



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 9, 2021

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

No plans to move for the Hurricanes. PNC Arena finalizes lease extension

By Steve Wiseman and Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes and the Centennial Authority on Thursday completed the new lease agreement for PNC Arena that extends through the 2028-29 NHL season.

The authority, an appointed group that is the arena landlord, and the Hurricanes announced in May 2020 that a term sheet on a five-year lease extension had been agreed on by both sides. It extends the Canes' lease, which was to expire in 2024, through September 30, 2029.

The authority approved the deal at its special meeting Thursday morning at PNC Arena with only one dissenting vote.

Hurricanes president and general manager Don Waddell spoke at the meeting, saying the current arena's site is where the team's home should be.

"This is 100 percent, in our view, the best place for the building," Waddell said. "That's our view, from the Hurricanes and the top of the ownership side."

In a statement released by the team after the meeting, Waddell said, "We are proud to call PNC Arena and the Triangle home."

Board member Stephen Stroud, who cast the lone vote against the lease extension, responded by vowing to support the team in that venture, saying, "If you certainly mean that, then I will help you get where you need to go."

Stroud spoke against the deal based on concerns about the team's long-term future, saying the new lease "opens the door" for relocation if a new owner wanted to buy the team from Tom Dundon and move it.

The lease stipulates the team would owe \$31 million termination fee if it relocates prior to the 2024-25 season. That fee drops each year from there until the end of the lease, falling to \$20 million, then to \$12 million, \$6 million and finally \$3 million for relocating prior to the 2028-29 season.

"I think Raleigh has proven they are a hockey market as much as any place in the country," Stroud said. "The fans here have been very supportive and very loyal to the Hurricanes."

But, Stroud said, the added deterrent protecting against relocation is not strong enough, given how valuable NHL teams have become.

"There's more and more interest from people interested in pro sports, interested in buying hockey franchises," Stroud said. "If the trend continues to value of the franchise should continue to grow. If Mr. Dundon decided he wanted to sell the franchise, there would be a considerable amount of profit at play there. So \$31 million, as a percentage of what he

could make off the franchise, does not amount to a huge amount of money in comparison."

Board member Randy Ramsey agreed with Stroud's concerns about the future, but nevertheless said it was imperative the board pass the new lease.

"My fear is a self-fulfilling prophecy here," Ramsey said. "I can see us getting to about 2029 and the Hurricanes, or whomever our partners are at that point, saying the building is dilapidated. It's out of date. You've got to build a new downtown arena. So while I'm going to support this because I believe its the right thing to do that this point in time, I believe we as a board will be ignoring our duties, our fiduciary responsibilities to this arena and the people who appointed us, if we don't do everything in our power to find a ways to enhance it."

To that point, a requirement in completing the term-sheet agreement in 2020 was that the authority gain approval from the City of Raleigh and Wake County that \$9 million a year through 2029 be provided through the Tri-Party Agreement, in which money annually is appropriated from the hotel and prepared food and beverage tax revenue.

The Wake County board of commissioners and the Raleigh City Council both approved the Tri-Party amendment in early October 2020. The lease extension then was turned over to attorneys for the authority and the Hurricanes for final inspection and approval.

The annual stipend of \$9 million will be used to assume part of the arena operating expenses detailed in the lease extension and for other purposes including enhancement of the arena, which opened in 1999 and hosts Canes games, N.C. State men's basketball games and other major events and concerts.

As part of the lease agreement term sheet, the authority will pay 50% of the arena operating costs each year up to \$3.885 million. The authority also agreed to a reduction of the rent for fiscal 2020 of \$1.78 million and no rent to be paid in the following years.

Authority chairman Tom McCormick said in May 2020 that a goal of the negotiations was that the Hurricanes "be in an average lease situation" with the other NHL teams.

"They clearly have one of the worst leases in the league," McCormick said in May 2020.

On Thursday, in addressing Stroud's concerns, McCormick pointed to the NFL's Raiders franchise as an example of how difficult it is to prevent a team from moving. The Raiders have called Los Angeles, Oakland and Las Vegas home over the last 30 years.



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McCormick said. "There are penalties involved if they do. It makes no sense for them to do it. They have a big investment here...(Dundon) has not skimped on putting money into the team. We've done everything we can on our side of it to make them successful."



Hurricanes, Centennial Authority agree to five-year lease extension

The Hurricanes will call PNC Arena home through at least the 2028-29 season.

By Andrew Schnittker

The Hurricanes will call PNC Arena home for at least eight more seasons. The team and Centennial Authority signed a five-year lease extension Thursday, stating that the

Hurricanes will occupy PNC Arena until Sept. 30, 2029, and through the 2028-29 season.

For those that need a refresher on how the Hurricanes and Centennial Authority's relationship functions in regards to the ownership and operation of the arena, Brian did an excellent job breaking all of that down last year.



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Brock McGinn: To re-sign or let him go?

One of the many Hurricanes free agents, forward Brock McGinn has been with the team almost as long as anyone. So, should the Canes re-sign him?

By Alec_Sawyer

There are a lot of questions surrounding the makeup of the Carolina Hurricanes' roster as the offense moves along, with some huge-name free agents and restricted free agents that the Canes have to make some decisions on.

Defenseman Dougie Hamilton is obviously stealing the headlines on that front, but a hockey team is a lot deeper than just one top-pairing defenseman and the Canes have some moves to make throughout the lineup.

One of those decisions will surround Brock McGinn, a depth forward for the Canes who isn't the most prolific scorer but has been a gutsy, grind-it-out player for the team for quite some time now.

McGinn, who is the second-longest tenured Hurricane behind only captain Jordan Staal, is an unrestricted free agent, and Carolina's front office will need to decide whether or not to bring back the player the organization drafted in 2012 for his seventh season with the NHL squad.

So, what does McGinn bring to the table, how highly will he be valued and should the Canes think about re-signing the Ontario native? Let's break it down:

What Brock McGinn brings to the table

It's no secret that McGinn isn't going to set the scoresheet on fire, but that doesn't mean he hasn't been an incredibly valuable part of the Canes success over the past few years.

He's got 51 goals and a smidge over 100 points during his six years with the Canes, though only two of those were full seasons for various reasons. In 2021, McGinn played in 34 of the team's 56 games, battling injury in the back half of the regular season, scoring eight goals and contributing five assists.

None of those numbers are staggering, but McGinn contributes in other ways, most notably on the penalty kill. The Canes boasted a top-three penalty kill during the regular season in 2021, and McGinn was a huge part of that.

McGinn led all Carolina forwards with 2:09 average time on ice on the penalty kill during the regular season, grinding out those shifts all year in the same way he has done during his whole career with the Hurricanes. He also scored one shorthanded goal, the fifth of his career, for good measure.

McGinn also brings that certain grittiness to the table that's hard to quantify, but is obvious when watching him and listening to the way his teammates and head coach Rod Brind'Amour talk about him.

"There's one guy that I can tell you if he comes out of a game, he's hurt," said Brind'Amour after McGinn got injured in a win over the Dallas Stars in April. "If that guy comes out, and you saw he actually came out and came back and tried

to play. There's nobody around since I've been done playing that is tougher than that kid."

But still with all that said, it's not like McGinn is incapable of scoring. He has a 30-point season under his belt in the league, and a four-game goal streak this past season.

There's also the factor of one "Playoff Brock McGinn," who seems to show up in the big moments. In McGinn's playoff career, he's played in 34 games and has six goals and six assists. One of those is a little bit more memorable than the others.

All that to say that McGinn is a very, very good depth forward option perfectly capable of breaking out at times and contributing on both ends of the ice in the NHL.

He's not going to put up the numbers of Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov, Martin Necas and others, but he's still a good guy to have around.

How highly will McGinn be valued?

The issue, of course, with any impending Canes deal is the money.

McGinn's previous contract was a two-year, \$4.2 million deal with an average annual value of \$2.1 million, and there's no real reason to believe that McGinn will get much of a raise, if any, from that.

Over the past two years, in two shortened seasons for all thanks to COVID-19 and a very shortened 2021 season for McGinn with an injury added in, his offensive numbers were slightly down from the two career seasons from 2017-19 that earned him that two-year contract.

So, how highly will McGinn be valued? Probably no more than \$2 million AAV, unless a team with some significant cap space loves the grit from McGinn enough to match that \$2.1 million AAV or even give him a raise.

Should the Canes re-sign McGinn?

It's a tough question, and not one with an easy answer.

On one hand, the Canes want to be saving as much cap space as possible for some top-end guys and there are cheaper bottom-line options than McGinn. On the other hand, you need to have competitive third and fourth lines in the NHL, and McGinn offers a known, gritty player that clearly has a locker-room presence for really not that much money.

If the Canes and McGinn can work out a deal, one for maybe slightly less than his previous deal, this is a move that may make sense for the Hurricanes.

But one area where there isn't a question here is on McGinn's side. He wants to be in Carolina.

"I want to be back here," said McGinn in his exit interview. "I like it here. I like where this team is going. Over the last couple years, we made some big steps. It's a good group, good core."



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The Hurricanes' Warren Foegele dilemma

With rumors afloat of dissatisfaction between player and team, Foegele's Carolina career may be nearing an end.

By Ryan Henkel

The Carolina Hurricanes have a handful of free agents to consider re-signing, both restricted and unrestricted and among them is current RFA Warren Foegele, who's time with the team may rapidly be coming to an end.

According to Sportnet's Elliotte Friedman, in his latest "31 Thoughts" blog, "Both player and team appear to want a change," and Foegele also appeared at number 17 on Frank Seravalli's "Seravalli Trade Targets."

This isn't to propose that Foegele has to go or that he will go, but it's important to take a bit more of a look at the situation since the rumors are out there.

Foegele primarily played on the Hurricanes' bottom-six all season, ranking 10th among Canes forwards in average ice time (14:09) and hasn't even seen increased usage on the penalty kill where he ranked seventh in average shorthanded ice time (1:02) barely edging out higher-end players like Teuvo Teravainen (1:00) and Martin Necas (0:58).

Even though he has gotten a slight bump in his average ice time each season, his usage rate leaves much to be desired for the 2014 third-round pick and a change of scenery may provide him with the opportunity that he is looking for, especially with no clear path for promotion with Carolina.

Foegele has 35 goals and 68 total points in 200 career NHL games — all at even-strength or shorthanded — and his value is strengthened by his solid underlying numbers.

One of Foegele's biggest attributes is his ability to drive offense. He is an excellent skater which helps him get to pucks in deep and he has a relentless tenacity about him, able to win puck and board battles.

Along with that, his defensive awareness and ability to read plays helps complement the Canes' main shutdown line with Jordan Staal and Jesper Fast and is a key part in what makes it so effective.

Foegele does all the little things right — goes to the net, is hard on the forecheck, is defensively responsible, finishes his checks, etc. — and seems so effective on paper, but when it comes to actually getting the puck into the net, Foegele struggles.

So although he is generating chances and looks at a high rate, the finishing touch just isn't there. It's a confusing, and often frustrating, reality to see that he is doing so much right and when, by all means his play should translate to more production, it just hasn't.

He's even had time and opportunity to play up in the lineup with Sebastian Aho and Andrei Svechnikov, but still he couldn't do much with that.

And without a real playmaking touch, Foegele's inability to finish has essentially limited him to the energy role and shutdown minutes he's getting.

From the team's standpoint, although Foegele is a good piece to have, the money just isn't there in the flat-cap and results driven world.

His production is solid, but it's nothing to write home about, and his style of game is what Brind'Amour wants to instill in all of his players, so it isn't as rare or necessary for the team.

Foegele is also a player who very much suffers from a hot and cold syndrome. The winger has signs of outstanding play yet can also disappear for stretches and it's only exacerbated by his struggles with finishing.

And outside of a monster playoff performance against the Washington Capitals in 2019, Foegele has not been that effective throughout his playoff career.

So what are the team's options with Foegele?

Re-Sign

The first option is that the Hurricanes decide to tender him a qualifying offer.

Foegele was scheduled to go to arbitration last season, but he and the Canes managed to hammer out a one-year, \$2.15 million contract before that date came. As such, he is still an RFA and his qualifying offer would be for that same amount.

However, with Foegele wanting a change of scenery, it is doubtful that he would just sign the QO and it would be the end of it all. If he took the team to arbitration again, it is likely he ends up with more money and the team wouldn't be able to walk away from any arbitration ruling below \$4,538,958 AAV.

Evolving Hockey projects Foegele's next contract as a four-year, \$3.484 million AAV deal, and that's just way beyond what the Hurricanes are able to afford with their higher-tier players paydays coming up year after year.

It would be great if the Hurricanes and Foegele could find common ground to make a deal work out, but the team can't expect him to accept less money just because they are in a tighter spot.

Expansion Draft

If Foegele is actually wanting a change of scenery and the chance to play in an elevated role, there might not be a better situation for him out there than with the Seattle Kraken alongside the general manager that originally selected him.

Ron Francis will have a few options to look at from Carolina including Brady Skjei, Jake Bean, Jesper Fast and of course Foegele.

With limited options for higher-end talent, Foegele would more than likely see an elevated position with the Kraken's forward group and maybe that could be just what he needs to get to that next level.

Foegele could also be used as part of a deal for Seattle to take another contract from the Hurricanes such as Jake Gardiner's.

Trade



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If Seattle opts to pass on Foegele and both parties do want to move on, the next step would be to move him before July 28, when qualifying offers have to be tendered to RFAs, else he would become a UFA and can walk for nothing.

The Canes will want to at least get something in return for Foegele's rights and the sooner they get a deal done, the better.

With Foegele being a middle-six winger and it just being for his signing rights, the Canes would more than likely end up with a low pick or a prospect, but anything is better than nothing.

Foegele is a good player to have, but one that the Hurricanes just can't afford to overpay to keep happy and if he wants a better opportunity he deserves the chance to go find one.

But it will be yet another cap-casualty that the Hurricanes will have to fill this offseason, as the number of blanks on the roster grows. It's a sad reality for a team that had kept itself mostly intact for three straight seasons, but a necessary one for a team that wants to take that next step.

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1217001 Carolina Hurricanes

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BY STEVE WISEMAN AND CHIP ALEXANDER JULY 08, 2021 10:59 AM,

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The Athletic / The Athletic's 2021 'Salary-Cap Era' NHL Franchise Rankings

By Craig Custance Jul 8, 2021

Winning one Stanley Cup is hard. Excruciatingly hard. Teams go decades without doing it. Some franchises forever. Winning back-to-back is something else altogether. It places you with the all-time greats. And to do it during the salary-cap era makes the Tampa Bay Lightning even more special.

The moment Steven Stamkos raised the Stanley Cup above his head, again, it propelled this group to a special stratosphere among its contemporaries. And it hasn't just been these two years for Stamkos, Victor Hedman and this core. Before that, they'd been knocking on the door. They had heartbreak, upsets and now multiple breakthroughs.

Last year, in ripping off a concept created for the NFL by colleague Bob Sturm, we tried to quantify exactly where each NHL franchise ranked in playoff success during the salary-cap era. It's an attempt to take opinion out of it. In that first attempt, the Lightning finished tied for third. In running it back for 2021, they joined some of the best teams of this era alone at the top. Before we get to all the teams and where they rank, first a breakdown in how the results were calculated:

Calculations began with the advent of the salary cap, the 2005-06 season.

Winning the Stanley Cup (SC): 11 points

Losing in the Stanley Cup Final (SCF): 5 points

Losing in the conference final (CF): 3 points

Making the playoffs: 1 point

Teams can't earn points in multiple categories so if a team wins the Stanley Cup in a given year, it also doesn't get the point for making the playoffs. It's also weighed in favor of significant playoff success. Sorry, teams that make the playoffs a lot but don't do anything once they get there.

Let's dive in:

1. Pittsburgh Penguins

Total: 51

Just how good have the Penguins been in the salary-cap era, which coincided with the debut of Sidney Crosby? They've won exactly one playoff series since their back-to-back Cups and still maintain a healthy lead on the No. 2 franchise in this ranking. Not every move has been perfect, but management has done a great job trying to keep the Stanley Cup window open for most of Crosby's career. Most of the teams challenging Pittsburgh at the top of these standings have embarked on some sort of rebuild or refresh. This title won't last forever.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18, 17SC, 16SC, 15, 14, 13CF, 12, 11, 10, 09SC, 08SCF, 07

2. Chicago Blackhawks

Total: 44

Depending on what you think of the young talent being developed around the aging stars in Chicago will impact how likely you believe the Blackhawks are the best candidate to knock off Pittsburgh at the top of this list. Chicago has received some lottery bounces and has good, young talent on the way but not nearly the high-end haul that their once-rival Kings have. That they're still No. 2 is another reminder of just how good those Chicago teams were early on in the Toews/Kane era.

Total playoff years: 20, 17, 16, 15SC, 14CF, 13SC, 12, 11, 10SC, 09CF

3. Tampa Bay Lightning

Total: 40



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Here come the charging Lightning. Not only is this franchise coming off consecutive Stanley Cups, it's still young enough to be very much in contention for a number of years. But the other teams in this range are a warning that it can end quickly. Yes, Brayden Point is just 25, which is one year younger than Andrei Vasilevskiy. But Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Ondrej Palat, Ryan McDonagh and others in the core are all in their 30s. It tends to drop off pretty quickly at that point. They have a chance to top this list in the next couple of years, but it's a race against time.

Total playoff years: 21SC, 20SC, 19, 18CF, 16CF, 15SCF, 14, 11CF, 07, 06

4. Boston Bruins

Total: 30

If you're a Bruins fan, one of the most frustrating things about Boston's inability to get past the Islanders in Round 2 is that this might have been their last, great shot at winning it all with the current core. There's a path ahead that builds around David Pastrnak and Charlie McAvoy, but it might take a Kings-like step back to get there.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19SCF, 18, 17, 14, 13SCF, 12, 11SC, 10, 09, 08

5. Los Angeles Kings

Total: 29

The Kings have been bad for a while and still sit this high up the list. The good news is that the cavalry is coming in the form of a loaded system. It also makes sense for them to pursue Jack Eichel, which would change the dynamic even more. The next steps for the Kings are fascinating.

Total playoff years: 18, 16, 14SC, 13CF, 12SC, 11, 10

6 (tied). Anaheim Ducks

Total: 27

The Ducks have had some great runs in the cap era. They've had some remarkable teams that ran into even better teams. But when you stack up the rebuilding efforts of some of their rivals, it's not where it needs to be. You get the sense that it's going to be a few years before the Ducks start accumulating points on this list again.

Total playoff years: 18, 17CF, 16, 15CF, 14, 13, 11, 09, 08, 07SC, 06CF

6 (tied). Detroit Red Wings

Total: 27

The Red Wings haven't earned a single point in this ranking since 2016. When Dylan Larkin was a teenager. They probably won't for another couple of years and still, they're higher than most NHL franchises. It's been a long time since this team was contending, but the silver lining is that the team their current GM helped build just won its second consecutive Cup. Better days are ahead.

Total playoff years: 16, 15, 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 09SCF, 08SC, 07CF, 06

8. (tied) San Jose Sharks

Total: 23

For most of the cap era, the Sharks were a high-end, quality team. Probably the best franchise of this era not to win a Stanley Cup. There's a lot to admire about how the Sharks were run through most of the cap era, but the toughest work is ahead as the team ages and the contracts get worse by the year.

Total playoff years: 19CF, 18, 17, 16SCF, 14, 13, 12, 11CF, 10CF, 09, 08, 07, 06

8. (tied) Washington Capitals

Total: 23

Yes, we'd like to see more long playoff runs out of the Capitals. It's why you don't see them higher up these rankings. But a Cup is a Cup, and this group will go down as one of the best of its era. It's just hard to expect them to jump up this list anytime soon with its aging core.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18SC, 17, 16, 15, 13, 12, 11, 10, 09, 08

10. St. Louis Blues

Total: 22

Life comes at you fast. Seems like just yesterday this team was going from worst to first in a season and winning a Stanley Cup. Now its most dynamic forward (when he's healthy) is asking out. Some tough decisions are ahead for GM Doug Armstrong.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19SC, 17, 16CF, 15, 14, 13, 12, 09

11. New York Rangers

Total: 20

The Rangers did what a lot of the teams above them on this list didn't: They pulled the plug early on their contending teams to spark the rebuild. While it might be a little painful watching someone like Ryan McDonagh lift the Cup, it's also put them in strong position to make significant gains in these standings in the coming years.

Total playoff years: 20, 17, 16, 15CF, 14SCF, 13, 12CF, 11, 09, 08, 07, 06

12 (tied). Carolina Hurricanes

Total: 19

During the salary-cap era, Carolina once went a decade without making the playoffs. The return to the postseason in 2019 should mark the start of a decade of playoff contention for this talented group. It's all there for Carolina, especially if Alex Nedeljkovic is the real deal.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19CF, 09CF, 06SC

12 (tied). Montreal Canadiens

Total: 19

A surprise run to the Stanley Cup Final this year jumped the Canadiens from the middle of the pack into this spot. This is a challenging team to project moving forward. Is there something special about the mix of aging veterans Carey Price, Shea Weber and emerging stars such as Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield? Every step of the way during their postseason run this year, the answer was yes.

Total playoff years: 21SCF, 20, 17, 15, 14CF, 13, 11, 10CF, 09, 08, 06

In 2021, Shea Weber, right, and the Montreal Canadiens made their first Stanley Cup Final since 1993. (Jean-Yves Ahern / USA Today)

14. Nashville Predators

Total: 17

Give credit to GM David Poile for constructing a team that consistently makes the playoffs. From the start of the salary-cap until now, the Predators seem to find a way to get in. It's the winning-a-playoff-series part that has been the biggest challenge. Outside of their Cup Final run in 2017, the Predators just haven't been able to put it together. And there's nothing about the current roster that suggests it's going to change anytime soon.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18, 17SCF, 16, 15, 12, 11, 10, 08, 07, 06

15. Philadelphia Flyers

Total: 16

This season was a frustrating step back for a franchise that looked like it was emerging as a potential contender once again. Consistency has been a challenge for the Flyers during the cap era outside the Jeff Carter



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/ Mike Richards stretch. Getting Carter Hart back on track to stardom will go a long way in re-establishing this team.

Total playoff years: 20, 18, 16, 14, 12, 11, 10SCF, 09, 08CF, 06

16. Ottawa Senators

Total: 14

The Senators haven't been good for years, but DJ Smith's group showed signs of life this season. Tim Stütze is a cornerstone to build around and there's an intriguing collection of young talent. We'd be more optimistic if there was more faith in management and ownership.

Total playoff years: 17CF, 15, 13, 12, 10, 08, 07SCF, 06

17. Dallas Stars

Total: 13

The grind of last season's playoff run mixed with all the challenges that came with playing hockey during a condensed schedule seemed to hit Dallas as hard as any franchise. But the emergence of Jason Robertson was a better development for this franchise than eking into a playoff spot would have been. That 2017 draft (Robertson, Miro Heiskanen and Jake Oettinger) has the chance to be franchise-altering for the Stars.

Total playoff years: 20SCF, 19, 16, 14, 08CF, 07, 06

18. Vancouver Canucks

Total: 12

The price of Quinn Hughes, Elias Pettersson and eventually Brock Boeser is heating up dramatically and what that ultimately looks like will determine how bullish you should be about the Canucks' future. But as frustrating as this season was for Canucks fans, there's still a lot to like here if management can make all the pieces fit. They should accumulate points in these standings in the coming years.

Total playoff years: 20, 15, 13, 12, 11SCF, 10, 09, 07

19. Vegas Golden Knights

Total: 12

This is my favorite one. The Golden Knights have played four seasons and have accumulated more points in this system than a dozen NHL teams that have played a dozen more seasons. There were high expectations on the Golden Knights this season. They were a popular Cup pick and it didn't work out. But it's worth taking a moment to step back and appreciate just how successful this franchise has been in a short period of time.

Total playoff years: 21CF, 20CF, 19, 18SCF

20 (tied). New Jersey Devils

Total: 11

There's been just one playoff appearance since Peter DeBoer guided this team to a Stanley Cup Final in 2012. That's not great. New Jersey has another pair of first-round picks, a strong pool of young players and a slew of cap space. It's time to put it all together into tangible success.

Total playoff years: 18, 12SCF, 10, 09, 08, 07, 06

20 (tied). New York Islanders

Total: 11

Back-to-back trips to the conference finals under Lou Lamoriello and Barry Trotz's guidance have jumped the Islanders up this list. This is such a fascinating study, where culture and teamwork continue to win out over more talented rivals. This group knows how to win and there's no reason to expect it won't continue.

Total playoff years: 21CF, 20CF, 19, 16, 15, 13, 07

22. Minnesota Wild

Total: 10

We're moving into the portion of the standings consisting of teams that have dabbled with consistently making the playoffs without achieving any real playoff success. The Wild have been pretty good for a long time, whatever that is worth. There was enough spark from this year's team and GM Bill Guerin's game plan to provide more optimism for the future in Minnesota.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14, 13, 08, 07

23 (tied). Calgary Flames

Total: 8

The cap era hasn't been great for the Flames. They accumulate playoff appearances without any real success. Now comes an offseason that might be the biggest of GM Brad Treliving's era. The sample size on the Flames' core is large enough to suggest changes are necessary. You know Treliving, who is one of the most active GMs in the league, is trying. Chances are, things look much different when the season starts.

Total playoff years: 20, 19, 17, 15, 09, 08, 07, 06

23 (tied). Buffalo Sabres

Total: 8

Things started so well for the Sabres in the cap era. Now, there's just about zero chance they field a better roster to start the season — if Eichel isn't on it — than they had this season. The future should be bright with a potential Eichel return combining with the No. 1 pick, but I feel like we've been saying that for a long time about the Sabres.

Total playoff years: 11, 10, 07CF, 06CF

23 (tied). Colorado Avalanche

Total: 8

This feels like it should be higher, right? We're now eight years into the Nathan MacKinnon era and this powerhouse roster is still way too low in these standings. The good news is that the Avalanche are still relatively young. In some cases, really young. They have smart management. They have a good coach. All the boxes are checked. Now, it's time to convert that playoff frustration into the kind of run the Lightning just finished.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18, 14, 10, 08, 06

23 (tied). Edmonton Oilers

Total: 8

The Oilers are kind of like the Avs-lite. Great young players still waiting for a breakthrough but without the depth throughout the roster. It's got to happen at some point for Connor McDavid, right?

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 17, 06SCF

23 (tied). Winnipeg Jets

Total: 8

It feels like the Jets are aging and this team has been knocking on the door for a long time, but then you're reminded that Nikolaj Ehlers is just 25. Pierre-Luc Dubois is 23. Neal Pionk is 25. Connor Hellebuyck should be entering a stretch where he's at his best for the next several years. They've got Cole Perfetti on the way. There's some climbing in these standings to be done by the Jets if they can put it all together.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18CF, 15, 07

28. Columbus Blue Jackets

Total: 6



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The Seth Jones decision takes a major backseat as this franchise now has to navigate tragedy. Starting with John Davidson at the top, there are quality people in key positions throughout this organization. Nothing comes easy in Columbus and this stretch might be the hardest yet.

Total playoff years: 20, 19, 18, 17, 14, 09

29. Arizona Coyotes

Total: 6

At least Jakob Chychryn appears to be really good, so the Coyotes have that going for them.

Total playoff years: 20, 12CF, 11, 10

30. Toronto Maple Leafs

Total: 6

The Maple Leafs are piling up playoff appearances with a talented roster. The breakthrough is coming. It might not feel like it right now, but it's coming.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 19, 18, 17, 13

31. Florida Panthers

Total: 4

Remember the first-round series between the Lightning and Panthers? It was great. Fun, fast-paced hockey. Spencer Knight made his postseason debut. The Panthers went toe-to-toe with the champs. A legitimate reason for hope.

Total playoff years: 21, 20, 16, 12

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The Athletic / The NHL needs more of Nikita Kucherov's shirtless, beer-soaked rants — not less

By Sean Gentile Jul 8, 2021

It was learned behavior.

After 16 months of Zoom press conferences — each more boring than the last, a matryoshka doll of say-nothing, dead-eyed, empty calories — I missed Nikita Kucherov's post-Stanley Cup tour de force. I missed it because I couldn't remember the last time one of those things was worth watching. I missed it because I went to sleep.

And I didn't doze off, either. This wasn't an accident. I willfully, knowingly made the trek from couch to bed. It was late, and I was tired.

Naturally, I woke up to Phase II of The Discourse. I'd missed the real-time shock over a hockey player saying something interesting (in public, on camera) and jumped, midstream, into the backlash. "Stay classy" Twitter replies. Hurt feelings. Reaction GIFs, as far down as you could scroll.

Why? Why? Why does such a huge chunk of the NHL-watching populace — the demographic who fetishize toughness and passion more than any fanbase in North American sports — reach for their pearls when it all gets verbalized? If you're mad about this, why? Don't you want to learn who these guys are?

This isn't cherry-picking, either. It's easy to do that when you're writing off Twitter replies, but when there are enough folks saying the same thing, the straw man is made flesh. People are pissed about this, or they were — and they shouldn't be. Hoo boy, they shouldn't be. Typically, we have

to draw humanity from hockey players in drips and drabs. We watch their actions, and we make assumptions, and we project. That guy cares because he plays hard. Ignore the 45-second answer where he said "get pucks in deep" enough to lull you into a trance. We rarely get moments like Kucherov's — raw, real, funny, delivered with charisma and purpose, fueled by Bud Light — and when we do, a weird strain of Puritanism takes over. Hockey players are meant to be seen and not heard, or whatever.

There's some irony at play here, too. When Steve Levy and Barry Melrose did their pregame hit on "SportsCenter," both of them cracked jokes about how lethally boring Zoom pressers have become. That's not the players' fault, either. Each day, they've had to stare into a webcam lens and answer questions (some good, some bad, most in the mushy middle), with no real way to connect to the people asking them. Under normal circumstances, their answers are the product of media coaching, say-nothing hockey culture and contempt for the people asking them. Under pandemic circumstances, it's even easier to hit cruise control and let some combo of all that stuff take over. We've all been doing this since March 2020. It's easy to zone out, on both ends of the conversation.

Still, it was funny to hear Levy and Melrose state it so plainly. Levy said — and this is paraphrasing — that the circumstances of Game 5 were primed to kill enthusiasm. Melrose said he had to give up tickets to a baseball game with his grandson, and he was openly annoyed over it. The Canadiens were outmatched, everyone was traveling and Zoom pressers suck anyway, so ... what are we doing here, exactly? So, the two broadcasters said, they opted to ask players whether they were having fun. Blake Coleman, technically, said something. Brayden Point, literally, did not.

And that was that. Good try, good effort. That's how it works.

And that's why Kucherov's summertime airing of grievances was such a pleasant shock.

NO SHIRT.

COLD BEER.

"@JOESMITHTB LET'S HEAR IT." 🤔

NIKITA KUCHEROV WITH A LEGENDARY PRESS CONFERENCE FOLLOWING THE STANLEY CUP FINAL.

📷 @BRADYTRETT PIC.TWITTER.COM/TWMDVUX9SW

— THE ATHLETIC NHL (@THEATHLETICNHL) JULY 8, 2021

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

On Conn Smythe winner Andrei Vasilevskiy: "Vasy was outstanding. MVP... 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." That was Marc-Andre Fleury catching a stray.

On his teammates: "I've been in love with those guys."

Kucherov's likes: Vasilevskiy, beer. Kucherov's dislikes: ill-timed fan celebrations, shirts. And now, as Festivus rolls on, we come to the feats of strength. Until you pin me, Vasy, Festivus is not over. It was perfect because it was recognizably human and — this is important — harmless.

Kucherov should defend his guys because that's being a teammate. He should lob bombs at fans in Montreal for counting their chickens because that's being a competitor. He should — now, more than ever — be able to bask in the glow of a second straight Cup, won in front of his fans, on the home stretch of the weirdest, worst collective experience most of us have been forced to endure because that's being a person.

For too many, that's not being a hockey player. Here's hoping that changes. And if the Lightning are back here in 2022, I'm staying awake.

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The Athletic / LeBrun: Lightning join Penguins in winning back-to-back Cups in salary-cap era, an incredibly difficult accomplishment

By Pierre LeBrun Jul 8, 2021

I remember thinking it might never happen in the salary-cap era. Like, ever.

Then, the Pittsburgh Penguins did it.

Surely, that would be it. The league was just too tight and had too many good teams. Never again, I thought, would a team repeat as Stanley Cup champions in this cap system where retaining talent is so damn hard.

Wrong again.

The Tampa Bay Lightning joined the Penguins in a group of the most elite NHL clubs by capturing their second consecutive title Wednesday night, defeating the Montreal Canadiens in five games.

As I often say, the talent gap between the top 20 or so teams in the NHL is comparable to a crushed beer can. It's that close.

How hard is it to go back-to-back?

"Incredibly hard," Penguins head coach Mike Sullivan told The Athletic.

"You win 16 playoff games to win a Cup and then you got to do it again. Think about how hard that is physically and mentally," added former Penguins general manager Jim Rutherford, at the helm of those back-to-back Cup champion teams in Pittsburgh.

It's crazy hard in the salary-cap era. And now only two franchises truly know what it takes to do it in that world.

Of course, the circumstances were a bit different last year. The Lightning won it in a bubble without fans and then began their title defense the following January.

Still, back-to-back is back-to-back.

"It's a little bit different with how they have gone through it with the pandemic but obviously when you win, everyone wants to beat you and you get everyone's best," Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby told me via email.

"The other part is the demand physically with the shorter offseason and injuries as you go. You have to be able to get over that adversity because you have to go through that as well to win. They had a little bit longer of an offseason, which probably helps but overall, that's what you deal with. You need depth and big plays to win consistently and they have proven to have both."

The comparison isn't perfect.

Because of the pandemic, the Lightning played 126 regular-season games over the past two seasons compared to of course the full 164 for Pittsburgh in 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Pretty similar when it comes to playoff games, 49 for the Penguins in those two years and 48 for the Lightning over the past two years, which includes the extra early round in the bubble.

So on one hand, you can argue the Bolts had it easier as far as total games over two years: 174 regular season and playoffs combined compared to 215 for the Penguins.

On the other hand, the Lightning played both playoff tournaments within a nine-plus month span, winning the first Cup on Sept. 28 and then the

second on July 7. That's a lot of playoff hockey in a shorter-than-normal window.

While I think we can all agree that the circumstances were different, back-to-back Cup titles were equally impressive for both the Pens and Bolts.

Funny thing is, Rutherford proved prophetic in a column I wrote in mid-March, suggesting the Bolts had all the indicators of a team that could seriously repeat.

"What you look for is whether they have enough juice, do they have enough energy to do it two years in a row, and do they want to do it?" Rutherford told me on March 16. "If you're a GM or a coach, those are the things you're always watching. Are they going to get worn out or not? There's the obvious, too, do they have the players, the pieces still to do it? The answer to that is, yes they do.

"They have the best goalie in the league, they have the best defenseman in the league. And they have a number of impact players that you need to step up in critical times of a game. And they have the supporting cast."

When reminded of those comments this week, Rutherford said he wasn't surprised by Tampa's run, but stressed how difficult it was to repeat.

"It's hard to win back-to-back," Rutherford said. "But when you do win, you learn from it. And you learn how to win. That's what Tampa did last year, which matured them even more. Then they have all the important pieces, which you need to win championships. They have the top-end players, the best goalie, the best defenceman in the league. And all their players really play such key roles. They had depth. So, things have to fall your way, but when we chatted then (in March), to me Tampa was the best team at that point."

One common thread between both teams is the quality of head coach behind the bench. Sullivan and Jon Cooper rank among the best in the NHL. The Penguins coach praised his players for pushing through the challenge of defending their Stanley Cup, despite the hurdles in their way.

"What I find interesting in looking back on it, and I've had some of these conversations with Sid and some of our other guys, we look back on it and we remember all the highlights and the great goals or the great plays," Sullivan said. "But there's always times during every series where it seems like games could go either way, it's not always as smooth as how it looks like after the fact. There's so many challenges along the way. First and foremost, it takes such a complete investment from everybody, physically, emotionally, in every way, shape or form. It becomes a war of attrition. That in itself is a challenge. Then when you think about the experiences that we went through, every series takes on its own storyline and with that comes a set of challenges that a team has to fight through and overcome.

"For me, it speaks volumes for the character of the players on the teams," Sullivan added. "I've always been a big believer that this is a players' game. When I look back at our teams, and I would guess that (Jon Cooper) would have the same comments with respect to his guys in Tampa, just can't say enough about the character of the players and the people and the leadership that it takes to overcome the challenges that are required to win."

Even with all that said, it's just such a close league in terms of talent. Every little play, no matter how small, matters.

"There's such a fine line between winning and losing. There's so many really good teams," Sullivan said. "And a lot of times, there are critical moments that can be series changers. Whether it's a big save at a key time or a blocked shot, some of them are highlight plays but some of them fly under the radar. Like winning a faceoff at a key time."

But it's not like these Penguins and Lightning teams were the only champions who wanted to defend their title in the cap era. You don't think those Blackhawks teams that won three Cups in six years or the Kings who won two Cups in three years wish they couldn't have pulled that off?



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That defending year is so bloody hard. Making your brain believe that you want it just as desperately, that you're ready to pay that same price is easier said than done.

"Yes, there's a big factor in the mental part of it," Rutherford said. "You have to have your leadership guys and your whole group buy into wanting to do it again. I think everybody wants to do it again. But doing all the little things you need to do and the big things you need to go, you have to buy into and you have to have everyone buy into it. Sometimes when a team wins, it's hard physically and mentally for some players to do it in such a short period of time again."

Sullivan remembers debating how to prepare for training camp in September 2016 as they began the title defense with a roster that still had players recovering from injuries after the long Cup run just a few months before.

"Our fear as a coaching staff, and we said this to the players on Day 1 of training camp: 'We can't win the Stanley Cup in October and November, but we can lose it if we're not careful here. We got to make sure we get back to business,'" Sullivan recalls.

The Penguins coach sought out legendary Scotty Bowman during that short offseason. They talked about how to approach training camp.

"I said to my staff, 'Do we ease these guys back in or do we make training camp as demanding as we always do?'," Sullivan said. "And Scotty suggested to me that you go back to business and that last year was last year, you put it behind you. You make it every bit as hard as it's always been. And that's what we did. We didn't give our guys any sort of excuse to tweak the mindset that hey, we're going to ease into this."

By all indications, the Lightning had a similar approach. The games early on matter, Tampa beginning the season 9-1-1.

That's how the Pens tried to approach it in the fall of '16.

"It's the second game of the season in October and you're trying to convince your guys to re-invest," Sullivan said. "That's the biggest challenge. We felt if we could get through the first 30-40 games of the season, and stay competitive, once there's light at the end of the tunnel and the runway gets a little bit shorter, I think we can get our guys to engage. That was our mindset as a coaching staff. And it was a daily endeavor. Just talking to our team about making sure that we don't exhale, that we re-invest every single day. I think that's what makes it so hard."

Then there's the physical part of it. Players need time to recover between the two championship seasons. But it's a fine line.

"That's one of the challenges, right? Because it's such an investment physically," Sullivan said. "It requires so much attention to detail as it relates to fitness. I have so much respect for our leadership on our team and it starts with Crosby, with respect to just controlling all of the controllables around your personal situation to give yourself the best chance to succeed once the puck drops. So the fitness aspect is so critical coming off that Stanley Cup win because you play so many games and you play so deep into the summer and there's such a short turnaround, you got to find a way to get some rest and recovery but at the same time, you can't just disengage completely. Because then you're playing catch-up all year. Your nutrition, your living habits, your off-ice training habits, all those things come into play. And that's the foundation for a player that gives him the opportunity to act on his talent level."

"Every individual player on your team has to make sure that they maximize their opportunity to recover but also you're walking that line because you're trying to recover but you don't want to disengage."

Again, Sullivan reiterated, it comes down to the leadership of your team.

"The character of your players. It speaks volumes for the people. Because at the end of the day, they're the ones who get it done," Sullivan said. "They're the guys that made the choice to pay a price and become a team in the true sense of the word. That's what I witnessed with my group in Pittsburgh and that's what I watched with Tampa."

The reality is that most Stanley Cup champions of course want to repeat, but they're often guilty of allowing the party to seep into the next season, whether consciously or not.

The belly is full. The hunger isn't quite there.

"And I don't blame any team for that," Rutherford said. "It's so hard to win. It's hard to make the playoffs. It's hard to win a playoff game. It's hard to win a series. You put all that together and you think about that, it's hard to win a Cup."

Imagine two in a row.

"It is really hard," Sullivan said. "That's it."

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The Athletic / NHL Staff Mock Draft 2.0 with scouts' audit: Do the Canucks win the draft? Will the Wild get a center?

Corey Pronman Jul 8, 2021

The 2021 NHL Draft is just about two weeks away, and there is still lots of uncertainty about how the early selections will play out.

Will Owen Power go No. 1? Who will be the Kraken's first drafted prospect?

After the NHL Draft lottery, The Athletic's staff made the first 15 selections. This time we complete the first round. Prospect writer Corey Pronman will also audit these selections, along with feedback from NHL scouts.

Guide to the 2021 NHL Draft

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

Is defense the Sabres' biggest need? No. They lack goal-scoring and playmaking forwards on the NHL roster, in the AHL and in the prospect pipeline. But more than anything, Buffalo needs talent. Power is the most talented player in the class. The organization will add the best asset available. Power's desire to return to Michigan for one more season has no impact on the selection. It's better for him to go dominate in the NCAA than get pounded on a non-playoff team anyway. But someday, Power and Rasmus Dahlin will make an impressive blueline foundation. -John Vogl

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

Kraken director of amateur scouting Robert Kron spoke about Matthew Beniers in a way that shows the Michigan star clearly left an impression. Going with Beniers would give the Kraken a 6-foot-1 two-way center that can play a number of different roles. They would also get a prospect who can develop without needing to be rushed once he's ready to move on from Michigan. -Ryan S. Clark

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

When you're picking third overall, you have to go with the best player available and not necessarily focus on filling needs. The Ducks have a few, but the biggest is anyone that can fill the net on a consistent basis. Draft honcho Martin Madden has always emphasized going with the best player wherever he is in the first round but this is a draft where the difference in talent between 1-10 isn't such a great divide. Hence, it makes sense to go for a high-end sniper that could develop into the first-line goal scorer they need. Guenther has torn up the WHL since he broke in. If Beniers somehow was available at three, it would be hard to pass up the two-way engine that could slide in behind Trevor Zegras as their future second-line center. It won't happen, so Guenther or last year's No.



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27 pick Jacob Perreault can team with Zegras and become a finisher Anaheim desperately needs. -Eric Stephens

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

If Luke Hughes is not among the first three players selected July 23, he's going to be one of the biggest stories of the night — either because the Devils do draft him or because they do not. The last name does matter, to a point. But even if he was Luke Mirtle or Luke Custance, he'd be worthy of consideration at No. 4. He is one of the youngest players in the draft, might be the best skater at his position and he did outproduce a pretty significant defenseman at the USA NTDP on a per-game basis — his oldest brother, Quinn. -Corey Masisak

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

The Blue Jackets insist they won't draft to fill immediate needs, but this roster (and organization) needs pretty much everything outside of goaltending. With Beniers off the board, the debate was between Edvinsson and McTavish, but the Big Swede is the pick. If he's ready to play immediately, he could soften the blow of Seth Jones' imminent departure. The Jackets haven't taken a blue-liner in the first round since Zach Werenski (2015). -Aaron Portzline

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

Despite picking in the top 10 since 2017, Detroit has yet to turn one of its premium draft picks into a long-term top-six center. That's a tough way to build in the NHL. McTavish's skating is a question, but he would give the Red Wings a goal scorer with a knack for winning puck battles. William Eklund and Kent Johnson should tempt Detroit too, though, and one of the big, mobile blueliners such as Hughes or Edvinsson would make this pick even more interesting if they escape the top five. -Max Bultman

7. San Jose Sharks: Kent Johnson, C, Michigan-Big Ten

I think the Sharks would prefer a defenceman here given how forward-heavy their pool now is but I suspect the one they're least likely to be interested in is the only one that's left. Seeing that Luke Hughes and Simon Edvinsson are off the board, I elected for Johnson over William Eklund because the latter profiles a little too much like some of their other recent picks in size and skill. Johnson would add a dynamic quality to their group that it lacks. -Scott Wheeler

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

If the Kings get a crack at drafting a defenseman in the top 10, it should make their decision that much more straightforward if Clarke is there. The last time they selected a defenseman in the top 10 was Drew Doughty in 2008. Currently, their pipeline is crowded like rush-hour traffic on the 405 freeway with forwards, in particular centers. One scouting analyst recently told me that Clarke, who opted to go to Slovakia to play for HC Nove Namky this past season, plays a lot like Brent Burns of the San Jose Sharks and threw in Erik Karlsson of the Sharks for good measure, adding: "I love the mind. I love what he does." -Lisa Dillman

9. Vancouver Canucks: William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

I don't think William Eklund will be around when Vancouver makes the ninth overall selection, but they'd be ecstatic if he was. Since the Canucks' hold on the 9th overall pick was established at the draft lottery, we've been through four mock drafts at The Athletic (one from Corey, one from Scott and two including all NHL staff), and in those four mocks the Canucks have selected Mason MacTavish, Kent Johnson (x2) and now Eklund. All are great value at ninth overall if they're still there, which just goes to illustrate that with very little separating the prospects behind Power and Beniers, the Canucks are quietly in a very enviable spot. They don't get to pick their prospect, but they're going to at least get the remaining member of the so-called top nine, so long as they don't trade out of the spot (possible, but unlikely) or overthink it. -Thomas Drance

10. Ottawa Senators: Chaz Lucius, C, U.S. NTDP-USHL

I know there has been a lot of chatter about the Senators taking a goalie in this spot, but I believe the organization desperately needs some high-

end skill up front. The Senators are stacked on the blue line, but their forward group still feels a little thin as we project out their top-six when they want to be a legitimate contender in a couple of years. So a kid like Lucius — who has a ton of skill and upside — could be a perfect addition to add a more dangerous element to their offensive attack. Lucius has been described as many as a pure goal scorer and he should be able to slot in as a centreman with this organization. -Ian Mendes

11. Arizona Coyotes: Void

12. Chicago Blackhawks: Matthew Coronato, RW, Chicago-USHL

It's tempting to go with a goalie here, particularly Jesper Wallstedt, but the Blackhawks just picked Drew Comness in the second round last year and are high on the Boston University netminder. Throw in the offseason signing of Arvid Soderblom and it's getting pretty crowded on the Chicago depth chart in goal. So when in doubt, it's always a good bet that the Blackhawks will opt for a USHL kid or a local kid. Matthew Coronato fits both bills as a Chicago Steel product. Could be an opportunity to trade down a few spots with a team looking for a goalie. -Mark Lazerus

13. Calgary Flames: Cole Sillinger, C, Sioux Falls-USHL

It's fair to wonder whether or not the Flames (in the real draft) would opt for a goalie at this spot, but I think the organization would do well to add some high-end skill up front. Sillinger, one of the USHL's top forwards this season, would fit that bill. In Pronman's recent draft confidential, one source said: "All Sillinger ever does, wherever he goes, is score and play a reliable two-way game." If he can translate that style to the NHL level, it's hard not to feel keen about him. -Hailey Salvian

14. Philadelphia Flyers: Fedor Svechkov, C, Togliatti-VHL

All things considered, I do think the Flyers would like to address their organizational depth at center in this draft, which is why Sillinger going one pick before them in this mock is tough. Fabian Lysell would fill a stylistic need for high-end speed, so he'd certainly be an option in this scenario, even though he's a wing. And while the goalies falling to No. 13 here is intriguing, I wonder if the Flyers really want to spark the inevitable Carson Wentz/Jalen Hurts comparison in Philadelphia with Carter Hart by taking a goalie so early. But let's go with Svechkov here, a center and a riser on draft boards. He fits the bill as the kind of two-way player that Flyers scouts tend to like, and his numbers as an 18-year old in the VHL against men proves that he's not lacking offensive skill, either. -Charlie O'Connor

15. Dallas Stars: Fabian Lysell, RW, Lulea-SHL

The Stars can benefit from injecting some forward talent into their pipeline. While it would still be premature to write off Riley Tuft, things aren't trending favorably there. Ty Dellandrea and Riley Damiani are the next two young talents in the waiting and there's a chance that one, if not both, will be on the NHL roster next season. The Stars have high hopes for both based on the potential each displayed in the NHL and AHL last season, respectively, but either being a bona fide top-six NHLer would be a pleasant surprise. Lysell is an intriguing offensive talent, starting with his supreme skating abilities and relentlessness. He already has a knack for getting to the tough areas and isn't afraid to get dirty. He's not imposing in stature but makes up for that in tenacity. -Saad Yousuf

16. New York Rangers: Brennan Othmann, LW, Flint-OHL

The Rangers are overstocked on defense, and heavy on skill-laden forwards they've accumulated over the last four years. So, a forward who plays a hard game — like last year's second-rounder Will Cuyille — would be ideal. However, I think there's a better than good chance the Rangers will be trading the pick before the draft in a package to fill a need. -Rick Carpiello

17. St. Louis Blues: Jesper Wallstedt, G, Lulea-SHL

The Blues have a WJC gold-medal goalie in Joel Hofer and another who put up record numbers in the QMJHL this year in Colten Ellis, but Wallstedt is too good to pass up. The team's prospect pool is thin at



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forward and defense, but the Blues can either trade one of their goalies or find skaters later in the draft. -Jeremy Rutherford

18. Winnipeg Jets: Carson Lambos, LHD, Winnipeg-WHL

Winnipeg would be delighted if an elite forward fell to them as Cole Perfetti did in 2020. With the board breaking in a more straightforward fashion, Winnipeg ICE defenceman Carson Lambos is good value at 17th overall. Scouts like the 6-foot-1 left-shooting defenceman's ability to attack the middle of the ice off the rush or from a standstill, walking the line deftly at the point before opening up a seam for himself or one of his teammates. A medical issue ended Lambos' season early but, as long as he's in fine physical form, the Winnipeg product has enough all-around tools to help his hometown team build its blue line of the future. -Murat Ates

19. Nashville Predators: Francesco Pinelli, C, Kitchener-OHL

The Predators began incorporating younger players into their lineup this season, which places greater importance on finding prospects who can contribute sooner than later. Pinelli, who had 41 points in 59 OHL games in 2019-20, held his own against professionals in Slovenia this season and has top-six potential. -Adam Vingam

20. Edmonton Oilers: Sebastian Cossa, G, Edmonton-WHL

The Oilers have some fine goalie prospects in Stuart Skinner, Ilya Konovalov, and Olivier Rodrigue, but none of them have the same elite upside as Cossa. The organization would be getting a much-needed goaltender of the future, who can turn pro next fall because of his late birthdate. Cossa stars for the Oil Kings, the local WHL team owned by the Oilers owner Daryl Katz. Just worth noting. -Daniel Nugent-Bowman

21. Boston Bruins: Corson Ceulemans, RHD, Brooks-AJHL

The Bruins secure size, offensive creativity and an always-valuable right shot on defense with Corson Ceulemans. The Regina, Saskatchewan, native scored one goal and seven assists for Team Canada in the 2021 U-18 World Championships, most of any defenseman in the tournament. He could be a future partner for Mason Lohrei, the left-shot defenseman the Bruins drafted in 2020. Ceulemans, who will be a freshman at Wisconsin, fits the Bruins' preference for NCAA commits. Seven of their nine picks in 2019 and 2020 are collegians. -Fluto Shinzawa

22. Minnesota Wild: Zachary Bolduc, C, Rimouski-QMJHL

You can never have too many centermen, and even though the Wild took a couple in the first two rounds last year, getting a guy that Pronman had going at No. 17 at 21 seems a good bet. Good skater, high skilled, not a munchkin. Perfect pick. -Michael Russo

23. Detroit Red Wings: Nikita Chibrikov, RW, SKA-VHL

In Chibrikov, the Red Wings take a swing on a potential top-six winger after Chibrikov led all 2021 draft eligibles in scoring at the World U18 championships. He also led all U18 players in per-game scoring this season in Russia's VHL and played 16 games in the KHL with SKA, a top team in that league. -Max Bultman

24. Florida Panthers: Isak Rosén, RW, Leksands-SHL

Given who was available and the Panthers' tendencies at the draft in the last few years, I debated both Sasha Pastujov and Oskar Olausson for this pick as well. But Rosén is probably slightly more highly regarded as a prospect among a consensus of scouts. They're not afraid of a group to target players with warts that some teams will steer clear of (ie. Pastujov's average acceleration, for example) but there's a clear desire for up-tempo, skilled creators who can play with pace and Rosén both qualifies and fits into the 20s range. -Scott Wheeler

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

This is a bit of a gamble pick for Kekalainen, and it could pay big dividends. Raty slid down draft boards with a disappointing 2020-21, but his collection of skills are undeniable, and he plays a premium position

that is a desperate need in Columbus. Nobody has more intel on players coming out of Finland than Kekalainen. -Aaron Portzline

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

I was going to go D here because the Wild are light on D prospects, but Pronman isn't positive Bolduc will end up being a center in the NHL (he'll fit in perfectly in Minnesota then), so I decided to go with another center in Johnston. The more centers the merrier in Minny, as all Wild fans know. -Michael Russo

27. Carolina Hurricanes: Colton Dach, C, Saskatoon-WHL

Who could forget Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon's vow to stop drafting defensemen in the first round? You've got to factor that in when you're discussing the Hurricanes in the first round. Then you factor in the unusual circumstances of this year, the Hurricanes' low pick at 26 and their future needs. Although it strays from their usual agenda of upside, speed and skill, I wouldn't hate seeing them go for Colton Dach. Jordan Staal is showing no signs of slowing down, but the Canes will eventually need another big man down the middle — Dach could eventually be one of those guys at a depth level as your Vincent Trocheck and Martin Necas of the world fill out the Hurricanes' center. This would be purely for insurance, and that's not the Hurricanes' usual jam, but I don't think they have many options, here. I also think Dach's stock rose last season, growing into his 6-foot-4 frame and posting 11 goals and 20 points in 20 games in the WHL. It might be a controversial pick, but I really see Dach growing into a depth NHL center. -Sara Civian

28. Colorado Avalanche: Samu Salminen, C, Jokerit-Jr. A. Liiga

The Avalanche have used their first pick on defensemen three of the past four years, and considering the system's depth at that position, it would make sense to pick a forward unless a blueliner they like falls in the draft. Salminen is a center who can score, and though his skating could use work, he likely will get selected somewhere in the range of the Avalanche's first pick. He's also committed to play college hockey at Denver, which would make it easy for the team to track his development. -Peter Baugh

29. New Jersey Devils: Oskar Olausson, RW, HV71-SHL

The Devils have some obvious long-term needs, but it has to be all about who's left on the board at No. 29 (or 28, because this is confusing — thanks, Coyotes). There would have been serious consideration for Samu Salminen had Peter not snatched him up with the previous selection, but Oskar Olausson has decent size and has earned high marks for his skating and shooting abilities. New Jersey can afford to be patient with Olausson, given players like Alexander Holtz, Dawson Mercer and Nolan Foote are ahead of him in the "almost ready for the NHL" queue. -Corey Masisak

30. Vegas Golden Knights: Xavier Bourgault, C, Shawinigan-QMJHL

The Golden Knights have plenty of well-rounded forwards in their pipeline but don't have a pure playmaker like Xavier Bourgault. The biggest questions around Bourgault are his skating and defense, which is why he's available this late in the draft. But his high marks for vision, passing ability and quick release on his wrist shot should set him apart from most of the forward prospects in Vegas' system. The fact that Bourgault is older than most of his peers, and the QMJHL season was so unusual due to the pandemic, make evaluating Bourgault difficult, but he was the most productive draft-eligible player in that league this season and Vegas is unlikely to find a player with higher offensive upside this late in the round. -Jesse Granger

31. Montreal Canadiens: Zachary L'Heureux, LW, Halifax-QMJHL

It is a bit of a trope for the Canadiens to be taking a Quebec kid and hoping he pans out, but when you are picking at this spot and someone with the upside of L'Heureux is available, the unique reality of the Canadiens comes into play. Having said that, L'Heureux's competitiveness fits with what the Canadiens have been looking for in the draft over the past few years, and the relative lack of talented wingers in



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their system fits an organizational need as well. Win-win-win. -Arpon Basu

32. Columbus Blue Jackets: Samu Tuomaala, RW, Karpat-Jr. A. Liiga

Tuomaala followed a point-a-game season in the Finnish junior leagues with a breakout performance in the World U-18s this spring. He had 5-6-11 in seven games, tied for fifth in points among all players. His skill is undeniable. He's a crafty, quick, creative player who looks like a future NHL power play threat. If the draft falls this way, the Jackets will have drafted two Karpat players in Raty and Tuomaala. -Aaron Portzline

Pronman's audit

One critique I would make of our writers is how few defensemen got picked with only six going in the top 32, which seems unrealistic. I would expect Daniil Chayka to very likely go Day 1; with Shai Buium, Kirill Kirsanov and Stanislav Svozil as strong possibilities to be first-rounders; and Olen Zellweger, Evan Nause and Jack Peart having outside chances too.

On the flip side, I thought it was interesting how fast the centers went off the board, a value tendency that is common among NHL teams. I identified 10 players of a pool of about 40 players I thought projected as true NHL centers to our writers and by pick 27 they were all gone.

I wouldn't be shocked, because of the risk of projecting the position, but I would be somewhat surprised if the first goaltender is picked by No. 16. That said, the writers' hesitancy to go goalie I think reflects the inherent risk compared to getting a top skater prospect high in the draft. Those debates happen in NHL draft meetings.

NHL scouts' audit

When we were doing the picks as a group, Detroit writer Max Bultman said some scouts would chastise our picks for the two top goaltenders. He was right. "No chance Wallstedt gets out of the top 15," said one scout. "Cossa will go higher," said a second scout.

"Both of the goaltenders are similar types of prospects to Spencer Knight and Yaroslav Askarov, who both went very high," said a third scout.

But the feedback was not all negative on that front. "I think you have it mostly right with the goalies. Maybe I'd project them a couple spots higher. St. Louis or Winnipeg would be the floor for the second goalie," said one NHL scout.

Another disagreed, "I could see one of them sliding later into the teens, some teams won't take that gamble. Edmonton for me would be the floor on either as you guys have it."

In several iterations of this mock draft that I've sent to scouts — with a consensus group of nine skaters emerging no matter the variation between our two staff mocks or my personal one — there is always a scout who is convinced a certain player won't get to Vancouver at No. 9. In this instance, it's Eklund with several scouts saying he'll be gone by then. But in my mock with Johnson at No. 9, I got similar feedback and in our last staff mock with McTavish. Thomas Drance is sure he's won both iterations of the staff mock, and depending on who you ask, he's probably right.

Who didn't go top 20 that some think will?

"Isak Rosén would be a candidate for me. His U18s were great. He's going to go higher or someone in the 20s is getting a steal," said one scout.

Who went top 20 that some think won't?

"Pinelli is a really good player, but if he goes Day 1, I would bet it's towards the end of the round," predicted a scout.

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

Chris Johnston

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.

"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.

Remaining Time -1:04

Lightning's Colton finishes beautiful passing play to beat Price

"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.



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"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?"

Remaining Time -1:25

Nikita Kucherov calls out Canadiens fans in legendary postgame game presser

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.

Remaining Time -2:26

Do the Lightning have a claim of being the best team in the salary cap era?

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."

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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.

Remaining Time -1:01

Lightning celebrate winning Stanley Cup as clock ticks away in Game 5

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.

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USA TODAY / NHL 2021 season is over. What is next for Lightning, Canadiens after Stanley Cup?

Mike Brehm

The Tampa Bay Lightning are knocking on dynasty status after becoming the second team of the salary cap era to repeat as Stanley Cup champions.

But will the salary cap prevent them from winning another?

"The team knows they're probably not going to be together next year," Lightning coach Jon Cooper told Sportsnet after Wednesday night's 1-0 victory against the Montreal Canadiens. "That was the conversation: Don't let this end. What a group. Expansion. Cap. Everything. We weren't going to go out without raising that trophy."

The Lightning were able to keep most of the team together because Nikita Kucherov went on long-term injured reserve after having offseason hip surgery and missing the entire 56-game regular season. That allowed them to exceed the cap by the amount of his \$9.5 million hit.

But the Lightning won't be able to do that again, and the Seattle Kraken expansion draft is looming:

Where do the Lightning and Canadiens stand heading into the offseason?

Tampa Bay Lightning

The good news for the Lightning is that the core -- Kucherov, Brayden Point, Steven Stamkos, Andrei Vasilevskiy, Victor Hedman, Ryan McDonagh, Alex Killorn, Ondrej Palat, Anthony Cirelli and Yanni Gourde -- is signed through at least next season.

The bad news is that the team is already in cap trouble and two-thirds of the highly effective third line is coming up for unrestricted free agency.

Blake Coleman (\$1.8 million) and Barclay Goodrow (\$925,000), who were acquired before the 2020 championship, were bargains. But they



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will be due bigger deals after their strong postseason that included a spectacular goal in Game 2 of the Final.

Five defensemen are under contract, but David Savard and Luke Schenn are unrestricted. Forward Ross Colton, who scored the series-clinching goal, is a restricted free agent.

The Lightning put forward Tyler Johnson (two goals in Game 3 of the Final) on waivers before the Kucherov surgery, so he likely will be gone. He has three years left on his deal at a \$5 million hit. Maybe the Lightning could offer the Kraken a pick to take him in the expansion draft.

Moving forward, Point will be due a big raise after his contract expires in 2022.

General manager Julien BriseBois has his work cut out for him.

Montreal Canadiens

The Canadiens can't rest easy because they'll be moving back into a loaded division that includes Tampa Bay, Boston, Florida and Toronto.

But they have cap room and a good mix of veterans and rising youngsters (Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Jesperi Kotkaniemi) who gained valuable experience during the team's run.

GM Marc Bergevin loaded up on former Stanley Cup winners, and Corey Perry and Eric Staal are unrestricted. So is Joel Armia, the third member of their effective fourth line.

Checking center Phillip Danault also is unrestricted. They could choose to move on from UFAs Tomas Tatar, Erik Gustafsson and Jon Merrill.

Artturi Lehkonen and Kotkaniemi are restricted free agents.

Backup goalie Jake Allen is expected to be exposed in the expansion draft.

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