



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 25, 2021



Gold: Canes consider who to protect from the Kraken

By Adam Gold

In about one month, the Seattle Kraken will enter the NHL player procurement phase of their existence. It's the league's expansion draft in which they'll be able to select one player from each NHL team's roster. Well, other than the Vegas Golden Knights, as they're exempt from this process having just entered the league a few years ago.

The rules are simple. Everyone on your roster or in your system that has been a pro for two seasons and is either under contract or a restricted free agent is eligible for selection. There is the odd player or two that is exempt and for the Carolina Hurricanes, Martin Necas falls into that category.

Each team can protect players from being selected by Seattle in one of two groupings.

Seven forwards, three defensemen and a goaltender.

Or...

Eight skaters (regardless of position) and a goalie.

Given the Hurricanes roster, it is almost a certainty that they'd choose option number one. Here are the players I think the Hurricanes will/should protect:

Forwards: Jordan Staal, Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Andrei Svechnikov, Vincent Trocheck, Jesper Fast and Steven Lorentz.

Defensemen: Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce and Brady Skjei.

Goaltender: Alex Nedeljkovic.

Staal has a "no movement" clause in his contract, so the Hurricanes have to protect him from selection. But, based on his value to the team and the offensive resurgence he enjoyed this year, he'd be one of the first players Carolina would hide from the Kraken anyway. The next four are really in the no-brainer category.

Aho, Teravainen and Svechnikov are the core of this team and will hopefully be here for their next contracts. Trocheck might not, but a productive, 2-way, right-handed center is critical to Carolina's line up. And, Fast is a really good player on a very good (okay, cheap) contract, so he was an easy add to this list.

The only head-scratcher is deciding which of Carolina's young forwards is number seven. I went with Lorentz because he's a big body that can play a heavy game and play the middle of the ice. He might never be anything more than a fourth line center, but you need those, and he might end up being Jordan Martinook's replacement if the team feels that there is too much redundancy in their line up.

Remember, Brock McGinn is an unrestricted free agent and, as a favorite of the head coach, is a likely candidate to be resigned.

Slavin and Pesce are obvious. Carolina's two best defensemen and lifetime Hurricanes. For my money, the future has Pesce with a letter on his chest (with Aho wearing the "C" after Staal's reign) based on his character and reliability. Both players are going to be due substantial salary increases in the coming years (Slavin in four, Pesce after three), but they should be the Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook of this franchise.

Skjei proved incredibly valuable to Carolina this year, swallowing up big minutes in high-leverage situations. When Slavin was out, once with Covid-19 and then due to injury, Skjei stepped into the void and excelled. Is he a tad overpriced at \$5.25 million for three more years? Oh, yeah. Especially since there isn't much offensive production to his game. But, he does so many other things and since it is likely that Dougie Hamilton will not be back with the team next season, the Hurricanes could not head into the summer in search of two top-4 defensemen.

Nedeljkovic is as easy a call as anyone else since he proved he can play at the NHL level this year. Not a lot of teams would expose a rookie of the year finalist to expansion and the Canes won't either. Ned had a marvelous season, established himself as at least part of a goaltending tandem going forward, and could end up being better than just a piece if he takes the next step.

Nedeljkovic's postseason wasn't as good, as he himself assessed. But, it is undeniable that he established himself as a bonafide NHL goaltender. Now, the only question is what will his contract look like. He's a restricted free agent with arbitration rights and, based on his regular season performance that had him among the best goalies in the league this year (data, people), it might be wise for the Canes to avoid the coin flip and get this done before that process plays itself out.

So, who is left exposed for Carolina's former general manager, Ron Francis, who is now running the show in Seattle? Here are some of the highlights.

Warren Foegele, Nino Niederreiter, Morgan Geekie, Jake Gardiner and Jake Bean.

Foegele has so much potential that you could see the Canes protecting him and thinking that given another year the light bulb just might flicker on. Size, strength and speed (and just enough skill to be dangerous) are awfully hard to give up on in an NHL player.



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But, other than that playoff series against Washington three years ago, Warren has been more tease than anything and my guess is that we never get to the expansion draft with Foegele on the roster. I'd use him in a trade and let another franchise wonder why he fades in and out.

Niederreiter is a 25-goal scorer for the Hurricanes and those aren't easy to find in the NHL. Prorated, it was higher the year he was acquired and this season might have ended at 30 given he scored 20 in 56 games. But, for all of his big goal moments this year, Nino was again mostly invisible in the playoffs. In 29 postseason games with the Hurricanes Niederreiter has just 3 goals and 7 points. If Francis wants to remove his \$5.25 million obligation from the Canes' roster this summer, Carolina will find a replacement.

Geekie is the temptation on this list because you can tell there is a higher ceiling of offensive production. As he grows into a better skater and gets stronger Geekie will become more productive and valuable on both ends of the rink. He's smart and can play center and will be an inexpensive roster piece if Ronnie doesn't snap up the player he took in the 3rd round of the 2017 draft -- his last with Carolina.

Gardiner is broken. Gardiner is expensive. Gardiner's signing two offseasons ago wasn't a good idea. Maybe you're playing the hindsight is 20-20 game, but he wasn't really that good his final season with the Maple Leafs before Carolina backed up a money truck for him. There's no way he's selected because there's no way Francis is going to do the Hurricanes a favor, unless the Canes want to part with a first round pick -- they don't.

There are two ways the Canes can go with Gardiner. They could buy him out of the final two years of his contract and have a dead cap hit of \$1.44 million for the next four years.

Or, maybe Gardiner has back surgery and misses the entire season next year and Carolina uses the long term injury (LTIR) exception and his \$4.1 million cap hit is removed from next year. The Lightning did that with Nikita Kucherov this season after he underwent hip surgery in December.

Bean got off to such a good start when he was pulled out of the taxi in early February. In a 13-game stretch, Bean had 9 points (1g, 8a), a +1 rating and was dazzling with his intelligence in the offensive end. It looked like Bean was finally ready for the next step. Then it was gone. Just 3 assists in his final 26 regular season games and other than high game-tying, power play goal in the opening loss to Tampa Bay, his post season was a dud.

On the positive side, Bean did show flashes of what he might become. And, at just 23, there is still time for him to achieve that. On the negative, unless he gets much stronger or faster, it's hard to see him succeeding in a top-4 role. We could really end up finding out what Francis thinks of the player he selected 13th overall in 2016. Remember, Ron was at virtually every Carolina home game this year, so he saw Bean a LOT.

These aren't the only options for expansion losses, but they're the most prominent ones. No matter which player is lost, there is the risk that Carolina will miss what he brought to the mix or what he might become down the road.

This is the first step to constructing next year's roster. The next is figuring out what to do with Dougie Hamilton. And, we'll address that next time.



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What could Andrei Svechnikov's next contract look like?

The Carolina Hurricanes' Russian star is geared for a solid payday from his first contract negotiations, but what will the term look like?

By Ryan Henkel

There are a few key contracts that the Carolina Hurricanes will have their hands full with in figuring out this offseason and one of the most important of those is for the Canes' 2018 lottery pick, Andrei Svechnikov.

The 21-year old forward so far has a career stat line of 59 goals and 140 points in 205 regular season games with nine goals and 20 points in 26 playoff games.

It's also important to keep in mind in terms of comparisons that Svechnikov has played only one complete season with his last two having been shortened seasons.

For that purpose, we can take a look at Hockey-Reference.com which lists Svechnikov as having an adjusted statline of 72 goals and 174 points, calculating that total by taking his scoring pace from each season and multiplying it out for a full 82 game season.

Carolina has two paths forward with their Russian star: a long-term deal or a bridge deal.

For all intents and purposes, a bridge deal makes the most sense for Svechnikov's camp. He had a bit of a down year this season and there just isn't as much money to go around currently with the flat cap.

He's a star player and betting on himself to put up big numbers in the next few seasons is a smart gamble.

If he does want to go the bridge route, the Canes will need to sign him to either a two or four year term. Under no circumstances should Carolina sign a three-year term because that would put the contract expiration at the same time as the end of Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Brett Pesce and Brady Skjei's contracts.

Having to worry about re-signing your entire top line and two of your top four defensemen is just a recipe for disaster and the Hurricanes' front office is smarter than that.

So what would a bridge deal look like?

Let's take a look at some recent bridge deals for high-profile RFA forwards.

*Prior Stats: Goals-Assists-Points // (Playoffs) Goals-Assists-Points

**Stats are from before the player signed their current contract

Brock Boeser

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 59-57-116
- Contract: 3x\$5.875

Boeser only played around two seasons before signing his bridge deal, but the American winger is consistently around the 30-goal mark each season.

Brayden Point (C)

- Signing Age: 23
- Prior Stats: 91-107-198 // 8-9-17
- Contract: 3x\$6.75

Go figure that Tampa Bay would manage to sign Point to a less than \$7 million contract the year after he puts up 92 points. Centers are usually paid more money than wingers, but Point is on a great value contract and it can be argued that nobody should be demanding more money than he's getting right now.

Patrik Laine

- Signing Age: 21
- Prior Stats: 110-74-184 // 8-8-16
- Contract: 2x\$6.75

Laine is one of the best pure goal scorers in the NHL and that fact played heavily into his short bridge contract as he bet on himself to raise his value.

However, he's run into a bit of trouble as of late with not playing alongside a good playmaking center in Winnipeg and now is still in that same boat with Columbus.

Mathew Barzal (C)

- Signing Age: 23
- Prior Stats: 59-148-207 // 7-17-24
- Contract: 3x\$7

Barzal is the offensive engine on Long Island and Lou Lamoriello might have played some hardball with him on his first deal to keep his contract relatively contained, but the young phenom is going to be due for a monster contract.

Matthew Tkachuk

- Signing Age: 21
- Prior Stats: 71-103-174 // 2-1-3



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- Contract: 3x\$7

Tkachuk before he signed his contract is probably the most comparable player to Svechnikov one-to-one at this point in his career, with a virtually identical point total with Svechnikov's adjusted totals.

Also, both are power forward, left wingers that love to throw the body.

Oh yeah and both have had some dramatic goals. One having a through the legs, buzzer-beater OT winner and the other two lacrosse goals.

The other path for Svechnikov would be a long-term deal if he and the team do actually decide they want to hammer one out.

It isn't the worst idea in the world to get your young star signed to a big-term deal because at this point he shouldn't be breaking the bank. It could be one of the more cost effective moves for the club moving forward if the contract's cost stays relatively similar to what a bridge deal value would be.

It isn't the most likely path and the comparables really run the gamut, but surely Canes fans would love to secure Svech for a good while.

So let's take a look at some recent high-value RFA forwards on long-term deals to see what one for Svechnikov could look like.

Travis Konecny

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 59-65-124 // 1-0-1
- Contract: 6x\$5.5

Konecny plays a similar style to Svechnikov with both being a hard to play against, antagonizing winger and also each have the same exact career high totals. A solid comparison if the Canes and Svechnikov want to go a longer term route.

William Nylander

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 48-87-135 // 2-6-8
- Contract: 6x\$6.962

Nylander played hardball against the Toronto Maple Leafs and ultimately won in the end after nearly deciding to sit out a full year. The highly skilled winger is now on a reasonable contract especially compared to the albatross contracts of the Leafs' big three.

Kyle Connor

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 67-61-128 // 6-9-15
- Contract: 7x\$7.142

Connor is an elite goal scorer and Winnipeg seems smart so far in locking him up with a 7x\$7. Svechnikov is projected to

be that same high-level scoring talent, and while he still has time to reach that level, he isn't quite there yet. However, Svech's playmaking abilities are developing rather nicely to supplement his value.

Mikko Rantanen

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 80-129-209 // 6-12-18
- Contract: 6x\$9.25

Rantanen has been one of the NHL's best players even while living in Nathan MacKinnon's shadow. So in that regard, it's kind of crazy that Rantanen is the highest paid player on the Avalanche. That's not to say he isn't worth the money, because by all means he deserves it, but it just shows how good Colorado's front office has been with assembling their team.

Mitch Marner

- Signing Age: 22
- Prior Stats: 67-157-224 // 5-12-17
- Contract: 6x\$10.903

On the reverse side of team's with savvy front offices comes the anchor that Mitch Marner put on his team with his massive contract. In Toronto's defense, you can't just let a player of Marner's caliber sit out, but would he really have?

His holdout was well documented and the Leafs might still have been a bit scarred by Nylander's prior holdout, but while Marner is a superstar level player, the fact is that this contract makes figuring out any other roster moves a Herculean task.

Is Svechnikov expected to sign a deal anywhere near Rantanen or Marner's numbers? No, but it's worth noting them anyway with how unpredictable the market has become.

Another important note is that there is always the chance of a potential offer sheet. It happened with Aho and it can happen with Svech too, but the Canes should match any offer that is thrown his way without a second thought.

With a down year from his elite second season, there's room to discuss a potential — if any — drop in Svechnikov's contract value, but it is all a waiting game to see how it will pan out at this point.

One last note is that Svechnikov doesn't have arbitration rights so the Canes could decide to play a bit of hardball with him, but that is never something you want to end up doing and potentially isolate a player.

Evolving Hockey's contract projections has Svechnikov signing a 4x\$6.175 deal. That seems to be a very reasonable contract all around and one that falls into a similar vein as the other bridge deals listed.

Svechnikov can probably be expected to sign anywhere from \$5.5 million at the best value to upwards of \$7 million on a two or four year bridge deal.



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The Athletic / NHL Mock Draft 2021: From the Sabres through the Cup winner, Corey Pronman picks the entire first round

By Corey Pronman

Jun 24, 2021

We're a month from Buffalo being on the clock so it's time to start discussing how I think the first round of the 2021 NHL Draft will actually go. This mock will be 31 picks deep and there will be a longer one closer to the draft date.

This mock is less "intel" based, given a lot of teams haven't had meetings yet to put together their lists. The mock will discuss certain picks and how they blend with that specific team, but readers should also use this exercise to get an idea of roughly what players I think will go at what range, and what options their team could be looking at. This is not my opinion of the players in the draft class. Those along with full reports can be found here.

The last four team slots in this mock were based on points percentage.

1. Buffalo Sabres: Owen Power, LHD, Michigan-Big Ten

I would be more surprised than stunned if this was anyone other than Power. I won't rule out one of the other top prospects for No. 1 here but after the IIHF World Championship that Power had with Team Canada, I think this one has become fairly locked in.

2. Seattle Kraken: Matthew Beniers, C, Michigan-Big Ten

Seattle will take their best player available, as anyone would at No. 2, but a part of me suspects that org will want their first-ever pick to be a center or defenseman. If they like Beniers, you can argue it's a reasonable selection on talent too. Premium centers will be the toughest to acquire via the expansion draft as well.

3. Anaheim Ducks: Dylan Guenther, RW, Edmonton-WHL

Guenther is a highly talented goal-scorer and there isn't a ton of that in the Ducks' pipeline right now. You can envision a future PP1 with him on the left flank, Trevor Zegras on the right and Jamie Drysdale manning the point. The organization could use another premium center, so teams around the league think Mason McTavish or Beniers, if he gets to No. 3, could be possibilities here as well.

4. New Jersey Devils: Luke Hughes, LHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

I'm sure some will roll their eyes at this one, which would unite Luke with his brother Jack Hughes. The Devils are somewhat stuck between a rock and a hard place if their preference is someone else at No. 4. People around the league think this will be either Luke Hughes, Guenther or Simon Edvinsson as I am not hearing this is 100 percent Hughes.

5. Columbus Blue Jackets: Simon Edvinsson, LHD, Frolunda-SHL

The message out of Columbus is they need centers but once Seth Jones is dealt they will need centers and defensemen. Edvinsson, Hughes and McTavish are the names people around the league think could be the pick at No. 5 with Edvinsson being the one I've heard mentioned the most.

6. Detroit Red Wings: Mason McTavish, C, Peterborough-OHL

McTavish is the name I've heard the most with Detroit early in the mock draft season but team sources have also said they think goalie Jesper Wallstedt or Michigan forward Kent Johnson could be the pick here too. An interesting thing with this pick is both Johnson and William Eklund face questions on if they're actually NHL centers. Could Detroit use three high picks in four years on potential wingers?

7. San Jose Sharks: William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

Eklund would provide the type of elite skill at forward the Sharks haven't been able to draft in a long time and would fit into the type of player they've taken in recent years. If Guenther doesn't go higher than this I imagine he's a strong possibility at No. 7 as well.

8. Los Angeles Kings: Brandt Clarke, RHD, Barrie-OHL

The Kings have only used one first-round pick on a defenseman since 2010 (Tobias Bjornfot at No. 22 in 2019). Teams around the league think in a draft with four premium defense prospects that seems the odds-on thing to happen with L.A.'s pick — to take whichever of Hughes, Edvinsson or Clarke are left at No. 8.

9. Vancouver Canucks: Kent Johnson, C, Michigan-Big Ten

There is an industry consensus top-nine skaters in this draft and it's presumed Vancouver will take whichever of the nine are left at their pick. In this mock scenario, it would be the Michigan forward Johnson.

10. Ottawa Senators: Jesper Wallstedt, G, Lulea-SHL

When I've asked team sources around the league where they think the two top goalie prospects in Wallstedt and Sebastian Cossa could end up, the common answers are Ottawa and Chicago, with some mentioning of Detroit, too. Once the consensus top-nine skaters are gone most scouts agree the goalies are right in that mix. Mads Sogaard had a decent brief stint with AHL's Belleville Senators, but almost all scouts consider Wallstedt as a major upgrade and the best player available at No. 10 in this scenario. Once the consensus top nine are gone Ottawa becomes one of the most interesting picks in the draft.



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11. Chicago Blackhawks: Sebastian Cossa, G, Edmonton-WHL

Cossa hasn't emerged as a top-12 guy with every scout but most think he's right in this mix talent-wise and think Chicago will consider whichever of him or Wallstedt are available at this slot. Alternatively, sources think Chaz Lucius or Matthew Coronato could be the path they go if they opt for a skater.

12. Calgary Flames: Chaz Lucius, C, U.S. NTDP-USHL

If both goalies go before Calgary, the Flames have a chance to dictate how the rest of the first round goes. Lucius, Matthew Coronato and Fedor Svechkov are names I've heard mentioned with Calgary's pick. Lucius' stock dipped slightly in the eyes of teams over the season when he was healthy, but he's right at the top of next grouping and should go right around this area.

13. Philadelphia Flyers: Cole Sillinger, C, Sioux Falls-USHL

Sillinger didn't get to play in the U18 worlds but before the tournament he was a guy most teams expected to go in the 13-to-18 range. The Flyers could use some young center depth, especially if Nolan Patrick is moved this summer.

14. Dallas Stars: Matthew Coronato, RW, Chicago-USHL

Coronato's stock kept going up all season, from a second-or-third-round type to a late first-round projection, to a guy teams firmly expect to go in the middle of the first round, either at this slot or plus or minus a couple picks due to how well-rounded a forward he is. He could provide a skill and scoring injection into Dallas' system.

15. New York Rangers: Fedor Svechkov, C, Togliatti-VHL

Before the U18 worlds, Svechkov was getting more buzz as a 20-to-40 range type of pick, but following U18s, with him being the 1C on the second-best team at the tournament, there's more interest in him as a top-20 pick. He would make sense based on talent and the Rangers having a need for some top young center talent in their system.

16. St. Louis Blues: Corson Ceulemans, RHD, Brooks-AJHL

Ceulemans is a divisive player with teams. Some don't see him as a first-rounder, and some see him as a top-15 candidate. I think after a strong U18s he'll end up going around the teens as a 6-foot-2, mobile defenseman with offense. St. Louis hasn't picked a defenseman in the first round since 2012.

17. Winnipeg Jets: Zachary Bolduc, C, Rimouski-QMJHL

Bolduc didn't have an amazing season but his stock has remained high with teams due to how well he skates to go with a high skill level and it's expected he will be picked in the 15-to-25 range on draft day. The Jets don't have a clear, pressing need in their system so Bolduc or defenseman Carson Lambos would be the best players available per the industry.

18. Nashville Predators: Carson Lambos, LHD, Winnipeg-WHL

Trying to mock draft Lambos is a tough exercise due to the fact he didn't have a great season and a medical issue ended his 2020-21. Some teams don't think he's a first-rounder and others remain very optimistic on him as a top-15 candidate. I expect on draft day he will go right around this range given those risks after coming into the season as a top prospect. Nashville hasn't used a high pick on a defenseman since 2016.

19. Edmonton Oilers: Brennan Othmann, LW, Flint-OHL

Othmann's stock rose after the U18 worlds, and some scouts think he could go much higher than this slot but others expect right around 20 is where he will land due to a lack of speed. Othmann would bring a high level of skill, goal-scoring ability and physicality to the Oilers and someone to finish plays set up by their star centers.

20. Boston Bruins: Daniil Chayka, LHD, CSKA-KHL

Chayka's season in Russia was up and down, but talking to teams there is still a lot of interest in a mobile 6-foot-3 defenseman who many scouts believe has some offense. Boston's system has a lot of needs so taking the best player available here, per the industry, would be Chayka who is expected to play again in Ontario next season. I could see Aatu Raty or Wyatt Johnston here too, as the Bruins system could use a skill infusion.

21. Minnesota Wild: Nikita Chibrikov, RW, SKA-KHL

Mock drafting Chibrikov is a tough exercise. Many scouts agree on talent that he's a top-15 pick player in the draft due to his great skill, sense and high compete level. They also admit it's tough going to bat for a smaller, not overly quick winger signed with SKA and thus teams think he could get to the 20s. Minnesota has other system needs, such as defense, but this would be too much talent to pass up at this point and there isn't an obvious top defenseman prospect on the board.

22. Detroit Red Wings: Isak Rosen, RW, Leksands-SHL

Rosen had a great U18 worlds, leading to some speculation from scouts that he could go top 20 if not higher, whereas others still see him as a late-first type. Rosen brings a lot of speed and skill to a lineup and could become another important prospect for Detroit. I could see Chibrikov or Othmann here as well if either gets to this slot.

23. Florida Panthers: Xavier Bourgault, C, Shawinigan-QMJHL

Bourgault has elicited mixed opinions among scouts, with some saying he will go top 20 due to his tremendous skill and production and others saying he's more a 25-to-35 type player because of what he lacks outside his skill. I think Florida would ideally like to add a defenseman at this pick but there isn't an obvious defense pick here so I see them targeting more dynamic players such as Bourgault, Fabian Lysell or Oskar Olausson.

24. Columbus Blue Jackets: Aatu Raty, C, Karpat-Liiga

Trying to figure out where Raty's stock is right now has been a challenge. I don't talk to a lot of scouts who are excited to step up and take him high, but most expect he will still go somewhere in the 20s due to the chance that he could be a middle-six center, even after his underwhelming draft season. If Columbus picks Edvinsson at No. 5, adding centers with their other selections adds up with Raty or Johnston being ideal targets.

25. Minnesota Wild: Wyatt Johnston, C, Windsor-OHL

Johnston's stock shot up following the U18s and he's now being talked about among scouts as a probable first-round pick. Minnesota added two centers in the last draft with Marco Rossi and Marat Khushnutdinov but you can never have too many with Johnston being seen as a two-way center with good skill and compete with middle-six potential. I could see Raty as a possibility here too.

26. Carolina Hurricanes: Fabian Lysell, RW, Lulea-SHL

After coming into the season as a presumed top-15 if not top-10 pick Lysell's stock has slid with teams over the course of the campaign. He's a really tough player to mock draft. I wouldn't be surprised if he still did go top 15 and I wouldn't be surprised if, like in this mock, he flirts with the edges of the first round. If he gets to this spot, he fits a lot of what Carolina targets in terms of dynamic ability. Bourgault also makes sense for them here.

27. Colorado Avalanche: Oskar Olausson, RW, HV71-Allsvenskan

Olausson's stock fell as the season went on, with scouts thinking he'll go around 25-to-35 now. I still think he'll squeeze into the first round. He is a goal-scorer with size, skill and speed who you can see complementing the various weapons Colorado already has.

28. Montreal Canadiens: Matthew Knies, LW, Tri-City-USHL

Knies' draft stock has gone through waves during the last 16 months, with a great underage year, a big early-season dip and then a recovery in the closing parts of the season. Some teams expect he will for sure go in



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the second round, but I've heard some late first-round discussions about him recently. He brings size, skill and competitiveness to a team that values that in Montreal.

29. New Jersey Devils: Shai Buium, LHD, Sioux City-USHL

Buium is one of the players whose draft stock went up the most over the course of the season. After playing U16 prep hockey two seasons ago he's being discussed now as a 25-to-40 selection candidate with the late first-round chatter picking up with how well he ended his USHL season. Even with adding Hughes, the Devils could use several more good defense prospects and Buium would add a skill component that their other current defense prospects don't have.

30. Columbus Blue Jackets: Samu Salminen, C, Jokerit-Jr. A. Liiga

True centers make the world go round when it comes to the NHL draft and Salminen created a lot of attention for himself at the U18s. He was Finland's top center, playing very well and getting some scouts to see the possibility of him being a middle-six center even if not all scouts agree he can be that. For that reason I can see him sneaking into the first with Columbus being a prime candidate for how much they want to shore up that position.

31. Vegas Golden Knights: Kirill Kirsanov, LHD, SKA-KHL

Kirsanov is expected to go in the 25-to-50 range. Vegas has some good defense prospects but hasn't used a top pick on that position since Erik Brannstrom in their first draft. They also have shown no hesitation picking Russians. I could see Stanislav Svozil as an option here as well.

The Arizona Coyotes forfeited their 2021 first-round pick for violating the NHL's combine testing policy.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.25.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / Through long and testing road, Canadiens find way back to Cup Final

Eric Engels @EricEngels

June 25, 2021, 1:58 AM

MONTREAL — It was a Saint Jean Baptiste Day celebration like no other, with the Montreal Canadiens playing for the first time ever on Quebec's cherished Fête Nationale and punctuating it by stamping their 34th ticket to the Stanley Cup Final.

Unique? How about unheard of.

This has been the year of the unexpected — for all of us, but most certainly for these Canadiens, who were given no chance against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Round 1 and even less of one in this semifinal against the Vegas Golden Knights. No team has had worse odds to make it this far in over 30 years, and it's perfectly fitting this one defied them.

These Canadiens fought through in six games, overcoming this challenge like every other one they faced before it: ferociously and all together. And this series-clinching win was a microcosm of that, with Artturi Lehkonen scoring 1:39 into overtime to end Game 3 at 3-2 and send them back to the Final for the first time since 1993.

Prior to that, the Canadiens allowed two one-goal leads to slip away and fell back on their heels to end the third period.

They stayed there to start overtime, but were lifted off their toes to celebrate Lehkonen's goal after Brendan Gallagher cut through the neutral zone and fed the puck to Phillip Danault, who slashed through the middle and found Lehkonen's stick.

The 3,500 fans at the Bell Centre erupted, handshake lines were formed, and then Shea Weber skated over to accept the Clarence Campbell Bowl — he didn't touch it — for the first time in over 100 years of Canadiens history.

Weird? No, just more of the same stuff this year's been made of.

"We've been through a lot," said the captain, who scored the opening goal — his first of the playoffs, a booming slap shot from the left point that made you almost forget he missed the final eight games of the season with a left-thumb injury.

The drama of the last six months could've filled a dozen soap operas.

This team started off on a tear and then played so badly it got its coach fired. This team came out of a break and then jumped into a pause when Joel Armia caught COVID-19. This team had to finish the season by playing 25 games in 44 nights, travelling across the country three times just to get it done. This team faced a salary-cap dilemma and a roster crunch that handcuffed its coach from dressing the optimal lineup when he desperately needed the flexibility post trade deadline. This team lost Weber, star goaltender Carey Price and every other key player to injury while a playoff spot hung in the balance. This team clinched with a loss in its second-to-last game of the season — one of 14 they endured over their final 21. This team was dead to rights down 3-1 to the Maple Leafs, shut out on home ice in what was expected to be their last game of the year at the Bell Centre. And this team left Vegas tied 1-1 in the series with the Golden Knights, returning to Montreal, where head coach Dominique Ducharme was diagnosed with COVID-19 and placed into quarantine for the remainder of this series — and possibly beyond.

This team prevailed.

"We wouldn't be here right now if we didn't believe," said Price, who made 37 saves in Game 6. "We've always stuck with it."

On Thursday, with a city's worth of people flooding the streets outside the building and a few thousand more filling the seats within its walls, the Canadiens were the team who surrounded that Campbell Bowl for a picture and then left it right there on the table.

"Obviously there's a bigger one out there that we're chasing," said Cole Caufield, whose goal in the second period featured every element of what will make him a special player for years to come.

The 20-year-old rookie pushed a stretch pass over Brayden McNabb's stick in the neutral zone, double-clutched from second gear to fourth and ripped his wrist shot over Robin Lehner's glove and under the bar of the Vegas net to make it 2-1 Canadiens 9:36 into the second period. It was the fourth goal of the series for the kid who started the playoffs watching the first two games from the Toronto press box.

Resilient.

After Lehkonen sealed the deal, Lehner shared his appreciation for the Canadiens' determination.

"Hell of a team," Lehner said. "Works really hard. Sticks with their structure, and they have a lot of great players. Everyone underestimates them. Good for them."

All of them.

You don't get through everything the Canadiens have been through and pull off something entirely unexpected without every single person doing what's expected of them — and some doing even more.

"It's really fun to see the guys enjoying themselves in the dressing room," said Ducharme's stand-in, assistant coach Luke Richardson. "They deserve it. It's really heartwarming to see a group of guys that work that hard together. I know every team is the same, it says the same thing, but



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these guys are a special group and a really good mix. It's hard to put into words how proud we are of them, but they deserve it, and they're not done yet.

"I saw a fire in their eyes. They're already talking about it. We are shifting our focus right away. We'll probably step away (Friday) and just take some rest and come back on Saturday and do a little work and Sunday, get right back at it. And we're looking forward to the challenge."

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Sportsnet.ca / Golden Knights caught in Canadiens' destiny as latest playoff run ends

Mark Spector @sportsnetspec

June 25, 2021, 12:50 AM

Sometimes you get caught in the path of destiny's freight train. A fate train, if you will.

That's where the Vegas Golden Knights spent the past couple of weeks, trying simultaneously to beat the Montreal Canadiens and a 28-year curse, where the country that cares the most about the Stanley Cup annually has watched it ship south for the summer each year.

Now, at the expense of the Golden Knights, Canada gets another shot.

And a town that has had nothing but a contender since getting their expansion team four seasons ago? They just watched hockey's eldest franchise show them a thing or two about playoff hockey, closing off this series in overtime with a 3-2 win in Game 6.

"(Montreal) owned the key moments of the series," said Vegas head coach Peter DeBoer, in the wake of another close-but-no-cigar season for the Golden Knights. "When they got a chance, they stuck it in the net. When they needed a save, they got a big save. They won the overtime battles. They won the special teams battles.

"If you're losing those areas of the game, you're putting yourselves in a tough spot."

Artturi Lehkonen was the unlikely overtime hero, "Finn-ishing" the Golden Knights with a dandy roof job off a slick pass from Phillip Danault. The goal came after Max Pacioretty had stared down Carey Price from tight, shooter's range, but failed to beat the man who enters the Stanley Cup Final as Montreal's Conn Smythe favourite.

It was a microcosm of the series: Perhaps Vegas' most lethal scorer could not solve Price, and moments later Lehkonen — a third-liner who will give you 12 goals a season — pots his first of the series to drive the stake through the Golden Knights' armour.

"It just came down to they did a better job scoring goals in the series," said Reilly Smith, Vegas' most dangerous forward in this series. "The opportunities were there for us. They got a breakaway or an opportunity and it ended up in the back of the net. We didn't do a good enough job on our chances."

Let's face it: Vegas' biggest shooters choked in this series.

Mark Stone, Jonathan Marchessault, William Karlsson and Alex Tuch all had zero goals versus Montreal. Pacioretty and Smith each had one.

The power play finished the series at 0-for-15, a crippling outage and likely the decisive failure in this series for Vegas.

"Their D play hard. They're big, they're strong. Their forward group is responsible," Stone said of the Canadiens. "I can praise them all I want, but ultimately it falls down on myself and the top players on this team. We had some guys produce night in, night out, but as far as myself and a number of other guys..."

"I got skunked this series," he concluded. "That can't happen. I'm the captain of this team. The leader of this team. I take a lot of responsibility for what just occurred."

Cole Caufield and Nick Suzuki were miles better than any Vegas forward — two small, skilled Montreal players whose ability to pull you out of your chair is off the charts. That two kids could become the difference makers against a Vegas team with this much playoff experience is simply amazing, befitting of the tale the Habs are penning here.

How hard are these Habs to play against?

"They stick with their 1-1-3 structure," said goalie Robin Lehner. "And they made it hard for not just us. They made it hard for Winnipeg and Toronto, with some of the best goal scorers in the world."

"When you're concentrating on defending and you have the ability to counter-punch with guys who don't need multiple looks to stick a puck in the net, you're a very dangerous team," DeBoer said of Montreal. "That was the story here. They concentrated on defending, shutting guys down. And when the puck went the other way, on Caufield's stick, Suzuki's stick — they put it in the net. That's playoff hockey."

In their four seasons since joining an expansion team, the Golden Knights have bowed out once as a Stanley Cup finalist, and twice more in the Round of Four. They have never missed the playoffs, small solace as they pack up their gear and head home to the desert as a failed semi-finalist for the second straight year.

It doesn't have to get much better in Vegas, but it can't stay the same either.

"There's another door we have to find a way to barge through at this time of year," agreed DeBoer. "Everyone. Coaches included."

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B.C. boy Johnson brings creative flair to NHL draft class

By Mark Masters

Kent Johnson was only eight years old, but he remembers being in the crowd when his favourite team, the Vancouver Canucks, finally vanquished the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2011 Stanley Cup playoffs.

"[Alex] Burrows slayed the dragon with that slap shot on Corey Crawford," Johnson said with a smile. "Never going to forget that one... We probably would go to one playoff game a series back in those days, so really lucky I ended up being at that one."

The 18-year-old from Port Moody, B.C. lists that game as his favourite fan moment growing up.

"It was just so loud," Johnson recalled. "I had to clog my ears. It was just so loud. So, pretty special."

Pretty soon Johnson may be in position to create some special moments for young Canucks fans. The Michigan Wolverines forward is projected to be a top pick in the upcoming National Hockey League draft and TSN director of scouting Craig Button has Vancouver picking him in his latest mock draft.



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"It'd be a dream come true to get to play for my hometown team," Johnson said.

During a conversation with TSN, Johnson spoke about why Vancouver's Elias Pettersson is a role model and where his game grew the most this season. The following is an edited transcript of the interview.

You're a really a creative player, where does that come from?

"Kind of naturally. I like to watch a ton of the best offensive players in the NHL and I think they make some creative plays, so I try and play like them a lot and just naturally try and have fun out there. That's the way I play."

Who are your favourite guys to watch?

"I'd say Pettersson in Vancouver and [Patrick] Kane in Chicago."

What do you like the most about Pettersson's game?

"He has a similar body type to me and it doesn't matter. He still wins a lot of battles, protects the puck and makes a lot of skilled plays."

Back in December you scored a really nice backhand goal against Minnesota, what did you see on that play?

"It was a delayed penalty and I jumped on for the goalie as the extra attacker and slung low, got the puck and just beat one or two guys and then beat another guy and tried to get the backhand off and luckily it went in a good spot there."

It's fun to look at some of your highlights on YouTube. I was looking back at your BCHL days with the Trail Smoke Eaters and there was a shootout goal when you just had one hand on your stick the whole way. What was your thought process there?

"I kind of did that a lot at practice, at the end of practice on my goalie, and it kept working every time and he was like, 'Yeah, that's so surprising that you can shoot that so quickly.' We kind of talked that out and were like, 'Yeah, that can work in a game.' So, first shootout of the year I tried it and it was a big goal and we were both pretty happy when it went in."

How do you assess your season in Michigan?

"It was a solid season. It definitely got a lot better as the season went on and there's a lot to build on for next year."

Where do you feel like your game grew the most?

"Just protecting the puck against the older guys in college. At the end of the year, it was really tough to get the puck off me even though I was a younger guy and skinnier guy. I used my body well to protect it."

From a forward's perspective, what's it like going up against Wolverines defenceman Owen Power in practice?

"It's a good challenge, for sure. He's so big and skates so well at his size and he's got such a long reach and a good stick and just really smart with the way he defends. It's really tough to get around him."

What stands out the most about linemate Matthew Beniers?

"I was lucky enough to get to play with him all year and everyone notices that motor right away and how he's just going all day. And it's like that in practice too. He's working so hard the whole practice, buzzing around, and obviously he has a really good two-way game and is great defensively, but that doesn't mean he's not good offensively. He can definitely put the puck in the net and make plays. So, it's really fun to play with him."

What's it been like talking to NHL teams?

"Really cool. Some of the people are kind of NHL legends, which you get to talk to, which is pretty amazing."

Who is one legendary hockey figure that you've talked to that's stood out?

"Pretty recently [Red Wings general manager] Steve Yzerman, so that was cool."

What was that like?

"Maybe it helped that I didn't know he was going to be on the call so I didn't really have time to think about that or be nervous and he was really nice to me, so it was good."

Was he asking a lot of questions or just listening?

"He was mostly listening. They had a lot of guys on there, maybe six or eight, asking questions, but he definitely asked a fair bit of questions too."

What's one question that you've gotten from any team that's surprised you?

"Geez, they're kind of all blending into one now. I know a lot of times they ask you to rate your skills out of 10 or whatever and that's something I never really think of doing. So, that's a challenge for me to kind of think about every skill on its own like that."

What gets the highest marks in your game?

"Probably my hockey IQ and my puck skills."

What are you going to be focusing on in the off-season?

"Just mostly focusing on filling out and getting stronger and faster and doing some power skating to tweak my stride a little bit ... I try and get on the ice with skating coach Barb Aidelbaum. She's been awesome for me."

What are you learning?

"Just little things here and there about my form that, before I went to her, I didn't notice on my own. Mostly little things that once she points out it's like, 'Geez, I really didn't do that. Like, that's pretty easy to fix.' Stuff like that, she has a really good eye for."

Can you give us an example?

"In a straight line, I wasn't getting enough upper-body rotations, so I'm just rotating my upper body more to give me more power and not use my legs as much."

What would you like to accomplish next year?

"Well, I think everybody at Michigan believes we have a national championship-contending team again, so that's a big thing."

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USA TODAY / Canadiens defeat Golden Knights in overtime in Game 6, reach first Stanley Cup Final since 1993

Mike Brehm

USA TODAY

No Canadian team has won the Stanley Cup since the 1993 Montreal Canadiens.

The 2021 version of the team has a shot at ending that drought after defeating the Vegas Golden Knights 3-2 in overtime in Game 6 in Montreal on Thursday night. The Canadiens are the first Canadian team to reach the Stanley Cup Final since the 2011 Vancouver Canucks lost to the Boston Bruins.



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Artturi Lehkonen scored the winning goal for Montreal 1:39 into overtime.

The game was decided off a faceoff in the Montreal end, and after goaltender Carey Price held his ground to stop former Canadiens captain Max Pacioretty set up in the left circle. Montreal's Nick Suzuki gained the Vegas zone and slipped a pass to his left to Lehkonen, who lifted a shot beating Robin Lehner high on the short side.

"Just trying to go high and hit the net," Lehkonen said. "We're trying to keep it going one game at a time and not think things too much far ahead. I feel like we showed up today and it's a big win for us and we have four more to go."

Cole Caufield and captain Shea Weber also scored, as Montreal will make its playoff-leading 35th Stanley Cup Final appearance with a shot to add to its 24 championships.

Montreal clinched the league's final playoff spot with 59 points. After trailing 3-1 in the first round, the Canadiens have won 11 of their last 13 games to upset the Toronto Maple Leafs (77 points) and Winnipeg Jets (63) in the North Division and then the Golden Knights (82) in the Stanley Cup semifinals.

The roots of the playoff run started in the offseason when Marc Bergevin, the runner-up for the Jim Gregory General Manager of the Year Award, brought in a host of former Stanley Cup winners. They included forwards Tyler Toffoli and Corey Perry, defenseman Joel Edmundson and backup goalie Jake Allen. Eric Staal, who won the Stanley Cup in 2006, was added before the trade deadline.

The Canadiens also had to overcome adversity throughout the season. They fired coach Claude Julien on Feb. 24 and named Dominique Ducharme interim coach. They also fired goalie coach Stephane Waite and named Sean Burke director of goaltending. They had a grinding schedule at the end to make up for games postponed by COVID-19 protocol.

"We wouldn't be here right now if we didn't believe," Price said. "We've believed this whole time and obviously we're ecstatic and we have a lot of work left to do."

Just as Price was turning around his game, he suffered a concussion in April. Forward Brendan Gallagher broke his thumb, leaving the Canadiens without two key players down the stretch.

But both returned for the playoffs. Price has been the key, helping the Canadiens to a 11-2 postseason record when they score the first goal. The team's big defensemen are clearing out the crease to help him see shots, and Montreal is getting contributions from veterans (Toffoli, Perry, Staal) and youngsters (Cole Caufield, Nick Suzuki and Jesperi Kotkaniemi).

They even encountered adversity in the semifinals because Ducharme tested positive for COVID hours before Game 3.

"I feel like we've always responded well to adversity, and tonight was just another example," Price said. "Not having Dom behind the bench is just another twist we had to deal with."

Luke Richardson, named the interim coach, won three out of four games to advance.

The Canadiens will face the winner of Game 7 between the defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning and New York Islanders.

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USA TODAY / Seattle Kraken name Dave Hakstol as first head coach in franchise history

Alyssa Hertel

USA TODAY

The Seattle Kraken on Thursday announced Dave Hakstol as the first head coach in franchise history.

The NHL approved a proposal to grant an expansion franchise to Seattle in 2018. In July 2020, the team revealed the Kraken as the mascot as well as branding and team colors. Luke Henman recently become the first player in franchise history when Seattle inked three-year entry level contract with the center on May 12.

Hakstol coached at the University of North Dakota for 11 seasons. He was named the Philadelphia Flyers' head coach in 2015, becoming the first head coach to go directly from the NCAA to the NHL since 1982. Hakstol led the Flyers to three winning records in his first three years, but was fired after a 12-15-4 start to the 2018-19 season.

In 2019, he was hired as assistant head coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"Dave is confident, strong on technical aspects of playing three-zone game," said Seattle GM Ron Francis. "Tracking back to University of North Dakota days, Dave is a coach who cares about his players. At times, a coach's messages can get diluted. Players want to understand what the coach wants them to do. Dave communicates clearly and concisely. Players like that."

Hakstol spent much of his career – both coaching and playing – with the University of North Dakota. He played college hockey from 1989 to 1992 and played minor league hockey for five years before hanging up the skates. He spent a little over four years with the Sioux City Musketeers of the USHL before returning to his alma mater as an assistant in 2000.

In 2004, Hakstol was named head coach of the Fighting Hawks. He compiled a 289-143-43 record and led North Dakota to the national tournament every year. The Fighting Hawks made the Frozen Four seven times and went to the national championship once under Hakstol, but never won the title.

"He turns kids into men," said Stephane Pattyn, a former North Dakota player. "He's by far the greatest coach I've ever played for. He's taught me a lot on the ice and as a person. Every guy in that room has his back. He genuinely cares about all of us."

Hakstol will be head coach for less than a month before the 2021 Expansion Draft, set to take place July 21. Seattle will then have the second overall pick in the NHL Draft on July 23.

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