



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 8, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Carolina Hurricanes add 2018 draft pick to roster on a three-year deal

By Steve Wiseman

The Carolina Hurricanes added a promising young forward to their payroll Wednesday, agreeing to terms with Jack Drury on a three-year, entry-level contract.

A former top collegiate player at Harvard who played in Sweden last season, the 21-year-old Drury will earn \$832,500 each season while on the Canes' roster at the NHL and \$70,000 with in the minors in the American Hockey League. He'll receive \$277,500 in signing bonuses as part of the deal, the team announced.

"Jack is an outstanding two-way forward who perfectly fits our system and plays the right way," Canes GM Don Waddell said in a statement. "We expect him to be an important piece for the Hurricanes in the very near future."

Drury was a highly touted recruit at Harvard given his familial lineage, and he didn't disappoint. He was third on the Crimson in goals as a freshman with nine, often playing on the top power play unit with young NHL defensive star Adam Fox. He led the team as a sophomore with 20 goals, and was second in points with 39.

As a first-year pro with Växjö Lakers of the Swedish Hockey League last season, the 5-11, 174-pound Drury tallied 30 points in 41 games, scoring 10 goals. He was among three finalists for the league's rookie of the year.

Carolina originally selected Drury in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft with the 42nd overall pick. He would add a measure of scoring depth to the Canes' young forward group, though he isn't known as a grinder the likes of Warren Foegele or Jordan Martinook, key depth players for the Hurricanes still questionable to return to the team next season.

In international play, the New York City native played on the U.S. team in 2019 and 2020 World Junior Championships, winning silver at the 2019 tournament in Canada.

His father, Ted, and uncle, Chris, are both former NHL players with Ted Drury having played in 50 games for the Hartford Whalers from 1994-95 prior to the team's relocation to North Carolina. Chris Drury is currently the New York Rangers president/general manager.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes Ink Jack Drury to Three Year Deal

The Hurricanes prospect was an SHL champion and a finalist for the SHL's Rookie of the Year Award this past season.

By Matthew Somma

The Carolina Hurricanes announced today that they have agreed to terms with forward prospect Jack Drury on a three-year entry-level contract. The deal pays Drury \$832,500 per season with signing bonuses of \$277,500. The deal will pay Drury \$70,000 at the AHL level. Drury was selected by the Hurricanes in the second round, 42nd overall in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft and has represented the United States at both the World Juniors and the World Championships.

GM Don Waddell commented on the signing, saying "Jack is an outstanding two-way forward who perfectly fits our system and plays the right way, we expect him to be an important piece for the Hurricanes in the very near future."

Drury has taken a bit of a strange path to the NHL since he was drafted. He started his collegiate career at Harvard University, where he spent two seasons with the program. Over the course of those two seasons, Drury amassed a total of 63 points in 60 games.

After Harvard announced that they would not partake in the 2020-2021 season due to COVID restrictions, Drury signed with the Växjö Lakers in Sweden to begin his professional career. Drury emerged as a top line player in the SHL and finished with 30 points in 41 games in one of the top leagues in Europe. Drury contributed 11 points in 14 games on his way to an SHL championship, which then resulted in an invite to play for the United States at the Men's World Championships. Drury appeared in nine games and scored two goals for the United States, winning bronze in his first stint with the men's national team.

Hurricanes fans can expect Drury to be good at, well, everything. He is a much stronger skater than he was in his draft year and he's a great player on both sides of the puck. You can trust Drury on your power play, penalty kill, even strength, when you need a goal, you name it. He has a good shot and great hockey sense, allowing for him to create offense and become a top two-way forward. I believe that Drury could contend for a bottom six role on the Hurricanes this season due to the way he plays. He can inject some much needed offense into the bottom six while still being that dependable defensive forward that Rod Brind'Amour wants. Drury is the third player from the Hurricanes' 2018 draft class to sign a contract, with the others being Andrei Svechnikov and Jesper Sellgren.

The team's official release follows:

'CANES AGREE TO TERMS WITH JACK DRURY

Forward was finalist for SHL Rookie of the Year in 2020-21

RALEIGH, NC – Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has agreed to terms with forward Jack Drury on a three-year, entry-level contract. At the NHL level, the deal will pay Drury \$832,500 per season. He will earn \$70,000 at the AHL level for all three seasons, and will receive \$277,500 in signing bonuses.

"Jack is an outstanding two-way forward who perfectly fits our system and plays the right way," said Waddell. "We expect him to be an important piece for the Hurricanes in the very near future."

Drury, 21, played his first professional season with Växjö Lakers of the Swedish Hockey League (SHL) in 2020-21. He registered 30 points (10g, 20a) in 41 games and was named one of three finalists for the SHL's Rookie of the Year award. The New York City native ranked second in the league with 11 points (5g, 6a) in 14 playoff games as Växjö Lakers won the Le Mat Trophy as league champions.

Prior to turning professional, Drury played two seasons at Harvard, posting 63 points (29g, 34a) in 60 collegiate games from 2018-20. The 5'11", 174-pound forward was named Second Team All-ECAC and Second Team All-Ivy League in 2019-20 after ranking tied for sixth in goals (20) and third in power-play goals (11) among Division I skaters. In his first season with the Crimson, he was named to the ECAC All-Rookie Team after leading all Harvard forwards in power-play goals (6). Drury also played for Waterloo of the United States Hockey League (USHL) from 2016-18, earning 77 points (28g, 49a) in 100 games. As the Black Hawks' captain in 2017-18, he led all USHL skaters in both power-play goals (12) and shorthanded goals (5), becoming the first player in the USHL's Tier 1 history to accomplish the feat.

Drury has represented the United States during a number of international tournaments, including the 2019 and 2020 World Junior Championships, winning silver at the 2019 tournament in Canada. He won a bronze medal with the Americans at the 2021 IIHF World Championship in Latvia, scoring a pair of goals in nine games. Drury was selected by Carolina in the second round, 42nd overall, of the 2018 NHL Draft. His father, Ted, played 414 career NHL games with Calgary, Hartford, Ottawa, Anaheim, Columbus and the New York Islanders. His uncle, Chris, appeared in 892 career NHL games and is currently the President and General Manager of the New York Rangers.



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He said it: Jack Drury on signing wit the Hurricanes

Hurricanes prospect Jack Drury spoke to the media via Zoom after signing his ELC Wednesday.

By Andrew Schnittker

After playing last season in Sweden, Hurricanes 2018 second-round pick Jack Drury signed his three-year entry-level deal with the team Wednesday. Drury figures to compete for a roster spot in the Hurricanes' bottom six in training camp.

Drury spoke to the media via Zoom Wednesday, here's some highlights of what he had to say:

On signing with the Hurricanes: I'm incredibly excited. It's a great feeling. Having that clarity is nice, and I'm just excited to get to work and be a part of this great organization.

On his game and if there's an NHL player he plays like: I think I'm an offensive two-way player. You've seen [Nick Suzuki] in the playoffs, I think I try to play a bit like him, strong on both ends of the ice, but with offensive scoring ability and playmaking ability as well.

On the Hurricanes' organization: It's incredibly exciting. I think seeing Rod Brind'Amour and getting to meet him a couple times, seeing how respected he is across the league, that's something incredibly exciting. I think the Hurricanes' organization in general, it's evident how they keep moving up and keep doing better and better. So I'm really excited to be a part of that.

On what he likes about the Canes' system: I think they play aggressive and they play hard. They're not a team that generally sits back. I think that fits my style of play. I like to try to dictate the play and play aggressive. So in that sense, I'm excited. I think I can certainly help the team out that way.

On getting to play for Rod Brind'Amour: It's incredibly exciting. I think anybody in the league would want to play for Rod. I think the organization, they really value him a lot and all the players, I'm sure, do. So it's incredibly exciting. I think it's a good chance but at the end of the day, I've still got to go out and prove myself, and play to the best of my abilities.

On his decision to play in Sweden: I was planning on going back to college for my junior year, but once it looked like we weren't going to have a season, that kind of pushed me towards looking at some alternative options. Europe was a safe bet to play. I think Sweden's an incredible league for young players. Personally, I wanted to work on my skating and get better at skating. I think that big ice surface really

allowed me to do that. To play on that all year and be with players that use their speed a lot, I think helped my game out a lot.

On his family connections: I think it helped. I don't think the name itself helped, but I think having the background, having the experience that my Dad had, and my uncle had, and even my mother with her sports had, they could provide me with a lot of input, particularly in tough times. I think they know the mental approaches needed to get through the dips in your career and how you can use those to really better yourself.

On the experience playing in Sweden: It was incredible. I think the last week was really, really cool. I think getting to win and be a part of a real playoff team in a pretty grueling playoffs, that was great experience. I think I learned a lot from our older guys and our veterans that have won a couple championships before. It's definitely something that's going to help me transitioning into North American pro hockey. So I think that was very valuable. We had a tight team, and being an import, I think it's a unique situation, but it gave me a little bit of perspective on the European teammates I'll have in North America, what they go through and the differences there. So all in all, I think it helped me become not only a more well-rounded player, but a more well-rounded person too.

On how he's grown since being drafted: I think I'm just a lot bigger, stronger and faster. It's a cliché but it's true. When I got drafted I was kind of a scrawny 18-year-old and I feel like now I'm 21 and a lot bigger, faster, stronger. I think mentally you just kind of learn how to be a pro a little bit more, learn how to be a little more consistent and overall skill development. I think just learning how to read plays, things like that that come with time, these last couple years have really helped me out with that.

On if he has any friends on the Hurricanes he can talk to: I don't have super close contact with anyone. But being at the development camps in the past, before the coronavirus hit I got to go to two development camps. My first one, [Andrei Svechnikov] was there and Martin Necas, I got to talk to those guys a bit, form, not a close relationship but we got to know each other. At my second camp, I got to meet some guys like [Ryan Suzuki], [Jamieson Rees] and some guys like that, so I think, in the future, I'll get a lot closer with those guys, but it's good that I've already met them and know some familiar faces coming in.



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Replacing Dougie Hamilton: Free Agents, Trade Options, and In-House Solutions

If the Hurricanes part ways with Dougie Hamilton, they will have their hands full trying to replace him. What are their options?

By Brett Finger

With Dougie Hamilton's future with the Carolina Hurricanes muddled with uncertainty, the team might have to come to grips with the idea of looking elsewhere for a replacement.

Replacing a player like Hamilton will not be easy. In fact, it might be impossible in the short term, but there are options worth exploring.

Today, we're going to take a look at the free-agent market, the trade market and the in-house options that the Hurricanes could pursue this offseason in hopes of remaining a Stanley Cup contender, should Hamilton play hockey elsewhere this fall.

The UFAs

This year's class of UFA defensemen doesn't inspire much confidence. If there's a guy you're going to dish out big money to over a longer-term, it's going to be Hamilton and only Hamilton.

Perhaps a team will give a pricey long-term deal to Tyson Barrie, who is coming off a season wherein he led all NHL defensemen in points, but it absolutely shouldn't be the Hurricanes.

The 30-year-old defenseman has been downright atrocious defensively for the better part of the past five seasons and hasn't even been a positive driver of offensive scoring chances at 5-on-5 in four of the past five seasons.

In fairness to Barrie, he can absolutely run a power play if he has talent around him, which he would in Carolina, and he is a good puck-mover in transition. So there certainly is a good bit of skill there.

Unfortunately, for every offensive chance he plays a part in creating, he gives up back-breaking chances the other way and makes mistakes that essentially make his offense irrelevant.

His big 2021 season certainly helped his market value, but there's an obvious reason as to why he produced the way he did.

Barrie and McDavid

Scenario	TOI	CF%	GF%	xGF%	SCF%
Barrie w/ McDavid	557.28	52.99	55.07	51.03	52.19
Barrie w/o McDavid	402.28	45.85	47.06	44.73	43.68
McDavid w/o Barrie	380.18	57.93	60.47	64.85	60.92

It's truly impressive that Barrie, a fixture in Edmonton's top-four, consistently made the Oilers worse when he was on the

ice with McDavid compared to when McDavid was out there without him.

There isn't a player who benefitted more from Connor McDavid last season than Tyson Barrie, especially now that he is a UFA coming off of a 48-point season. Before he benefitted from McDavid and Leon Draisaitl in Edmonton, he benefitted from Auston Matthews in Toronto and Nathan MacKinnon in Colorado. He has spent well over half of his ice time over the last three seasons with those superstar players on the ice.

Barrie has been perhaps the very worst defensive liability in hockey over the last handful of seasons. If you have a problem with how Hamilton plays defense, Barrie will show you what real defensive ineptitude looks like.

All of that was echoed in the Norris Trophy voting. While Norris voting is far from being a definitive way of grading defensemen, even the voters for the best defensemen in the NHL shunned Barrie. He was the first player in the 67-year history of Norris Trophy voting to not garner a single vote despite leading all defensemen in scoring.

The Barrie contract could be the most dangerous deal made this offseason, and the Hurricanes need to stay far away from it.

There are better bets in the UFA market, even if none of them will come close to replacing the impact of Hamilton on its own.

Alec Martinez was a good driver of offense at 5-on-5 in Vegas this season and posted a career-high 32 points. He is 33, though, and while his offense has trended up since going to Vegas, his defense has declined. He has also been a sizeably negative PK impact over the last three seasons.

Mike Reilly is among my favorite UFA options outside of re-signing Hamilton. He didn't score a single goal this past season, but he posted a career-high in assists and points with 27 in 55 regular-season games with the Ottawa Senators and Boston Bruins. Only four of those assists came on the power play, as well. That's a lot of even-strength point production, which, combined with a strong year defensively as well, will likely lead to a team giving him a good deal in free agency. He ended up leading the Bruins in 5-on-5 ice time during the postseason.

This isn't a real needle-mover, though. If it works out, he can give you some quality minutes, preferably in the bottom half of your defensive depth chart, and help drive play in the right direction. He's no Dougie.

The list really falls off from there. I don't think there's much value in the free-agent market for a top-four defenseman. When Alex Pietrangolo hit the UFA market, there was a quality second option in Torey Krug. Barrie is essentially this year's Krug, which says a lot about this UFA class.

Trade Options

If the Hurricanes are going to fill Hamilton's role with a big splash addition, it's probably going to have to be through a trade.



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The two big names on the market appear to be Seth Jones and Matt Dumba. I can get behind one of these options, but the other feels destined for disappointment.

Let's start with the disappointment.

Jones reportedly wants out of Columbus. The 26-year-old blueliner has one year left on his deal that carries a \$5.4 million AAV. In addition to him having a modified no-trade clause for the next two seasons, he will almost certainly demand a price equal to or higher than what Hamilton is looking for this summer.

The kicker here is that Hamilton is better than Jones, and it isn't particularly close.

Jones has been a negative relative defensive impact at 5-on-5 for Columbus each of the past two seasons and has been a negative offensive impact in each of the last five seasons.

The most troubling part of this is that his defense has gotten worse every season since 2017-18. If his isolated offensive impact was below average but he still got his numbers and his defense remained strong, that would be one thing, but there's just nothing there that suggests he is the player that Hamilton is.

To add to that, it's not like Jones has played on consistently bad teams. Columbus made the postseason for four straight years from 2017 to 2020, and Jones has played more than half of his minutes over that span with a good defensive partner in Zach Werenski.

And let's say they get Jones and he even performs above expectations and does a respectable job of replacing Hamilton (something I very much doubt would happen). He would then be owed a new contract after next season, and you're going to have to pay him just as much as Hamilton. In all likelihood, it would be more than Hamilton since they'll be another year down the road and another year removed from the COVID seasons.

You'd then have to pay Hamilton money for a guy who isn't as good as Hamilton, and that's likely after you'd have already overpaid to acquire him in the first place.

For those reasons, it's a pass for me. While I think he is better than his metrics indicate and I wouldn't be surprised to see him turn things around on a new team, I don't think it's something that the Hurricanes should legitimately consider.

The other big-name defenseman is Dumba, who I consider to be a better option than Jones for several reasons.

Like Jones, Dumba is a 26-year-old right-handed defenseman. Dumba has an additional year on his contract, though, and he has a more consistent track record of offensive impact than Jones.

Dumba has scored double-digit goals in each of the last four 82-game NHL seasons and tallied six in each of the last two shortened seasons. He has also been a consistent source of offense at 5-on-5 in each of the past three seasons.

There are notable downsides to him. He is a weak defender who has hurt the Wild in terms of expected goals against in almost every season of his NHL career. To this point,

though, his shooting ability and his offensive driving have made up for his defensive shortcomings.

The Hurricanes would have to feel confident that Slavin could help things with Dumba's defense. Unlike a guy like Barrie, I could actually see Dumba's defense improving in Carolina's system. And unlike a guy like Jones, Dumba's offense has been consistently strong enough to warrant taking that risk.

You also get a guaranteed two years of Dumba at a \$6 million AAV, which lines up well with the contracts that Carolina has on the books right now. Jordan Staal and Jesper Fast are the only notable players with expiring deals after the 2022-23 season.

Beyond Jones and Dumba, no one really knows who is and isn't available. It's totally within the realm of possibility that the Hurricanes are looking into a name that hasn't been publicly tossed around the rumor mill, but if you made me pick one of those two players, I'd go with Dumba and feel pretty good about it.

In-House

If all else fails and the Hurricanes have to solve this problem in-house, things don't look great.

Jacob Slavin, Brett Pesce, and Brady Skjei will likely be the team's top-three defensemen next season, and there's a sizeable drop-off from the first two names to the third name. The drop-off from a Hamilton to a Skjei should not be overlooked. It's dramatic and your team is far worse in that scenario.

After a promising start to his NHL season, Jake Bean had a brutal finish in the latter stages of the regular season and into the postseason. He was practically unplayable.

Does he take a step forward? Does he get snatched up by Seattle in the expansion draft?

If he stays put in Carolina, he will likely be one of the team's top-six defensemen and they will need a lot more from him both at 5-on-5 and on the power play. If the team is serious about winning, Bean being your number four defenseman is likely a recipe for disaster.

An interesting name is Joey Keane. The Canes acquired him in a one-for-one trade that sent Julien Gauthier to the New York Rangers in 2020 and gave him his first NHL look in game 56 in Nashville, which was essentially a throwaway game with no meaning for the team.

He isn't going to be a big impact player, but I'd imagine that he is on the shortlist of guys who could take the next step next season and make the team's roster if they don't go outside of the organization to address the need for a top-four defenseman.

If Hamilton is gone and they can't get anything done for a replacement, that means Pesce will get even more ice time, and one of Bean, Keane, or a Sellgren will have to play top-four minutes. This is all under the assumption that Jake Gardiner isn't even in the equation given his uncertain medical status and general status with the organization.



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It's almost impossible for me to imagine a scenario wherein the Hurricanes let Hamilton walk, address it in-house, and remain as good as they were last season.

There you have it. That was a breakdown of the options on the table for the Hurricanes. Of course, it would be a classic Don Waddell and co. move to spring a trade for a really solid defenseman out of nowhere.

That would be this offseason's version of the Devon Toews trade. Colorado surprised everyone when they acquired Toews from the Islanders in a deal that everyone knew

would be a win for the Avalanche. Those deals are hard to pull off, though.

If the Hurricanes want to at least tread water next year and not take a step back, they have to either sign Hamilton or go out and get a guy to play in something that resembles his role. They can't stand pat and try to do it from within the organization, and while there are some pending free agents out there that would fit well on this blue line, those options aren't viable in terms of getting a top-pairing defender.

The next three weeks are going to be crucial for the Hurricanes. They need to get this one right.

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Carolina Hurricanes add 2018 draft pick to roster on a three-year deal

BY STEVE WISEMAN

JULY 07, 2021 02:09 PM

The Carolina Hurricanes added a promising young forward to their payroll Wednesday, agreeing to terms with Jack Drury on a three-year, entry-level contract.

A former top collegiate player at Harvard who played in Sweden last season, the 21-year-old Drury will earn \$832,500 each season while on the Canes' roster at the NHL and \$70,000 with in the minors in the American Hockey League. He'll receive \$277,500 in signing bonuses as part of the deal, the team announced.

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Drury was a highly touted recruit at Harvard given his familial lineage, and he didn't disappoint. He was third on the Crimson in goals as a freshman with nine, often playing on the top power play unit with young NHL defensive star Adam Fox. He led the team as a sophomore with 20 goals, and was second in points with 39.

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The Athletic / Is this the NHL's summer of the blockbuster? Here are 5 stars who could be traded

By Scott Burnside, John Vogl and more

Jul 7, 2021

Is this the summer of the blockbuster?

No, not a Thanos/Avengers blockbuster, but knock your socks off elite NHL players on the move and not just in free agency?

Oh, I know you've heard it all before. Big names on the move, promises of cornerstone players simply packing up and moving on to another team, blah, blah, blah. But we're serious. This time it's really going to happen.

Don't believe us? The Athletic writers Scott Burnside, John Vogl, Aaron Portzline, Hailey Salvian, Tarik El-Bashir and Thomas Drance have identified a group of five cornerstone players who are or could be in play right now and how things might play out in the coming weeks.

Jack Eichel, Center, Buffalo Sabres

Backstory

In the interest of brevity, we won't unpack all of Jack Eichel's mostly disappointing run in Buffalo but suffice it to say that since the Sabres earned the consolation prize of the second pick in the Connor McDavid draft in 2015, Eichel and the Sabres have managed to play in zero playoff games. Eichel has played for three coaches in his short tenure in Buffalo and that number would be four had Eichel not been injured when Don Granato took over for Ralph Krueger midway through this season. The Buffalo captain is also on his third GM. Apart from the dismal organizational decisions that have helped make the Sabres a laughingstock, there is the ongoing dispute between Eichel and the Sabres over his treatment for a neck injury that limited him to 21 games this season. Last offseason, the first whispers regarding a possible trade emerged and now those whispers have turned into a full-throated scream. A number of sources we spoke to believe it's not if but when Eichel is dealt.

Trade Degree of Difficulty (Scale of 1-10, 10 being most difficult)

Burnside: 5 — Eichel has zero trade protection so rookie GM Kevyn Adams controls when, where and if he trades his top player. Well, sort of. Eichel is under contract at \$10 million annually for the next five years, which will limit trade options. And then there is the neck injury that cost Eichel half a season and which must be resolved before any deal is finalized. There is also the fact Adams doesn't have to trade Eichel so he can ask for the moon (which is apparently the case) and if he doesn't get it hope the relationship between player and team somehow repairs itself. But if sources are correct and both parties believe the only recourse in this marriage is annulment, well, the clock is ticking to what would be one of the biggest trades in recent NHL history.

Vogl: 6 — Normally, teams would be ringing Adams' phone nonstop and lining up with their offers. But things are rarely normal in Sabreland, and this is no different. Eichel has wanted to schedule an artificial disk replacement since suffering a neck injury in March. The organization says the procedure has never been done on an NHL player and it has no desire for its captain to be the guinea pig. Certainly, the Sabres are not alone in that anti-surgery stance, which cuts down the trade partners before even getting to salary, fit and talent. But Eichel's camp is convinced he'll be fine just two months after the surgery. And when healthy, Eichel is that good. He finished eighth in Hart Trophy voting



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during his last full season and was a three-time All-Star before that. The right trade partner is waiting regardless of the neck concerns.

Possible Destinations

Burnside: Basically any team looking to add a top-flight center should be in this discussion, so think Minnesota, the Rangers, Los Angeles, Anaheim and Columbus to start with. With Vegas' collapse against Montreal in the semifinals there is a lot of buzz that GM Kelly McCrimmon will try to address a deficiency down the middle and the team has assets that could be of interest to Buffalo starting with prospects like Cody Glass and Peyton Krebs and some solid young NHL-ready defenders like Nicolas Hague and Zach Whitecloud. Both Vegas and L.A. fit the bill for one longtime talent evaluator who feels Eichel needs to be around a strong veteran core. "Just sit the fuck down and behave and bring your 'A' game," the longtime NHL scout said. "I wouldn't want him driving the bus."

Vogl: Eichel trade talk started during the 2020 offseason with the Rangers, and they're still lingering. New York president and GM Chris Drury had the same agent as Eichel during his playing days, and they also share a Boston University connection. The Ducks can dangle the No. 3 pick while the Kings have the No. 8 selection and a group of prospects that makes Buffalo salivate. Vegas makes sense for all the reasons Scott mentioned. While there's certainly a team conducting clandestine talks, it'd be a surprise if Eichel lands anywhere but the bright lights of New York, Southern California or Las Vegas.

What Needs To Come Back?

Burnside: So many holes to fill for the Sabres and with the potential that Adams may have to deal both Eichel and restricted free agent Sam Reinhart, who has been the team's most consistent forward the past two seasons, there's going to be a couple of gaping holes in an already slight lineup. Still, it does feel like the team isn't trying to deal themselves into a '22 playoff race with assets from an Eichel deal but rather collect assets that can grow with a new young core of Rasmus Dahlin, Dylan Cozens and Jack Quinn and so on. So, start with a first-round pick and then build from there with a top NHL-ready player or two and a collection of picks/prospects. The Sabres could even sweeten the deal by bringing on some salary.

Vogl: When Eichel leaves, the Sabres will need a new face of the franchise, someone who'll get the beaten-down fan base excited. The first part of the trade has to include that energizing figure. It could be an elite prospect like the Kings' Quinton Byfield. It could be a young, proven skater like the Flames' Matthew Tkachuk. What it can't be is a middling mix of Patrik Berglund, Vladimir Sobotka and Tage Thompson, which is what the Sabres got for Ryan O'Reilly in 2018. The Sabres aren't winning next season. They might not win the year after that. But they want to be contenders by the time Dahlin and Cozens are 24 — which is Eichel's age now — so getting a few more players in their age range is a must.

End Result

Burnside: Kings — Spoke to a longtime scout and executive who believes the Los Angeles Kings have coveted Eichel for a long time and it's hard not to love the idea of Eichel growing into a star role in an important market behind iconic Kings players like Anze Kopitar and Drew Doughty. Plus, the Kings have the assets and it gets Eichel out of the conference which is an added bonus for the Sabres.

Vogl: Kings — It's always easy to find reasons why a trade won't work. That's certainly the case with the Kings. They've built a stable of young prospects who could put L.A. among the elite in a few years. Why toss away multiple pieces for one guy who may not be the same because of injury? Well, because it makes sense. Kopitar and Doughty might not have enough game left when those prospects mature. Bringing in Eichel improves the Kings immediately and lets them take advantage of their stars' final good seasons.

Backstory

The talent drain out of Columbus continues unabated, which we don't truly get but that's a story for another day. But credit cornerstone defender Seth Jones for informing the Blue Jackets in a timely fashion he does not plan to sign an extension as he enters the final year of his current deal. As a result, GM Jarmo Kekalainen will move the talented defenseman he acquired from Nashville for center Ryan Johansen in

January 2016. Kekalainen is also likely to move one of his two netminders, Joonas Korpisalo or Elvis Merzlikins, and there is also talk that Patrik Laine, a restricted free agent acquired in another forced blockbuster deal early in the 2020-21 season for Pierre-Luc Dubois, could also be on the block. All of these elements are connected as the team has to identify whether they are looking at trying to reset on the fly or go longer term in what would be a more formal rebuild. But it all starts with Jones.

Degree of Trade Difficulty

Burnside: 3 — Jones has one year left on his deal at a totally manageable \$5.4 million and a limited no-trade where, according to CapFriendly, he can identify 10 teams to which he will not be traded. Jones did not have a banner year with 28 points in 56 games but name one Blue Jackets player who did have a banner year. Even though his analytics numbers have declined and he ended up with a minus-18 plus/minus, scouts and managers still view the 26-year-old as a top-four defenseman and captain material. Columbus has made it clear they do not want to repeat the stressful dynamic of 2018-19 when pending UFAs Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin played out a full season knowing they were headed out the door without assets returning so Jones is going to be moved, just a matter of where and what kind of treasure trove of assets comes back.

Portzline: 2 — Jones, until recently, has been a consistent Norris Trophy candidate, but it's always been a fight to gain national attention because of his marketplace (Columbus) and that he's a two-way defenseman, not just a points generator. But very few NHL defensemen move across the blue line with Jones' fluidity. Very few are as smart and anticipate plays as well as he does. He can dial it up physically, too, and has done so in the playoffs, eating big minutes and becoming a heavy player. Jones has done the Blue Jackets a big favor in making his plans clear but he could do the Jackets another solid by making it clear which clubs he'd consider signing with on a long-term contract. Barring that, we'd expect any trade to include a conditional draft pick that would be turned over to the Jackets if Jones signs an extension with his new team.

Possible Destinations

Burnside: Jones' limited no-trade complicates the proceedings at least a little. For instance wouldn't Jones look good in a Winnipeg Jets jersey? Yes, he would. But would Jones be willing to go to Winnipeg? Well, that's another story altogether. Philadelphia is a team that has the assets to make such a deal and GM Chuck Fletcher is under pressure to add a top-four defenseman. Would Kekalainen prefer to move Jones out of the conference let alone the division? Of course. But the return is the key more so than the location. How about Colorado? Love the idea and we're guessing Jones would too even if GM Joe Sakic would have to do some serious juggling to make it happen. One veteran scout familiar with the Avs felt Colorado was exposed on the back end by Vegas in the playoffs and that Jones could become the missing piece to the Avs' as yet incomplete Stanley Cup puzzle.

Portzline: While not speaking directly about Jones, Kekalainen has always made it clear that he'll take the best offer in any trade talks. Put another way: if Philadelphia makes the best pitch for Jones, the 6-foot-4, 215-pounder will be a Flyer, even though the Blue Jackets and Flyers share space in the Metropolitan Division. Chicago is said to be interested in acquiring a top-notch defenseman this summer. Would Jones fit or does it make more sense for Chicago to pursue pending unrestricted free agent Dougie Hamilton? Colorado and Toronto have surfaced in rumors, too, but both of those clubs would need to clear significant salary to make it happen. The Blue Jackets could also be one of the few teams with salary-cap space under the flat-cap realities of next season and perhaps could sweeten a Jones deal by taking on a contract in exchange for a sweet draft pick or a hot prospect. This could go a lot of different ways.

What Needs To Come Back?

Burnside: Columbus has been looking for a franchise center since, well, since they dealt Johansen to Nashville for Jones. It's not necessarily a one-for-one proposition, though. Jones doesn't have to return an emerging NHL center although that would certainly be a tidy arrangement. But the assets Kekalainen obtains have to be significant enough that the Blue Jackets could turn around and at some point message them into a No. 1 center. Maybe that center is Eichel although we'll let Aaron address that. Certainly adding an established player like



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Eichel sends a different message vis a vis the Blue Jackets' long-term plan. But if the idea isn't to add for the coming season but for long term is a first-round pick and another later round pick, Alex Newhook and Samuel Girard enough to get a deal done with Colorado?

Portzline: The return of John Davidson to the organization as president of hockey operations has slammed the brakes on a quick reload. No more patching tires; the Blue Jackets seem poised to rebuild. Don't rule them out of the Eichel sweepstakes, but his neck injury is a major concern and the price tag required to acquire him is apparently outrageous. The return for Jones will be heavily shaded toward "futures" — top prospects, high picks and perhaps conditional picks. I wouldn't rule out a current NHL roster player being included, but that player won't likely be the biggest part of the return for Columbus.

End Result

Burnside: Avalanche — It won't be easy but the Avs are in win-now mode and need to address a lack of stability on the back end and Jones checks every box (sorry analytics people).

Portzline: Flyers — I could very well see that, Scotty B., because Denver is a place that's near and dear to Jones' heart. He might end up there long term. But I'm putting my loonies and toonies on the Flyers. Fletcher has done a poor job of containing his excitement ever since Jones' name hit the market earlier this summer. It feels like this is the move that defines Fletcher's summer.

Backstory

Let's start with the fact the talented center was our vote for playoff MVP when the Capitals won their first-ever Stanley Cup in 2018. Since then, though, it's been more rags than riches for Kuznetsov. There was a decline in play post-Cup, a positive test for cocaine at the 2019 World Championship which yielded a four-year international suspension and three-game suspension from the NHL. Then, this past season, he was scratched for being late to a team function, there were two trips to the COVID-19 protocol list and finally, a desultory three-game appearance in the playoffs where Kuznetsov did not register a point as the Capitals were bounced in the first round for the third straight season. To say the Caps are disgruntled with Kuznetsov's career arc is an understatement. One source familiar with the team put it this way: "he's a flake and a gamble."

Trade Degree of Difficulty

Burnside: 7 — Kuznetsov has, according to CapFriendly, a 15-team no-trade list and a \$7.8 million cap hit through 2024-25. If you're a team on Kuznetsov's list that kind of term isn't necessarily a bad thing. If he can get his act together. If he can't regain his form, well, that term suddenly looks like a prison sentence and there's no way to know which way this turns. Possible the Caps would have to end up eating some of Kuznetsov's salary if, indeed, they are determined to part ways.

El-Bashir: 9 — I suspect it's going to be difficult to move Kuznetsov for all of the reasons Scott laid out. Kuznetsov's missteps haven't gone unnoticed by the rest of the NHL. Nothing really egregious. Just enough for teams, including the Caps, to question his level of commitment. Here's another way to look at it: Considering all the baggage, the on-ice inconsistency and the flat cap, would a team sign Kuznetsov to a four-year, \$31.2 million deal today?

Possible Destinations

Burnside: Columbus is desperate for a No. 1 center. Minnesota needs someone to play with Kirill Kaprizov. Anaheim is also looking to redefine itself offensively. Our personal favorite is Vegas, where there has to be some reckoning after their entire forward corps disappeared in a six-game series loss to Montreal in the semifinals. And George McPhee, president of hockey operations in Vegas, drafted Kuznetsov while GM in Washington.

El-Bashir: Ottawa is in the market for a first-line center, too, which brings us back to the 15-team no-trade list. Although we don't know who's on it, we can be sure of this much: Players demand trade protection precisely for moments like these. Why would Kuznetsov, a 29-year-old who is married with kids and has spent the past eight seasons in Washington, accept a trade from a contender to a cellar dweller? Or to a city where he

does not want to live for the next four years? I don't think he does. Fans need to keep that in mind when mulling potential matches.

What Needs To Come Back?

Burnside: Talked to one source who felt it would be a victory for Washington to get out from under Kuznetsov's salary and his divisive presence. If that's the case mid- to late-round picks and a prospect or two might be enough. The real asset for the Caps is in the cap space. "So many options if he's gone," the source said.

El-Bashir: A big part of what's made the Caps so good for so long is their depth down the middle. Kuznetsov and Nicklas Backstrom are a great 1-2 punch. Meanwhile, Lars Eller remains one of the game's best third-line centers and Nic Dowd is a very good fourth-liner. Subtract Kuznetsov from that mix, though, and a strength suddenly becomes a question mark. Backstrom also turns 34 in November and was banged up at the season's end. So what are their options? The ideal scenario would be getting a first-line center back in the transaction. The not-ideal-but-potentially-workable scenario would be getting a middle-six center back and hoping that Backstrom, Eller, the new player and Dowd are good enough as a group. The Caps' No. 1 prospect, Connor McMichael, is a center and they've got big plans for him. But internally the 20-year-old isn't viewed as being ready to step into a full-time top-six role next season.

End Result

Burnside: Golden Knights — Love the idea of Kuznetsov in Vegas and believe, if he can regain his form, he might represent the missing Stanley Cup puzzle piece for the Golden Knights. And Kuznetsov might solve Vegas's center depth problem without costing key assets in the way that Eichel might.

El-Bashir: Capitals — The Caps were frustrated by Kuznetsov's season and disappointed by the way things ended. But first-line centers don't grow on trees and it's hard to imagine the Caps getting a fair return given everything we've discussed. In the end, I think GM Brian MacLellan has some conversations and kicks some tires but ultimately stands pat.

Backstory

Where to start with a Flames team that continues to sink beneath the surface of relevancy in spite of its talent and promise? Two years ago, the Flames were the top team in the Western Conference and got bounced by eighth seed Colorado. In the bubble of 2020, they beat a decimated Winnipeg Jets team in the play-in round and then let a series against eventual Stanley Cup finalist Dallas get away from them after an injury to Matthew Tkachuk. This season? Out of the playoffs in spite of acquiring top free-agent goaltender Jacob Markstrom. The Flames have won one best-of-seven playoff round since advancing to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final in 2004. One. GM Brad Treliving can't simply roll the dice again with this core. Can he? One longtime NHL player and scout believes there is serious internal discussion about moving on from at least one core piece which is why we've identified Johnny Gaudreau because the Flames have good depth on the wings, especially the left side.

Trade Degree of Difficulty

Burnside: 5 — One of the reasons that the Flames might be considering moving Gaudreau — apart from the fact that he has shown little ability to elevate his game in critical moments — is that he has a limited no-trade that allows him to identify five potential trade partners that kicks in before the start of free agency on July 28. So, the timing of any potential deal is critical. Getting ahead of his no-trade clause will allow the Flames to take full advantage that Gaudreau, who has expressed a desire to remain with the Flames, has one more year left on his deal at a manageable \$6.75 million. And for all of the disappointments, Gaudreau remains in his prime at 27 and in 2018-19 had 99 points. So finding suitors shouldn't be difficult.

Salvian: 5 — It's been well documented that if the Flames are going to move on from Gaudreau, it should be before his five-team trade list kicks in this summer. And I agree with that. Ideally, the approach with Gaudreau this summer is to either re-sign him or trade him rather than risk watching him walk away as a UFA in the summer of '22.



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Talk of changing up the core is nothing new around Calgary, and certainly not after another disappointing season. However, flipping one of your steadiest point-producers just so you can say you've overhauled your core makes little sense. Of course, a return that would actually improve this team would be welcomed, but I'm not sure if Gaudreau's current value — two years removed from his 99-point season — pulls that kind of return. All that said, I agree with you Scott.

Possible Destinations

Burnside: Sounds counterintuitive to suggest a guy that hasn't responded well to pressure situations go to a place where they are this close to being a Cup champ but I think Gaudreau would be a good fit with the Islanders and Barry Trotz especially if they end up moving on from Kyle Palmieri. The Isles need to get a little more dynamic especially on the wing. And after a slow start Gaudreau did come around under head coach Darryl Sutter, who replaced Geoff Ward in early March. Gaudreau, from New Jersey, would help an emerging Devils team but they're looking to get bigger on the wings and back end so not sure that's a fit. But what about another hometown team in Philadelphia? The Flyers are in the market for a difference-making defenseman but Gaudreau would certainly look good in the top six and the Flyers might be interested in moving D-man Shayne Gostisbehere, which could be a fit. And what about Anaheim, where the Ducks need to find some scoring oomph to help accelerate their reboot? And new assistant Ward knows Gaudreau well from their time in Calgary.

Salvian: This is always a big guessing game but the one landing spot I always go back to is Philadelphia. In April, I did one of our "Who says no" trade proposal stories and the most popular proposal was Gaudreau for Travis Konecny, which is intriguing for both sides.

Konecny didn't take the step the Flyers hoped he would this season after a solid 2019-20 campaign. However, Konecny is only 24 — four years younger than Gaudreau — and a right-shot right winger, which is a big hole in Calgary that he could fill. This could be a shake it up trade for both Calgary and Philadelphia. As an aside, Gostisbehere would be intriguing, especially if the Flames were to lose captain Mark Giordano to Seattle in expansion, as that would leave a massive hole on the left side of the blue line. The question with all of the potential landing spots is: Are these teams comfortable trading for Gaudreau when they could have a shot at him in free agency in 2022?

What Needs To Come Back?

Burnside: If the point of this exercise is for Calgary to tinker with a key part or two in the hopes of finding the elusive playoff combination as we've seen teams like St. Louis and Washington do successfully in recent years then maybe it's not what comes back in assets so much as what you do with the key asset of cap space. For instance, if getting a package of picks and prospects from an acquiring team for Gaudreau allows the Flames to sign a free agent who can play in the top six and help the power play like Mike Hoffman or two-time Cup champ Brandon Saad that should be — or could be — a net gain which is the point, right?

Salvian: It may sound obvious but at the end of the day the Flames need to make moves this offseason to improve their team.

This is where a Gaudreau move gets tricky. For everything said about his decline in play or disappointing seasons (and playoffs), the Flames struggled to consistently score goals and generate offense this season, and Gaudreau led the team in goals (19) and points (49). He's arguably still the club's most dynamic player. I like your idea about using this trade to clear cap space to get a meaningful player on the open market. However, unless you're getting a better player or a package that takes you to the next level in return, doesn't trading Gaudreau make you worse?

End Result

Burnside: Ducks — Talked to a longtime NHLer and talent evaluator familiar with the North Division. He believes there has been an obvious decline in Gaudreau's effectiveness. "But when he's on his game he's a very dynamic guy that makes a lot happen offensively or with the puck," he said. "But it just feels like the league has figured him out a little bit. Personally, I would move (Sean) Monahan." Honestly, I'm not sure there's the will in Calgary to make these kinds of moves even as it seems

critical that the Flames do something. But if it happens I like Anaheim GM Bob Murray to get in on the talented winger.

Salvian: Flames — It's hard to disagree with what the former NHLer said there. Monahan is probably a likely trade target this year, with many teams in need of a center this summer. And when Gaudreau is on his game, there aren't many players who can create at his level, which is what makes the idea of losing him so difficult for fans. I'm in the camp that would like to see Gaudreau back in Calgary. This is a difficult one to predict. I could realistically see Gaudreau moved in the next month, mostly due to that pesky modified no-trade clause. For now, I'll go with a gut feeling, and say he stays.

Backstory

Last offseason the Coyotes explored whether they might move on from their captain and highest-paid player, Oliver Ekman-Larsson. Ekman-Larsson, through his agent Kevin Epp, responded with a two-team list of potential destinations: Vancouver and Boston. With a full no-move clause such as Ekman-Larsson's right and when a deadline established by the player and agent passed without a deal those talks were tabled. Ekman-Larsson, 29, played 46 games last season collecting 26 points and delivering disappointing advanced stats along with a minus-17 plus/minus. Ekman-Larsson told Craig Morgan of AZ Coyotes Insider that the effort to move him impacted his confidence. Now it appears the Coyotes would like to revisit a possible trade and that Ekman-Larsson is more amenable to being moved which, in theory, will open up the options for Arizona GM Bill Armstrong.

Trade Degree of Difficulty

Burnside: 8 — Lots of moving parts that will make facilitating a trade very difficult. First, Ekman-Larsson's contract carries an \$8.25 million cap hit through 2026-27. Also, he's owed \$10.5 million in real dollars for the next three seasons. His actual salary goes down to \$5.25 million in the final two years of the deal but no matter how you slice it that's a lot of weight to move when it comes to actual dollars. Then there's his declining level of play. Finally, the no-move clause means that even if Ekman-Larsson is open to moving he still holds all the cards when it comes to finding a new home for the veteran defender who was the No. 6 pick in 2009.

Drance: 10 — The difficulty of making this deal has been ramped up by Ekman-Larsson's struggles last season, in stark contrast with the rise of his teammate Jakob Chychrun. Now Ekman-Larsson is seen around the league as a player you're gambling on to bounce back, a big bet to place considering his contract represents a \$40 million salary liability over the life of the deal. It isn't just that Ekman-Larsson's performance makes this deal more complicated this summer. Honestly, it's difficult to escape the impression that the Coyotes missed the boat here as they paid Ekman-Larsson a \$4 million signing bonus last offseason and still couldn't get a deal done. This is a trade that was probably a 7 last season even with a shorter list of teams that Ekman-Larsson was willing to be dealt to, as opposed to what it is now a full 10 in my opinion.

Possible Destinations

Burnside: Boston was interested as they'd like a top-four left-hand shot defender and may remain so assuming Arizona eats as much as half of the outstanding monies owed. Our pal Craig Morgan wondered aloud at a possible fit in Edmonton where Ekman-Larsson could reunite with former coach Dave Tippett. If the Oilers move on from Tyson Barrie (who is a right-hand shot pending UFA) maybe there's a way to make that work especially if the Coyotes not only eat some of Ekman-Larsson's salary but took on one of the Oilers' onerous deals like James Neal. In recent days the Oilers have been linked to veteran Chicago defender Duncan Keith so lots of moving parts to the Oilers option. The reality is that unless a team believes wholeheartedly that Ekman-Larsson can return to being an elite defender with the confidence to make plays, contribute to the power play and log big minutes, the contract makes acquiring Ekman-Larsson an enormous risk.

Drance: Edmonton makes a ton of sense. I can't really see Boston as a fit, unless the Coyotes retain a ton of money. The Bruins' need on the left side is obvious, but they're going to have better options and the cap flexibility to pounce on them. Perhaps Vancouver could revisit things too if the Coyotes lowered their demands significantly from the last time out and also took some of Vancouver's bad money back. The club still likes



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the player, even if there was some frustration on both sides with how the non-deal played out.

What Needs To Come Back?

Burnside: This isn't an assets trade. The Coyotes recently hired highly regarded junior and international coach Andre Tourigny as their new head coach, signaling a trend to a more youthful Coyotes roster. So, whatever cap space is created by moving Ekman-Larsson is the key here. Even if Arizona has to take on another unhealthy contract or toss in a late-round pick or mid-range prospect this is all about short-term pain for long-term gain as GM Bill Armstrong tries to chart a course back to respectability for the beleaguered franchise.

Drance: Scott is dead on, but this is too bad for Arizona because the Coyotes were asking for a ton last season and missed a relatively unique opportunity to offload this contract. Now, just nine months later, we're all in agreement that any Ekman-Larsson trade will solely return cap space? Tough place for the Coyotes and their second-year general manager to be in.

End Result

Burnside: Coyotes — As one longtime scout familiar with the Coyotes put it, Ekman-Larsson simply isn't an elite defender anymore. "You can't take this guy with that kind of load," he said referencing Ekman-Larsson's contract. Best case scenario seems to be that Ekman-Larsson is rejuvenated with a new coaching staff in Arizona and the team can return to a possible trade next offseason when the cost and the hence the exposure for another team declines at least some.

Drance: Coyotes — The flat cap just makes it so difficult to solve big money, big cap space problems like this one for Arizona. There just isn't enough flexibility in the system to lubricate this kind of trade. Unless Arizona accepts that they'll be taking some inefficient short-term money back in any deal, eating some salary in retention in the deal and getting little of hockey value back, there's no chance this deal happens. At this juncture, it will take a salary cap Houdini quality escape for the Coyotes to move this deal.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.08.2021

1190324 Websites

The Athletic / What to expect from NHL Draft-eligible prospect Dylan Guenther

By Corey Pronman

Jul 7, 2021

I want to highlight the Edmonton Oil Kings' Dylan Guenther, my No. 2 prospect for the 2021 NHL Draft, and discuss why, in my mind, he has somewhat distinguished himself as the top forward prospect in the draft class.

The videos below will show a player who doesn't have one attribute that's truly elite but does a lot very well.

Here is my latest mock draft so you can see the analysis behind Guenther's potential landing spot.

Skating

Guenther's skating isn't the main thing that draws me to him, but it is a strong point of his game that looks NHL-quality. That he grew over the last year from 6 feet to nearly 6-foot-2 and still looks quick is a positive.

Puck skills

Guenther is a very able forward who can make skilled rushes at a quick pace, generating a lot of controlled zone entries. That combination will help him beat NHL defenders one-on-one.

He has great offensive-zone creativity and can create space for himself because of his combination of speed and skill.

Shot

Guenther is mainly known as a goal scorer. His shot doesn't jump out at you like, say, Alexander Holtz's or Cole Caufield's in recent drafts, but it is a very good shot. He can pick corners from midrange.

He can beat goalies from a long way away.

He's also a versatile player in how he uses shots, with a great wrist shot and one-timer. Plus, he knows how to use screens well.

Compete level

Guenther's talent and production draw you to him. But it's his work ethic that makes me believe he has the most potential of any forward in this draft class. Guenther isn't an overly physical player, but he creates a lot of havoc with his compete level. He attacks the net and generates a lot of turnovers.

He's a strong defensive forward who penalty killed for Edmonton and Canada's U18 team and can create offense off his defensive play.

He works on the backcheck and forecheck, using his speed and effort to be first on pucks.

Vision

Guenther is primarily a shoot-first type, but he is a good passer as well who can make tough passes to create chances.

He can make unique distributions, such as this one, where he pops it from the boards to an open player in front:

On the power play, Guenther is a threat because of his shot, but he's able to make seam passes to create for his teammates as well.

Production

Here is the production of some top-10 picks in their respective NHL drafts from the WHL as compared with Guenther in his draft year:

The sample on Guenther is obviously an issue because of his shortened WHL season. His production would have likely regressed over a full season. How much? Who can really know? Maybe it comes down to 1.75 points per game, 1.60, 1.50 or fewer.

We can use that same group of players but only look at their underage seasons with a more similar number of games:

It still reflects well on Guenther, although the production looks more realistic in this grouping, which is to be expected.

What the hockey world is saying

NHL scout: "There's a lot to like about this player. He's a great skater. He's very skilled. He can score a lot of goals. He's not going to run people over, but he's a worker. He knows where he needs to give a little extra to win a race or create pressure."

NHL scout: "There's no denying the talent, no denying the scoring touch and his production. I wonder if in the NHL he's a primary driver of a line, or is he more a secondary guy who needs a top center to create the offense?"

NHL scout: "The way he plays in Edmonton is not the way he played for Canada's U18 team. There was a lot of deferral to Shane Wright at that tournament. In the WHL, he's the guy with the puck. He makes things happen."

Dave Barr, Canada's U18 coach: "He's got a great stick, he has a great shot and he skates well. He's an excellent player."

Projection

Guenther is a little boring for a No. 2-ranked prospect. Kent Johnson has more skill. Matthew Beniers has better compete. Luke Hughes is a better skater. What Guenther does do, though — and those three players do not — is check every box. His skating, skill, vision, shot, size and compete are all NHL-quality, projecting as NHL average or better in every aspect. This is rare in a prospect. He combines that with



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production in his draft season and underage season, which is very impressive. His U18 worlds were good, not great, lacking spectacular moments that get one excited, but he still led the gold medal-winning team in ice time, playing all situations.

He is a player, because of the combination of his tools and consistency, whom I can see as a top-line NHL forward. He's the forward prospect who has the best chance of anyone in the 2021 NHL Draft to become a star, playing a type of game similar to Andrei Svechnikov even if the two are not directly comparable skill-set-wise.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.08.2021

1190325 Websites

The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Who wins, an all-time roster of stars with no Cups or stars who won Cups with multiple teams?

By Sean McIndoe

Jul 7, 2021

With a new set of names soon to be engraved on the Stanley Cup and the offseason looming, let's kill some time with a roster challenge.

How about this one: Who wins, a team made up of guys who never won the Stanley Cup or guys who won Stanley Cups with multiple teams?

Let's start with the obvious. By setting the rules like this, we're wiping out the vast majority of NHL stars. That's the beauty of it. By definition, we lose all the guys who only ever played for one franchise, like Mario Lemieux, Nicklas Lidstrom, Joe Sakic or Denis Potvin. We lose everyone who only won a single Cup, like Ray Bourque, Teemu Selanne, Brian Leetch and Luc Robitaille. And we lose anyone on the surprisingly long list of players who played for multiple teams and won multiple Cups but only ever got a ring with a single team, including Wayne Gretzky, Dominik Hasek, Bobby Orr and Jaromir Jagr.

Who's left? Enough to make two pretty good rosters, although it won't be easy. Then again, why would we do this if it was?

But first, a few ground rules. We'll limit this to the modern era, which is to say post-1967, and when in doubt we'll lean toward more recent Stars. We'll try to keep position in mind, although we'll assume that some of the best players in history can shift around if we need them to. We're disqualifying any active player from the "no Cups" roster; if they're still playing, it's not fair to say that they won't win a Cup. And we're obviously only looking at Cups won as a player, without worrying about any rings a guy may have earned as a coach or executive.

Makes sense? Cool, let's make up some fake rosters to argue about.

First line

There's no surprise on who's heading up the top unit on Team No Cup. It's the same name that always shows up on these lists: Marcel Dionne, one of the greatest offensive players of all time but a guy who never made it out of the second round. We'll make him captain, and we'll give him two of my personal favorite players on his wings in Jarome Iginla and Paul Kariya. That's three Hall of Famers and about 1,750 goals. Not a bad start.

Can Team Multi-Cup match them? They can get off to a solid start down the middle with their own captain in Mark Messier, who had Cups with the Oilers and Rangers and (checks notes) not the Canucks. Let's put Brett Hull on one wing, thanks to Cup wins in Dallas and Detroit, and hope nobody's manning the replay review booth.

As always, left-wingers are tough to find, especially since six-time champ Frank Mahovlich just misses our post-expansion cutoff based on his last Toronto title coming in 1967. But we can at least give them a winger who shot left, as Mark Recchi joins Team Multi-Cup's top line thanks to rings

earned in Pittsburgh, Carolina and Boston. That gives us a top line that accounts for roughly 4,800 points.

Three players per roster into this, and it's too close to call. Team Multi-Cup has slightly better numbers, but I kind of want to see Team No Cup in action a little more. Let's call it even and move onto the second lines.

Second line

Team No Cup still has plenty of options, but I'm going to give this line a mid-90s focus. We'll start with a pair of players who had a ton of real-life success together, as we put Adam Oates at center and give him Cam Neely on his wing. Will it make Oates sad to see Hull on the other side? Maybe, but I'm guessing he'll be OK, especially when he looks over on his other wing and sees converted center Eric Lindros. How much room do you think a finesse guy like Oates would get with Lindros and Neely running around out there? The answer: All the room.

Team Multi-Cup has an elite option available down the middle, as Bryan Trottier makes the team thanks to four Cups with the Islanders dynasty and two more with the early-90s Penguins. We'll give him another six-time champ on one wing, as Glenn Anderson's late-season trade to the 1994 Rangers pays off. And we'll round out the line with Joey Mullen, who won with Trottier in Pittsburgh after already earning a ring in Calgary with the 1989 Flames.

Trottier's the best player from this group, but I think Team No Cup has the more dangerous threesome. We'll give them an edge as we move on to the bottom six.

Third line

The hits just keep on coming for Team No Cup, who have an embarrassment of riches still available to them. For example, let's build a third line out of Mike Gartner, Dale Hawerchuk and Gilbert Perreault. Just a quick 1,700 goals and 4,000 points to toss over the boards when the top six need a breather. No big deal.

By contrast, Team Multi-Cups is losing steam. We can still put a 500-goal man down the middle with Joe Nieuwendyk, who won with the 1989 Flames, 1999 Stars and 2003 Devils. But the pickings are getting slim on the wings, where I'll have to settle for Claude Lemieux (Habs, Devils and Avs) and Brad Richards (Lightning and Blackhawks). Two very good players, and maybe even borderline Hall candidates to some eyes, but there's really no contest with what Team No Cup is putting out there. This is starting to get away from Team Multi-Cups.

Fourth line

The sheer volume of talent still available for Team No Cup is getting silly. We're not even going to use Pat LaFontaine, Darryl Sittler, Mats Sundin, Michel Goulet, Bernie Federko or Peter Stastny, although you could easily swap any of those guys onto the roster and I wouldn't complain. Instead, I'm going to offer a gift to a fan base that could use some positivity these days by building out a Canucks super-line of Pavel Bure with Henrik and Daniel Sedin. That's clearly a better unit than Team Multi-Cups' third line, and maybe even better than their second. Team No Cup is just stacked.

Team Multi-Cups can't compete here, although they do get to start their fourth unit with a Hall of Famer in Guy Carbonneau, who won with the 1986 and 1993 Habs and again with the 1999 Stars. He was known as a checker, and he's going to have to be for this team. We'll give him a 50-goal power forward in Adam Graves (Oilers and Rangers), and finish the line with Justin Williams (Hurricanes and Kings) just in case this goes seven games.

Team Multi-Cups is icing some solid players, but there's really no contest here. Team No Cup has the better forwards, by a little in the top six and by a lot on the depth lines. This might not be as close a battle as I was hoping for, as Team Multi-Cups will have to make up some ground on defense if they want to have any shot.

First pairing

Team No Cup continues to impress, adding two more big names to anchor the blue line. They'll take Brad Park and Borje Salming, a pair of '70s stars who never managed to get their names on the Cup. Park had a few trips to the final with New York and Boston but always fell short, while Salming played for the Maple Leafs so you do the math.



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That's an imposing pairing for Team Multi-Cup, who need to make up some ground after losing the forward battle. But they respond nicely, as they can offer up two of the very best of the '80s and '90s in Chris Chelios and Paul Coffey. Chelios earned his rings with the Habs and Red Wings, while Coffey hoisted the Cup for the Oilers and Penguins (and also came close with the Red Wings and Flyers).

This is a tough call that spans a couple of different eras. Park and Salming were easy Hall of Fame picks, but neither won a Norris — thanks, Bobby Orr — while Coffey and Chelios combined for six. I think we have to give the edge here to Team Multi-Cup, who'll need to keep that momentum going as we round out our blue lines.

Second pairing

For the first time, Team No Cup is starting to struggle to find truly elite names, although they can still land some Hall of Fame talent in Mark Howe and Phil Housley. Neither won a Norris, and both had to wait for induction, but they're in now, so Team No Cup's HHOF streak continues. The door is open for Team Multi-Cup, though. Can they take advantage?

I think they can, as they offer up a pairing of Scott Niedermayer and Larry Murphy. Niedermayer won two Cups and a Norris in New Jersey before adding another Cup and a Conn Smythe in Anaheim. Murphy didn't collect as much personal hardware but did win back-to-back Cups with both the Penguins and Red Wings, and I think Team Multi-Cup takes another win here.

Third pairing

Team No Cup can add another Hall of Famer in Doug Wilson, who also claimed a Norris. But as best I can tell, this is where their all-HHOF run will end. Of the 26 Hall of Fame defensemen whose careers lasted into our post-expansion era, the only remaining ones without a Cup are Harry Howell and Leo Boivin, who both played the vast majority of their careers before our timeframe, and Pat Quinn, who was elected as a builder, not a player. That doesn't mean Team No Cup can't find a good player to round out the blue line, though. We could consider names like Kevin Hatcher, Andrei Markov and Roman Hamrlik, but let's go with the only eligible Norris winner who isn't in the Hall and put Randy Carlyle on the team. (Remember, Carlyle's win as coach of the Ducks doesn't count.)

Meanwhile, Team Multi-Cups can keep rolling out Hall of Famers, although just barely. We still haven't used Sergei Zubov, who won with the 1994 Rangers and 1999 Stars, so he's an easy call. And since our post-expansion cutoff means we can't use legendary eight-time winner Red Kelly, we'll give our last spot to Kevin Lowe, another member of the Oilers dynasty who stuck around to win with the Rangers. Should Lowe be in the Hall of Fame? That's a debate for another time, but having a stay-at-home guy on the third pairing should work well here.

I think that's another win for Team Multi-Cups, who sweep the blue line categories and may have erased a good chunk of Team No Cup's advantage earned up front. This one's tightening up as we head to the goaltenders.

Let's start the Team No Cup section with a tough call: Do we consider Henrik Lundqvist to be an active player? If not, he's clearly going to be one of our two goalies. He's 39, didn't play at all last year and is coming off major heart surgery, so it's not hard to read the writing on the wall for one of the cap era's greatest players. But he hasn't announced his retirement, and the optimist in me would love to see him come back for one more run. Legends deserve to go out on their own terms, so we'll let The King tell us when he's done. He hasn't yet, which means Team No Cup loses out on a star.

We run into another question with Tony Esposito. The longtime Blackhawks starter was a rookie backup on the 1969 Canadiens, but never saw the ice during their playoff run. Does that count? Not according to his hockey-reference page, but I think they're wrong. Esposito's name is on the Cup, so I can't put him on this team.

With two top candidates out of the running, Team No Cup fans might be getting worried. But they still have some options, including Hall of Famer Ed Giacomin. I did say I was going to lean toward the modern era, so let's give the goaltending spots to Roberto Luongo and Curtis Joseph. Neither won a Vezina, but they combined for nearly 950 wins, and there haven't been many guys in the modern era who were significantly better.

There are a few, though, and one of them qualifies for Team Multi-Cups, as Patrick Roy earns our starter's job thanks to four Cups split between the Canadiens and Avalanche. The second spot gets tricky, as our timeframe means we can't use Terry Sawchuk (Wings and Leafs). I don't see any HHOF options, so I'm going to have a bit of fun with our backup slot. Hey Patrick, make some room for Mike Vernon, who won with the 1989 Flames and 1997 Red Wings. I believe you two may have met?

The goaltending is a close one. Roy's pretty clearly the best of the four, but you could argue that Luongo and Joseph might be a better overall combo, especially after Roy and Vernon are done bloodying each other. I'm still going to give the nod to Team Multi-Cups, who continue to hold an edge on the back end.

What, you thought we were done?

We usually would be, but this sort of exercise feels like it's calling out for a coach and GM slot. So let's do that, keeping in mind that we're only looking at Cups won in a particular role — championships from playing days or different jobs won't count. That's going to turn out to be important in the next paragraph.

For Team No Cup, it's probably not surprising that my best picks behind the bench are a couple of former Leafs coaches. I was originally leaning toward Pat Quinn, who could make a case for GM duties as well. But I think I'll go with Roger Neilson, a brilliant innovator and who took the 1982 Canucks to the final but never got any further. He'll report to Harry Sinden, who was the Bruins' GM for 28 years and guided them to five finals without ever seeing them win it all. Sinden did win a Cup as Bruins coach in 1970, so we'll make him leave his ring at home before showing up for work. (But if you insist that a coaching Cup should disqualify him, we'll have Bryan Murray on standby, and David Poile ready to step in the moment he retires.)

For Team Multi-Cups, I've got fewer options than you might think, especially once our timeframe takes Dick Irvin and Tommy Gorman off the board. But it doesn't matter, because we only need one coach and the most obvious pick on the board is right there for us: Scotty Bowman, who won with the Habs, Penguins and Red Wings. His boss in the front office will be Jim Rutherford, who won with the 2006 Hurricanes and again with the Penguins in 2016 and 2017.

We've got four extremely accomplished names here, plus a few more available if we need them. But with all due respect to the others, Bowman is the best coach in NHL history, so he gives Team Multi-Cups a big boost.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.08.2021

1190326 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Forged by disappointment, Lightning ride out every storm to win Stanley Cup

Chris Johnston @reporterchris

July 7, 2021, 11:37 PM

TAMPA, Fla. — Go figure that a team known as the Lightning would become the NHL's best at riding out a storm.

Whether it was Hurricane Elsa, a do-or-die Game 7 or a magical run by the Montreal Canadiens, nothing could knock the Tampa Bay Lightning off course in their pursuit of a second-straight Stanley Cup.

They went from kings of the Edmonton bubble to back-to-back champions in just 282 days, by far the shortest span between Stanley Cup victories by one NHL organization.

No one handled the unique pandemic challenges better. No one reacted more favourably to unpredictable circumstances. The Lightning blistered through eight playoff rounds with a 32-13 record — not so much as losing consecutive games in the process.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"It's so hard to win the Stanley Cup. And then you do it two years in a row, you deserve to go down in history," said Lightning captain Steven Stamkos. "And this group, no matter what happens from here on out, this group is going to be etched in history forever and that's pretty effing special."

"I'm so proud of the guys."

Remaining Time -9:06

Lightning raise Stanley Cup after beating Canadiens in Game 5

Tampa overwhelmed the Canadiens in the Final, completely smothering them Wednesday while clinching their fifth-straight playoff series with a shutout: 1-0.

That was enough for Andrei Vasilevskiy to secure the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP following a run where he finished with a league-best .937 save percentage and five shutouts.

"If he played in a different market, he would win the Vezina every year," said Nikita Kucherov.

The winning goal came courtesy of two players who didn't lift the Cup in September, with trade deadline pickup David Savard firing a perfect pass to rookie Ross Colton at the edge of Carey Price's crease.

Just like in the 1-0 win over the New York Islanders in Game 7 last round, that was all they needed.

"The biggest thing we didn't talk about publicly, is the team knows we're probably not going to be back together next year," said Lightning coach Jon Cooper. "That was the conversation: 'Don't let this end, it's too special of a group.'"

"They weren't going to go out without raising a trophy."

This was night-and-day from the scene at Rogers Place on Sept. 28. Gary Bettman looked around the packed stands at Amalie Arena and said it was a sign things had returned to normal before Stamkos and his teammates came to accept the Cup.

Then every player took a full lap and soaked it in while passing the trophy from Stamkos to Victor Hedman to Savard to Alex Killorn to Ryan McDonagh to Pat Maroon to Kucherov to Vasilevskiy.

"I'm so happy. I didn't want to go back to Montreal," said Kucherov. "The fans in Montreal, come on. They acted like they won the Stanley Cup last game. Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? Their Final was last series, OK?"

The Lightning forged their mettle from disappointment. They were swept out of the first round by the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2019 after tying an NHL record with a 62-win season, prompting general manager Julien BriseBois to make roster moves that sharpened the edges around his sterling core.

Then they ruthlessly picked apart opponents while reeling off two straight championships. Bad bounces or injuries like the one that knocked Killorn out of the Cup Final didn't introduce any doubt.

"I think it's just the calm inside the room," said Savard, ironically a former member of that Blue Jackets team. "I think there's never ever some panic. I think no matter what happens, we stay focused."

"You learn from guys who have been through that road."

The Lightning didn't blink after missing a chance to eliminate the Islanders in Game 6, or after failing to complete a sweep of the Canadiens in Game 4 at the Bell Centre. They just continued to prioritize process over results — a message Cooper hammered home repeatedly.

They also wrapped their arms around the chance to become just the second NHL team in two decades to go back-to-back, openly acknowledging that salary cap challenges will force BriseBois to make some tough roster decisions this summer.

Tampa was only spared from that reality ahead of this season because of Kucherov's December hip surgery, which forced Kucherov to sit out the entire 56-game schedule before returning for Game 1 of the playoffs.

They finished third in the Central Division without him, forcing them to open a first-round series with Florida on the road.

"We had so much uncertainty," said Cooper. "Anybody can say what they want, but when you take the most dynamic offensive player out of your lineup, and say, 'Hey you're going to still make the playoffs' — you're not so sure about that all the time."

Once they welcomed Kucherov back and got into the comfort of the post-season they found their legs. Kucherov led all scorers for the second-straight year, finishing with 32 points.

"I don't know how anyone can miss the entire regular season, come back and do what he did," said Blake Coleman. "He deserves all the credit."

Brayden Point also had another standout run and fell one game short of matching an NHL record by scoring in nine-straight games. Stamkos, limited to just five shifts and one memorable goal during the bubble Cup, was a full participant this time around and contributed eight goals.

The Coleman-Yanni Gourde-Barclay Goodrow line was a tone-setter, and Coleman provided a memorable dagger by diving to meet the puck and score with one second left in the second period of a Game 2 that Montreal had been dominating.

"It was a tough season playing against the same teams over and over again, but the closer we got to the playoffs, it felt like our game really came together and then the playoffs started and it was just like we picked up where we left off last last post-season," said Victor Hedman.

This second Stanley Cup might have been even sweeter.

They clinched it in front of a frothing Amalie Arena crowd that included 200 friends and family members after doing it in the quiet of Rogers Place in September. There'll almost certainly be another championship boat parade to celebrate in the days ahead. And this summer the Cup is expected to travel again, potentially giving players the chance to bring it to their hometowns after getting individual days in the Tampa area last fall.

Even after winning it once, the Lightning remained hungry.

"You can't soak it in yet," said Stamkos. "It's so fresh. It's so new. You don't even realize what's going to happen. We won the Stanley Cup and we still have the Stanley Cup. That's just amazing."

The rainbow on the other side of the storm.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 07.08.2021

1190327 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / From the painful end of Canadiens' fabled run, a future champion may emerge

Eric Engels @EricEngels

July 8, 2021, 1:52 AM

TAMPA, Fla. — This is pain. The deep-cutting, searing kind that leaves scars. Scars that will never heal.

But that's not all the Montreal Canadiens are left with after this fabled run through the playoffs left them three wins away from lifting their 25th Stanley Cup. It may feel like it's all they've got on this night, with the Tampa Bay Lightning — back-to-back champions — celebrating across from them after a 1-0 win in Game 5, but this group still gained something in all of this.

The Canadiens were the 18th-ranked team in the NHL. A group their coach, Dominique Ducharme, said the rest of the world took for idiots for believing in themselves before stamping their ticket as last entrant into the playoffs. They weren't David to Goliath; they were David's scrawny



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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kid brother — the longest of longshots to go anywhere, let alone to the Final.

But the Canadiens defied the odds and played their hearts out.

"They bled, they fought, they never quit," said Ducharme after revealing captain Shea Weber played all 22 games with a busted thumb, that Jeff Petry played the final two series with damaged fingers, that Tyler Toffoli sustained a groin injury and that Brendan Gallagher also had one, "and more."

Several more Canadiens played banged up and played all out to lift Montreal out of its darkest hour. From down 3-1 against the Toronto Maple Leafs and left for dead in Round 1, to trouncing the Winnipeg Jets in a sweep before conquering a juggernaut Vegas Golden Knights team and, ultimately, succumbing to a truly special Lightning team, they united a city forced into division by the pandemic. They brought everyone out to the streets in celebration, until all hours of the night, after they were all under lock and key for months on end.

This result will be something the Canadiens want to forget, but the process they underwent created memories that will last a lifetime.

But that's not all.

This run may have given birth to a future champion — especially when you consider who helped drive it. There was 21-year-old Nick Suzuki right at the helm, leading the Canadiens in goals (seven) and points (16) in the playoffs for the second time in his two-year career.

Cole Caufield, 20, rode shotgun on his line and came up with four goals and 12 points in his first 20 playoff games. His professional career is months old, with 32 games between the AHL and NHL regular seasons and these playoffs under his belt.

Jesper Kotkaniemi may have three seasons and two playoff runs under his belt, but he just turned 21 on Tuesday. He may have sat out the first game against Toronto and the last two against Tampa, but he's gained the type of experience players 10 years older than him haven't.

Even the sparingly used Alex Romanov grew by leaps and bounds. The 21-year-old's first year in this league will only help him fulfill his promise as a future top-pairing defenceman.

Just think about who he learned from on this stage. Think about the lessons he took from Weber, Petry, Ben Chiarot and Joel Edmundson — four pillars at the position who played like warriors.

Suzuki, Caufield, Kotkaniemi and 24-year-old centre Jake Evans flew under the wings of triple gold members Corey Perry and Eric Staal. They all grew together, suffered this heartache together and must take something out of it together.

"From every tough playoff loss I've had, I felt like I've learned something," said an inconsolable Gallagher. "We have a lot of young guys who are going to be a key part of this team moving forward, and as painful as this is right now, sometimes you need to feel this to be able to call yourself a champion. I wish it wasn't the case, but maybe this is the journey we needed. It stings for sure, but you take more from a loss than you do from a win. And if we're able to learn from this experience, maybe the positive is that we can be better off.

"Right now, I don't know what to tell you. It stings."

There's no turning away from that part of it.

The 35-year-old Weber had never been past the second round of the playoffs before captaining the Canadiens to this Final. Perry and Staal, who consistently reinforced to their teammates how rare and special opportunities to play in the playoffs are, may never come this close again to earning another Cup.

They're 36, without contracts for next season, and each of them are well over 10 years removed from their last championship.

Carey Price is three years younger and 14 years into a career that's seen him win everything but a Cup. The superstar goaltender came into the playoffs having missed the final 13 games of the regular season with a concussion, and he turned in miracles to get the Canadiens into position to play the Lightning.

They proved formidable through the first games, making Price look fallible when they'd have made any of the great goaltenders in history look foolish, and he couldn't shake the idea that he had somehow cost the Canadiens this opportunity because of it.

"At the end of the day, I don't think I played well enough at the start of the series," Price said before Weber interjected.

"I don't think that's the case at all, to be honest," Weber said. "I think that we weren't good enough in front of Carey. And give them credit, they're a heck of a team. They're here for a reason and they were better than us."

This Lightning team was better than everyone, with Nikita Kucherov breaking the 30-point barrier for the second consecutive playoffs and Andrei Vasilevskiy capturing the Conn Smythe Trophy after earning a 22-save shutout that brought his save percentage to an eye-popping .937 and his goals-against average to a ridiculous 1.91.

Look at everyone in between, the scoring they got up and down and the incredible defensive commitment they supported it with.

The Lightning were virtually unbeatable, and it earned its designation as a special team.

"It's unbelievable," said Steven Stamkos. "I mean, so cliché to say, but there's no words. For this group to go back-to-back after everything we went through last year in the bubble... to go through this year, ups and downs... I mean, it's amazing."

And as Lightning coach Jon Cooper said, they'll be hard-pressed to do it again.

Ross Colton, who scored the winner 13:27 into the second period, will be among the many Lightning players to return. But this team, which used long-term injury reserve to ice the NHL's most talented roster, knows it will be significantly altered come next October.

As for the Canadiens, the pieces around the core will shift, but they're young and blossoming and so much better off for what they just went through together. And even if that's tough to keep in perspective at this moment, it will come into focus with every day that passes.

For now there's pain.

"I take nothing out of moral victories," said Gallagher. "Start of the year, we sat down as a group, our goal was to be here. We expected to be here regardless of what people thought of our team. The expectations were to win this series. I know we probably surprised a lot of people, but our expectations were to be the team celebrating right now. And that's why it hurts so much.

"I told you guys all the time how much we believed. I wasn't lying. We believed in this group. It's just a tough pill to swallow."

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Sportsnet.ca / Kucherov takes shot at Montreal fans but spews truth in epic press conference

Luke Fox @lukefoxjukebox

July 8, 2021, 2:19 AM

A low-event Stanley Cup finale blessed us with a high-event championship Zoom call.

After the double lapping and amidst the cork popping, Nikita Kucherov delivered a press conference that might garner more enthusiastic replays than the game itself.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 8, 2021

The Tampa Bay Lightning winger's dismissal of the Montreal Canadiens fan base should slap him with the villain tag and earn him Bell Centre boos till eternity:

"I didn't want to go back to Montreal," Kucherov said. "The fans in Montreal, come on. They acted like they won the Stanley Cup last game. Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? Their final was last series."

His chirping of the press conference itself was amusing:

When Kucherov couldn't decipher a question, he told a reporter to "buy a new microphone." And once his podium time outlasted his beverage, he marveled: "Well, it's a lot of questions too today. Come on. I'm used to one, two questions. Today's like what, five? I can make a record."

But at his heart, Kucherov — typically a superstar of few words, and fewer worth quoting — wanted to make a point about his friend, no matter if it ruffled a few feathers.

After storming into view like a one-man party, crashing some fantastic and revealing post-game commentary from Victor Hedman, Steven Stamkos and Alex Killorn, a shirtless Kucherov sat down alone and owned centre stage like it was a post-season scoring race.

Championship cap pulled on backwards and askew, smiling wide, he clapped his hands five times and raised two fingers, one for each time his name will be etched in the Stanley Cup.

Then he tilted his neck back and guzzled a hungry swig.

Kucherov slapped the table, wiped domestic beer from 16 wins' worth of beard growth and prepared for launch: "Let's go."

At one point he sent someone away to fetch champagne.

He was sloppy in the happiest way and happy in the sloppiest way. Pumped full of the serum, Kucherov spewed truth.

Kucherov's five minutes and 20 seconds on the mic were as refreshing as a first Bud Light and about as unhinged as a sixth.

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.

Rambling and profane as it may have been, the Conn Smythe runner-up had a good point to make about the trophy's deserving winner, Andrei Vasilevskiy.

"Vasi was outstanding. MVP. I was telling him every day: 'Vasi, you MVP. You're the best player.' And then they give it to whatever the guy in Vegas [Marc-Andre Fleury], the Vezina. Last year they gave it to somebody else [Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck]. Number 1 bullshit. Number 1 bullshit," Kucherov said.

"Vasi took both Cups, and then he took MVP... Another shutout by him. Remarkable. Can't even tell more. I'm so happy."

In blanking the Montreal Canadiens 1-0 on home ice in Game 5 of the final, Vasilevskiy became the first goaltender to hoist the Stanley Cup in consecutive playoff years with a goals-against average under 2.00 in each postseason since Montreal's Ken Dryden (1976-1978).

Vasilevskiy won all 32 of Tampa Bay's games in the two triumphant tournaments. His backup, Curtis McElhinney, never saw so much as a minute of ice.

More impressive: Vasilevskiy has now recorded a shutout in five consecutive series-clinching wins.

"I can't believe how he shuts the door in the biggest games of his career," coach Jon Cooper said. "He's the Big Cat, and when he locks in, he is remarkable to watch."

"And you look at the guy he's going against [Carey Price]: Let's be honest, the best goalie in my era, we just played against. And the best goalie now in this next era is the goalie that just won a Stanley Cup. And so, I think hockey fans were privileged to watch two generational goalies play tonight. And a torch has been passed."

Vasilevskiy is only 26 and is already charging a path towards the Hockey Hall of Fame.

The Russian's playoff numbers (16-7, 1.90, .937) are not matched by ego.

Appearing as some sort of soft-spoken anti-Kucherov, Vasilevskiy sat next to his Conn Smythe and deflected praise.

"It's not about me. It's about the team," Vasilevskiy said of his individual trophy. "The whole team deserves it, for sure."

So caught off-guard was the goalie that he'd been named MVP that he needed prodding from his teammates to skate up and accept the Conn Smythe. For sure, Vasilevskiy thought, Kucherov deserved it. Maybe Brayden Point. But not him.

Vasilevskiy gathered his phone before leaving the ice. He called his parents and then his brother back home to rejoice while so many of the other Lightning's family members swarmed the ice.

"It's probably like 4 or 5 a.m. in Russia now, and they were watching me in the morning," Vasilevskiy said.

"So that's amazing to just share this moment with them. Unfortunately, they couldn't get here for this game because it's a little complicated, but I felt their support, and that's just amazing."

Equally amazing was the support Vasilevskiy received from hypeman Kucherov.

Yes, his press conference will surely go viral and get trigger some laughs. But there is something beautiful about a guy speaking so strongly in support for a friend who downplays his own role on this historic night.

"He's very humble guy," Kucherov said. "He doesn't want people near him to say he's the best. He wants to prove me he's the best, but I know he's the best, you know? He wants to prove me, but I'm like, 'Vasi you prove me a f—ing long time ago. When I was 15, you proved it to me.'"

"Even though he's getting robbed every year by NHL, not getting the Vezina, he's still humble, he still works hard. If he would play in a different market, he would take this Vezina year after year. He would beat all the records, whatever, blah, blah, blah. He's the best."

Drop the mic.

Plan the parade.

Mix in a water.

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USA TODAY / Nikita Kucherov doesn't hold back in press conference after Tampa Bay Lightning win Stanley Cup

Mike Brehm

USA TODAY

The Conn Smythe Trophy choice came down to Tampa Bay Lightning leading scorer Nikita Kucherov (32 points) and goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy (five shutouts).

Vasilevskiy walked away with the award Wednesday, but Kucherov was the MVP of the postgame news conferences after the Lightning won their second consecutive Stanley Cup championship.

Showing up for the Zoom session shirtless and drinking a beer, he went on a rant about Vezina Trophy voters and Montreal Canadiens fans.

Vasilevskiy is a four-time finalist for the goaltending award, but general managers gave it to the Vegas Golden Knights' Marc-Andre Fleury this season in a close vote.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"Vasy was outstanding. MVP," said Kucherov. "I was telling him every day, Vasy MVP. You're the best player. And they give it to whatever the guy in Vegas, the Vezina. And last year, they gave Vezina to somebody else. No. 1 (expletive). No. 1 (expletive)."

Vasilevskiy gave the Lightning the win in Game 5 with a 22-save shutout. Kucherov was grateful because he didn't want to go back to Montreal for Game 6.

"They acted, the fans in Montreal, like they won the Stanley Cup last game," he said. "Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? Their final was last series."

When answering the next question, someone brought him another drink and he pointed out it was Bud Light, not champagne.

"That's No. 1 (expletive) again," he said.

But he got serious when talking about sharing another championship with his longtime teammates.

"I've been in love with those guys, ups and downs," he said. "I said one time, you give us one time to win, we're going to win twice, and that's what happened."

Kucherov had missed the regular season after having offseason hip surgery but returned for Game 1 of the playoffs.

"Just to miss the whole season and come back in the playoffs and get (the most) points for the second playoffs (in a row) is amazing," Vasilevskiy said. "Great player. Great personality, and to be honest, I was surprised he didn't get the Conn Smythe."

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USA TODAY / Tampa Bay Lightning repeat as Stanley Cup champions with Game 5 win against Montreal Canadiens

Mike Brehm

USA TODAY

The Tampa Bay Lightning are back-to-back Stanley Cup champions after defeating the Montreal Canadiens 1-0 in Game 5 on Wednesday night.

They are the second team of the salary cap era to repeat, joining the 2016-17 Pittsburgh Penguins, though salary cap issues could make some parts of the team look different next season.

Still, the Lightning will have top scorers in Nikita Kucherov, Brayden Point and Steven Stamkos, a top defenseman in Victor Hedman and a great goaltender in Andrei Vasilevskiy.

"We've been knocking at the door for so many years, and now to be able to do it back-to-back, that kind of cements this group as special," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

Vasilevskiy had another strong bounce-back performance after a loss with a 22-save shutout to give the city its third championship in less than a year. The Buccaneers won the Super Bowl in February.

Vasilevskiy picked up the Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP with his fifth shutout. Counting the 2020 Stanley Cup title, he has recorded shutouts in five consecutive series clinchers.

"I still can't believe it," he said. "Obviously, the whole team deserves it for sure. Just to have five shutouts in one playoffs, it's all about team."

The Lightning won their 2020 championship in a bubble environment in Edmonton last fall, but this time, they got to celebrate in front of their fans at Amalie Arena. The Lightning are the first NHL team to clinch a Stanley

Cup title at home since the Chicago Blackhawks did it in 2015 against Tampa Bay.

"We really wanted to seize this opportunity in front of the crowd, in front of family, and found a way to get it done," said defenseman Ryan McDonagh. "It's a great feeling. We're going to celebrate all night long."

A look at Game 5:

Rookie scores

Forward Ross Colton and defenseman David Savard weren't part of the Lightning's 2020 championship.

But they hooked up for the lone goal at 13:27 of the second period.

Savard took a pass from McDonagh, skated to the right faceoff circle and fed a pass out front, which Colton tipped past Montreal goalie Carey Price.

It was Colton's fourth goal of the playoffs. He had moved up to the second line after an injury to Alex Killorn.

Colton was in the American Hockey League last season when the Lightning made their run. Savard was acquired from the Columbus Blue Jackets at the deadline with some clever salary cap maneuvering by Lightning general manager Julien BriseBois.

Vasilevskiy shines

Because of Vasilevskiy's play, the Lightning didn't lose back-to-back games in two consecutive postseasons. He was 7-0 last season and 7-0 this season following a loss.

The Lightning played strong defense in front of him in Game 5, but he fended off Montreal's pressure before Colton's goal.

He also stopped Montreal's Josh Anderson and made a blocker save on Brendan Gallagher in the third period.

"I can't believe how he shuts the door in the biggest games of his career," Cooper said. "When he locks in, he's remarkable to watch."

The Lightning also blocked nine shots in front of Vasilevskiy. Barclay Goodrow had three of them, including a big one on the Canadiens' hard-shooting captain Shea Weber in the third period.

"That exemplifies everything with our team," Cooper said.

Maroon makes it three

Lightning forward Pat Maroon picked up his third consecutive Stanley Cup title, including the 2019 one with the St. Louis Blues.

He's the first person to win three consecutive Cups with different teams since Ed Litzenberger did it with Chicago in 1961 and Toronto from 1962-64.

The Lightning didn't get their day with the Stanley Cup last year because of the pandemic.

"What we're hoping is to get two days with the Cup, back-to-back days, because we missed our day last year, so NHL, wake up," Maroon said.

Canadiens fall short

Price carried the 18th-place Canadiens to the Final and put together a second consecutive strong performance Wednesday night with 29 saves.

But he blamed himself partly for the loss in the championship round after recording a 4.39 goals-against average and .835 save percentage as the Canadiens fell behind 3-0 in the series.

"At the end of the day, I don't think I played well enough at the start of the series," he said.

Weber quickly interjected: "I don't think that's the case at all, to be honest with you. I don't think we were good enough in front of Carey. Give them credit. They're a heck of a team. They were here for a reason, and they were better than us in the end."

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USA TODAY / Lightning try to clinch Stanley Cup at home: What to know about Game 5 vs. Canadiens

Mike Brehm

USA TODAY

The Tampa Bay Lightning's 3-2 overtime loss to the Montreal Canadiens in Game 4 continued a playoff trend for the defending Stanley Cup champions.

That game marked the fifth time in six series that the Lightning had lost their first opportunity to clinch. But in the other four series, Tampa Bay always won the next game.

A lot of that has to do with goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, who hasn't lost two in a row in the playoffs since 2019. He is 6-0 with three shutouts this postseason following a loss.

The Lightning, up 3-1 in the Stanley Cup Final against the Canadiens, will try to clinch the championship at home Wednesday night. No team has done that since the 2015 Chicago Blackhawks, who beat the Lightning that year.

What to know about Game 5:

When and where is Game 5?

The game broadcast is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET at Tampa's Amalie Arena.

How can I watch Game 5?

The game will be shown on NBC. It also can be streamed on NBC Sports live. If the Lightning win, it would be the last NHL game shown on NBC, with the league shifting its national broadcast partners to ESPN and Turner Sports.

How did Montreal win Game 4?

Coach Dominique Ducharme's lineup changes paid off. Defenseman Alexander Romanov, added to the lineup, scored a goal that was assisted by Jake Evans, another of the additions. Josh Anderson, who was moved to a different line, scored twice, including in overtime.

The Canadiens killed all five Lightning power plays, include a late double minor to Shea Weber. Montreal also played a physical game against the Lightning's top stars.

"Every night, you have to continue to do the small, little things like putting the puck in deep and banging the body," Canadiens forward Corey Perry said. "It takes a toll on guys."

Who's hot?

Montreal forward Nick Suzuki has a three-game point streak. His linemate, rookie Cole Caufield, has three points over the past two games. Tampa Bay linemates Barclay Goodrow and Blake Coleman have a point in every game of the series.

Who's not?

Tampa Bay's Brayden Point has no goals since his nine-game goal streak ended five games ago. He has no points in his last three games. Weber delivered several big hits against him in Game 4. "You just try to fight through it," Point said. "You don't try to change the way you play. You try to embrace it and try to find a way to get things done."

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