11 faceoffs in the first period alone and finishing with 14 wins and eight losses for a win percentage of 63.6. Dach went 3-for-12 (25.0 percent).

9. Adam Gaudette continues to impress in a Chicago uniform. He recorded an assist and provided the net-front screen on Murphy's goal and also connected with Alex DeBrincat shortly after for his second assist. He has at least one point in all three games with the Blackhawks this season.

10. The Blackhawks hosted hundreds of family members and team-invited guests for the first time since the NHL put its season on pause March 12, 2020. It was nice to hear a little roar at the United Center again. The general public will be allowed back into the arena on May 9 and 10 for the final two home games.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211494 Nashville Predators

With win against Dallas, Nashville Predators control their own NHL playoff destiny

Will Backus



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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There was a moment when the Nashville Predators decided to turn their season around.

From March 15 to April 16, they won 14 of their 16 divisional games, skyrocketing to NHL playoff contention after a season mired in mediocrity. Wins against Central Division leaders Florida and Tampa Bay proved the streak was no fluke.

But even after that run, consistency became scarce. After two losses to Carolina and a defeat to Chicago in late April, Nashville's grip on its own postseason fate started to slip.

This was worsened by a 7-4 loss to Florida on April 27.

As they have done so often, the Preds responded, securing a 1-0 overtime victory against the Dallas Stars on Saturday night in Bridgestone Arena.

"Playoff style game, playoff style atmosphere," Nashville coach John Hynes said. "Just liked the fact that we were able to find a way to win and stay with it against a really good team. It was a good night for us."

Unsurprisingly, Juuse Saros was in top form, recording his third shutout in the last 18 games with 28 saves. Erik Haula was the hero, scoring the game-winning goal 3:32 into overtime.

Since March 21, Nashville (28-22-2) is 5-1 in games that go to overtime or a shootout.

Most importantly, Nashville is back in the driver's seat for its own playoff hopes. The win put them at 58 points in the Central standings, three ahead of Dallas.

While this may not seem like a significant gap, a look at the road ahead for each team shows how crucial Saturday's game was.

Dallas will play at Florida on Monday before a two-game series at Tampa Bay. Those two teams, with spots in the playoffs already secured, are the third and fourth best teams, respectively, in terms of points in the entire league.

The Stars will then closeout the regular season with a road trip to Chicago. That's five-straight road games down the final stretch.

Meanwhile, Nashville will travel to Central cellar-dweller Columbus for a pair of games on Monday and Wednesday before closing the season in Nashville against the Carolina Hurricanes on April 8 and 10.

"We've still got some business left here to do," Saros said. "It's a fun, tight race."

Carolina currently sits as the top team in the NHL, but Nashville has proven it can win against the Hurricanes' ilk.

"We have to take it one game at a time," Hynes said. "We need to make sure that you enjoy tonight and we've got to focus in on Columbus. ... We accomplished our mission tonight, but we've got a big week ahead of us."

Tennessean LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211495 Nashville Predators

This weird Nashville Predators season is becoming what our city needs right now | Estes

Gentry Estes

You can't count on it. But every so often, sports turn generous enough to remind everyone why they are so important.

This was one of those moments, and for so many reasons.

Because it hinted that more might be coming from these Nashville Predators, who were once dead on the ice this season. What they are doing now seemed impossible then, and that's making it even more exceptional, right down to when Erik Haula scored on a game-winning assist from Mattias Ekholm.

As pro hockey goes, Saturday night's 1-0 overtime victory over the Dallas Stars at a half-empty but fully enthralled Bridgestone Arena could only have been more intense if it was in the NHL playoffs.

"Like a Game 7," said Stars goalie Anton Khudobin, who played spectacularly until Haula bested him.

And like I said, Haula's goal was a moment.

Because it made it a lot more likely the Preds are going to sneak in the playoffs ahead of the Stars, a Stanley Cup finalist a season ago.

Because it happened at Bridgestone. Because it happened now. Because we've gone too long without that type of shared celebration in Nashville.

Because we were ready for it.

I don't want to oversell this. Nothing is guaranteed yet. The Preds are in good shape, but they still need to win more games this week to ensure they make the postseason. The Stars aren't out of it, and the Preds simply aren't good enough to take anything for granted. Caution is still in order, it must be said.

As of Saturday night, though, one can start to detect a groundswell of support that is building. This never-say-die team's weird season is starting to go from being a nice turnaround story to something more significant, in large part because of the timing.

It finds a city still staggered by a horrible pandemic and trying to recapture its fun-loving heartbeat. We're seeking a return to blessed normalcy and each other and moments just like Saturday, when Smashville roared like the glory days, liking it, loving it, wanting more of it.

The Preds are good for this. Of this city's best recent sports memories, they've provided many of them. All due respect to Vanderbilt baseball or the Titans or to our wonderful NFL Draft experience in saying that, but it's true. The Stanley Cup finals run of 2017 was the pinnacle in terms of uniting our community around one team.

Which makes sense. Vols fans aren't eager to cheer for champion Commodores. And while a lot of people in Tennessee might have grown up rooting for another NFL team, very few grew up with built-in hockey fandom. The Preds are unique in that way. They can be an NHL team for an entire state. They need to win to get that attention, though.

If the Preds do keep winning in the coming weeks, you're going to hear a lot of people compare this setup to 2017. The similarity comes with the fact the Preds barely made the playoffs that season, too.

This, however, isn't like 2017. But even if they don't make it that far again, any success in the playoffs has a chance to be special. We'd appreciate it more.

We'd all but given up on the Preds amounting to anything this season. Not that long ago, they were expected to start selling off players and dismantling the roster. If you watched them, you understood why. They were terrible. They were listless, coasting and often looking like they had better things to do than play hockey that night.

Then they started playing a lot harder and a lot better and winning. Credit the team and its coaches for that, but I also don't think it's a coincidence that it has happened as more and more fans have been allowed back into Bridgestone Arena. They have a genuine home-ice advantage again, and that wasn't the case early in the season.

Those opportunities matter for sports fans who were forced to be sidelined so often this past year, even as the Titans hosted an NFL playoff game in front of a reduced crowd.



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And for the Preds themselves, those fans matter when you're eking out wins by the narrowest of margins. Saturday made the Preds 9-2 in overtime games this season. They are 5-0 in shootouts. That's remarkable.

But a lot about what has been happening with the Preds lately is remarkable.

As they've come back to life, around them at Bridgestone Arena, our city is doing that, too.

Tennessean LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211539 Websites

The Athletic / Proposed junior showcase hopes to give young NHL hopefuls a platform in an otherwise lost season

By Sean Shapiro May 3, 2021

It started as a joke.

Frustrated with the on-again, off-again nature of the Ontario Hockey League, and watching a full season pass by, Andrew Perrott, a defenseman with the Owen Sound Attack, joked with his good friends Ryan Humphrey and Ryan Beck.

"What if we just ran our own showcase?" Perrott remarked. "Put it together ourselves, something for the players."

They laughed. It was a joke. But then they stopped and thought about it again: what if we really could pull this off?

This was in early April. Over the next three weeks the three OHLers, joined by the Erie Otters Brendan Hoffmann, organized and launched a junior hockey showcase that will be held in Erie, Pa. between June 1 and 13. The PBHH Junior Showcase Powered by Lake Effect is scheduled for six weeks before the 2021 NHL Draft, giving some players that missed an entire season a final chance, or in most cases, a first chance to play in front of NHL scouts this year.

A website for the event is expected to launch on May 3.

Right now the showcase has close to 100 players signed, nearly enough for six full teams, with hopes of having enough players for an eight-team showcase. The showcase is built around individual players, there won't be any standings or eliminations, with the hopes of saving the careers of some junior players that may have slipped through the cracks.

"Even if they don't get drafted, you still need to perform and play well enough to earn rookie camp or development camp invites," Perrott said. "I know I was fortunate to go to Boston Bruins camp and it's a memory I'll never forget for the rest of my life. And I was never drafted. I know that it was a big deal for me to just go to a rookie camp. And I don't see how guys could even go to rookie camps if they don't play at all. It might be hard for NHL teams to take a guy if they haven't played a single game."

"That's one of the reasons we're putting it on," Beck said. "I know a lot of kids. It takes them a year and then that second year, they come out and they just, they light up the league, and then they get drafted really high. And they're moving on with their hockey careers. And so a lot of kids couldn't do that this year, they were stuck. They couldn't show what they've done over the offseason."

Turning their idea into reality started with social media. Perrott, Humphrey, and Beck started messaging players across the OHL, through Twitter and Instagram. They pitched the idea, interest was there, and the sheer number of players who wanted in vindicated the trio as they started to tackle the difficult part of figuring out the logistics of the showcase.

This is when Hoffmann joined the group and played a key role in securing the venue in Erie. The group had earlier discussed hosting the showcase in venues in Toledo, Ohio and Orchard Lake, Mich. before finding a fit with ErieBank Sports Park.

With a venue and growing player interest, the group was able to start leveraging donations and sponsorships to help cover the costs. Players participating in the showcase will still have to pay a fee, right now expected between \$500 and \$750 depending on final sponsorship, but Hoffmann said the goal is to make the player cost as low as possible and the showcase is still open to additional sponsors.

"All four of us are working tirelessly to find sponsors and people that are willing to just donate. We will have a donation link on our website when it launches as well for anyone to go on, whether it's \$1, or whatever they feel comfortable donating," Perrott said. "I know we're gonna do that. And I know for me personally, I've found local sponsors in the Cleveland area that just, I know personally that believe in this, that they love the idea."

In a document that they've been sending to potential players, the group has laid out plans for a schedule that would potentially feature four games per day. The group has already laid out potential pitfalls for Canadian players and provided advice on how to best obtain a Visa and travel to Erie with COVID restrictions.

CCM has signed on as a partner for the event and will provide jerseys, while a sales rep from CCM will be present at the event with whom players can place any stick or equipment orders needed to play in the showcase.

Perrott said the group is starting to get a positive reception from the hockey world, and he's hoping NHL scouts will take notice and plan on spending additional time in Erie in early June. For the four men that have worked to organize the event, it's become a story they'll tell for the rest of their lives while the reason the showcase is needed hasn't been forgotten.

"Think about how weird the situation actually looks," Hoffmann said. "Four American OHL players putting together a tournament for junior players across the US and Canada."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211540 Websites

The Athletic / NHL business notebook: Regional sports networks update, Winter Classic 2022 hope, E.J. Hradek to call a game

By Sean Shapiro May 1, 2021

Baseball season was supposed to fix the impasse between Sinclair and various television carriers when it came to regional sports networks. Nearly a month into MLB season, that hasn't been the case, to the continuing frustration of 13 NHL franchises that have their games carried on a Sinclair-owned Bally Sports Network.

"There's not much we can do or anything we can even say to get it done. We've gotten the complaints and we've forwarded them on to Sinclair. It hasn't changed anything," one NHL team executive said. "It's incredibly frustrating. We have fans that want to watch our games and they can't."

As a reminder of the situation, Hulu and YouTube TV dropped the Sinclair-owned regional sports networks in October. Sling and FuboTV have also dropped Sinclair properties. You also can't get the Bally Sports regional sports networks on Dish Network. There are options that still carry Bally Sports RSNs, including DirecTV and AT&T TV, but the choices are limited.



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NHL teams, and NBA teams for that matter, were hopeful that Sinclair and the various TV providers would see MLB Opening Day as a hard deadline to get something done. April is one of the busiest sports months of the year. The combination of NHL and NBA playoff pushes combined with early-season baseball optimism typically drives the highest ratings for the RSNs.

"If they can't get it done for the month of April, I don't know what will get it done," another NHL team executive said. "I'm happy our team isn't in that situation."

Some NHL teams were at least holding out hope a deal would get done before the first round of the playoffs, when RSNs still have local rights, but those hopes have evaporated. This could lead to extreme fan frustration in the first round because national TV games will be blacked out locally, even if a carrier doesn't offer the RSN.

Employees at the local Bally Sports RSNs are also frustrated. One told The Athletic he's given up trying to change his TV carrier to watch the network he works for.

(Of note, we know fans are also frustrated. If you are a fan of a team that has its game broadcast by a Bally Sports RSN, we want to hear from you)

### Winter Classic to return in 2022?

The next Winter Classic has a new TV partner in Turner Sports, and it likely already has a finalized location in Minnesota, which was supposed to host the 2021 Winter Classic before the COVID-19 pandemic altered all plans.

Now there is hope that it has a date: Jan. 1, 2022.

That hope has been generated by the fact the Minnesota State Fair is planning on returning in 2021. The Minnesota State Fair is the second-largest state fair in the United States, drawing more than 200,000 people per day on the weekend. It welcomed a total of 2,126,551 in 2019. If the Minnesota State Fair is able to go on as planned in August, after being canceled in 2020, it could be setting the precedent the NHL and the Minnesota Wild need to host an outdoor hockey game Jan. 1 at full capacity.

Like most things, you should follow the money. Outdoor games, on average, generate \$5 million in profit for the league, which is what the league would expect from a sold-out crowd at Target Field, where this year's game was supposed to take place. And at this point, as the league and players are trying to generate as much as they can, any money-making venture is encouraged.

There's also want from the NHL to deliver a successful Winter Classic for Turner Sports in its first year of a new seven-year contract. It's best to keep new partners shelling out \$225 million per season on average happy.

### Hradek to call play-by-play

E.J. Hradek will call play-by-play on an NHL game for the first time Saturday when the Boston Bruins and Buffalo Sabres are featured in the NHL Network Showcase game.

Hradek has been a fixture at NHL Network for a decade as a studio host and has called play-by-play before for college hockey when he worked at ESPN and for the Biosteel All-American Game in March that was shown on NHL Network.

Hradek will work alongside Kevin Weekes, who has been a frequent analyst for the NHL Network Showcase games, typically alongside broadcaster Stephen Nelson.

Hradek said he's always had a partial interest in pursuing play-by-play opportunities, and working in Dallas in the early 1990s he created demo tapes, calling games into a tape recorder at Reunion Arena.

"Nothing really panned out there, I got a number of letters back — one letter in particular from Springfield, Ill., that was a really encouraging

letter and I always held on to that," Hradek said. "A lot of guys who do this, they go through that process. But then I ended up getting swept into other things ... (play-by-play) got pushed back to the back burner."

That's why Hradek has pursued the opportunities when they have arisen, like the ones at ESPN and this one, with Nelson unavailable to call the game this weekend.

### Betting on himself

After months of a "will they or won't they" discussion, the Ontario Hockey League officially canceled the 2020-21 season, without a game played, on April 20.

Because of the lack of a clear plan, many OHL players were left in limbo. Though some quickly found alternative options to play games this past season, others who were betting the OHL would play were left out in the cold.

Francesco Arcuri, a 17-year-old draft-eligible player from the Kingston Frontenacs, was one of the players who took his future into his own hands and through his agent, Patrick Morris, found a European home for the 2020-21 season with the Linz Steel Wings, an Austrian team in the Alps Hockey League. The AlpsHL is a 16-team professional league that has clubs from Austria, Italy and Slovenia.

Arcuri said it was a time investment that was crucial to his professional future with an uncertain draft year.

The 2021 draft year is already a great unknown for teams, with in-person scouting being extremely limited, prospects playing fewer games and any typical structure having been thrown out the window.

As Arcuri put it, for a 17-year-old, it would be easy to slip through the cracks in 2021, and by at least playing games, even in Austria, he was keeping himself on NHL teams' radar, even if the scouting was mostly done via video.

"It was just the way it is and you had to adapt to it," Arcuri said. "I needed to play games and I wanted to play a lot of minutes, which is why the Steel Wings were a good fit."

For the Steel Wings, finding space for Arcuri and fellow OHLers Cameron Supryka and Curtis Douglas was about following the AlpsHL's import system. Teams are given 16 points to add imports to the roster. An older foreign-born player costs three points, and a 17-year-old like Arcuri only costs one point against the system.

Aside from that, it was as close to a traditional professional setup as possible for Arcuri. The Steel Wings covered his flights to and from Austria and his lodging while playing for the team.

It turned into a good investment for the Steel Wings. Arcuri led the team in scoring with 15 points in 18 games.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211541 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets' response to extended slump will prove what they're made of

Ken Wiebe

May 2, 2021, 11:18 AM

WINNIPEG — The Winnipeg Jets have arrived at the proverbial fork in the road.

Yet the astute words of the late, great Yogi Berra do not apply in this case.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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After dropping a season-high six consecutive games following Friday's 5-3 loss to the Montreal Canadiens, the answer isn't as simple as "take it." Right now, the struggle is real and the search for solutions has hit a serious rut.

"We don't know that, otherwise we probably would have won the game," said Jets captain Blake Wheeler. "It's a real test of our team, our group, our character and certainly one of the toughest stretches we've had in a long time."

Wheeler isn't prone to exaggeration and he's not wrong.

This is not only one of the toughest stretches the Jets have had in a long time, it's the toughest.

It's the third six-game losing streak since Paul Maurice took over as head coach, but the first that includes six consecutive regulation losses (Jan. 27 to Feb. 6 of 2015 and Nov. 5-16 in 2015).

Remaining Time -1:47

Prior to the slide, the Jets had won five of six and were in the midst of applying some pressure to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Instead, the Jets' hopes of finishing in first place have been replaced by the need to get their collective house in order during the final six games of the regular season.

If they don't do that soon, slipping to fourth place could become a legitimate possibility. And if the problems were easy to fix, this slump would probably already be over.

At the very least, things wouldn't have reached this tipping point.

Nothing is easy right now for the Jets, who built a pair of two-goal leads on Friday (2-0 and 3-1), only to watch the more desperate Canadiens rattle off four unanswered goals with very little pushback supplied by the visitors.

During the first half of the season, the Jets made a habit of finding a way to rally and overcome deficits.

In a strange turn of events, the offensive well has recently run dry. Going into Friday's game, the Jets had scored only six goals during a five-game losing skid. Getting three — including a pair from fourth-liner Trevor Lewis — against the Canadiens should have been enough, yet it wasn't.

With dynamic winger Nikolaj Ehlers out of the lineup for the remainder of the regular season, the Jets need more production from their big guns, plain and simple.

Since Mark Scheifele was benched during the second period of the marquee matchup against the Maple Leafs, he's scored once — and that was window dressing in the 6-1 loss to the Edmonton Oilers.

Kyle Connor has only one goal (and point) during his past six games and only managed one shot on goal during the past three games. Connor is the best pure finisher on the Jets and he needs to generate more.

This is a four-time 20-goal scorer, three-time 30-goal producer and was well on his way to cracking 40 last season prior to the stoppage.

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

With Maurice hinting strongly that Adam Lowry would return for Monday's game against the Ottawa Senators, he suggested there could be another turn of the blender when it comes to the line combinations.

Reuniting Scheifele and Connor on the top line looks like something both players need right now and it would be a surprise if it doesn't happen.

Another solution Maurice will be seeking is where to put Pierre-Luc Dubois. The latest idea to move Dubois down to the third line in Lowry's absence was well thought out and meant to try and build his confidence.

Somewhat surprisingly, there wasn't much immediate chemistry between Dubois and Mathieu Perreault. It's been a revolving door of linemates for

Dubois and the spinning wheel is about to take another turn with Lowry's pending return.

The long-term fit for Dubois as a No. 2 (or 1B) centre remains very much in play, but things aren't going smoothly right now. Figuring out where Dubois slots in must be one of the priorities for the Jets during this final stretch of games.

He needs to find a place where he's comfortable — whether that's on the wing with Scheifele, alongside Paul Stastny or on a unit with Lowry that's asked to go up against the opposition's top lines.

Dubois, who has gone 11 games without a goal, has the ability to be a difference-maker when the games matter most. At present, he's trying to figure out what his role is going to be - but it's not too late to get that sorted out.

For a variety of reasons, the Jets' line combinations have been in flux throughout this entire season. Being able to move things around when things aren't clicking is important, but so is finding some continuity.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

But for as much experimentation that's taken place up front, the Jets have mostly been married to the same defence pairings this season — especially in the top-four.

Although Neal Pionk and Josh Morrissey have been used together at times while chasing the game of late, using them on a consistent pairing is something both players could benefit from.

Since Dylan DeMelo and Derek Forbort are already used together on the Jets' top penalty-killing unit, trying them together at even strength is also worth exploring. That would leave Tucker Poolman on the third pairing with one of Jordie Benn, Logan Stanley and Ville Heinola.

When it comes to goaltending, the Jets don't have any real concerns, though finding a way to get backup Laurent Brossoit a couple of starts to help keep Connor Hellebuyck as fresh as possible could also help matters.

You can learn a lot about the make-up of a team when times are tough and things don't get much tougher than what the Jets are enduring right now.

"There are no easy answers," said Maurice, whose squad has slipped to 27-20-3. "Confidence is such a difficult thing to define, it's such a hard thing to capture."

We're about to find out what this edition of the Jets is made of. Can they find a way to turn the corner or is this crisis going to continue to spiral out of control?

It won't take long to find out.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211542 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' Matthews continues 'unbelievable' season with wingman Marner

Luke Fox

May 2, 2021, 12:47 AM



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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TORONTO – Of all the wild statistics getting bandied about during Auston Matthews' stroll to the Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy, one number sticks out: 23.

That is the age of the youngest Toronto Maple Leafs regulars, the best players on the team — or arguably any team outside of the Edmonton Oilers, for that matter.

Maybe it's because Toronto is already deep into Year 5 of the Matthews–Mitch Marner era, and that four years of post-season disappointment wore hard on a deeply scarred faithful, that fans might forget that these are still big kids coming into their own.

No wonder a childlike joy has permeated through this explosive season, Matthews and Marner's first as permanent linemates.

The Leafs have essentially led Canada wire to wire, their 5-1 romp Saturday over a depleted and defeated Vancouver Canucks squad extending their latest win streak to five.

Toronto has outscored opponents 22-7 over its latest heater, and Matthews has registered the club's past three game-winners, bringing his NHL-leading total to 12.

"Happy birthday, Dad," Matthews smiled wide post-game.

The best shooter in hockey will ring Brian Matthews tonight, like he does after every match.

"He's easy," Matthews said. "We just kinda B.S., I guess, and talk about the game a bit. I'm sure he's enjoying this day with the win and a couple goals."

The goals have become as routine as the phone calls.

Marner was asked post-game if it feels like his centreman is on the verge of scoring every time the puck touches his tape.

He considered the question for a beat.

"Well, no," Marner replied. "I mean, if he's in the D-zone, I don't think so."

Yet Matthews' first goal on Saturday began with him winning a D-zone draw and triggering a rush up-ice. New left winger Nick Foligno went hard for a forecheck to get the puck to Marner (and gather his fourth assist in four games), and Marner put the thing on Matthews' blade.

Bang.

"I love the way they see the game," Foligno said. "They always have a plan every time they step on the ice."

"It just shows how engaged they are and the difference they want to make every time they step on the ice. I think that's so impressive and the reason why they've led this team."

Wrist strength intact, Matthews has scored 17 times in his past 17 games. He has 38 on the season, humming along at a 0.81 goals-per-game pace.

Over 82 games played, that would give him 66.

"I'm just enjoying watching it now, what he's doing. No matter how many games we're playing, he's feeling it," coach Sheldon Keefe said. "The chemistry between [him] and Mitch is obvious. He went through a tough stretch where he battled through injuries and stuff like that and he's obviously feeling better, and you're seeing the results."

The last player to win the Rocket with 66 goals is no one. Not even close. The award wasn't invented when superstars were lighting lamps at Matthews' current pace.

You have to flip back to '90s-era Mario Lemieux to compare this type of efficiency, and if you were to adjust for era or look at his even-strength production, Matthews' tear would look even more impressive.

When it comes to goal scoring in short NHL seasons, Matthews has jumped onto a leaderboard with names like Dit Clapper, Cooney Weiland and Babe Dye. This is the level of history we're talking:

"It's unbelievable. He's definitely a one-of-a-kind player. You see the way he shoots the puck and makes plays, it's tremendous," said Alex Galchenyuk, who got to know Matthews when they trained together during some private Arizona sessions in the off-season.

"He's a great human, really easy-going. So, a great guy to be around with. He's having a lot of fun on the ice, and it's the same way off the ice."

At even-strength, Matthews and Marner have combined for more goals (46) and points (97) than any other duo in the sport.

Matthews has scored a greater portion of his team's goals (22 per cent) than any other player.

Marner registered his 17th multi-point outing of 2021 on Saturday and was left, as he so often is, to be crowned second star.

Twice this week, shoot-first Matthews tried passing some of the love he's getting to the best wingman he's had.

"I don't know if he gets really enough credit with what he's been doing this year and the kind of player that he is and person," Matthews said. "He's just a blast to play with, and I think we both complement each other well."

"No matter who's playing with us, I think every guy has fit in pretty well. We just try to go out there and compete and make plays. Obviously, the end goal is to win games and put the puck in the net. He's been playing awesome, and it's been a blast playing with him."

Again, we're talking about 23-year-olds.

Yes, they're rolling at their best.

But better might lie ahead.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211543 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Cole Caufield stamps dream year with unforgettable first goal

Eric Engels

May 2, 2021, 12:04 AM

MONTREAL — After scoring his first NHL goal in a way he must've dreamt countless times, Cole Caufield declared 2021 the best year of his life.

That no fans were at the Bell Centre to watch this 20-year-old sniper streak down the wing and fire his shot into the top corner of Filip Gustavsson's net for the overtime winner, in a game his Montreal Canadiens were trailing 2-0 in the third period and desperately needed to win in this pandemic-stricken NHL season, was but an infinitesimal sample of what's made this one of the worst years in recorded history.

But a dream came true in that instant, at 2:25 into the extra frame of this thrilling game between the Canadiens and Ottawa Senators, and it was one of many brought to life over the last five months of Caufield's existence. The kid from Stevens Point, Wisc., had world junior gold wrapped around his neck and the American flag draped across his shoulders in January. He followed a torrid February with the Wisconsin Badgers with two goals on Mar. 6 to help them to their first Big Ten Championship in 21 years.



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A loss in the opening round of the Frozen Four was a brief disappointment at the end of the month, with the elation of signing his first NHL contract coming a day later. Then Caufield accepted the Hobey Baker Award an hour before making his professional debut with the Laval Rocket, scoring two goals—one of them the winner—and an assist. He scored the game winner the next night and then came his call to the big club on April 16. A first NHL road-trip started three days later and, on April 26, the 15th overall pick in the 2019 made his highly anticipated NHL debut.

Caufield will never forget May 1.

"It's pretty unbelievable," he said. "It still hasn't hit me yet."

None of it, really. Caufield still hadn't seen a replay of his first strike, still hadn't processed that a legend of the game he grew up watching—Corey Perry—had collected the puck for him, and he was totally unprepared for what happened when he got to the locker room after giving his on-ice interview, simulcast on Hockey Night in Canada and TVA Sports.

"We were all waiting for him and we gave him the silent treatment," said Jeff Petry, who had started this Canadiens comeback with his 12th goal of the season—and his first since Mar. 13. "We've seen it in years past with other guys walking in, not saying a word, and let him sit there. He kind of looked around a little confused and then everyone broke out and congratulated him."

The thrill of a lifetime.

"It's all pretty surreal right now," Caufield said.

It felt scripted, though.

The diminutive winger who shattered current NHL-leading scorer Auston Matthews' United States National Development Program team's scoring record in 2019, who was the highest-scoring rookie in the Big Ten last year and put up 30 goals and 52 points in 31 games with Wisconsin this year, was due. Caufield, a one-shot shooter, put 11 on net over four games before his 12th finally hit the back of it.

"I think it turned out pretty good for him," said 21-year-old Nick Suzuki, who set up Tyler Toffoli's 27th goal to tie the game with 5:35 remaining in the third period. "It's not a bad first goal to win it in overtime. He's a scorer, he's going to be scoring goals for a long time."

That's what made the build up to this one feel agonizingly long.

Objectively—and know that this is not a critique, because most players don't just jump into the NHL and automatically start lighting it up—you could see some un-Caufield-like moments amidst the offensive zone creativity and general comfort he displayed all over the ice through these first four games; the odd mistimed flash through the neutral zone on the breakout, pucks ricocheting off his pallet and out of the offensive zone, and one hesitant play leading to a turnover on the power play that offered the Senators an odd-man rush in Saturday's game.

"That comes with experience and finding ways to know what you can do and what you can't do out there," Caufield said. "It's all kind of feeling it. Obviously, you've got to make the plays at the right time to be out there, so I'm just going to learn with every shift that I get and continue to watch film stuff and grow as a player and keep pushing myself to get better, because some of those pucks that roll off my stick can't happen. Just going to keep working and sooner or later those will go in."

One finally did. It may have taken four games for Caufield to do it, but it took less than 53 minutes of playing time to get the goal that will accelerate that adaptation period.

And the best year of his life will continue.

"It all kind went pretty fast," Caufield said. "Been a lot of trips, a lot of people who pushed me to get here, and obviously it's the best year of my life so far and just going to keep growing from it. A lot of great experiences along the way and I learned a lot, so it was a big year for me and I'm just going to keep it going."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211544 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers mentally preparing for playoffs as regular season winds down

Mark Spector

May 2, 2021, 2:28 AM

EDMONTON — Home and cooled in second place in the North, and having now hammered home the final nail in the Calgary Flames coffin, the Edmonton Oilers are just about done with this regular season.

If the playoffs could start on Monday, they'd be all in.

"Knowing we can beat any team in the North, and if you do that anything can happen," began the Renaissance Man, Mike Smith, a 39-year-old goalie who might just find his name on the Vezina ballot this season.

Smith had another stellar evening, warding off a spunky Calgary club in a 4-1 win (two empty-net goals). He made 29 saves to up his saves percentage to .924 with a 2.30 goals-against average, then spoke about the final two weeks of a season that will include five of their remaining seven games against the tired and troubled Vancouver Canucks.

"These games are mentally tough. You see the standings, and you want home-ice advantage, but mentally you kind of just want to get through these games ... and let the real games begin," Smith said. "There's a feeling in the locker room where we want to be playing well going into the most important games, but we're chomping at the bit to get into those games."

Really, there are only two questions left on the Edmonton Oilers menu in the 2020-21 regular season:

Can Connor McDavid notch 13 points in the final seven games to reach 100 points in a 56-game season? (He had 1-2-3 Saturday, the fourth time in his last five games he's had at least three points).

And, who will their playoff opponent be? Winnipeg, as it has seemed for weeks? Or Montreal, who are breathing down the necks of the struggling Jets?

On the first question, McDavid is a dud. He is all about the team, this superstar, whose three-point night against the Flames gave McDavid 556 points in his first 400 games, two more than Sidney Crosby had in his first 400.

"It's been a pretty wild start to a career," McDavid said. "Just another step in the road."

Calgary kept McDavid off the score sheet on Thursday. On Saturday he had a goal and a primary assist before the game was eight minutes old.

"When he gets shut down one game, the next game he's that much hungrier to help the team," Smith marveled. "Everyone knows how incredible he is out on the ice, but I've seen a young man grow into a leader of this hockey club. Impressive to watch a young guy like that take this team on his shoulders. To do what he's done this year, it's an incredible feat."

As for the second question, if you can get a professional hockey player to publicly state his preference of a playoff opponent, you are a finer hockey writer than I. On this team, as with most, it's about how they're playing, not who they're playing.

This Oilers team is now 27-11-2 since their 3-6 start to the season. On their third game in four nights, they nearly rescued a point or two before losing Thursday. Two nights later a rested Oilers team weathered



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everything Calgary could throw at them — playing plenty of defensive minutes — but surrendered just a single goal.

That is a sign of a good team.

"In the playoffs you can't lose two in a row. You've got to bounce back," McDavid said. "Learning to play when it's not really going your way is a big part of winning. Like tonight: we started great, and in the second period they kind of took over. When we do give up chances, Smitty and Kosky have been great back there."

In a Battle of Alberta where Matthew Tkachuk has yet to look Darnell Nurse in the eye, McDavid gave Milan Lucic a poke in the chops after the two had some contact.

"He tried to finish on me in the neutral zone, and we were both skating back to the bench and I gave him a little bump. He says it was up high. I didn't think so," McDavid shrugged. "I'm not trying to stir up the big man. I don't have a death wish."

That stuff is incidental.

What matters now is how a team that has put together three months of .700 hockey plays when the chips are down. Because as we recall, the last time it didn't go so well.

"We were playing some of our best hockey before the pause, and then you go into a bubble situation where ... personally I was not mentally ready for that," said Smith, whose Oilers lost in four games to Chicago in the Qualifying Round.

"We've come a long way mentally," he continued. "Finding different ways to win, whether it was being up, coming back, holding leads... Just a lot of maturity, not just on the ice but off as well. How guys are handling themselves. What guys are talking about. It's team first, and I've seen a lot of those kinds of things that maybe we didn't have in the past."

"Guys are just really excited about playing important games."

Only seven to go, and five against the Canucks.

This could drag on.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.03.2021

1211545 Websites

TSN.CA / Chemistry between Matthews, Marner fuelling Leafs

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto Reporter Mark Masters reports on the Maple Leafs, who practised at Ford Performance Centre on Sunday before travelling to Montreal.

Two more goals for Auston Matthews on Saturday. Two more assists for Mitch Marner.

Toronto's dynamic duo continues to lead the way as the Leafs close in on their first division title since the 1999-2000 season.

"You could look back to the stone age and see chemistry between those two," said defenceman Travis Dermott. "When they're buzzing like they are it's easy for our team to get going."

On Saturday, the Leafs fell behind early and looked sluggish against the Vancouver Canucks. Then, late in the first period, Toronto's top line turned a defensive-zone draw into a goal in the blink of an eye.

Matthews won the face-off back to T.J. Brodie, who flipped the puck to Marner, who hustled through the neutral zone gaining the offensive blue line with speed and chipping the puck to the perfect spot below the goal

line. Nick Foligno got there first on the forecheck and played the puck to the other side of the net where Marner had arrived. Marner quickly put the puck in front to Matthews, who backed up to create just enough space to get a shot off.

"There's nights when it seems like they're just on the same page and they don't have to look," Brodie marvelled, "they just know where the other guy is."

Sheldon Keefe paired Matthews and Marner together midway through last season and has kept them together this entire year.

"Over time, I think that pays off and we are seeing that in terms of their ability to find each other and use each other's strengths very well to create a nice combination for us," the coach noted.

Matthews (49) and Marner (48) sit second and third in even-strength points this season behind only Edmonton's Connor McDavid (56).

Matthews leads the league with 38 goals in 47 games. That's a 66-goal pace in an 82-game season.

"He's done an amazing job in the O-zone of getting himself open," Marner said. "He can shoot the puck from really wherever in his stance. That's something that he works on a lot."

Marner (33) trails only McDavid (41) in primary assists.

"I don't know if he gets enough credit with what he's been doing this year and the kind of player that he is," Matthews said. "He's just a blast to play with and I think we both complement each other well."

An elite goal scorer with a dynamic playmaker, it's a tale as old as time. A match made in hockey heaven. But teammates are quick to point out this pair is about much more than pretty plays.

"They're just really complete players, 200-foot players," said captain John Tavares, "hard to play against, very good defensively and that leads to so much offence."

Matthews and Marner share the best plus-minus rating among Leafs forwards (+21). Matthews (43) leads all Toronto forwards in blocked shots and Marner (39) is just behind. Marner (46) leads the way in takeaways and Matthews (43) is just behind.

"They continue to feed off each other," Tavares observed.

"They both have the team in mind in all the plays they make," said goalie Jack Campbell. "They are coming back in the D zone making great plays and it leads to those highlight-reel plays you see on the TV every night."

Mitch Marner connected with Auston Matthews for a pair of goals on Saturday as the dynamic duo continues to display their creativity and chemistry together on the ice. Mark Masters has more on the two superstars and the natural connection they share.

Keefe has leaned heavily on the pair of 23-year-olds this season. Marner averages 22 minutes and 22 seconds of ice time per game, which is third among NHL forwards, while Matthews is fifth at 21 minutes and 41 seconds.

But on Saturday both registered their lowest time-on-ice totals of the season. Marner played 17 minutes and 37 seconds while Matthews finished with 15 minutes and 52 seconds in the 5-1 win.

Keefe confirmed he is planning to spread the minutes around a bit down the stretch.

"Last night, that was something I was trying to be conscious of," the coach explained. "Trying to build up the confidence of our third and fourth lines and putting them in different situations we might need them in. The pace and physicality of the playoffs are going to require those guys to play a little more and certainly play against better players at different times."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 3, 2021

Toronto will play three straight against Montreal this week before wrapping up the regular season with games in Ottawa and Winnipeg. The Leafs do not have any back-to-back sets remaining.

"We are also trying to be competitive, win the games, and keep the top guys in their rhythm," Keefe stressed. "We don't want to pull back too much and then you have too far to go to ramp them up when the playoffs begin."

The main reason why former Leafs coach Mike Babcock said he was reluctant to play Matthews and Marner together was because he felt the Leafs benefited more from having each guy drive their own line. So, Matthews played with William Nylander while Marner paired successfully with Tavares.

And early on this season there was some buzz that maybe Keefe should revert to those previous combinations. Toronto's top line, after all, was the only one consistently producing goals in five-on-five play.

Of late, however, Tavares and Nylander have been heating up. Last week, Nylander revealed his linemate made a modification to his stick, which helped spark the offensive explosion.

"I guess Willy's letting out some of my secrets," Tavares said with a smile on Sunday. "I've used the same curve probably since minor hockey so just felt it was time to play around with some things, try something out. I liked something new and just been getting more and more comfortable with it. And then my specs came in with the curve so I got it the way you want your stick to feel."

Tavares has seven goals and 11 assists in 14 games since April 4. He insists the stick isn't as big of a factor as sticking with it.

"More importantly, it's just been building good habits and trusting my ability and staying with it," Tavares said.

Tavares reveals he changed curve of stick for first time since minor hockey

With 18 points in his last 14 games, John Tavares has been red-hot as of late for the Maple Leafs. Tavares credits a new curve on his stick for some of the boost in offensive production, but it's the added attention in the defensive zone that has been the biggest reason for his improved play this season.

The Leafs are undefeated since Foligno completed his quarantine and joined the team.

"He brings a light to the room," said Campbell. "We already had a great locker room and I loved the chemistry with the team, but adding Nick, he's just a leader. There's certain guys that just have it. I don't think it's a coincidence that once he stepped in the lineup we flipped that switch and started rolling again."

Toronto had gone winless in five straight (0-3-2) before Foligno debuted on the top line in Winnipeg on April 22.

Foligno, who served as the Columbus Blue Jackets captain for the last six seasons, hasn't hesitated to make his voice heard despite being the new guy. He even delivered a speech before his first game.

"He's not afraid to speak up and voice his opinion, which is amazing," said Marner.

With an assist in all four games played with the Leafs, Foligno has helped fill the void with Zach Hyman out with a MCL sprain.

"That goal there, that's a great forecheck by him," Marner noted of Toronto's opening tally on Saturday. "He's done a lot of great things for us, especially in the D-zone."

"He's such a sound guy," raved Dermott. "You know, just meat and potatoes. He does everything right. His track is perfect. He's always got a good stick going, finishing his checks."

Leafs undefeated since Foligno joined team: 'I don't think it's a coincidence'

The Maple Leafs are a perfect 4-0 since Nick Foligno was inserted into the lineup and once again sit comfortably atop the North Division. The players spoke about what Foligno has brought to the team since coming over in a trade from Columbus and are happy to have him in the locker room.

After taking a puck to the face and leaving Saturday's game in the third period, defenceman Justin Holl was absent from practice.

"He is doing well," Keefe said. "He is uncomfortable today, understandably. He is not going to travel with us. He won't play tomorrow. But we are not expecting him to miss any length of time beyond that."

Campbell departed practice early.

"That was just part of the plan," said Keefe. "We didn't need to overwork him today. He will play again tomorrow. We had set it up so that Fred would get an increased number of shots today and [David] Rittich would relieve Campbell when he was done."

Fred being Frederik Andersen, who continues to work his way back from a lower-body injury. Sunday was his third full practice since March 19. There is no timeline for his return to game action.

"No real clarity on it," Keefe said. "Today is a good step for him just in terms of increasing his workload. The plan at this point is that he is not going to travel with us, but we will have another team practice on Wednesday. As they are building up his workload, they are going to try to set up a plan from there."

Leafs Ice Chips: 'Good step' for Andersen; Holl will miss game in Montreal

Justin Holl, who was left bloodied after taking a puck to the face late in the win over the Canucks on Saturday, missed practice and will not travel with the Leafs to Montreal. Head coach Sheldon Keefe also said goaltender Frederik Andersen has made 'a good step' in his recovery but there is no real clarity on when he will return. Mark Masters has more.

Lines at Sunday's practice:

Foligno - Matthews - Marner

Galchenyuk - Tavares - Nylander

Mikheyev - Kerfoot - Simmonds

Thornton - Brooks - Spezza

Noesen

Rielly - Brodie

Muzzin - Liljegren

Sandin - Dermott

Engvall - Hutton

Campbell

Andersen

Rittich

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TSN.CA / Tavares embraces change to push Leafs forward



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 3, 2021

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — John Tavares might need a word with William Nylander.

The Maple Leafs' captain has been on a tear recently, racking up 18 points (seven goals, 11 assists) in his last 14 games. Nylander's been his linemate for most of the year, and theorized last week that Tavares' surge could be attributed to the new sticks he'd been trying out.

That public reveal didn't go without notice from Tavares.

"I guess Willy's been letting out some of my secrets," Tavares joked with reporters on a post-practice Zoom call Sunday. "I've used the same curve [on my stick] since minor hockey, so I just felt it was time to play around with some things, try something out and something new. I've just been getting more and more comfortable with it. And then I got my [other stick] specs in with the curve, so I got it the way you like your stick to feel."

This has been a season of change for Tavares, in more ways than just equipment. While he's now one of the Leafs' most consistently productive forwards, Tavares first had to embrace the new role being asked of him.

Back in the summer, coach Sheldon Keefe approached Tavares with a specific issue. Toronto had just been eliminated by Columbus in five games from the qualifying round of the NHL's postseason tournament, and it was clear the club was at a crossroads. Their defensive effort had to improve in the coming season, and Keefe expected Tavares to lead the way.

Toronto's captain took the message to heart, and cultivated a defence-first mentality. Initially that switch impacted his offensive output, and much was made early in the season of Tavares' two even-strength goals in his first 25 games.

It was a sacrifice Tavares was willing to make.

"Last year we were very up and down and weren't good enough away from the puck to have the type of success that we wanted to have," Tavares said. "And I think [Keefe] really challenged me, as the captain and a key member of the group, to really set the right example from that aspect. It's always challenging [when you don't score], but you really just try to not focus on the results, even though sometimes you'd like to see it pay off more often or sooner. It's just continuing to stick with that."

As Tavares' defensive game grew, the Leafs' other stars - namely Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner - were rising into the stratosphere.

In that 25-game span to start the year where Tavares notched 12 points at 5-on-5, Matthews and Marner combined for 44. But Tavares was eventually able to strike the right balance.

Over 27 games since, he's got 22 points at even-strength. And on the season, Tavares has excelled in the face-off dot at 55.7 per cent (ahead of Matthews at 51.8 per cent) while also boasting the second-most takeaways on the team (27) and the most penalties drawn (11).

While in some ways Tavares might be taking a backseat to the exceptional Matthews-Marner tandem, he's also emerging as a more well-rounded player than before.

"We continue to see the emergence of what Auston and Mitchy are doing and how dominant they've become, [so I knew] that things might change a little bit for me," he said. "Not in a negative way, but just in certain aspects of what your role looks like and how that's being defined. I continue to find that balance and be a leader in that aspect of being really good in all areas of the ice. [Keefe and I] have been on the same page in that way and he's communicated that really well."

Tavares pointed out it hasn't just been him paying more attention to the defensive side, but the whole team. Toronto is averaging the seventh-fewest shots-against in the NHL this season (28.2 per game) and the eighth-fewest goals-against (2.61 per game).

Comparatively, the Leafs were sixth in the league in goals-against last season (3.17 per game) and 13th in the shots-against (31.9 per game).

Seeing the Leafs' play tighter in their own end was a top priority for Keefe, and having Tavares on board has made all the difference.

"The growth of our team, both with and without the puck in terms of responsibility, and consistency, I think John really embodies that," Keefe said. "What's remained consistent for me is the fact that the puck rarely goes in our net when he's out there. He's doing a really good job of not giving up chances against, managing the game really well. And now he's starting to produce. It's been great to see that, but the foundation defensively has been right there from day one and that's what we needed as a team."

Tavares has no intention of letting up now, at either end of the ice. Armed with his new sticks and brimming with confidence, the veteran is ready to see what this next chapter of the season has in store for him and the Leafs.

"I want to be counted on in all situations," he said. "I've been known for producing offence and that has been a major part of my game ever since I really started playing hockey so I'm continuing to improve and adapt that as I go. But we've got such a talented group here, and obviously understanding my role and how that fits in and making sure I'm playing the way we want to play and then obviously finding my strengths through that [is key]."

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