



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

The News & Observer

Hurricanes assistant coach Dean Chynoweth departs for Maple Leafs

By Luke DeCock

For the second time in four seasons, the Carolina Hurricanes are looking for a new defensive assistant after Dean Chynoweth left for the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday.

Chynoweth, who orchestrated the NHL's third-best penalty-killing unit on Rod Brind'Amour's bench, replaces new Seattle Kraken head coach Dave Hakstol with the Leafs.

Negotiations over new contracts for Brind'Amour's staff, including Chynoweth, delayed the head coach's own three-year extension until June this spring: "It's important to have the right people around me," Brind'Amour said at the time. Chynoweth was given permission to entertain other offers and will become one of the NHL's highest-paid assistant coaches with the cash-happy Leafs.

"Everybody's happy about it. I'm happy for him," Brind'Amour said Monday in an interview. "I hate to lose him but everyone's situation is different. It's just the way it goes."

Chynoweth, 52, joined the Hurricanes in the summer of 2018 to replace Steve Smith, who Brind'Amour had hoped to retain from Bill Peters' previous staff when Brind'Amour was promoted to take over. Smith left to join the Buffalo Sabres. Jeff Daniels continues to serve as the other assistant coach.

During Chynoweth's tenure, the Hurricanes were one of the best regular-season teams short-handed but struggled in that

department in the playoffs, while the team's talented blue line continued to excel. Last season, Dougie Hamilton, Jaccob Slavin and Brett Pesce all received Norris Trophy votes. Hamilton finished fourth in the voting and was named to the NHL's second all-star team, while Slavin became the fourth defenseman in NHL history to win the Lady Byng Trophy honoring gentlemanly play.

"As someone who grew up in western Canada and watched the Maple Leafs on Hockey Night in Canada every weekend, I'm thrilled to join the team's coaching staff," Chynoweth said in a statement. "I'm very excited for the opportunity to work alongside (head coach) Sheldon (Keefe), the rest of the staff and the talented group of players in Toronto."

One potential replacement: Former Hurricanes defenseman Tim Gleason is the team's roving director of defensemen development, but Brind'Amour said there's no shortage of coaches interested in supervising a blue line that includes Slavin, Pesce and Brady Skjei. Hamilton is an unrestricted free agent who could still re-sign with the Hurricanes, but has been given permission to talk to other teams ahead of the July 28 opening of free agency.

"Everybody wants this job," Brind'Amour said. "I've got lots of people calling me. Obviously we have a good group to work with."



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Top NHL free agent goalies: Andersen on market

Grubauer, Rask, Mrazek also possibly available when signing can begin July 28

By David Satriano

With the NHL free agent signing period about to begin, there are several teams in need of a starting goalie or in the market for a backup.

NHL.com takes a closer look at the top unrestricted free agent goalies expected to be available when the market opens July 28 (listed in alphabetical order):

Frederik Andersen, Toronto Maple Leafs

The 31-year-old played 24 games, the fewest in his eight NHL seasons, because of a lower-body injury and was 13-8-3 with a career-worst 2.96 goals-against average and .895 save percentage. Andersen had won at least 20 games and had a save percentage of at least .909 in each of his previous seven NHL seasons. In 393 regular-season games (381 starts) for the Anaheim Ducks and Maple Leafs, Andersen is 226-100-48 with a 2.65 GAA, .915 save percentage and 19 shutouts, and 27-23 with a 2.55 GAA, .916 save percentage and three shutouts in 53 Stanley Cup Playoff games.

Jonathan Bernier, Detroit Red Wings

The 32-year-old was one of the bright spots for the Red Wings this season, going 9-11-1 with a 2.99 GAA and .914 save percentage in 24 games (23 starts). He has made at least 30 starts in each of his previous seven full NHL seasons and is capable of being a starter or backup. Bernier is 161-159-39 with a 2.77 GAA, .913 save percentage and 18 shutouts in 394 regular-season games (355 starts) for the Los Angeles Kings, Maple Leafs, Ducks, Colorado Avalanche and Red Wings. He is 2-5 with a 3.35 GAA and .885 save percentage in nine playoff games (five starts), winning the Stanley Cup with the Kings as the backup to Jonathan Quick in 2012.

Chris Driedger, Florida Panthers

The 27-year-old was 14-6-3 with a 2.07 GAA, .927 save percentage and three shutouts in 23 games, his first full NHL season. Driedger could be expendable with 20-year-old Spencer Knight emerging late this season as the successor to Sergei Bobrovsky, who has five seasons remaining on his contract. After it took the third-round pick (No. 76) by the Ottawa Senators in the 2012 NHL Draft more than seven years to make his first NHL start, Driedger has performed well in a limited sample size. He is 21-9-4 with a 2.09 GAA,

.929 save percentage and four shutouts in 38 regular-season games (34 starts) for the Senators and Panthers.

Devan Dubnyk, Colorado Avalanche

Although Dubnyk has struggled in each of the past two seasons, during which he is 18-26-4 with a 3.29 GAA, .892 save percentage and two shutouts in 52 games (46 starts), there will likely still be teams interested in signing the 35-year-old, who is out to prove he can still perform at a high level. For five straight seasons from 2014-19, Dubnyk won at least 31 games and never had a GAA higher than 2.54 or a save percentage lower than .913. He is 253-206-54 with a 2.61 GAA, .914 save percentage and 33 shutouts in 542 regular-season games (514 starts) for the Edmonton Oilers, Nashville Predators, Arizona Coyotes, Minnesota Wild, San Jose Sharks and Avalanche.

Brian Elliott, Philadelphia Flyers

If Elliott doesn't re-sign with the Flyers, he could be one of the most coveted backup goalies available. The 36-year-old was 15-9-2 with a 3.06 GAA, .889 save percentage and two shutouts in 30 games (26 starts) this season. Elliott has played at least 30 games in 11 of his 13 NHL seasons, going 256-155-49 with a 2.53 GAA, .910 save percentage and 42 shutouts in 502 regular-season games (457 starts) for the Senators, Avalanche, St. Louis Blues, Calgary Flames and Flyers.

Philipp Grubauer, Colorado Avalanche

The 29-year-old was 30-9-1 in 40 games (39 starts) this season. Grubauer led the NHL in GAA (1.95; minimum 30 starts), was tied with Semyon Varlamov of the New York Islanders for the lead in shutouts (seven), second in wins behind Andre Vasilevskiy of the Tampa Bay Lightning (31), and sixth in save percentage (.922). He is 109-61-21 with a 2.34 GAA, .920 save percentage and 18 shutouts in 214 regular-season games (187 starts) for the Washington Capitals and Avalanche. Grubauer is 19-10-1 with a 2.50 GAA, .913 save percentage and two shutouts in 33 postseason games (32 starts), winning the Stanley Cup with Washington as the backup to Braden Holtby in 2018.

Jaroslav Halak, Boston Bruins

The 36-year-old had been the primary backup to Tuukka Rask since signing with the Bruins as a free agent July 1, 2018, but he was overtaken by rookie Jeremy Swayman at the end of this season after being placed on the NHL COVID-19 protocol list April 5. Halak finished 9-6-4 with a 2.53 GAA, .905 save percentage and two shutouts in 19



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

games (17 starts). In 539 regular-season games (517 starts) for the Montreal Canadiens, Blues, Capitals, Islanders and Bruins, Halak is 281-173-62 with a 2.48 GAA, .916 save percentage and 52 shutouts. He is 17-20 with a 2.48 GAA and .919 save percentage in 39 playoff games (37 starts).

Petr Mrazek, Carolina Hurricanes

The 29-year-old was limited to 12 games this season because of injuries, going 6-2-3 with a 2.06 GAA, .923 save percentage and three shutouts. Mrazek won at least 21 games in each of his previous two seasons with the Hurricanes but could opt to sign elsewhere after rookie Alex Nedeljkovic took over as the starter late in the season and during the playoffs. Mrazek is 128-96-31 with a 2.59 GAA, .911 save percentage and 24 shutouts in 275 regular-season games (250 starts) for the Red Wings, Flyers and Hurricanes.

James Reimer, Carolina Hurricanes

Along with Mrazek and Nedeljkovic, Reimer was one of three goalies the Hurricanes regularly used this season. The 33-year-old was 15-5-2 with a 2.66 GAA and .906 save percentage in 22 games (21 starts) but could be playing elsewhere next season if the Hurricanes choose instead to try and re-sign Mrazek to pair with Nedeljkovic. Reimer is 173-131-43 with a 2.79 GAA, .913 save percentage and 24 shutouts in 385 regular-season games (351 starts) for the Maple Leafs, Sharks, Panthers and Hurricanes.

Pekka Rinne, Nashville Predators

The 38-year-old saw his playing time diminish behind Juuse Saros this season, when he was 10-12-1 with a 2.84 GAA, .907 save percentage and two shutouts in 24 games (21 starts). Rinne, who said he wants to continue playing, is 369-213-75 with a 2.43 GAA, .917 save percentage and 60 shutouts in 683 regular-season games (667 starts) with Nashville. He won the Vezina Trophy voted as the best goalie in the NHL in 2017-18, when he was 42-13-4 with a 2.31 GAA, .927 save percentage and eight shutouts in 59 starts.

Mike Smith, Edmonton Oilers

The 39-year-old had a resurgence this season, going 21-6-2 and ranking fifth in save percentage (.923; minimum 30 starts) and sixth in GAA (2.31; minimum 30 starts) after he was 19-12-6 with a 2.95 GAA and .902 save percentage in 2019-20, his first season with Edmonton. Smith is 283-254-76 with a 2.69 GAA, .912 save percentage and 42 shutouts in 642 regular-season games (618 starts) for the Dallas Stars, Lightning, Coyotes, Flames and Oilers.

Linus Ullmark, Buffalo Sabres

The 27-year-old played 20 games this season because of a lower-body injury, going 9-6-3 with a 2.63 GAA and .917 save percentage. His presence was greatly missed, though, by the Sabres, who were 6-28-4 without him in net. Ullmark is 50-47-13 with a 2.78 GAA, .912 save percentage and three shutouts in 117 regular-season games (112 starts) with Buffalo.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Will Petr Mrazek re-sign with Carolina?

A season plagued by injuries gave way to an heir apparent for the Hurricanes in net. Does this also mean that it will force Petr Mrazek out?

By Ryan Henkel

Let's flashback to three years ago.

Czech netminder Petr Mrazek, is coming off a brutal end to the 2017-18 season, where after being dealt to the Philadelphia Flyers at the trade deadline, he posted a 0.891 save percentage and 3.22 goals against average in 17 regular season games for them and because of that, saw only a single playoff game — a relief effort where two goals got past him on only 14 shots.

His options are limited and the offers aren't flying in.

But he did manage to land a gig with the offer coming from a team with a long floundering struggle in net. The Canes were opting to move on from long time netminder Cam Ward, and their acquisition from the year prior, Scott Darling, was proving to be a tremendous misstep.

So the net was up for grabs, and they were willing to give Mrazek a shot at it.

"That was something that I was looking for," Mrazek had said at the time of the deal. "The opportunity to start in net and get as many games as I can. That was going to be the number one choice for me. I was really excited and happy that Carolina wanted to give me the chance."

It even went beyond just the chance to start, as Mrazek also sought just a one-year deal to actually prove to himself he could do it.

"When I talked to my agent about it, that was the first thing I was telling him," Mrazek had said. "That I would like the one-year deal because I had it before when I was in Detroit and I felt pretty good with that. It's something that's going to put me under a little bit more pressure and that's something I like. To play with more pressure on me."

Now, three years later, Mrazek seems to be back to form, having helped the Canes not only snap the playoff drought, but also make three straight playoff appearances as well as a trip to the Eastern Conference Final.

And it would have been Mrazek leading the charge all three years for the Hurricanes, but a friendly-fire thumb injury and subsequent lower-body injury kept the 29-year old netminder on the sidelines for the majority of this prior season.

By the time he was fully recovered, it was Alex Nedeljkovic's net as the rookie goaltender had put up league leading

numbers during the regular season to earn the chance to start the playoffs.

Now it seems that Nedeljkovic will be the leading option for the Hurricanes moving forward, and with Mrazek at the end of another contract, is he going to want to accept the role as the 1B option to re-sign with Carolina?

However, there's still a degree of uncertainty with Nedeljkovic on if will be able to replicate his single season numbers so keeping a known commodity like Mrazek might be the safest bet from the team's perspective. Mrazek would still have the opportunities to play and be counted on as well.

The league is more and more heading away from the starter and backup structure for netminders and instead towards a 1A and 1B split (Unless you're a team like Tampa Bay or Montreal that can ride one of the world's best netminders all the way to the end).

The question is, is that what Mrazek and Nedeljkovic will want to do? And will each take the money that comes with that split load?

The average cost of goaltending at the start of last season was around \$7 million per team ranging from the tremendous sunk cost of the Montreal Canadiens (\$13.375 million) to the budget tandem of the Washington Capitals (\$1.641 million).

So the Hurricanes' goal should be to stay around that average.

Would a split cost between Mrazek and Nedeljkovic each getting paid \$3.5 million make sense for both parties?

I took a look at contract comparables for Nedeljkovic a few weeks ago and I can't see him and the Hurricanes managing to get to any deal higher than \$3.5 million — even in spite of the ridiculous 5x\$5 contract Jim Benning handed over to Thatcher Demko.

But the big question will be about Mrazek and if wants to look around for a team searching for that number one guy, much like he did three years ago.

He searched the market again just two years ago yet he still came back to Carolina and the same thing could very well happen again.

The situation in Carolina is good. He can make a bit more money and be part of a strong tandem with a team still in a good position to compete. Plus the team did give him the chance to re-establish himself.

If the team and netminder can reach a deal that works for both parties, the Canes bringing back Mrazek makes a lot of sense.



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1217228 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes assistant coach Dean Chynoweth departs for Maple Leafs

BY LUKE DECOCK JULY 12, 2021 06:15 PM

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supervising a blue line that includes Slavin, Pesce and Brady Skjei. Hamilton is an unrestricted free agent who could still re-sign with the Hurricanes, but has been given permission to talk to other teams ahead of the July 28 opening of free agency.

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News Observer LOADED: 07.13.2021

1217318 Websites

The Athletic / Pierre McGuire's parting shot about analytics in hockey is a reminder of what we can ignore

By Sean Gentile Jul 12, 2021

The wise move upon hearing the news of Pierre McGuire's super soft post-NBC landing — the gracious one, maybe — would've been to say nothing.

After 10, 15, 25 years of chasing windmills, McGuire caught one. He's a front-office Hockey Man once more, courtesy of Eugene Melnyk and the Ottawa Senators. The job title, vice president of player development, is no small thing. He's not a general manager, as Pierre Dorion is in Ottawa at the moment, and as McGuire nearly was in Pittsburgh not so long ago, but hey, what can you do? Maybe it works out. He followed his bliss. There's something to be said for that.

Best of luck in your future endeavors and namaste, or whatever. As someone who just spent a too large portion of 15 years watching him on television, and as someone without any stake in the success of the Senators' player development pipeline, it felt like a win-win.

It still is ... but McGuire left us — and "us" here is the coalition of chumps who can't ignore TV guys who get on their nerves — with one for the road. It was, of course, about analytics, which McGuire totally doesn't sneer at and totally does understand. Let 'er rip, baby! Go out the way you came in!

"It's not that I hate analytics, but I believe in scouting," he said. "I believe that there has to be people that are boots on the ground, hardcore hockey people that can actually evaluate a player without utilizing numbers and (decide that) the player passes the eye test. I still don't know if there's an analytic equation for heart, for character, for hard work, for fearlessness, for determination, so that's part of the formula that hardcore, boot-on-the-ground scouting has to be.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

"I don't hate analytics. I think it's a tool that can be utilized in any kind of evaluation, but I'm a big believer in boots-on-the-ground scouting."

And thus, a reason to write about a guy changing jobs was borne. It's too tidy of a mission statement to ignore; this is what we've heard from him for years, in the face of facts and logic, and a nice reminder of what U.S. audiences won't get with, say, Brian Boucher standing between the benches on ESPN.

It's also ... kind of weird, right? McGuire knows — he must know — that analytics and scouting, in 2021, isn't an either/or proposition. NHL organizations are big places, full of different jobs, skill sets and personalities. No team — literally none — is making personnel decisions based on big, noisy mainframes and dot-matrix printouts or whatever goes on in that corner of his imagination. That's conventional wisdom at this point; the best way to build a team is to cull information from a bunch of different sources, then rely on your people to synthesize it. Teams with analytics departments also have "boots on the ground" scouts. That's how it works. Cross-disciplinary approaches are good. Arguments are good.

Whether he views data analysts as "hardcore hockey people" might be a more interesting question. The best analysts I know spend more time watching games, tweaking models, learning about the game and closing information gaps than anybody. Maybe even Pierre McGuire.

Whether he actually understands "analytics" is less interesting, because the answer is clear. He doesn't. He doesn't understand the work and he doesn't understand the people who do it. He's been telling us as much for years.

MCGUIRE ON TSN690: "THE TWO TEAMS THAT HAVE BEEN BUILT THROUGH ANALYTICS AND THEY ARE BOTH ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN: THE TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS AND EDMONTON OILERS."

— NHL WATCHER (@NHL_WATCHER) JUNE 2, 2021

Ah, yes. The Edmonton Oilers — analytics darlings, because they're bad. No word on which Computer Boy is telling Ken Holland to trade for a soon-to-be-38-year-old Duncan Keith. The Tampa Bay Lightning? Now there's an old-time hockey team — because they're good. Ignore Michael Peterson. Certainly ignore Julien BriseBois.

The best example I can think of, as a Pittsburgh-based writer, is how McGuire treated every shift and every positive impact by the Teddy Blueger line. Blueger, Zach Aston-Reese and Brandon Tanev are, very literally, analytics darlings. Their work, 15 years ago, would either be unnoticed, unappreciated or not statistically flashy enough to keep the line intact. Analytics exist to show the impact of players like Blueger, Aston-Reese and Tanev.

In McGuire's world (as a broadcaster, at least), the nerds hate Blueger, Aston-Reese and Tanev.

"No analytics can measure that," he said on May 20, after Tanev scored the game-winner against the Islanders. Goals are pretty easy to measure, actually, and the effort/determination/character that those guys bring to the game shows up as measurable, tangible results in plenty of spots. Tanev in particular is a treat to watch — partially because his fearlessness leads to, y'know, good stuff. If he were out there, skating like a maniac and getting caved in, what purpose would he serve? There are plenty of sayings about "effort without results," and none of them are good. Thankfully for the Penguins, that's not in play with Tanev.

There's more, though. There always is; you've got 15 years of tape to go back on, though I'm not sure why you'd want to do that. We could keep going and maybe fully rehash an argument that should've been settled a decade ago. That'd be fun.

So, we'll leave it here; McGuire can now ride his favorite hobby horse to the Senators front office. Maybe it'll work out, and maybe it won't. It's not impossible to imagine him acting as a decent counter-balance in the

room, whenever The Big Debates are taking place. That's between him, Dorion and whoever else.

As viewers, though, we're officially spared. Fifteen years is a long time to listen to a person if they don't find something new to say.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.13.2021

1217319 Websites

The Athletic / Hold 'em or Fold 'em: Which NHL teams would prefer an expansion-style reboot over what they currently have?

Eric Duhatschek Jul 12, 2021

Here at The Athletic, we're always looking for a good hypothetical to chase down the rabbit hole and today, we're going to explore this question, in the context of the Seattle Kraken entering the NHL as its 32nd franchise.

If you're an NHL team and faced with a choice of either starting your entire franchise over from scratch, as Seattle is about to do, or press on with your current lineup and depth chart — which would you do?

Stay the course, on the grounds that even the weakest teams have some nice pieces in place?

Or jettison the entire lot because nothing would be better than all the overpaid, underachieving somethings that you've been accumulating over the years?

And we'll make it an either/or proposition. You can't cherry-pick one player — Miro Heiskanen in Dallas or Trevor Zegras in Anaheim, for example — and then dump all the rest.

You're either the Kraken, starting fresh, or you're prepared to muddle ahead with the good, the bad and the ugly on your current roster.

Procedurally, Seattle will make its expansion draft selections on July 21, choosing one player from each team except the Golden Knights, who are exempt. The Golden Knights are also exempt from this particular exercise.

One of the Golden Knights' most successful strategies was to weaponize its salary-cap space. They entered the NHL with a clean financial slate, which allowed it to help cure other teams' salary-cap headaches — at a price. In turn for taking on bad contracts, the Golden Knights received either player help or draft-choice consideration.

Think of this exercise as the NHL equivalent of sitting down at a poker table, and the dealer gives you two choices. You can either completely discard a bad hand without penalty or stay with what you've got.

Two choices: Hold 'em or fold 'em.

Any veteran card player will tell you there are no guarantees the new cards will be any better than the old ones. On the other hand, if they're awful to start, how much worse can they get?

So, let's take a look and assess every team and conclude with a verdict. Then we want your take on each situation as well. There's a poll to vote for each team and we'd love for you to share your thoughts in the comments.

Anaheim Ducks

If you did this exercise two years ago, the Ducks would have been at or near the head of the class when it comes to turning all their cards in. But this summer, a combined \$13.5 million in contracts (Ryan Getzlaf and David Backes) comes off the books, which leaves Adam Henrique, at \$5.825 million through 2023-24, as the priciest overpay. John Gibson



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

hasn't played like a \$6.4 million goalie in a couple of seasons now, but there's no reason to think that as the Ducks improve he can't return to the form he demonstrated earlier in his career. But the best news in Anaheim is that both Trevor Zegras and Jamie Drysdale, in this year's NHL cameos, showed significant NHL upside. Along with a slowly maturing young core, the Ducks look poised to inch back into NHL significance without too many salary-cap impediments holding them back.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Arizona Coyotes

The Coyotes explored trade options for Oliver Ekman-Larsson last offseason, but found the going difficult because not only is he signed until 2026-27 at \$8.25 million per year, he also has a full no-move clause, which limited Arizona's potential trading partners. When Ekman-Larsson was on the periphery of the Norris conversation, that contract might have seemed like a good idea. Now? It's weighty. The Coyotes have one emerging shining light on the blue line in Jakob Chychrun (\$4.6 million through 2024-25) and the underrated Conor Garland up front (RFA this summer and due for a raise). But when you factor in too much money for the likes of Clayton Keller, Nick Schmaltz, Christian Dvorak and Phil Kessel, the scales tip in the direction of a reset.

The verdict: Fold 'em.

Boston Bruins

Any discussion of the best value contracts in the NHL would have to include the Bruins' entire top line — Patrice Bergeron (\$6.875 million), David Pastrnak (\$6.66 million) and especially Brad Marchand, who this year finished third in the NHL points race and is signed for an extremely reasonable price (\$6.125 million) through the end of 2024-25. Historically, the Bruins have been able to convince a high percentage of their core players to accept hometown discounts in order to keep the whole band together. The biggest misstep might have been committing \$5.25 million per year to Charlie Coyle after one effective playoff. The Bruins' window to contend for a championship could shrink in three or so years down the road, but the core still looks effective right now.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres are a mess on so many levels, but the one that's basically beyond their control is the state of Jack Eichel's health, which sounds precarious. He has a neck issue and at the moment, there is a divide between the players' camp and the organization over how to treat that going forward. Eichel is a rare talent, which is why the Sabres originally committed \$80 million to him over an eight-year span. They also have arguably two of the most untradeable contracts in the NHL right now (Jeff Skinner, \$9 million AAV until 2026-27 and Kyle Okposo \$6 million until 2022-23). When you factor in all the losing and all the mediocrity in the bottom half of the lineup, even the idea that you'd be jettisoning younger bright lights such as Rasmus Dahlin and Dylan Cozens, you'd have to think: No one needs a complete, top-to-bottom makeover more than the Sabres do.

The verdict: Fold 'em.

Calgary Flames

Whenever a discussion of general manager Brad Treliving's strengths and weaknesses occurs, the one thing that almost always falls into the plus-category is his ability to get players signed for fair market value — and sometimes, even great bargains. Elias Lindholm would fall into that category — when he came over from Carolina in the Dougie Hamilton trade, he signed for an AAV of \$4.85 million until 2023-24 — there may not be a better value contract in that under \$5 million-per-year price range in the NHL. The highest-paid player on the Flames roster is Matthew Tkachuk, at a bridge contract at a \$7 million AAV that takes him to the end of 2021-22. The biggest anchor is popular dressing-room presence Milan Lucic at \$6 million for the next two years. More than

anything else, the Flames need some of the reasonably priced players in their core to have better seasons next year. This is one of the many teams that falls into a mushy middle — with the good outweighing the bad by enough that you'd probably lean toward ...

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Carolina Hurricanes

When Tom Dundon joined the NHL's ownership ranks, he was described as a "disrupter" and mostly when that term was applied to him, it was meant negatively. Well, who's laughing now? Dundon questioned some longstanding assumptions about value in the NHL. The staff, led by general manager Don Waddell, has done a nice job of blending players coming through their developmental pipeline (Sebastian Aho, Andrei Svechnikov, Martin Necas, Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce) with those arriving via trades (Dougie Hamilton, Vincent Trocheck, Nino Niederreiter). The net result: A team that contended for the Presidents' Trophy with the 27th-highest payroll in the league, according to CapFriendly. Impressive.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Chicago Blackhawks

If you scroll through CapFriendly and get to the Blackhawks' long-term injured reserve, you'd have seen five names there for this season, totalling \$25.3 million — salaries for Jonathan Toews, Brent Seabrook, Andrew Shaw, Zack Smith and Alexander Nylander. The Blackhawks are hopeful (but unsure) if Toews is coming back. Seabrook and Shaw aren't. Smith comes off the books this summer. For Nylander, it was essentially a lost season. On the plus side, Patrick Kane remains a driving force, but he commands \$10.5 million through 2022-23, so he represents fair-market value, but not a bargain by any means. Kirby Dach is on his entry-level contract and is probably their most exciting prospect. But the idea of shedding all that salary and starting over without paying for past performance would likely please the organization's accountants to no end. We know how they'd vote.

The verdict: Fold 'em.

Colorado Avalanche

The best bargain in the NHL right now is arguably Nathan MacKinnon, with two years remaining at \$6.3 million and easily in the top five of NHL centres. Colorado showed a willingness to pony up for market value when it gave Mikko Rantanen an extension averaging \$9.25 million, and they have three key players — UFAs Gabriel Landeskog and Philipp Grubauer and RFA Cale Makar — up for new deals this summer, so GM Joe Sakic will need to trim and pare elsewhere to keep his core pieces in place. But with quality youngsters such as Alex Newhook and Bowen Byram coming through the pipeline, the Avalanche has a great blend of today and tomorrow to offset the money they owe a couple of yesterday's heroes (Erik Johnson, the most notable drag at \$6 million for two additional years).

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets began shedding assets at the trade deadline, adding extra first-rounders for Nick Foligno and David Savard. They might also be obliged to trade franchise lynchpin Seth Jones in the offseason, to maximize his asset value and so as not potentially lose him as a UFA in 2022. Zach Werenski is a valuable piece, but he's RFA following this season, coming off a \$5 million AAV bridge contract. Patrik Laine had an underachieving season after coming over from Winnipeg and he'll need a \$7.5 million qualifying offer to retain his rights as an RFA. Goalies Elvis Merikins and Joonas Korpi are both UFA after 2022, so decisions need to be made there as well. On the plus side, the Blue Jackets aren't boxed into a lot of salary-cap corners and as they remake their roster to reflect the post-John Tortorella era, there is some valuable trade bait on the current roster. So, a little tentatively, but ... hold 'em.

The verdict: Hold 'em.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

Dallas Stars

Arguably, no team is harder to assess than Dallas because, on the one hand, they have around \$38 million tied up in five players that are either aging, injury-prone or both (Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn, Joe Pavelski, Alexander Radulov and goaltender Ben Bishop). On the other hand, they have some quality young talent that's attractively priced and has some upside, beginning with Miro Heiskanen, Calder finalist Jason Robertson plus goalie of the future Jake Oettinger. They are supported by Roope Hintz and Denis Gurianov, who are both young and entering their primes. To unload all the salary cap anchors would also mean discarding a decent young nucleus. I changed my mind on the Stars about five times, before grudgingly deciding on what will almost certainly be an unpopular conclusion.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Detroit Red Wings

The Red Wings are another team that two years ago would have gladly started from scratch, given all the dead weight they were carrying on their payroll. But time has a way of fixing that. Now you're really down to only one terrible contract — Frans Nielsen at \$5.7 million — and that disappears after next year. The Red Wings have a select few building blocks already in place — Dylan Larkin, Tyler Bertuzzi, Filip Zadina and Filip Hronek — and have a few more coming, including two high-end draft choices from 2019 and 2020, Moritz Seider and Lucas Raymond. In 2019, the Red Wings would have happily started over. Now? No.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Edmonton Oilers

You have Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl in their respective primes, signed for a combined \$21 million, McDavid for five more years and Draisaitl for four (which, for comparative purposes, is just slightly more than Dallas will pay Seguin and Benn, who'll earn a combined \$19.35 million over roughly the same term). This isn't difficult. You've got the last two Hart Trophy winners signed for decent dollars and term, plus emerging star Darnell Nurse. The biggest salary-cap headache they've got is James Neal, two more years at \$4.65 million, which, if necessary, can be bought out.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Florida Panthers

The Panthers would be neck-and-neck with the Oilers in this ranking, if not for one glaring contractual error — committing \$10 million a year to goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky for five more years after this which, even if he were a Vezina Trophy contender, would be too much. Consider that Bobrovsky, by himself, earns just slightly more than the combined salaries of Aleksander Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau — who make \$5.9 million apiece. Both players are stars and, along, with MacKinnon, Mark Scheifele and a handful of others, deliver as much bang for their salary cap buck as any two stars in the league. MacKenzie Weegar's emergence this year for a \$3.25 million AAV is more, great under-the-radar value. Imagine where the Panthers would be if they could shed themselves of Bobrovsky's money (not to mention the \$2.33 million buyout payment to Scott Darling or the \$1.092 million cap recapture payment for Roberto Luongo). You'd have up-and-comer Spencer Knight on his entry-level salary, plus the means to extend pending UFA Chris Driedger for modest dollars. Still, it's an easy call.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Los Angeles Kings

Just as with Chicago, the Kings paid a heavy financial price for their two Stanley Cup championship teams, rewarding their core players with massive pay raises that currently either match or outstrip their on-ice contributions. Both Anze Kopitar (\$10 million until 2023-24) and Drew Doughty (\$11 million through 2026-27) had good seasons for the Kings, but they certainly didn't outplay their contracts. Nor did Jonathan Quick (\$5.8 million) or Dustin Brown (\$5.875 million). The Kings do have a lot of

youngsters in the developmental pipeline, but probably only Quinton Byfield projects as a front-of-the-roster candidate. It probably won't sit well with some members of Kings Nation, but we're going to opt to ...

The verdict: Fold 'em.

Minnesota Wild

Kirill Kaprizov may be the most exciting player to join the Wild since Marian Gaborik, and he's ultimately the tipping point in this discussion. On one hand, the dollars tied up in aging stars such as Zach Parise and Ryan Suter (\$7.538 million AAV until 2024-25), other pricey deals for Mats Zuccarello and Matt Dumba (\$6 million AAV per player) and even the \$7.574 million committed to heart-and-soul captain Jared Spurgeon weigh heavily on the organization's payroll flexibility. On the other hand, the Wild developed some chemistry around worker-bee contributors such as Joel Eriksson Ek, Marcus Foligno and Jordan Greenway, and the upside of Kevin Fiala does not look to be fully tapped as yet. Also, the goaltending tandem of Cam Talbot and rookie Kaapo Kahkonen returned a lot of value for a combined salary total of roughly \$4.3 million — more than many teams pay for a starter. In the end, you'd have to lean toward ...

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Montreal Canadiens

Both Carey Price (\$10.5 million AAV) and Shea Weber (\$7.85 million AAV) are signed through 2025-26. It wouldn't be a problem if both were still in the absolute primes of their careers, delivering performances that had them in the Vezina and Norris Trophy conversations for many years. Until these playoffs, they hadn't played to those levels in a while — and those contracts will force the Canadiens to jump through the salary-cap hoops until they expire. That's a lot to ask for from a team that also has a few fairly priced contributing veterans (Jeff Petry, \$6.25 million; Brendan Gallagher, \$6.5 million), one bargain in Tyler Toffoli (\$4.25 million) and \$5.5 million committed to Jonathan Drouin. It would be an easy decision if it weren't for the presence of three youngsters: Nick Suzuki, Cole Caufield and Alexander Romanov, two of whom were absolutely sensational in Montreal's unexpectedly deep postseason run. Even though the goal of the exercise is to think long-term, big-picture thoughts, we can't completely rule out the value of having the collective whole come together as effectively as it did in the recently completed playoffs.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Nashville Predators

Nashville's salary-cap situation was even more complicated a few years back, but then the Predators traded P.K. Subban, bought out Kyle Turris and now just have to figure out what to do with Ryan Johansen and Matt Duchene, who each count \$8 million against the cap and are signed, respectively, until the 2024-25 and 2025-26 season. Neither is producing anywhere near the numbers those contracts imply. Nashville does have one of the NHL's top talents in 2020 Norris Trophy winner Roman Josi (\$9.059 million AAV). Also, Eeli Tolvanen finally looks like an NHL contributor (especially on the power play) after a longer-than-anticipated minor-league apprenticeship. It's hard to quantify how much the Predators' improved second-half chemistry would factor into the decision. Because if it was strictly based on contractual commitments, you'd have to say ...

The verdict: Fold 'em.

New Jersey Devils

In June, the Devils were at the absolute bottom of the salary-cap charts, and that's even with Subban counting \$9 million against the cap for another season after this one, at which point he will be UFA. The only core player signed for an extended period is Nico Hischier (\$7.25 million through 2026-27) and Hischier had a miserable season, punctuated by injury and illness. Most of the young building blocks, including Jack Hughes, are on entry-level contracts. The reality is the Devils are already close to Seattle in terms of having their own, relatively clean financial



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

slate. It's unlikely they would turn that in, after nabbing two No. 1 picks since 2017, plus a goaltender with a decent upside (Mackenzie Blackwood). No, they'll play this hand out.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

New York Islanders

The Islanders have two salary-cap anchors, Andrew Ladd and Johnny Boychuk (currently on long-term injured reserve) that they would gladly discard if they could. But otherwise, they're managing the payroll effectively and have some youngsters with an upside that would be difficult to part with: Goalie Ilya Sorokin, defenceman Noah Dobson and forward Oliver Wahlstrom. GM Lou Lamoriello traditionally likes an experienced lineup, so while the opportunity to go all young and fresh might appeal to many of his peers, it probably wouldn't suit his style or personality.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

New York Rangers

The Rangers are in a good place — in part because all the promising young talent they have in the system, from Adam Fox (still on his entry-level deal for one more year!) to Alexis Lafrenière and Kaapo Kakko — can offset the money allocated to Jacob Trouba (\$8 million per season through 2025-26) and to Tony DeAngelo, who is at \$3.725 million and figures to be a buyout candidate this offseason. And while Artemi Panarin has been an exceptional fit as a UFA, which happens so rarely that it's worth pointing out here, he does eat up \$11.642 million per season in salary-cap space. That's probably fair-market value for Panarin, but a bargain it is not. But when you factor in the youthful depth in goal, the upside looks quite promising.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Ottawa Senators

It wasn't so long ago that the Senators were an NHL laughingstock, with players fleeing the market in droves. But Ottawa maximized its return on a fading Erik Karlsson and its young core was fun to watch in the second half of a season, where they proved to be a tough out most nights. Thomas Chabot was the first of Generation Next to cash in — he's signed for \$8 million per season through 2027-28 and Brady Tkachuk (who along with Drake Batherson) is a restricted free agent this summer, who will similarly cost a lot of dollars to lock up. So far, the only real financial misstep has been giving Matt Murray a four-deal deal at a \$6.25 million AAV, which didn't return a lot of value this year. Maybe next season will be better.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Philadelphia Flyers

The Flyers are caught a little betwixt and between because, on the one hand, they have a quartet of players (Kevin Hayes, James van Riemsdyk, Jakub Voracek and Shayne Gostisbehere) earning way too much money for their levels of production. But on the other hand, they also have enough good young pieces (Carter Hart, Ivan Provorov, Joel Farabee) and players coming through the pipeline (Cam York, Morgan Frost) plus a wild card in Nolan Patrick that more than offsets the pricey high end of the roster. Starting from scratch means discarding too many players with upside.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Pittsburgh Penguins

The Penguins built two great dynasties by absolutely cratering at the bottom of the NHL standings and doing it at a time when generational players (Mario Lemieux, Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin) were coming down the pipeline. They may have to do it again — the question is the timing. The timing isn't right now, not after a year in which they won a regular-season divisional title and squeezed another fabulous year out of Crosby. He's still just 33 and has always played on a below-market

contract (\$8.7 million per season) and has a decent supporting cast still in place. Once Malkin and Kris Letang's current deals come off the books (\$9.25 million and \$7 million, respectively, both expiring at the end of next year), there may be a need to reassess. But now? No.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

San Jose Sharks

Ding! Ding! Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner. Even if all 29 other teams beyond Vegas ultimately decided to stay the course, there is no chance that the Sharks wouldn't completely avail themselves of our opportunity for a do-over here. Consider the evidence: On defence, Erik Karlsson, \$11.5 million AAV until 2026-27; Brent Burns \$8 million AAV until 2024-25; Marc-Edouard Vlasic, \$7 million AAV until 2025-26. In goal, Martin Jones, \$5.75 million AAV until 2023-24. Up front, Logan Couture, \$8 million AAV until 2026-27; Evander Kane, \$7 million AAV until 2024-25; Timo Meier, \$6 million AAV until 2023-24. At every price and experience point around the NHL, there is better value than what San Jose is getting from its core. ALSO: It's not as if the Sharks have any franchise-defining, history-altering prospects in the pipeline. Some of these calls are difficult and nuanced. This one is not.

The verdict: Fold 'em.

St. Louis Blues

Only two years removed from a Stanley Cup championship, the Blues have made some unusual spending decisions, signing both Justin Faulk and Torey Krug to contracts with identical AAVs (\$6.5 million) for terms that may not age well (both are on the books until 2026-27 seasons). Jordan Binnington's extension kicks in this year at \$6 million and it's uncertain if Vladimir Tarasenko has made a full recovery from the shoulder surgery that limited to 24 games this past season or if it will hinder his performance or trade value, which isn't great when you're on the books for \$7.5 million. The best value for dollars spent in St. Louis probably lies with three players: a \$7.5 million Ryan O'Reilly, a \$4 million David Perron and a \$5.5 million Colton Parayko. St. Louis' straight-set playoff exit to Colorado might muddy the waters a little, but the Blues have enough pedigree and experience to compete for the foreseeable future, which sways us to the side of ...

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Ever since trading J.T. Miller to the Vancouver Canucks at the 2019 draft, the Lightning have deftly managed a tricky proposition — keeping a championship nucleus intact that features a lot of players earning a lot of money. How much longer can GM Julien BriseBois keep up the Houdini act? Well, one way or another, he's done it for two years running and so it's possible he'll pull another rabbit out of the hat this coming offseason. Brayden Point is paying big dividends at an AAV of \$6.75 million, though his pay cheque next year comes in at a cool \$9 million in the final year of a bridge contract. The best values here are Victor Hedman (\$7.875 million until 2024-25) and Mikhail Sergachev (\$4.8 million until 2022-23). Nikita Kucherov and Andrei Vasilevskiy are priced about right for players of their respective statures and accomplishments (\$9.5 million each) and if we were ever to remain healthy, few would begrudge Steven Stamkos his \$8.5 million. There may come a time when it all explodes in a salary-cap mess in Tampa, but that hasn't happened yet. There's just flat out no way you could move on from this group at this time, not with a chance to go for a threeppeat next season.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Toronto's salary-cap commitments and machinations rival those of Tampa Bay's as a league-wide example of what to do and what not to do. On the one hand, Toronto tied up about \$40 million in four players: Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner, John Tavares and William Nylander. One could argue that three of the four are delivering value for what they're earning. The strategy of flowing in cost-effective youngsters and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

aging role players — some of whom were lured by the simple pleasure of playing for an iconic franchise — has kept them competitive for the last number of regular seasons. You can quibble with how GM Kyle Dubas got here, but there's no way you'd turn your back on a team with this sort of young core, even after this year's playoff stumble.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Vancouver Canucks

The Canucks' future is tied to three young pieces — Elias Pettersson at forward, Quinn Hughes on defence and Thatcher Demko in goal — and they'll all eventually break the bank on some level if their development arcs continue. Demko is signed already (five years at \$5 million a year seems reasonable). The goal, in the meantime, is to dig the team out of its salary-cap hole that prevented them from retaining, among others, Tyler Toffoli and Chris Tanev last year. The good news? Three of their better forwards (Brock Boeser, Bo Horvat and J.T. Miller) are all signed for contracts that also begin with a five and the better news is that, in one year's time, both the final year of Loui Eriksson's contract and Roberto Luongo's cap-recapture penalty come off the books. There's really no other conclusion here, other than ...

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Washington Capitals

Washington's Stanley Cup window may be closing fast, but the Caps stubbornly, year after year, make the playoffs and play an entertaining brand of hockey, yet tease you into thinking that they're a contender. Nicklas Backstrom's ticket — \$9.2 million per season — is pricey. And \$7.8 million is too much for what Evgeni Kuznetsov currently brings to the mix. Alex Ovechkin will probably get a small raise this summer after his groundbreaking 13-year, \$124 million contract expired. There really aren't a lot of prospects to get excited about in the Capitals' pipeline, but this is still a fun team to watch that looks as if there's still some tread left on the tire. When the time finally comes to bottom out, that's the year they discard the aging remnants of a squad that's pleased a lot of fans for a decade or more. In the meantime, we're keeping them around for a while longer.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Winnipeg Jets

The Jets have managed a neat trick; they've been getting a lot of talent signed at reasonable numbers for the long term while operating in one of the NHL's smallest markets. The latest value proposition? Adam Lowry turned down a chance to go to market this summer for a five-year, \$16.5 million extension — pretty good value for what he brings to the Jets' mix. Nik Ehlers (\$6 million AAV until 2024-25), Kyle Connor (\$7.124 million to 2025-26), 2020 Vezina Trophy winner Connor Hellebuyck (\$6.16 million until 2023-24) and especially Mark Scheifele (a huge bargain at \$6.125 million until the end of 2023-24) leave the Jets with a stable core of young vets either in — or just entering — their respective primes. Blake Wheeler, at \$8.25 million, is a little costly and they have another year to assess Pierre-Luc Dubois (\$5 million next year, until he becomes a restricted free agent) to work out a long-term arrangement or perhaps explore a deal. But still, this is a good team, with a bright future.

The verdict: Hold 'em.

Your verdict

Vote here on whether each NHL team should keep what they have or start from scratch. After submitting your responses, click "see previous responses" to view real-time voting results.

(Direct link for Android users is here.)

So that's how it shakes out.

In the beginning, when I first conceived the concept, I thought up to half the league might take advantage of that rare opportunity to start fresh, maybe because I've heard so many people complain, since Vegas joined

the league, that the Golden Knights had an unfair advantage and were gifted their Stanley Cup-contending team.

Personally, I don't think it's nearly as easy as people believe — and the Vegas management team, when injected with truth serum, will confess that it went far better than they originally imagined it could.

In the end, there were far fewer fold 'em options than I predicted in my own head.

For two-thirds or more of the teams in the league, the tug of a small, but attractive young nucleus overrode the big-picture attraction of starting from scratch.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.13.2021

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The Athletic / Best skaters? Top puck skills? Corey Pronman ranks the NHL draft-eligibles by skill

By Corey Pronman Jul 12, 2021

Who in the 2021 NHL Draft has the best skating, the best hands, the best hockey sense and the best compete level?

We'll rank the players via those skills and use video to highlight them. Along the way, we'll try to settle some debates on who should slot higher in which category.

For further reference on the players, here are my top 151 prospects and my most recent mock draft.

Guide to the 2021 NHL Draft

Best skaters

Luke Hughes, LHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

Justin Robidas, C, Val-d'Or-QMJHL

Jimi Suomi, LHD, Jokerit-Finland Jr.

Victor Sjöholm, RHD, HV71-Sweden Jr.

Colby Saganuik, C, Erie-OHL

Miguel Tourigny, RHD, Blainville-Boisbriand-QMJHL

Carson Latimer, RW, Edmonton-WHL

Fabian Lysell, RW, Lulea-SHL

Dmitry Zupan, C, CSKA-Russia Jr.

Luke Hughes is not a perfect player, particularly with his defensive play and at times risky turnovers, but he's a dimensional skater particularly at his 6-foot-2 frame. You could drop him in an NHL game tomorrow and his skating would separate from the pack. It's the combination of great speed, and unique edgework that his brothers Jack and Quinn also share that makes his skating ability special.

Here are a few examples of Luke Hughes' skating:

Eklund's skating isn't explosive in terms of his straightaway speed, which is still good, but his edgework and ability to evade pressure in tight is high-end.

Here's an example of his great edgework and agility:

Here's an example of his good, not great speed, but you see the edge play again in how he's able to cut through the neutral zone:



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

Robidas, Suomi, Sjöholm, Saganiuk and Tourigny all are undersized players but bring a lot of quickness with Robidas being the only top prospect of the bunch.

Whenever I inquired out west and ask about who's a guy who benefited from the WHL having a short season teams hope people are sleeping on, the name "Carson Latimer" came back several times, among some others. His skating is the main reason scouts are excited about him.

Fabian Lysell is a dynamic player and a possible first-round pick due to his high skill level combined with a top gear that will be dangerous in the NHL.

Best puck skills

Kent Johnson, C, Michigan-Big Ten

Chaz Lucius, C, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Brandt Clarke, RHD, Barrie-OHL

Zachary L'Heureux, LW, Halifax-QMJHL

Sasha Pastujov, RW, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Logan Stankoven, C, Kamloops-WHL

Conner Roulette, LW, Seattle-WHL

Stiven Sardarian, RW, CSKA-Russia Jr.

Nikita Chibrikov, RW, SKA-VHL

William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

The gap between Johnson and the rest of the group here is quite significant. His skill level is rather special.

I remember watching him in the BCHL and it was like watching a one-man highlight reel every shift. He's an extremely creative player who is able to pull off unique things with the puck.

This is one of my favorite plays I've seen by any draft-eligible this season, where Johnson does a between-the-legs pass from behind the net across the slot.

Lucius is known as a goal-scorer for good reason. He scores a lot of goals. But for me, his puck skills are just as impressive as his scoring ability. With his great hands and reach he can be dynamic with his stickhandling displays in how he gets around checks.

Some examples of Lucius' skill:

Clarke is a true offensive threat on defense and his hands truly pop. He's not a rush threat with his speed but his one-on-one play will allow him to create a lot of chances.

Here are a couple of plays showing Clarke's hands:

I'm sure some prospect fans are reading through this list recognizing top names and going "Know him, know him, know him ... who?" when they get to Sardarian. I don't know if Sardarian is going to get drafted because he has a lot of flaws. He's a wonky skater, not great off the puck, but his one-on-one skill is fantastic. There was rarely a shift you'd watch of him where he wasn't trying to pull off a difficult deke and usually executing. He's committed to playing college hockey at New Hampshire.

Best hockey sense

William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

Nikita Chibrikov, RW, SKA-VHL

Sean Behrens, LHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Owen Power, LHD, Michigan-Big Ten

Ryder Korczak, C, Moose Jaw-WHL

Olen Zellweger, LHD, Everett-WHL

Ryan Ufko, RHD, Chicago-USHL

Jack Peart, LHD, Fargo-USHL

Miguel Tourigny, RHD, Blainville-Broisbriand-QMJHL

Liam Dower Nilsson, C, Frolunda-Sweden Jr.

Eklund and Chibrikov are the two dynamic skilled/playmaking forwards you should know about in this draft along with Johnson but they are more pure passers.

Eklund can make some difficult plays and do so with pace with his above-mentioned skating making him a truly dynamic player. Here are some examples:

Behrens is one of the most dangerous defensemen in the class inside the offensive zone due to how good a passer he is, but he's an undersized player without a ton of speed.

Power is a smooth, highly intelligent passer which, along with his size and mobility, is why he will likely go No. 1 in the draft.

Korczak didn't have the best season but he looked like a playmaking dynamo in his underage year with Moose Jaw due to his skill and vision. His size/skating/compete are issues but his ability inside the offensive zone is NHL quality.

Zellweger, Ufko and Peart aren't among the very, very top defensemen in the class but because they have the high-end brains teams crave from defenders, they give themselves a chance to be good NHL players, particularly since Zellweger can skate very well too.

Best compete level

Matthew Beniers, C, Michigan-Big Ten

Alexander Kisakov, LW, Dynamo Moscow, Russia Jr.

Tyler Boucher, RW, U.S. NTDP-USHL

There are three players I felt distinguished themselves in this class in terms of their compete.

Beniers is a known player among many NHL fans already as one of the top-ranked skaters in the class, in large part due to his elite motor and how strong a two-way player he is. Kisakov is an undersized winger, but he generates a lot of offense through his great skill and his great work ethic. He shows no fear playing around the net and generates a ton of chances around the high-percentage areas due to his courage. He's also a physical player. Boucher is the physically punishing player of this class. He plays every shift looking to make a difference with his physical play and gets in the faces of opponents constantly with his hits and chippy play.

The Athletic LOADED: 07.13.2021

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The Athletic / How Francesco Pinelli's Slovenian hockey experience added extra maturity to his 2021 NHL Draft profile

By Scott Wheeler Jul 12, 2021

TORONTO — Francesco Pinelli is half-dressed in his hockey equipment when he sits down on a plastic chair 6 feet from Shane Wright and Brennan Othmann inside Toronto's Westwood Arena.

The dressing rooms are closed as part of the COVID-19 protocols, which allow for them to be here, so their sticks lean against the Rink 5 glass and their bags have been unfurled in the narrow space that runs around the boards. Several of the 12 other top NHL prospects who've joined



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

them spill into the hallways and benches that have been pulled outside into the concrete alleyway behind the arena.

It is the hottest day of the year so far, locally, with temperatures eclipsing 34 degrees Celsius and a humidity index that makes it feel much hotter, but the stickiness of outside has faded away inside, where Pinelli is all smiles as he gets ready for an 11 a.m. session at Power Edge Pro's (PEP) three-day July Toronto camp. The 15 players here for this skate (the second of three) are joined by five coaches in branded masks and a couple of other staffers who check the players in. At a table outside, PEP sweaters, workout shirts and hats are being unpacked for the players to take home when they're done.

Pinelli, Othmann and Wright discuss when their OHL clubs have asked them to report, rattling off dates at the end of August. Pinelli informs them rather formally that today is a big day, because Italy (Pinelli's parents, Frank and Daniela, are Italian) is playing Denmark in the Euro 2020 semifinals. Nick and Joe Quinn, who own and operate PEP, one of hockey's leading skills consultancies, greet them, laughing about how long it has been since they've seen them.

Wright and Othmann are best friends from their minor hockey days as linemates with the Don Mills Flyers. A couple of years ago, Pinelli took them on in the OHL Cup final as the captain of the rival Toronto Red Wings. Now they're all close, having played together for Team Ontario at the Canada Winter Games, Team Canada at the recent U18 worlds (where they captured gold) and in local training sessions like this one.

Nearby, Jets first-rounder Cole Perfetti, the Wild's Ryan O'Rourke, the Oilers' Ty Tullio and top-ranked 2021 NHL Draft prospect Owen Power are reuniting for similar conversations as they prepare to take to the ice. There to watch are KO Sports agent Cam Stewart and Oshawa Generals owner Rocco Tullio, Ty's father.

For each, this is their normal again, after a year that has been anything but. For Pinelli, who has just finished a season that took him to a town in the Slovenian alps at 17 years old, that rings particularly true.

"My draft year was definitely different," Pinelli says, laughing.

Until this season, Pinelli's young hockey career had travelled in a straight line.

He was raised in Stoney Creek, a community in Hamilton, Ontario, as the middle of three rep hockey and rep soccer-playing brothers. After beginning in Hamilton's minor hockey association, he and his brothers were invited to play for Detroit Compuware's AAA team, and the entire family moved south of the border for a year.

From there, he was recruited by several GTHL teams, eventually selecting the Red Wings, a program he helped turn from a middle-of-the-standings team to one of the province's best.

In his OHL draft year, he registered 114 points in 71 games (as well as 14 in seven at the year-end OHL Cup to play himself onto the tournament all-star team), good for third in the GTHL behind Wright and Othmann, the eventual first and second picks in the 2019 OHL draft.

Throughout that year, the Kitchener Rangers took a keen interest in him, ranking him among their top five or six skaters in the draft from the first tournament of his minor midget season right through to the OHL Cup.

"We just really liked his blend of hockey sense, his compete, and his skill level," said Rangers general manager and head coach Mike McKenzie. "He's a dual threat. He can score, he's got a really good shot, but he can also make plays and set guys up. He was the catalyst of that team offensively. He was always the guy."

They eventually picked him 13th, even though his Red Wings head coach Angelo Catenaro says there were "at least seven teams that would have taken him before that" after his people and his agency, Octagon, made their desire to be in Kitchener (closer to home) clear.

"There were teams that were ready to take him in the top five," Catenaro said.

In his rookie season in Kitchener, Pinelli earned a top role out of training camp and was quickly slotted onto the Rangers' first line (he played the majority of his first year, on a talented Kitchener team which won 40 of 63 games, in the Rangers' top six). When the year was done, he'd produced once more at the top of his age group, with 41 points in 59 games, third among under-17 players behind only 2022 prospect Wright (60 points) and 2021 prospect Mason McTavish (42 points).

And he did it while making the move from his natural centre position, which he always played growing up, to the wing.

"He did really well as a 16-year-old," McKenzie said. "You never know how guys are going to adapt with so much on their plate at 16. It's their first time away from home, new school, new billets, new level, playing against older guys. But we always have the mentality, especially with our first-round picks, that we want them to show us they can't do it rather than they can do it. That was one thing we talked to him about right away was really giving him a chance to play with some older guys in our top group. And he just ran with it."

Francesco Pinelli with the Kitchener Rangers. (Kevin Sousa)

So what happens when that linear path hits an unexpected fork in the road?

Pinelli had to figure that out for himself when the OHL's return for his draft year began to look less and less likely into this winter.

In search of somewhere — anywhere — to play, Pinelli eventually got lucky when a Slovenian-Canadian connection who was once his neighbour told him that he knew the general manager of a pro team in the Alps Hockey League, a professional league with teams in Slovenia, Austria and Italy.

Anze Pogacar, that general manager with HDD Jesenice, had no idea who Pinelli was when he fielded the call from their mutual acquaintance.

"Hey, I know one guy who is a big talent and he wants to play hockey because he needs games and there aren't any in Canada," he was told.

"OK, send us his name," Pogacar said, promising to watch some tape.

After watching some of Pinelli's games with Kitchener, and really liking what he saw, Jesenice decided to give Pinelli a chance and invited him to their small town just south of the Austrian border.

"Why we picked him was because he was a big talent who had a chance to go in the first round in the draft," Pogacar said. "We wanted to show all of our players who are about his age how they have to work and how good they have to be if you want to be somebody at that level."

And so in January, with his paperwork in order, Pinelli got on a plane in Toronto and made the day-long journey across seven time zones to the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana, and then on to his apartment in Bled, a scenic town of 8,000 people 15 minutes from Jesenice at the seat of the Julian Alps.

The move took him halfway across the world and completely out of his element. In the first week and a half, he acknowledges, there were a lot of phone calls to his mom, who he credits as a much better cook than his dad, for cooking lessons and cleaning questions.

Though most of his teammates spoke passable English, the move also came with a language barrier virtually everywhere that wasn't the rink. He also became reliant on team staff for drives — because he was too young to rent or drive a car — to Podmežakla Hall, the team's 4,500-seat arena in Jesenice, a mining and steel town of a little more than 13,000 people, where Kings star Anze Kopitar is from.

Eventually, though, he started to get into a rhythm in life on his own. During the days, he kept himself busy by spending a lot of time at the rink or on road trips through the Austrian alps or into Italy to towns and destinations he called "incredible."

Though the area and the arena were locked down when he first arrived, which meant no fans in the stands and limited things to do, he tried to



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

see the sights on his days off, which included a trip to Ljubljana and a visit to the Pilgrimage Church of the Assumption of Maria, a Catholic church and local tourist destination on an island at the centre of Lake Bled, near his apartment.

"We went all over the place," he said. "The scenery was amazing. I'll never forget that."

When his days were over, he got into the habit of FaceTiming his parents at night in Slovenia so that it was in the afternoon back home.

From January through to his last game on March 11, Pinelli made 15 appearances with HDD Jesenice in games split between the Alps Hockey League and the Slovenian Ice Hockey League. The 6-foot, 176-pound forward posted 12 points in those games, helping the team to its fourth Slovenian Cup since its founding in 2014.

Though he didn't get to see their Alps Hockey League season through because he had to return to North America to play for Canada at U18 worlds (where he posted 11 points in seven games to tie for fifth in tournament scoring), Jesenice finished the regular season in second place, with 74 points in 30 games and an 11-2 record in the 13 he played in.

Though he registered just one point in his first six games with the team as he adjusted to his first games in a professional league, he exploded for 10 in a five-game point streak before he left and regularly played over 20 minutes a game.

HDD Jesenice, who started him at centre before moving him to the wing, wished it could have kept him longer. Pogacar said he became one of the team's best forwards and never backed down from his opponents, some of whom he joked were twice Pinelli's age.

"There are only good things that I can say about him. He was like not 17 years old, he was like 25 or something. He got better and better with each game. We were really happy with him, his work and his mentality. I think for a 17-year-old guy, he believed in himself and showed he had hard work plus talent," Pogacar said.

"I was also surprised that he wanted to do what was best for the team, not just himself. He wasn't some selfish player who just came here to score some goals."

Though most NHL teams elected to watch Pinelli from afar on tape, he said three or four came to watch him play in person. Detroit Red Wings scout Vladimir Havluj even watched multiple games and followed up with phone calls to Pogacar to ask how he was doing.

When it was over, Pinelli called his unconventional draft year — and its month and a half in Slovenia — a transformative one for his life and his game.

"I'm not going to lie, it was a challenge. It was kind of difficult at times," Pinelli said. "I was there on my own. I was playing against older guys. We were playing on the Olympic ice. The language barrier was difficult. It was really competitive. But I really enjoyed my time there and I'm proud of how I played, so I have not regrets at all."

VIEW THIS POST ON INSTAGRAM

A POST SHARED BY FRANCESCO PINELLI
(@FRANCESCO.PINELLI71)

Back inside Westwood Arena, Pinelli is trying to build on the progress he felt he made in Slovenia, which left him as NHL Central Scouting's 15th-ranked North American skater in the 2021 draft class.

As Ontario has slowly reopened, he has resumed skating four times a week and training in the gym, where he has placed his focus this offseason on his skating and his shot.

When he's asked how he sells himself to NHL clubs over their Zoom calls, he rattles off a list of different skills he feels are strengths: his vision, his hockey IQ, his ability to process the play at high speeds and

understand where his teammates are, his level of competitiveness and his character.

One NHL source agreed with that assessment and said that there was "an outside chance he gets picked in the teens and an outside chance he gets picked between 32-42."

Added the source, "If I had to guess, though, I'd guess he goes between 20-31."

Quinn says his client, whom he has trained since his Red Wings minor hockey days, has come a long way.

"He was pretty raw in minor hockey, and he just had the strength and the power and he would just blow by guys. And now when you watch him out there with how he moves pucks to space, all of a sudden he can think it and his hands and feet are moving at the same time. And when a player like that ties it all together, it's exciting," Quinn said. "I think whoever picks him is going to get a really good player."

Most of all, though, Quinn credits Pinelli as one of his easiest clients to work with.

"(Pinelli's) one of those kids that you don't have to tell anything. He just does his thing and goes about his business quietly. And then he's one of those kids that comes up to you and thanks you at the end of every practice. He's really just a dream to work with as a coach. If you could have 15 kids like him at every practice, you'd be in pretty good shape as a coach," Quinn said.

Catenaro also credits Pinelli for his demeanour. In his time with the Red Wings, Catenaro said Pinelli worked as hard to become a go-to penalty killer and leader as he did on his offensive tools, something he called uncommon for a top prospect. When he wasn't in the dressing room, he knew that Pinelli was in there functioning as a coach on his behalf.

"He's going to be a very good pro. He already lives like a pro. He trains well, he's not putting junk in his body, and it's not just about hockey for him, it's about the whole package on and off the ice. Stats are stats. You can tell he can score and put points up. But I can't say enough about the kid because he's a great kid No. 1, but he's also a kid that is very dedicated to do what he needs to do to excel," Catenaro said. "I think he's got lots of upside."

McKenzie, who'd planned to use Pinelli at centre as a 17-year-old and was excited to see him take his next step in Kitchener this season, was fully supportive of his decision to go to Slovenia.

"I think it was a really good opportunity for him. He had to live on his own as a young guy, cook his own meals, and do it all while playing hockey in a foreign country where he didn't speak the language. And he didn't have any other people over there with him, either. It wasn't like him and another teammate went over and they could chum around," McKenzie said. "Maturity-wise, it was great for him. He was always a mature kid and I knew he could handle something like that, but it was really good for him to go over there and play a different style of hockey."

McKenzie describes Pinelli as a polite, respectful, quiet and serious — but confident — person who he expects to be among the OHL's top forwards next season. Though McKenzie says Pinelli has work to do to get a little quicker, he also calls his top pupil an "underrated skater" who has everything else he needs to become an impactful NHLer.

"He may not be real explosive off the mark, but he's super slippery and deceptive, especially with the puck. His strength is his offensive ability: his shooting, his scoring ability, the accuracy of his shot, his hockey sense. He's a really smart player who understands the game and really knows where to go to create offence," McKenzie said. "And I've always been really impressed with how good his off-ice habits are, which is rare to see for a kid that young. Usually, that's an area that needs a lot of work, but he was pretty dialled in at 16 and seemed to be ahead of his age in terms of the maturity of his training and all of that stuff that comes away from the rink."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

Othmann, who refers to Pinelli as one of his closer buddies and has spent time at his cottage, believes his friend will get back on that linear path after a winding year.

"He's a big centreman who is just a good hockey player," Othmann said. "He's got a good shot, he can skate, he's hard to knock off the puck. He's a just very good hockey player."

Though Pogacar didn't know who Pinelli was seven months ago, he plans to watch him closely from here on out.

"I wish him all the best. We will be very happy to watch him get picked," Pogacar finished. "He's going to be really good."

The Athletic LOADED: 07.13.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / Hip to hate Oilers' Keith deal, but the veteran defenceman can still play

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — It's hip to hate on the Duncan Keith deal.

Tragically, the only Hip going on in my world is coming out of my Bluetooth speaker.

The Edmonton Oilers upgraded their second-pairing, left-side defenceman position Monday by trading 93-game NHLer Caleb Jones and a conditional third-round pick for three-time Stanley Cup winner, 1,200-game, two-time Olympic team defenceman Duncan Keith, as well as forward Tim Soderlund.

Keith turns 38 on Friday. Jones is 24.

No salary was retained by the Chicago Blackhawks, though a pertinent aspect of this deal is that the Oilers only owe Keith \$3.6 million in actual salary over the next two seasons, despite a remaining cap hit of \$5.5 million annually for two seasons.

Also, Edmonton could not include overpaid backup goalie Mikko Koskinen in the trade, a form of salary retention that Oilers general manager Ken Holland proposed to Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman.

The Blackhawks win the deal financially. Edmonton, in trouble with Oscar Klefbom's injury situation, makes this trade to win on the ice right now.

Remaining Time -0:41

How much does Duncan Keith have left in the tank?

If you are someone who decried the fact that Holland wasn't "all in" at the last trade deadline — that he must be "all in" as long as Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl are in their prime — then you should like this deal.

Because it is about today.

Let's dig in on this trade:

- The only way these trades work, when a team acquires a 38-year-old player who brings with him the intangibles that Keith does, is if the player still has chops. He HAS to be able to play.

Well, Keith can still play.

He still holds the blue line, he attacks the play, he skates the puck out of his zone effectively and he can get back to transition pucks effectively. This Sportlogiq piece digs in on his numbers.

He's not Milan Lucic, whose feet failed him in Edmonton. He's not Loui Eriksson, whose skills didn't allow him to keep up in Vancouver. He's not

James Neal, who couldn't play the role the Calgary Flames wanted him to play, and wasn't happy in a lesser role.

He's not Joe Thornton or Jason Spezza, former first-line centres with deteriorated foot speed who are playing in depth roles with depth players for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Keith goes from being Chicago's No. 1 defenceman to Edmonton's second pairing. Less responsibility, sure. But he goes from playing with young, inexperienced partners like Ian Mitchell and Adam Boqvist, to slotting next to Adam Larsson (who will be signed), a steady, veteran defence-first righty who will allow Keith to worry about his own game.

I expect Keith's analytics to improve markedly, knowing that if they do not, folks will be feeding this line back to me on Twitter for years to come.

- Positionally, remember that Klefbom's status remains somewhere in the range of never playing again, to playing half a season, to playing for a while and being injured again, to playing 82 games. Keith's acquisition softens this process considerably.

Either Klefbom works in with less responsibility/minutes due to Keith's presence, or he doesn't play at all and the Oilers have their second-pairing left defenceman. And two years from now, when the Keith deal expires, Philip Broberg should be your second LD long-term.

One more thing: If not Keith, Holland needed to sign a second-pairing LD as a free agent. That would come with much more term than two years.

Take a look at the list of UFA left defencemen. It is thin.

- So, did the Oilers pay too much?

Some fans are screaming for more AAV retention by Chicago, which Holland did not secure. That is a legit concern.

However, in taking the entirety of Keith's two years at \$5.5 million per, Edmonton only owes him \$3.6 million in actual salary — total.

I get it — fans could care less about owner Daryl Katz saving some cash. But managers — and owners who have lost millions these last two seasons — care a lot. And that salary savings may make a Neal buyout more tenable. If that happens, there's the cap space fans wanted.

As for Jones, on the ice Keith replaces him times 10. He is a better, more experienced defenceman, who brings copious elements to the table that Jones does not. Jones may turn into an every-day NHL defenceman, something he is not at the moment. But with Evan Bouchard, Broberg, Dmitri Samorukov and William Lagesson all within two seasons of being regulars, the Oilers won't feel the loss of Jones.

- Finally, you have to remember that building a team in Edmonton isn't the same as in other markets. When you get a player like Keith — or Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — who wants to be here, that has major value.

Why have so many free-agent deals failed in this market? Because the good UFAs who have choices choose warmer locales with better tax situations. Edmonton, Winnipeg, and to a lesser extent Calgary, get the ones who come for the extra term and dollars that must get offered to entice players to our cold winter climate.

American free agents prefer to stay south of the border, generally. Guys who have played in warm weather cities like to keep that action intact, usually.

Keith wants to be here, and Edmonton needs experience, some winning pedigree, and to fill a big hole on left defence.

No trade is perfect, but I am OK with adding Keith for just two seasons, in a deal for the now.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

Sportsnet.ca / Senators hoping that Pierre McGuire really does 'know everything'

Wayne Scanlan July 12, 2021, 1:03 PM

Pierre McGuire has always had a sense of unfinished business in Ottawa.

A member of the Senators' coaching staff in 1995-96, McGuire was part of the hockey operations group swept out the door when general manager Randy Sexton gave way to Pierre Gauthier in the middle of that season, Ottawa's fourth as a franchise.

More than 25 years later, McGuire has returned — Pierre hired to assist yet another Pierre, Dorion. Long live the managers named Pierre in the Senators organization.

On Monday, Pierre McGuire, 59, was named senior vice-president of player development to support current GM Pierre Dorion. Henceforth, to avoid Pierre confusion, they shall be known internally as PM and PD, we suppose. The hire was made by Senators owner Eugene Melnyk, in conjunction with Dorion.

"This is something I've been looking forward to, in terms of joining this family (again) for a long time," McGuire said via Zoom call Monday. "I've always had a real drive toward Ottawa, the people there, the community, the hockey passion that people have. It's meant a lot to me to have this opportunity."

Remaining Time -0:33

Pierre McGuire describes his role with the Ottawa Senators

McGuire, known to hockey viewers throughout North America as the analyst voice on NBC broadcasts since 2006 is fired up, to say the least, to get back into team management again. It's been a while since he worried about who got the two points at the end of the night.

"I love it," McGuire said, clapping his hands at a question about being partisan again. "Ever since Mr. Melnyk told me that I had the position and I've been talking with Pierre Dorion, every day has been like a Game 7 for me. I'm just so excited about it."

McGuire was a scout and assistant coach with the Pittsburgh Penguins in the early 1990s and was part of a Stanley Cup winner in 1992. He later served as assistant coach, then assistant GM and head coach of the now defunct Hartford Whalers.

Not only does McGuire feel the transition from between-the-benches broadcaster to management will be seamless, he is expected to tap into his famous communications skills by being a strong voice for the organization, which has missed the late Bryan Murray's constant communicating when he was a senior manager with the club.

Working between the benches has been just as valuable as working behind one, according to McGuire.

"You get to see a lot behind the scenes of what works with each organization or league and what doesn't work," McGuire said.

"What players are trending up, what players are trending down ... one part of working in the media that works if you're doing it properly is that you do it with an unbiased eye. You don't care who wins or loses or care about what the fans or GMs care about. You're watching with unfettered access and with an unbiased eye."

Remaining Time -1:11

McGuire thinks Ottawa Senators are 3 players away from contending

That is about to change in a big way. McGuire sees his role as "multi-dimensional," working with amateur and pro scouts and the Senators'

NHL and AHL staff. He is also expected to work with the coaches in Ottawa and AHL Belleville, D.J. Smith and Troy Mann.

McGuire is bullish on the Senators young talent — led by Thomas Chabot and Brady Tkachuk — and feels the team's future could be exceptional. He notes the team could use more depth at the centre position and is a "bit light" on depth and talent on the blue line. He likes the Senators' goaltending depth.

As he has remarked many times on Ottawa sports radio in the past, McGuire feels the Senators "stole the draft" in 2020 by selecting forward Tim Stützle as well as defencemen Jake Sanderson and Tyler Kleven.

McGuire can be intense in his broadcasts, and he admits he was extremely so as a young coach in the league. He said he has learned to "take a step back," and be a little more calm in his appraisals and communication. While he has sometimes been at odds with the analytics community, McGuire says he doesn't dislike analytics, but feels they don't measure "heart, character and fearlessness," in the way that "boots on the ground" can do.

Social media in Ottawa is already all over the map as far as liking this hire, and not. But no one can dispute that the Senators' hockey operations staff is lean, and could use another pair of eyes, another strong voice.

Dorion said he plans to tap into McGuire's hockey expertise in all facets of hockey operations, from player development and scouting to trades.

"Having watched a lot of NHL games, he is definitely going to have a lot of input as far as player movement, player transactions," Dorion said. "But at the same time, he's done some scouting. He's been at a lot of world juniors, he's seen a lot of college hockey over the last few years, so I think he can have input there also."

Remaining Time -1:02

Senators want McGuire to bring an unbiased view to the team

The GM added that McGuire will be based in Ottawa and "very present" in everything we do, including input with coaches, scouts and players. Dorion likes the fact that McGuire comes in as an impartial voice on the Senators' staff, without favourite players he might have drafted or traded for in the organization.

In the chain of command, McGuire will report to Dorion, who is entering the final year of his contract.

Dorion dismissed any concern that he may have hired his replacement. McGuire, who has been interviewed for numerous GM positions over the years, is believed to have a three-year deal with Ottawa.

"I think and I hope to be here for the long-term and I hope that Pierre McGuire is a part of my team for the long-term," Dorion said.

"We all want ambitious people, people that are driven, to work with us, and there's no denying the fact that Pierre is ambitious and driven," Dorion said. "And I think that only makes us a better team and makes me a better general manager."

"The one thing is that I never worry about my contract. If you start worrying about your contract and what decisions you're going to make, then you're not helping the organization."

Melnyk, who recommended McGuire to Dorion in early June, has had several conversations with McGuire over the past month.

Dorion said what most viewers know to be true, that McGuire's passion for the game is both evident and contagious. He called it a "no brainer" to hire McGuire.

The two have had several meetings by phone and spent four hours in face-to-face conversation over the weekend at Mont Tremblant, where McGuire has a home.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

"I love talking hockey, and I think Pierre McGuire is the same way," Dorion said. "He loves talking hockey, loves talking players, loves talking about our plan. So, I think the dynamic is going to be exceptional."

Since the announcement, McGuire said he has heard from a myriad of NHL players and executives wishing him well, including Brian Burke, John Davidson, Luc Robitaille and Bob Nicholson.

A native of Englewood, N.J., McGuire has spent a good part of his life in Quebec and is bilingual. He earned an English degree at Hobart College, where he competed in hockey and baseball, and later coached.

McGuire and wife, Melanie, have two children, Ryan and Justine. Justine is a competitive college rower and Ryan, who has played hockey in the USHL and BCHL, will play Division I hockey for Colgate University in the fall.

For the past several years, the McGuires have called Connecticut home. Now, for the first time since 1995, home is Canada's Capital.

McGuire once did a wide-ranging radio segment in Ottawa called "Pierre Knows Everything."

McGuire would be asked a quirky general knowledge question and then inevitably, almost magically, provide the answer — which listeners may or may not have believed was an inside job.

Hockey-wise, the Senators would love to find out that Pierre really does know everything.

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TSN.CA / The opportunity cost of using a high draft pick on a goalie

Every team in the NHL would love to find the next Andrei Vasilevskiy or Connor Hellebuyck, but can they afford to take a goalie with a high pick? Travis Yost looks at the numbers to see just how risky that strategy might be.

By Travis Yost

With the Stanley Cup back home in Tampa Bay, organizations have turned their attention to a major milestone in the hockey off-season calendar — the approaching NHL Entry Draft on July 23, 2021.

There are at least two interesting wrinkles with this year's draft class. The first is a relative consensus of higher uncertainty surrounding prospect evaluation, the byproduct of less scouting and intermittent league schedules borne from the pandemic.

The second is a fascinating Swedish goaltending prospect in the form of Jesper Wallstedt.

Wallstedt — playing with Luleå HF in the Swedish Elite League as an 18-year-old — has emerged as the best goaltending prospect of the class. It should be noted that Edmonton Oil Kings netminder Sebastian Cossa is close behind Wallstedt and is also projected to be selected in the top half of the first round, which would make this an extraordinary draft year for goaltending prospects.

Wallstedt has always played above his age group through his developmental years, and his first taste of high-level professional competition saw him turn in a 90.8 save percentage in the 2020-21 season.

At last check-in with TSN's Bob McKenzie, Wallstedt was ranked 10th on the draft board, opening up the door for the possibility of a team using a high draft pick on a goalie.

Teams have been increasingly gun-shy around goaltenders for a while now — less likely to use valuable picks on them, and certainly less likely to offer lucrative contracts to them when they are active NHL players.

Though every team wants to get their hands on the next Connor Hellebuyck or Andrei Vasilevskiy, most are looking for successful goaltending tandems that are also friendlier against the salary cap, preferring to use important capital on skaters whose performance may be more predictable long-term.

On Sunday, I was following along an interesting conversation about the possibility of the Ottawa Senators (selecting 10th overall) using their pick on Wallstedt. It's a fascinating idea, perhaps more so in the light of Matt Murray's struggles in Ottawa this season. TSN's Shawn Simpson rightly pointed out that the organization shouldn't be cautious drafting a goaltender (and a position of need) in this window for two reasons: he may be the franchise cornerstone you are looking for, and other players present risk as well.

The second part of that argument is worth exploring because it flies in the face of what organizations have increasingly done at the draft. One of the big reasons we have seen teams shy away from drafting goaltenders (and perhaps more specifically, drafting goaltenders high) is that the opportunity cost is extraordinary. You aren't just fighting the possibility of a certain goaltender developing or busting early; you are also fighting the math of what else you could have done in that spot.

And here is the math problem for goaltenders, simple as it may be. It's awfully tough to crack an NHL roster as one long-term. Consider eight years of draft data (2007-15) for one moment, and pay attention to the goaltender position in relation to skaters:

A big portion of the opportunity cost factor is simply a numbers game. Most NHL teams are carrying 13 forwards and seven defenders over the course of the season, with any number of call-ups to displace them due to injuries or performance.

On the other hand, most NHL teams will only use two or three goalies over the course of the year. Organizations know this, which is why only 10 per cent of draft picks are used on goalies, a number that's been consistent in the modern era (post 2007).

Here's a second factor. Universally, the hockey community — front offices, coaches, fans, you name it — have a better relative understanding of talent at the skater level than at the goalie level. (Significant data limitations and the effects of team structural play in front of goaltenders are surely two of the biggest reasons for the lack of clarity.)

Let's increase our threshold to look at regulars only — guys who were drafted and have made a long-term impact (playing more than 50 per cent of future regular-season games from the time of their draft year for skaters, and just 25 per cent for that of goaltenders, a lower bar to clear due to longer developmental time). Then, let's break it out by draft pick value:

For forwards and defenders, you basically have a one-in-two chance of a first- or second-round pick becoming an NHL regular player. Compare that to the likes of goaltenders, where you have a 1 in 5 chance of that occurring.

But sometimes examples are better than the data. Let's look at the 35 goalies selected with premium picks over the 2007-15 timespan. You will note that 25 per cent of goalies taken in this range have still yet to play a game. So, what makes up the rest of the group?

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USA TODAY / Senators add NHL TV analyst Pierre McGuire as senior VP of player development



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 13, 2021

Scooby Axson

The Ottawa Senators named Pierre McGuire as the team's senior vice president of player development on Monday.

McGuire is a familiar face to NHL fans as he was a hockey analyst for NBC Sports since 2006. NBC's broadcast rights deal with the NHL expired at the conclusion of the Stanley Cup Final, and the league is turning to ESPN and Turner Sports moving forward.

McGuire also spent time as an assistant with the Senators during the 1995-96 campaign.

"On behalf of the entire Senators organization, I would like to welcome Pierre McGuire back to Ottawa," Senators owner Eugene Melnyk said. "We are excited to add Pierre to our hockey management group. His experience will be instrumental as we continue to build an elite team. Pierre's knowledge of the game and its players is highly regarded and I am confident that he will positively assist our team as it progresses to the next level."

The 59-year-old McGuire has experience as a scout and an assistant with the Pittsburgh Penguins and was on the coaching staff when they won the Stanley Cup in 1992.

McGuire was also an assistant coach, assistant general manager and head coach with the Hartford Whalers. He lasted one season (1993-94) as head coach as the Whalers finished next to last in the Eastern Conference.

"The biggest thing is just bring my experience and knowledge of the league," McGuire told The Ottawa Sun. "I've been in the league for over 30 years. Over the last 23 years, I've had pretty much unfettered access to the league in terms of players and management decisions. That's something that's pretty helpful."

The Senators finished this past season with a 23-28-5 record, missing the postseason for the fourth straight season.

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