



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 14, 2021



Gold: Expansion draft primer

By Adam Gold

The next few days should be pretty hectic for the Carolina Hurricanes. They have until Saturday to submit their protected list for the Seattle Kraken expansion draft which will be held next Wednesday. Two days later is the draft proper, with the Canes holding the 25th overall pick. Then on the 28th -- two weeks from now -- it's the start of free agency.

There's a lot to consider. Changes are coming to the roster. Decisions are due on which players are vital to the future and what those players truly represent to the Hurricanes' pursuit of the organization's second Stanley Cup. My guess is that some of those conclusions will be south of popular among the fanbase, but we'll address those in greater detail in a future piece.

Quick aside, as the Hurricanes will have to replace assistant coach Dean Chynoweth who left the organization for the same position with the Toronto Maple Leafs. Dean did a great job coordinating the defensemen and directing the penalty kill, which was one of the best in the NHL before getting steamrolled by the Lightning in the playoffs. Best guess is that Carolina will elevate former defenseman Tim Gleason into an assistant coach role after several years as a roving instructor.

But, this is about the expansion draft plan, we'll get into other matters, like why Alex Nedeljkovic might not be the Canes' goalie next year next week.

WHAT?!? Ned was a finalist for the Calder, Adam! Why in the name of Eric Fichaud wouldn't they bring him back? They've been looking for a franchise goalie since he who should not be named stole Rod Brind'Amour's Conn Smythe! This is why I don't pay any attention to what you think, Gold!

Okay, quickly. These aren't my thoughts on Nedeljkovic, it's just reading the room, as it were. There's a reason why Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported that the Hurricanes are considering not tendering Nedeljkovic, a restricted free agent, a contract. With arbitration rights and coming off a spectacular rookie season that saw him inserted as the playoff starter the club is terrified of an arbitration award in the \$4-5 million range.

That's a number one goalie neighborhood -- not necessarily a gated community with a guard house. But let's just say that in that subdivision no one in the cul-de-sac mows his own lawn -- and the Hurricanes don't see Ned as a true number one at this stage of his development.

DATA BREAK: Nedeljkovic had a tremendous regular season, with a .932 SV% in all situations over 23 starts. That

was actually the best in the entire league among goalies with more than 20 starts. Ned's high danger SV% of .869 was 3rd in the league and his goals saved above average (GSAA) according to NaturalStatTrick.com was 14.27, 4th best in the NHL. And, it's important to note that this number is cumulative, so it's even more impressive that he was 4th in the league in spite of having significantly fewer starts than several of the bigger named goalies. For instance, in 13 more starts, Vezina Trophy winner Marc-Andre Fleury's GSAA at 5v5 was 9.67.

Unfortunately, those numbers all went the other way in the playoffs. Alex absolutely wasn't bad in the postseason, but his GSAA was -1.14. That figure was 18th among playoff goalies. He went from 3rd to 12th in HDSV% (.836) as well, and we all saw the Blake Coleman goal in Game 1 of the Tampa series.

Can Ned be a big part of a tandem? That's what the organization hopes, but their ideal salary is probably closer to \$3 million than \$5 million and even that might be stretching their imagination a bit. So, file that all away under yet another contract dilemma for general manager Don Waddell (really, Tom Dundon). Similar to that for Andrei Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton. Among those three, only one is a certainty to be with the Hurricanes next season.

Like I said, more on these types of things next week. For now, here's the expansion draft plan.

The Hurricanes can either protect 7 forwards, 3 defensemen and a goaltender, or 8 skaters and 1 goalie. For Carolina, this is easy. I'm not sure they really have four defensemen they have to protect -- if we're being honest the real number is probably 2 -- so it's the 7-3-1 plan.

Forwards

Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Andrei Svechnikov, Jordan Staal and Vincent Trocheck are mortal locks to be protected. Staal has a "no movement" (NMC) clause in his contract and therefore must be protected unless he agrees to waive that right. But, the Hurricanes need Staal and would protect him anyway.

That leaves decisions on Jesper Fast, Nino Niederreiter, Warren Foegele, Steven Lorentz, Morgan Geekie and Spencer Smallman.

NOTE: If a player isn't on this list it's because he is an unrestricted free agent, and as long as he remains unsigned the Hurricanes don't need to protect him. For instance, Carolina could very well resign Brock McGinn, but that isn't going to happen until after the expansion draft.



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Working from the bottom, there's just no reason to protect Smallman, a 2015 late round draft pick, who has scored just 3 goals in 65 American Hockey League games over parts of three seasons.

Nino Niederreiter scored 20 goals for the Hurricanes last year, second on the team. Since arriving in a mid-season trade from Minnesota he's twice been on 25-goal pace for the Canes. But, his postseason performance has not measured up. His 3 goals and 7 points in 29 playoff games doesn't vibrate with the \$5.25 million price tag, so if our old friend Ron Francis wants to pluck Nino from the coop, I'd give him the green light.

Warren Foegele is a good player. Warren Foegele probably should be a better player than Warren Foegele is currently. But, here's another player with arbitration rights and the front office is unlikely to be interested in paying him in the neighborhood of \$3 million next season so, I'd be stunned if he ended up on a protected list. However, he can't just be allowed to leave for nothing.

I'd expect Foegele to be moved, ideally as a piece in a bigger trade, because it's almost not worth getting back a mid-round pick. A 6'2", 200 lb, 25-year old power forward who can forecheck, kill penalties and show a little scoring touch falls into the category of asset.

Yes, it sounds like someone the Canes should keep. But, Foegele is more tease than anything. Sort of like a peppermint mocha during December. The idea of that concoction is always better than the reality.

That brings us to three players I'm sure the team wants to be part of the future. Jesper Fast is a high character, low maintenance, versatile player who can play in all situations and has two years left at \$2 million a year. If there's anything we know about the Hurricanes it's that they LOVE a contract with good value. Fast isn't a big point producer, but he's a very good player.

Steven Lorentz and Morgan Geekie are young players with different skill sets but each brings a value to the Hurricanes and would be very low-cost options in the bottom 6. Both are also capable of playing center. Lorentz is bigger, faster, a more disruptive force on the forecheck and is probably an ideal 4th line center going forward. If he ever gains an NHL scoring touch he could have a huge impact down the line up.

Geekie is a smart, 2-way forward who can also help on the power play thanks to his advanced passing ability and creativity around the net. The biggest question is whether or not he can continue to improve his skating to be impactful even as a third line center.

The bottom line is that the Hurricanes need to ask themselves this question: Which of these players would it hurt least to lose? I'm not sure the answer isn't Fast. But, with Jordan Martinook and Foegele more than likely not returning, I'd keep Fast and hope that Francis doesn't snag Geekie, whom Ron selected in the 3rd round of his final draft as Hurricanes GM in 2017.

Protected: Aho, Teravainen, Svechnikov, Staal, Trocheck, Lorentz and Fast.

Defense

This is a bit easier for me as Jacob Slavin and Brett Pesce are like the sun rising in the East. In fact, if I were Don Waddell, I'd consider exploring contract extensions for both right now even though they have 4 and 3 years, respectively, remaining on super, team-friendly deals.

That leaves decisions on Brady Skjei, Jake Bean, Jake Gardiner, Maxime Lajoie and Eric Gelinas. On the surface this seems such an easy decision. Skjei was too valuable in the postseason, especially when Slavin was injured. He's a good skater, blocks a lot of shots, is a physical presence and eats up a lot of high-leverage minutes playing alongside Pesce. But, let's hold off on that for a second.

Gelinas, a 30-year old physical defender, has five years of NHL experience. However, he's spent the last four seasons playing in Russia and Sweden. He was just recently signed to a 2-way contract and there's both no reason to protect him, nor any for Seattle to take him. Moving on...

Maxime Lajoie was a very good player for the Chicago Wolves this year. He had 21 points in 27 games for Carolina's AHL team and was their best blueliner before being brought into the taxi squad late in the season. He made his Canes debut during the playoffs, which probably says more about Jake Gardiner's expected level of performance than anything else, but that doesn't mean Lajoie doesn't provide organizational depth. Still, if you shake a tree Maxime's fall out of it like pine cones, so he's unprotected.

Gardiner's \$4.05 million contract will not be protected. It also won't be selected by Francis. If the Canes were inclined to buy out Gardiner's contract, that would make sense, but that's not how this team likes to operate.

That leaves Jake Bean. About 10 games into his return to the line up it really looked like Jake was becoming the creative, dynamic offensive player he was expected to be when he was drafted 13th overall in 2016. But, after those three or so weeks, Bean became a potted plant. Easily maneuvered around, largely unnoticeable and incredibly replaceable.

His minor league numbers say he has a future as an offensive piece on the blue line. His NHL performance says he's more an extra defenseman/power play specialist than a top four option. Though, to be honest, he wasn't really that great with the man advantage either. However, if you think the jury hasn't come back on Bean's future yet, and hold to the cliché that defensemen take longer to develop and you'd be willing to let Skjei go thinking he's about \$1.5 million overpaid since he provides virtually nothing offensively, then protect Bean and expose Skjei.

But, I wouldn't.

Protected: Slavin, Pesce and Skjei.

Goaltenders:

Shortest paragraph ever. Protect Alex Nedeljkovic, if for no other reason than he's got number one goalie hair. I doubt highly if Francis is taking Jeremy Helvig from Carolina's minor league system.



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It all has to be finalized by Saturday. Likely, these decisions have already been made. We're just waiting for things to happen.



Top NHL restricted free agents: Makar could get offer sheet

Laine, Shesterkin, Heiskanen also among those who may be available when market opens July 28

By Jon Lane

The NHL free agent signing period begins July 28. NHL.com takes a closer look at the top restricted free agents (listed in alphabetical order).

Most restricted free agents can receive an offer sheet from another team. His team can match the offer sheet or receive draft-pick compensation based on its value. Note: Kirill Kaprizov and Quinn Hughes are not eligible to receive an offer sheet from another team and are not included on this list.

Forwards

Sam Bennett, Florida Panthers

The 25-year-old scored 27 points (10 goals, 17 assists) in 48 regular-season games for the Calgary Flames and Panthers, 15 points (six goals, nine assists) in 10 games after he was traded to Florida on April 12. He scored five points (one goal, four assists) in a six-game loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning in the Stanley Cup First Round, though he was suspended for Game 2 by the NHL Department of Player Safety for boarding Lightning forward Blake Coleman.

Tyler Bertuzzi, Detroit Red Wings

Bertuzzi scored seven points (five goals, two assists) in nine games before he was sidelined for the final 47 games with a back injury. The 26-year-old had surgery and is expected to be ready for the start of next season, hoping to return to the form that helped him play in the 2020 NHL All-Star Game and score an NHL career-high 48 points (21 goals, 27 assists) two seasons ago.

Pavel Buchnevich, New York Rangers

The 26-year-old scored an NHL career-high 48 points (20 goals, 28 assists) in 54 games, tying forward Chris Kreider for second on the Rangers in goals and finishing fourth in points. Buchnevich has scored 195 points (79 goals, 116 assists) in 301 regular-season games and has one assist in eight Stanley Cup Playoff games.

Kevin Fiala, Minnesota Wild

Fiala scored 40 points (20 goals, 20 assists) in 50 regular-season games, and two points (one goal, one assist) in seven playoff games. The 24-year-old has scored at least 20 goals in each of his first two full seasons with the Wild and 101 points (46 goals, 55 assists) in 133 games since he was traded to Minnesota by the Nashville Predators on Feb. 25, 2019.

Patrik Laine, Columbus Blue Jackets

Laine scored 24 points (12 goals, 12 assists) in 46 games for the Winnipeg Jets and Blue Jackets, 21 points (10 goals, 11 assists) in 45 games after the 23-year-old was traded to Columbus on Jan. 23. The No. 2 pick in the 2016 NHL Draft scored at least 28 goals in each of his first four NHL seasons, including a career-high 44 in 2017-18 that was second behind Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin (49). Laine averaged 0.46 goals per game with the Jets and 0.22 with the Blue Jackets. He was runner-up to Toronto Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews for the 2017 Calder Trophy.

Andrei Svechnikov, Carolina Hurricanes

The 21-year-old scored 42 points (15 goals, 27 assists) in 55 regular-season games and eight points (two goals, six assists) in 11 playoff games. The No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft had NHL career-highs in goals (24), assists (37) and points (61) in 68 games during his second season in 2019-20, shortened due to concerns surrounding the coronavirus.

Brady Tkachuk, Ottawa Senators

Tkachuk scored 36 points (17 goals, 19 assists) in 56 games, 12 points (five goals, seven assists) in his final 14. The No. 4 pick in the 2018 draft, the 21-year-old has scored 125 points (60 goals, 65 assists) in 198 regular-season games.

Elias Pettersson, Vancouver Canucks

The 22-year-old scored 21 points (10 goals, 11 assists) in 26 games, 14 points (seven goals, seven assists) in his final 14 games before a hyperextended wrist sidelined him for the final 30. The No. 5 pick in the 2017 NHL Draft, Pettersson expects to be fully healthy in time for the start of next season. He won the Calder Trophy in 2019 and has scored 153 points (65 goals, 88 assists) in 165 NHL games.



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Defensemen

Rasmus Dahlin, Buffalo Sabres

Dahlin scored 23 points (five goals, 18 assists) in 56 games. The 21-year-old led the Sabres and ranked 15th among NHL defensemen with an average of 20:15 of ice time per game at even strength from April 6 until the end of the season and scored 10 points (three goals, seven assists), best among Buffalo defensemen in that span. The No. 1 pick in the 2018 draft has scored 107 points (18 goals, 89 assists) in 197 games. He scored 44 points (nine goals, 35 assists) in 2018-19 and finished third in Calder Trophy voting.

Vince Dunn, St. Louis Blues

The 24-year-old scored 20 points (six goals, 14 assists) in 43 games and did not play in a four-game loss to the Colorado Avalanche in the Stanley Cup First Round because of an upper-body injury. Dunn has scored 102 points (32 goals, 70 assists) in 267 regular-season games and 11 points (two goals, nine assists) in 29 playoff games, winning the Stanley Cup with the Blues in 2019.

Miro Heiskanen, Dallas Stars

Heiskanen scored 27 points (eight goals, 19 assists) in 55 games and has scored 95 points (28 goals, 67 assists) in 205 regular-season games and 30 points (eight goals, 22 assists) in 40 playoff games. The No. 3 pick in the 2017 draft, the 21-year-old set a Stars record for points by a defenseman with 26 (six goals, 20 assists) in 27 games in the 2020 playoffs to help them advance to the Stanley Cup Final, where they lost to the Lightning in six games.

Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche

Makar was a finalist for the Norris Trophy as the top defenseman in the NHL, scoring 44 points (eight goals, 36 assists) in 44 regular-season games and 10 points (two goals, eight assists) in 10 playoff games. The 22-year-old tied for the lead at the position in game-winning goals (three) and was fourth in power-play points (22; four goals, 18 assists). The No. 4 pick in the 2017 draft won the Calder Trophy in 2020, when he scored 50 points (12 goals, 38 assists) in 57 games, and has scored 94 points (20 goals, 74 assists) in 101 regular-season games and 31 points (seven goals, 24 assists) in 35 playoff games.

Neal Pionk, Winnipeg Jets

The 25-year-old scored 32 points (three goals, 29 assists) in 54 regular-season games and had four assists in eight playoff games. Pionk played an average of 21:58 per game, second on the Jets to defenseman Josh Morrissey (23:33), and 26:00 per game in the playoffs, third on Winnipeg. He scored an NHL career-high 45 points (six goals, 39 assists) and 25 power-play points (three goals, 22 assists) in 71 games for the Jets in 2019-20, his first full season with Winnipeg after his trade from the Rangers for defenseman Jacob Trouba on June 17, 2019.

Goalies

Carter Hart, Philadelphia Flyers

Hart was 9-11-5 with a 3.67 goals-against average, an .877 save percentage and one shutout in 27 games (25 starts),

and did not play after April 15 because of a sprained MCL in his left knee. The 22-year-old's GAA was the highest and save percentage was the lowest among the 32 goalies to play at least 25 games, a drop from the 2.42 GAA and .914 save percentage in his second NHL season. He's 49-37-9 with a 2.88 GAA, a .905 save percentage and two shutouts in 101 regular-season games (95 starts), and 9-5 with a 2.23 GAA, a .926 save percentage and two shutouts in 14 playoff games.

Alex Nedeljkovic, Carolina Hurricanes

The 25-year-old was a finalist for the Calder Trophy after he was 15-5-3 with a 1.90 GAA, a .932 save percentage and three shutouts in 23 starts. Nedeljkovic ranked first among rookie goalies in GAA and save percentage (minimum 20 games) and tied for the rookie lead in shutouts (three) with Ilya Sorokin of the New York Islanders. He was 4-5 with a 2.17 GAA, a .920 save percentage and one shutout in nine playoff games.

Ilya Samsonov, Washington Capitals

Samsonov was 13-4-1 with a 2.69 GAA, a .902 save percentage and two shutouts in 19 games (18 starts) during a season that included two stints in NHL COVID-19 protocol. Though the 24-year-old was 0-3 with a 2.99 GAA and an .899 save percentage in three playoff games, he returned with little practice time and made 40 saves in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup First Round before a miscommunication with Capitals defenseman Justin Schultz led to the winning goal in a 3-2 double-overtime loss to the Boston Bruins. Samsonov is 29-10-3 with a 2.61 GAA, a .908 save percentage and three shutouts in 45 regular-season games (40 starts).

Juuse Saros, Nashville Predators

The Predators believed Saros could be their No. 1 goalie and the 26-year-old proved them right by helping Nashville finish the regular season with a 20-7-1 run to clinch the No. 4 seed in the eight-team Discover Central Division. Saros was 18-6-1 with a 1.88 GAA, a .941 save percentage and three shutouts beginning with a 2-1 win against the Blue Jackets on Feb. 27. His 21 wins, 2.28 GAA and .927 save percentage were NHL career bests. He was 2-4 with a 2.78 GAA and .921 save percentage in a six-game loss to the Hurricanes in the first round, including a combined 110 saves on 117 shots to win Games 3 and 4.

Igor Shesterkin, New York Rangers

The 25-year-old completed his first full NHL season as the heir apparent to Henrik Lundqvist in New York and was 16-14-3 with a 2.62 GAA, a .916 save percentage and two shutouts in 35 games (31 starts). Shesterkin was third in games played, tied with Kaapo Kahkonen of the Wild for third in wins, fourth in save percentage and fifth in GAA among rookie goalies to play at least 10 games.

Ilya Sorokin, New York Islanders

Sorokin was 13-6-3 with a 2.17 GAA, a .918 save percentage and three shutouts in 22 games (21 starts) but proved during the playoffs he was worth the wait for the Islanders after six seasons playing in his native Russia. The 25-year-old allowed nine goals on 159 shots against the



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Pittsburgh Penguins in the first round, including a 48-save performance in Game 5 and 34 saves in Game 6 to win the best-of-7 series, becoming the first Islanders goalie to win each of his first four playoff games and the 10th in NHL

history to do it. He was 4-1 with a 2.79 GAA and .922 save percentage in seven playoff games (five starts) to help New York reach the Stanley Cup Semifinals.



SB NATION
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2021 Draft Profile: Sasha Pastujov

Ten years ago, Pastujov would have been one of the draft's most exciting prospects. In today's game, Pastujov's pace could be a barrier to NHL success.

By Matthew Somma

The fifth and final draft profile is here, and this time, we'll be discussing National Team Development Program (NTDP) forward Sasha Pastujov. I'll break down his stats, give a scouting report, and discuss whether or not Pastujov would be a fit for the Hurricanes in this draft profile.

As a side note, I conducted a Twitter poll last week asking which player Canes fans liked the most out of the four players covered thus far. I have to say that I'm surprised by the results.

To be fair, I would be fine if the Hurricanes selected any of these four players. All four have reasonable NHL upside, with Olausson and L'Heureux likely having the biggest ceilings. Let's see where Pastujov fits in this group, shall we?

Paper Stats

Pastujov is a polarizing prospect in this draft class due to a variety of reasons that we'll touch on in the scouting report. His biggest supporters, Draft Prospects Hockey, have Pastujov ranked 22nd, while EliteProspects puts him at 56th on their board. Pastujov's stats were impressive this season, to say the least.

He scored a total of 40 goals across all of his games and finished with a season total of 91 points. In fact, Pastujov led the U18 team in scoring with 65 points in 41 games, 16 more points than the next highest scorer. Pastujov's five goals and eight points in five games at the U18s raised his draft stock in some cases, making him a bubble player for the first round in a few rankings. Pastujov seems to have a feel for the offensive side of the game and can pass and score with ease according to his paper stats. His 6-foot, 183-pound frame is good for a player his age and will help him adjust to the collegiate level. To find out why scouts are so divided on Pastujov, we'll have to dive into the scouting report.

Scouting Report

Taken from NTDP games as well as the U18 tournament

After watching some of Pastujov's games, I can see why scouts are so divided on Pastujov. Similar to Zachary L'Heureux, there are some major issues with Pastujov's

game that can put a damper on what there is to like about how he plays. Let's break down the positive aspects of his game first.

Pastujov has great hockey sense and is able to adapt to a situation in the offensive zone. If his teammate changes his angle, Pastujov can adjust and skate to an open area in order to try and receive a pass or support his teammate. Pastujov is also able to react to a shot or deflection and immediately know where the puck is going so that he can try to knock the rebound in. His shot is impressive, too. It's quick and there's a fair amount of power behind it, but I wouldn't call Pastujov a sniper. Sure, he can pick corners every now and then, but I would call Pastujov a finisher more than a sniper.

You may be asking what the distinction is between the two, so allow for me to explain using Hurricanes players as examples. Andrei Svechnikov has a quick and accurate shot, making him more of a sniper due to the fact that he can find the smallest amount of open space and beat a goalie with an elite shot. Now take Vincent Trocheck as your other example. Sure, Trocheck is known to do the same thing as we saw in the Nashville series, but more often than not, Trocheck finds ways to score around the net, whether it's a deflection, off of a rebound, or something else. This is essentially how Pastujov operates in the offensive zone. He has a great shot but doesn't rely on it as the only way to score. His shots find a way to the back of the net in a variety of different ways, making him a multi-faceted goal scorer. Pastujov is also a good playmaker that has the ability to thread passes through multiple defenders.

I thought that Pastujov was strong on the puck and that he thrived along the boards. His physicality stood out on a few occasions, and while he may not have the build or the style of a power forward, there's an edge to his game. He is a gifted stick handler, as well. While I am yet to see Pastujov weave through defenders with a few dekes, he is able to gain some separation from a defender by deking. There are times when that foot or two of space is all he needs to make a defender pay for making a mistake, too. Pastujov needs to rely on his strength on the puck in order to beat defenders, however, because he can't beat them with his speed.

That brings us to the negative side of Pastujov's game. There's one glaring weakness to Pastujov's game that sticks out like a sore thumb, and that's his skating. He's not nearly



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a good enough skater to compete at the NHL level. He has been able to rely on his hockey sense and offensive toolkit at the junior level, but he'll need to transform his game in a major way if he wants to see any sort of success at the professional level. His pace, stride, acceleration and top speed are all below average, in my opinion. He's not that big of a guy, either, so his skating is a legitimate cause for concern.

There were countless times where I noticed Pastujov getting beat on both sides of the puck due to his lack of foot speed. I even noticed that his inability to keep up with his teammates killed a few rushes. There were times when a teammate would skate into the offensive zone and have to wait a second or two for Pastujov to catch up, which was enough time for the defense to adjust and take the puck away. It's frustrating to see a player's lack of foot speed kill a rush, because he plays on a line with some talented prospects.

He saw power play-time with Chaz Lucius and Luke Hughes, both projected to be top-15 picks in this year's draft. Jack Hughes, a Northeastern commit and another 2021 draft prospect was on his line as well, so seeing some rushes die because of Pastujov's skating was discouraging. I also got the sense that Pastujov wasn't the best defensively. He got caught napping a few times and was out of position on a handful of chances in the games that I watched. Awareness can be taught, however, and Pastujov is a smart enough player to be able to make changes to his defensive game.

It's clear that Pastujov's skating hampers a lot of his effectiveness, so as a result, he has to compensate. Since he is strong on the puck and a good stickhandler, his skating doesn't stand out to be as poor as it is on occasion. Pastujov is able to muscle his way through defenders on occasion, even if it does look like he is skating through cement while he does it. I'd rate the offensive side of his game a B+. There's a lot that he does well, and while he doesn't have an elite offensive ceiling due to his skating, there's a lot to like about his offensive game.

Summary

Pastujov would thrive as an NHL prospect in the early 2000's and 2010's. His skating wouldn't stand out as much and he'd be a consistent 60-point player at the NHL level given his offensive skills. In today's NHL, however, there are legitimate concerns that he may not even make it to the NHL. This just goes to show how different the game is now. Pace is the

name of the game, and NHL players are getting much, much quicker. If Pastujov is unable to keep up, then he won't be able to stay in the NHL for long. Pastujov will have to get no less than two or three steps quicker in order for me to feel confident in his odds for NHL success. After a few years at Notre Dame, it's possible that he gets quick enough to turn pro and see some AHL time in order to get another half step faster. This is a best-case scenario, though.

If Pastujov hits his ceiling, I believe he could be a 25-goal, 60-point player at the NHL level. There's a lot to like about how Pastujov seeks out offense as well as his hockey sense. He's a smart player that can adapt to situations, and if his skating improves, he'll be an even greater threat offensively. That potential alone, as well as his performance at the U18 tournament, are why some scouts have him ranked in the first round. As for me, I'm putting Pastujov as a top-40 prospect in this draft, somewhere between 32-40.

I don't see Pastujov as a first round prospect due to his skating, but some team will be happy with picking him in the early second round. I don't believe there is a fit for the Hurricanes, either. He has the hockey sense and skill that the Hurricanes look for in a prospect, but he's lacking in the skating department. In recent years, the Hurricanes have drafted a vast majority of players that are good skaters with high amounts of skill or hockey sense. I can't see them breaking that trend with their first round pick in 2021.

If I were to rank each prospect that I've profiled in this series based on how happy I'd be if the Hurricanes selected them, this is how I would rank them:

1. Oskar Olausson
2. Zachary L'Heureux
3. Matthew Coronato
4. Sebastian Cossa
5. Sasha Pastujov

It was a tough list to hash out because I like four out of the five prospects as first round options for the Hurricanes. Olausson seems like he would be a great fit for the team, however, which is why I put him first. Stay tuned for more draft content leading up to draft day, including a Canes Country mock draft, a brief look at more options for the Hurricanes and more.

TODAY'S LINKS

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

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The Athletic / From Sandy Hook to the NHL Draft, one prospect's enduring connection

Scott Wheeler Jul 13, 2021

Editor's note: This article has been updated to correct the date of the Sandy Hook shooting. We apologize for the error. At 9:39 a.m. on the morning of Dec. 14, 2012, Patty and Fred Samoskevich were sitting in the Blue Colony Diner on Church Hill Road in Newtown, Conn. They were eating breakfast when cop cars started flying through their quiet town. "My God, there's no reason why they need to be travelling that fast," Patty said. . . .

As they stepped out of the diner and into the parking lot, the wave of Newtown local police turned into a rush of Connecticut state troopers. They assumed the worst. "Something has happened," Patty said, turning to Fred, believing at first that the worst could be a fire, or maybe a robbery at a nearby bank. Patty was supposed to hop on the interstate ramp adjacent the diner to begin the commute to her job of more than 25 years in the mortgage business. Fred, a tower crane operator, needed to turn right to make the short trip back to the family's home down Riverside Road. But before she got in her car and he in his truck, Patty turned to her husband again. "You know what, before I get on the highway I'm just going to take a ride by the kids' school just to make sure everything's OK there," she said. So she went left to make the short drive to Reed Intermediate, a school for fifth and sixth graders where her twin children, Mackie and Maddy, had just begun that fall. When all was quiet there, she turned back and hopped on I-84, while cop cars continued to speed past her in the other direction. Less than a mile from the diner, Fred came to a stop, hopping out of his truck where the cruisers had screeched to a halt outside Sandy Hook Elementary School. Knowing that the road was a slow, meandering drive through the woods on a normal day, Fred, without talking to anyone and still believing he'd arrived at the scene of a fire at the school, decided to direct the traffic that had begun to back up, waving through fire trucks, town officials, and local post office security personnel he didn't even know existed. At Reed Intermediate, Mackie and Maddy, who'd celebrated their 10th birthday just a month earlier, were sitting in their science class when its lights were suddenly turned off and they were told they were going into lockdown. They remained there for four hours. "It's a day that I'll never forget," Maddy says. "I remember every detail about it, which is kind of crazy. "I just remember sitting in that dark classroom for the longest time and just not knowing what was going on," Mackie says. "It was scary. Long before that morning, Sandy Hook Elementary held a place close to the hearts of the Samoskevich family and everyone else who called Newtown home. Mackie and Maddy had been students there from kindergarten through fourth grade until their graduation that spring. Before them, their older sister Melissa was there, too. The school itself sits just a couple thousand feet from the Samoskevich family home through the forest that divides them, a walk Mackie guesses might have taken 10 minutes. But none of the Samoskeviches yet knew of the tragedy that had just taken place. That a gunman had walked through the same school doors they had so many times before to murder 26 of their neighbors, including 20 children just 6 and 7 years old. That the lives of so many in their town had just been shattered. And that, though their family of five would escape unharmed, they would carry that day

with them for the rest of their own lives. Nearly nine years later, Mackie is set to be picked in the first or second round of the 2021 NHL Draft. And when people ask him about the town listed in his bio or about his family, he has a singular appreciation for what those things mean to him. Newtown (or Sandy Hook as he calls it), Fred, Patty, Maddy and Melissa are his world, his everything. . . .

There were two things that eventually made Fred realize it wasn't a fire. The first was when his kids' former kindergarten teacher, Janet Vollmer, emerged from the school with her students. In the moment, he found himself thinking it was weird that her crying didn't appear to be out of pain but as someone who was trying, desperately, to keep her composure. "Mrs. Vollmer, are you OK?" he asked as she passed by him with her trail of children. "We're OK," she said to him. "We're OK. The second was moments later when one of the cars he asked to slow down, an unmarked old Ford van without windows, pulled right past him. Its driver made eye contact before stopping 10 feet from where he was standing to unload half a dozen men holding rifles. When the men leapt out, they didn't pause to look for someone to talk to, like so many others had. They just sprinted down the street toward the school's entrance. . . .

Fred cries as he tells the story. . . .

"I'll never forget Mrs. Vollmer's words," he says, pausing to compose himself before choking them out a third and fourth time. "We're OK," she said. 'We're OK.' That hits me right now. He can still feel how the hair on his arms stood up and his heart sank when the men in that van unloaded. After they arrived, he recalls how "everything went south" and cruisers made way for ambulances. Then came the groups of gathering parents who passed by with questions he couldn't answer because he didn't want to let himself believe that what had actually happened was worse than his worst fear. "I didn't really get a closeup. But I had to help out a lot of parents and I didn't know what they were asking because I was convinced it was a fire," Fred says between breaths. "That really hurts the most, knowing that I could have talked to one of the mothers that lost a child. That hurts. I couldn't help her. Patty turned around on her way to work that morning when word of what had happened began to hit the news. "It was a rough morning. It affected us for a long time," Patty says. "I don't know to this day how the parents go on. I really don't. Halfway across the country, Melissa was on a bus to Chicago in her first year as a student and hockey player at Shattuck-St. Mary's School in Minnesota when one of her teammates showed her the news on her phone. The first thing she did was panic, nearly hyperventilating from the shock. Hours later, as she tracked the news and the number of deaths climbed, she allowed herself to cry. That night, she told herself, "I'm going to play for my hometown tonight," an experience she describes as out-of-body. The following day, she made arrangements to return home early before Shattuck started its Christmas break. "I'll never forget that day. I just felt so separated and so far away," Melissa says. . . .

When Mackie and Maddy returned home from school and walked through the front door, the first thing they saw was the television lit up with images of people and places that they recognized — and many others in uniform that they did not. Into that first night and beyond, a world's worth of news vans arrived and the police presence expanded. "Helicopters were flying over our house all night. And I mean, tree height with guys on their landing thing with guns in their hands staring at me," Fred says. "It was pretty heavy. Before putting the twins to bed, Fred and Patty sat them down to try to explain what had happened in terms they would understand. "The kids were young. They didn't fully understand. And it was hard," Patty says. "We were close with a lot of the faculty. When the names of those killed were eventually released, they learned that among them were 6-year-old Jack Pinto (the younger



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brother of one of Mackie's classmates, Ben Pinto), 52-year-old Anne Marie Murphy (who taught Melissa in second grade), and 27-year-old Victoria Soto (Melissa's favorite teacher). When Melissa arrived home from Shattuck, Patty and Fred struggled with what to do next. "We ended up bringing them to a rink outside of town to let them skate and try to get their minds off of it," Patty says, laughing for the first time. "It was all about just trying to keep them safe and keep their minds in the right place. Hockey has always been the place the Samoskevich family goes to get away. It was also the first thing that bound them together, before tragedy ever did. . . .

Fred played the sport into high school and when Melissa was 3 years old, instead of installing a pool in their backyard, he constructed a year-round hockey rink, with concrete for ball hockey in the summers that he could cover in plastic and flood in the winters.

Fred's backyard rink. (Courtesy the Samoskevich family)

My wife thought I was crazy and I did too when I was about halfway done," Fred says, chucking to himself. By the time the twins arrived and Fred got Maddy onto the ice, she took off walking, her pacifier still in her mouth. Mackie was a different story. . . .

"Mackie started bawling his eyes out," Fred says. "It probably took him a week to get over it. But I tell ya, once he got over it, he just took over past there. Together, the three kids grew up spending their afternoons after school out back, with Melissa showing her younger siblings the ropes. When they'd get called in for dinner, Mackie would strap on goalie gear in the kitchen while Maddy took shots at him. On weekends, they'd follow Melissa to hockey tournaments with her travel team in Eastern New York, stickhandling their way in and out of arena lobbies. . . .

"Part of the reason why they're the best of friends is because we've been together every weekend for their entire lives," Fred says. "That's what we loved about it. We were on vacation pretty much every week. We didn't go to Disney World, we didn't go for a week to the Caribbean or anything like that. We were in Philly, we were in Boston, we were in Toronto, we were in Edmonton. The twins were always inseparable, with Mackie choosing forward and Maddy choosing defense so that they could practice against one another. Both Melissa and Maddy played boys hockey until their bantam years, so Mackie and Maddy also played on the same team until he began playing AAA up a year with the 2001 age group. . . .

Mackie and Maddy also played spring and summer hockey together. (Courtesy the Samoskevich family)

Every step of the way, Melissa was always there to give them pointers after their games. "She taught us a lot growing up. Just seeing her love for the sport made us fall in love with it," Maddy says. "And then when she put the work into it, it paid off. That work carried Melissa to the pinnacle of the sport. Beyond Shattuck, she played for Team USA's women's under-18 team twice (collecting a gold, a silver, and a spot on the tournament all-star team in her second appearance). She then spent four years at Quinnipiac University, including two as captain. She was the second overall pick of the Connecticut Whale in the 2018 NWHL draft. In 2019, she won gold with Team USA again, this time at the women's world championships. This past season, she was hired as an assistant coach with Penn State's women's team (though she's not yet prepared to call herself retired). Mackie and Maddy have always tried to follow in her footsteps. . . .

After finishing fifth grade, they both also attended Shattuck. In 2019, Maddy played for Team USA at the under-18 worlds, just like her big sister had. She then also committed to Quinnipiac, where she has just finished her freshman year. Mackie's turn to represent Newtown is up next at the University of Michigan — and the NHL beyond that. He spent two years with the USHL's Chicago Steel following his time at Shattuck. . . .

"To see my sister in those spots, it's something that I want to do, to be on TV and have everyone watching," Mackie says. "Just seeing where she was and how she got there has been a huge thing in my life. "And I also want to represent Sandy Hook. It's my favorite place in the world. Mackie calls his two sisters his best friends, a bond that they all say was strengthened in the years after the shooting. . . .

These last two years, Mackie has called his sisters every week from Chicago. This year, when he broke his finger crashing into the boards, they dreaded being away from him. As a family, they found the pandemic most difficult because none of the five do well being away from each other. In a normal year, Fred and Patty would visit Mackie half a dozen times in Chicago. This season, they weren't able to visit until they were both double-vaccinated around playoff time, as Mackie's Steel chased and won the USHL's Clark Cup. As soon as they'd won, he couldn't wait to get home to celebrate it with them. "When I'm at home, I'm not usually out and about with other friends because we're always together and I'd rather be with my sisters," Mackie says. "Not everybody has that.

Mackie and Melissa. (Courtesy the Samoskevich family)

None of the people who've worked with Mackie over the years have asked him about Sandy Hook. Not Ben Umhoefer, who coaches and runs the program at Shattuck. Not Ryan Hardy nor Brock Sheahan, who were his general manager and coach with the Steel. Not Michigan head coach Mel Pearson, who will welcome him to the Wolverines in the fall. But they know all about Melissa, Maddy, Patty and Fred, because Mackie's always talking about them. And when you ask them to describe Mackie the hockey player, they can do that. . . .

Owen Power, Mackie's teammate in Chicago and soon at Michigan and the presumptive No. 1 pick in the upcoming draft, calls him the most talented player he's ever shared the ice with. Pearson gets giddy when he talks about how he may be able to use him. Umhoefer will tell you that Mackie's game speaks for itself. "From a skills, skating, talent perspective, there's really not a lot to pick holes at," he says. Sheahan laughs about how often Mackie appeared in the videos he showed the Steel this season, both offensively and defensively, calling him a complete player. He and Hardy also said they saw Mackie do things every night for two years that nobody else could. Mackie, Sheahan insists, is "as elite as it gets" as a skater and puck handler. "I think he was the most skilled player in the USHL," Sheahan says. . . .

Mackie Samoskevich is NHL Central Scouting's 26th-ranked North American skater in advance of the 2021 NHL Draft. (Courtesy Chicago Steel)

But they'd all rather talk about Mackie the person. . . .

"The way he treats everybody is awesome," Hardy says. "He's a very kind and genuine person and I think that speaks to the parents that he has and the relationship that he has with his sisters. Sheahan will tell you that he has learned as much from Mackie as he has taught him, something he says is rare. "He's a great kid," Sheahan says. "He really burns to be a player, like he really works at it. He's the type of guy I like to just sit there and talk with. Umhoefer talks about the Samoskeviches as a humble, hardworking, blue-collar family who have and will accomplish special things. Though he never spoke with any of them about the shooting, he and other faculty recognized that they were shaken by it and tried to go out of their way to check in on them at Shattuck. . . .

"Mackie was a really quiet kid with us. He never really showed a lot of emotion. He's one of those kids that's sometimes hard to get a read on," Umhoefer says. "But the shooting was a really sad time for everyone that worked in education and then there was a lot of focus brought onto those kids because as a school you feel a lot of the same emotions that they feel when you see that they're hurting. Mackie's quiet nature is one of the things that all those who've worked with him talk about. "Mackie is identical to me and Madison is identical to my wife. I was the same way Mackie is right now, a little quiet," Fred says. But to Maddy and Melissa, Mackie is a different person than the one the rest of the world sees. . . .

To Maddy, he's a confidante who is easy to talk to. "He was always there for me. If I had a question about hockey, he would spend a good amount of time teaching me until I got the full answer. I feel like I'm the player that I am today because of him," Maddy says. To Melissa, the reserved Mackie people see at the rink is someone else altogether at home. "He's soft spoken but it's funny because he's also a little shit around the house," Melissa says, laughing. "He's one of the funniest kids I know when you get him going. We make fun of each other a ton. So when people see Mackie and think he's quiet, that's because when he's at the rink he's ready to work. Melissa thinks



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that attitude has taken Mackie this far. "Me and Maddy go to the rink and work but we like the social aspect of it," Melissa says. "The quietness of him is because he's a 24-hour athlete. And it has paid off for him and that's solely because of him. He's out on our outdoor rink for hours just stickhandling by himself. Watching his work ethic is amazing. I wish I had it. Whenever Patty thinks about her son's draft day, she gets nervous. "The butterflies just drive me crazy," Patty says. When Melissa and Maddy think about his big day, their octave changes in excitement. "It's going to be amazing. I'm so proud of everything he has accomplished," Maddy says. "He has worked so hard for this and he deserves it. It's going to be an emotional day."

"I'm just," Melissa says, choking up, "yeah ... I'm really proud of him. He deserves all of the attention. But the draft won't be the only thing on their minds. The first thing they'll all think of will be Newtown. "We love Sandy Hook ... um," Fred said, pausing to collect himself once more, "it's just sad going forward. You see one of the moms out at the grocery store and it just brings you right back to it. We're a resilient group of people here in Sandy Hook. We help each other out as much as we can. Plus, the help we received from the world. It was amazing what everyone did for us around here, it really was. "It was life-changing for so many, including us," Maddy adds. "It brought our family a lot closer. After that day, our parents were there for us and we were there for each other. Not a day goes by where Mackie doesn't think about that day or his hometown.

"It's crazy to think about all of the towns in the world and your town is the one that this happens to. To see that people are willing to do that, I can't believe it continues to happen to other people," Mackie said, pausing himself for the first time. "But at the end of the day, it was a pretty amazing thing to see Sandy Hook come together. It was a positive thing in one small way, how everyone was able to come back from it the way that they did. And it's that last part, that sliver of good, that he'll carry with him.

It's a reminder, he says, of how little hockey actually matters, and of how much his weird little hockey family does.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: In which a simple question about NHL draft history goes wrong

By Sean McIndoe Jul 13, 2021

So I had what I thought was a neat idea for a draft-related column. Instead, I think I discovered a new and immutable law of the NHL universe. Stay with me, it's the offseason and this is going to get weird. Here was the original idea: What's the best starting six you could make if you just took the first players drafted at each position in a given draft year? In other words, you take the first center, the first left winger, the first right winger, the first two defensemen and the first goalie selected in an NHL entry draft, and that's your six. Which year gives you the best mix of legitimate stars?

Simple enough, right? It's even easy enough to research, since plenty of sites list every pick from every draft. We do get into a bit of a grey area when it comes to positions, since some guys move around the ice a bit and it can be tough to figure out what exactly a team thought they were drafting, but that's not a huge hurdle. I decided to use Hockey Reference as my guide, and that I'd just default to whichever position they listed unless I could find convincing evidence that they were wrong. I also decided to start with the first entry draft, which was the legendary class of 1979. That skips the 17 years of amateur drafts from 1963 to 1978, but that seems fine since those 1960s drafts tended to be terrible and the 1970s weren't all that much better. Lots of high picks in those days never played at all, and I wanted to focus on the picks that turned into stars. (Thunder rumbles and ominous foreshadowing music briefly plays.) Let's stick with the big names, right?

It goes without saying that some years will be better than others. There are busts in every draft class, and sometimes they're even the first pick at their position. So we just figure out which years were actually good, narrow it down to a top 10, and you've got yourself an easy ranking column for the week before the draft. What could go wrong?

So I started with 1979, often considered the best draft class ever because it was a double cohort (after the league changed the eligibility age from 19 to 18). It produced the highest-scoring defenseman ever in Ray Bourque, the third-highest scoring forward in Mark Messier, a 700-goal scorer in Mike Gartner, plus Hall of Famers like Michel Goulet, Kevin Lowe, Guy Carbonneau and Glenn Anderson. Fertile ground for this sort of thing. But as it turns out, our draft-based starting six is ... just OK. Barely passable, if we're being honest. We get a solid enough blue line with the first pick in Rob Ramage and the sixth pick in Craig Hartsburg, but miss Bourque because he went eighth. Mike Foligno bumps Gartner out of the right wing spot by one pick. The center is Perry Turnbull, the left winger is Tom McCarthy. And the goalie is Pat Riggin, an underrated 1980s name but one who was a backup by his mid-20s. That's kind of a disappointing way to start, but you get the concept. Let's dive in and find some more star-studded lineups. The 1980s

The 1980 draft gets off to a rough start when we lose Denis Savard (No. 3) to fellow center Doug Wickenheiser (No. 1), and I'm sure Habs fans don't want to hear a bunch about that pick. We do get Larry Murphy, but he's by far the biggest name on a team that otherwise includes Don Beaupre, Dave Babych, Jim Fox and Brad Palmer. All solid enough NHLers, but that's about the best we can say. The 1981 class looks better thanks to top pick Dale Hawerchuk and Grant Fuhr in goal, but stalls out quickly after that. The 1982 squad is even worse, with Brian Bellows and Ron Sutter being the only really recognizable names except for Trottier — as in Rocky, Bryan's younger brother who scored six career goals, but was the first right winger taken. And 1983 gets Pat LaFontaine (but not Steve Yzerman), John MacLean (but not Cam Neely) and Tom Barrasso (roughly 200 picks ahead of Dominik Hasek), but also top pick bust Brian Lawton. Huh. This isn't going great. But that's OK, because the 1984 draft is the Mario Lemieux year. And he gets some help right away on his wing from Kirk Muller. The starting six would also include a personal favorite in Al Iafrate, and two capable journeymen in Petr Svoboda and Craig Billington. We're close to our first real contender until we get to our other winger. That would be Trevor Stenborg, the first right winger off the board when he went 15th to Quebec. He played parts of four seasons, and recorded 12 career points. The 1985 draft gives us Wendel Clark and Sean Burke, but also someone named Dan Gratton at center — his NHL career lasted seven games. The 1986 team features Jimmy Carson, Joe Murphy and Zarek Zalapski, but also top-ranked left winger Warren Babe (two career goals) and goalie Shawn Simpson (a solid radio career, but zero NHL appearances). In 1987, we start strong with Pierre Turgeon and Brendan Shanahan, but also get saddled with Wayne McBean and Jimmy Waite. And in 1988 we don't get to use top-10 picks Teemu Selanne, Rod Brind'Amour or Jeremy Roenick, but do get stuck with Corey Foster and Jason Muzzatti. By the time I got to 1989 — Mats Sundin and Olaf Kolzig, sure, but also Adam Bennett and Dave Chyzowski — I didn't have a single team featuring six star players, and I was starting to get that sinking feeling. Was this starting to veer towards jersey number territory? It couldn't be. Maybe 1980s scouts were just bad at their jobs. Surely things would get better in the 1990s. And they did. Kind of. The 1990s

Ah, the 1990 draft. One of the most memorable of the era, and one that produced two of the greatest players ever in Martin Brodeur and Jaromir Jagr, not to mention 500-goal scorers Peter Bondra and Keith Tkachuk and 1,000-point man Doug Weight. Guess how many of them make this team. Go ahead, guess. The answer, of course, is none. Fifth pick Jagr was the second right winger off the board, losing our slot to first pick Owen Nolan. And while Brodeur was the second goalie taken, the first was Trevor Kidd, who (checks notes) did not win almost 700 games. That said, the rest of the 1990 roster fills out nicely. There aren't any Hall of Famers, but we do get Brad May at left wing, Petr Nedved at center and a solid blue line of Derian Hatcher and Darryl Sydor. That's not bad! The weak link is clearly Kidd, who never lived up to his draft pedigree and spent a lot of his career as a backup, but he played 12 big league seasons so he's far from a bust. For maybe the first time, we can fill a roster with six legitimate NHL names. Not stars, granted, but decent players. We can build on this. Just not in



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1991, where Eric Lindros, Scott Niedermayer and Markus Naslund are weighed down by Pat Falloon on wing and somebody named Andrew Verner in goal. The 1992 team is Alexei Yashin and then a who's who of vaguely OK guys like Todd Warriner and Mike Rathje. And our 1993 entry has two of the all-time greats in Chris Pronger and Paul Kariya, but also Alexandre Daigle. The 1994 entry isn't very good, although it's kind of fun. The top two picks cover the blue line, with Ed Jovanoski and Oleg Tverdovsky. We're stuck with Radek Bonk at center, but that's better than the alternative because Jason Bonsignore was the next pick. We're solid at wing with Jeff O'Neill and Ryan Smyth. And our goalie is seventh pick Jamie Storr, who never lived up to the hype but does make the 1994 team the most efficient of the bunch, with all six roster spots assigned after just seven picks. The 1995 team is pretty decent, with Wade Redden, Bryan Berard, Shane Doan and J.S. Giguere. No Hall of Famers, and they're stuck with Daymond Langkow at center and Chad Kilger at left wing, but it's not bad. But any positive momentum is immediately snuffed out by the legendarily bad 1996 class, one that features Andrei Zyuzin, Alexandre Volchkov and a goalie (Craig Hillier) who never made the NHL. The 1997 team gives us Joe Thornton and Roberto Luongo, but also Paul Mara and Jason Ward, who takes the right wing spot in heartbreaking fashion by going one pick ahead of Marian Hossa. And 1998 peaks with Vinny Lecavalier and Alex Tanguay before descending into Rico Fata and Patrick DesRochers. By the time we get to 1999, I barely want to bother. That was the Sedin year, but we only get Daniel thanks to top pick Patrik Stefan taking our center spot, and after that we're stuck with Pavel Brendl, Jeff Jillson, Branislav Mezei and Brian Finley. You know what, I owe 1980s hockey scouts an apology. The 1990s crew does a slightly better job, if we're being generous. But only slightly, and if a Team 1990 that has Trevor Kidd in goal is the best we can do so far, it feels like something has gone terribly wrong. It was at this point that I abandoned my original mission. A top 10 ranking? Futile. A dumb idea borne out of the optimism of someone who should know better. I apologize for getting your hopes up. Instead, we're shifting gears to a different question. Can we find one draft class — just one — where each player who was the first prospect taken at their position ended up being a legitimately above-average NHL player?

I still think we can. But we're running out of years.

The 2000s

The first draft pick of the new decade is Rick DiPietro, so we're already off to a tough start, and despite some promise from Dany Heatley and Marian Gaborik, all hope vanishes when the Bruins use the seventh pick to give a blue line spot to someone named Lars Jonsson. (He never even signed with Boston, and eventually played his entire eight-game NHL career with the Flyers.)

The 2001 draft gives us Jason Spezza and Ilya Kovalchuk, who were stars, but also Pascal Leclaire and Fredrik Sjostrom, who were not. The 2002 team is deeply weird, as we get Rick Nash, Kari Lehtonen and Jay Bouwmeester with the top three picks, but are stuck with Pierre-Marc Bouchard as our top center. That would be manageable, but then you get to right wing and ... there aren't any. At least according to the Hockey Reference listing, NHL teams didn't draft a right winger until the 27th pick, when San Jose took Mike Morris, who never made it. (The HockeyDB version thinks Scottie Upshall was a right winger when he was picked, but I don't think he played there much in the NHL and I said I'd go with Hockey Reference when I wasn't sure. Put him on this team and it's better, although still not overly scary.)

That brings us to the class you've probably been waiting for, knowing it would be the inevitable savior of this whole thing. The 2003 draft is arguably the best ever, and had such a high hit rate that the only legitimate bust in the entire first round — Rangers' pick Hugh Jessiman — is still famous for it to this day even though he didn't go until the 12th pick. With names like Shea Weber, Brent Burns, Patrice Bergeron, Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry on the board, surely the 2003 draft will be a goldmine. And it is! Kind of. Our starting six ends up being Eric Staal, Nathan Horton, Thomas Vanek, Ryan Suter, Braydon Coburn and Marc-Andre Fleury. We've got a Hall of Famer in goal and two more guys in Suter and Staal who'll at least be considered. But Vanek? Coburn? Horton? Good players all, but kind of underwhelming given how strong 2003 was. I'm not sure this group actually beats out the 1990 entry. With a deep sigh, we move on to 2004, where we know not to get too excited about the fantastic forward line of Evgeni Malkin, Alexander

Ovechkin and Blake Wheeler and instead wait for the inevitable appearance of Cam Barker and Al Montoya. Likewise, 2005 brings Sidney Crosby and Carey Price, but also Brian Lee. In 2006 we start with Erik Johnson, watch Jordan Staal slide in at center ahead of Jonathan Toews and Nicklas Backstrom, briefly get our hopes up when Phil Kessel appears at right wing, and then watch Ty Wishart take the second blue line spot. I'll be honest with you, by now I was openly rooting against the scouts. It was like being at the ballpark when the other team's pitcher is throwing a no-hitter. At some point, you just go with it. Let's see if we can make it to the end of this stupid thing without finding a single year where all six players are stars. The 2007 team has Patrick Kane and James van Riemsdyk, but also Thomas Hickey and a goalie named Joel Gistedt who never played in the NHL. Then things get top-heavy for a few years, as 2008 starts strong with Steven Stamkos and Drew Doughty before Nikita Filatov and Chet Pickard show up, while 2009 has John Tavares and Victor Hedman and even Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Evander Kane, but also one career game from Scott Glennie. Depending on how generous you want to be with guys like Trevor Kidd and Braydon Coburn, I think we may be 0-for-3 decades right now. This is completely hopeless. Will I read the writing on the wall and give up? I'm a Leafs fan, so you know the answer.

2010s

The 2010 draft is another that starts strong, this time with Taylor Hall and Tyler Seguin, but our blue line is Erik Gudbranson and Dylan McLlath. The 2011 class isn't star-studded but looks genuinely promising for at least serviceable players right up until Magnus Hellberg takes the goalie nod by one spot over John Gibson. And the 2012 draft is so weak that even Andrei Vasilevski can't save it from Nail Yakupov and Griffin Reinhart. The 2013 class gives us Nathan MacKinnon at center and a legitimately strong blue line in Seth Jones and Darnell Nurse, but once again it's the goalie who gets us, as Habs pick Zachary Fucale hasn't made the NHL yet. Any hopes for 2014 hinge on the question of whether we can call Leon Draisaitl a left winger, even though Hockey Reference says he was drafted as a center. That would let us avoid Michael Dal Colle, but reports at the time call Draisaitl a center, and besides we're once again lacking a goalie with NHL experience unless Mason McDonald makes it someday. At this point, we're probably too recent to draw real conclusions — anyone drafted by the mid-2010s still has a ton of their story left to write. But in case you're wondering, the 2015 class is looking strong with Connor McDavid, Ilya Samsonov, plus Ivan Provorov and Noah Hanifin on the blue line. Right wing is good too, with either Mitch Marner (listed here as a center) or Timo Meier, but Lawson Crouse at left wing is the weak link right now. And the 2016 team looks great, with an Auston Matthews/Patrik Laine/Matthew Tkachuk top line, plus Mikhail Sergachev and Carter Hart. But as always, there's a fly in the ointment, and it's the slow development of Olli Juolevi. Beyond that, we get some promising classes, but none where all six players look like guaranteed stars. This means we've covered over 40 years of entry-draft history, and the scouts haven't aced a single one. Like I said way back at the beginning, I didn't come into this expecting perfection. Scouting is hard, player development is a dicey business, and you never really know what you're getting with an 18-year-old. All factors considered, NHL teams finding above-average players with their top pick at each position in a given draft year should be hard to do. It should be rare. But still ... like, it should happen sometimes, right? The goal here wasn't to find the draft's best player at each position with the top pick. We just wanted a good one. And in over four decades of entry draft history, I'm not sure it's ever happened. So what have we learned? Two things. First, I should really sketch this stuff out before I dive into writing a full article, but far more importantly: There appears to be a law of the hockey universe here. The hockey gods have revealed something important to us today. In any NHL draft, it appears to be impossible for the scouts to hit on the top picks at each position. I'm not completely sure how you define a successful pick, but if we draw the line somewhere around "better than Braydon Coburn or Trevor Kidd," then apparently it just can't be done. Keep that in mind when you're watching the picks next week, because one of those top position picks is going to betray you. . .

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL rumour roundup: Will Eichel be Sabres' first domino to fall?

Breaking down Keith trade & other potential names on the move

Chris Johnston joined Tim & Friends to talk about the Oilers' trade for Duncan Keith and touched on other big names that could be on the move in the NHL.

Mike Johnston

It's a busy week for NHL front offices with teams needing to submit their protected lists by July 17 ahead of next week's 2021 NHL Expansion Draft.

The first round of the NHL draft takes place two nights after the Seattle Kraken unveil their inaugural roster, followed by the start of free agency the next week.

The busy calendar could lead to flurry of transactions before a five-day trade freeze goes into effect Saturday at 3 p.m. ET, two hours before the deadline for teams to file their exemption lists.

Monday saw the Edmonton Oilers add some leadership and bolster their blue line by trading for Duncan Keith. They sent Caleb Jones and a third-round pick to the Chicago Blackhawks for the two-time Norris Trophy winner.

With plenty of buzz surrounding star players like Jack Eichel, Vladimir Tarasenko, Seth Jones and others, the Keith deal may just be the tip of the iceberg this week.

Sabres have plenty to ponder

There's no shortage of teams interesting in adding a player of Eichel's calibre, however completing a trade where both teams involved feel like they're getting a fair deal is a completely different issue.

"The problem is they're trying to trade the 36-goal Jack Eichel of 2019-20 and other teams are like, 'Well, it's the two-goal Jack Eichel who says he needs a neck surgery of 2021,' so it's a hard dilemma here for GM Kevyn Adams," Mike Harrington of Buffalo News told Hockey Central.

The Sabres have been a team perpetually stuck in a rebuilding phase and Harrington suggested the team can't afford another trade like the deal from three off-seasons ago when they moved Ryan O'Reilly, who went on to win the Selke, Conn Smythe and Stanley Cup with the St. Louis Blues.

The Sabres received a package of Patrik Berglund, Vladimir Sobotka, Tage Thompson, a 2019 first-round pick (Ryan Johnson) and a 2021 second they later used to acquire Colin Miller in exchange for O'Reilly.

"You can't make a trade like that for Jack Eichel," Harrington said. "You have to really score big."

Eichel is signed through the 2025-26 campaign and can be dealt to any team in the league since his no-movement clause doesn't kick in until 2022-23.

Finding the right deal for the 24-year-old star is clearly the top priority for the Sabres, but certainly not the only one.

The team holds the first-overall selection in this year's draft with University of Michigan defenceman Owen Power the projected top prospect.

It's also possible Sam Reinhart has played his final game in a Sabres uniform. The pending restricted free agent is set to enter his seventh full NHL season and has yet to see the playoffs, and seems disenchanted with the team that selected him second overall in 2014.

"Realistically, the first big move might be Reinhart or Rasmus Ristolainen, neither of whom seem that interested in being here anymore," Harrington added. "I don't think the first move can be Eichel. I just think that's really, really complicated to pull off. ... It's really a dark time here in Buffalo and they're going to really have to show they're

making some strides under Kevyn Adams and head coach Don Granato to get this fan base back."

An Eichel trade has to be for more than picks & prospects

Could Golden Knights make pitch for Eichel?

The Vegas Golden Knights have been aggressive with acquiring big names throughout their brief history. Vegas has added Max Pacioretty, Mark Stone, Alex Pietrangolo and attempted to trade for Erik Karlsson in its first season, but even though the team needs help down the middle they may not be in a position to go all in on Eichel.

"Not only would you have to clear out cap space – and moving cap space in a market the way this is right now where no teams want to spend because of the flat cap is going to be difficult – and you're going to have to give up an insane amount of picks and prospects and players to get Jack Eichel to begin with," Golden Knights reporter Jesse Granger of The Athletic told Hockey Central.

Granger suggested the team might be better off looking at adding depth instead of another first-line talent, but the team is in a bit of a cap-space bind either way.

There's \$12 million tied up in the crease between reigning Vezina winner Marc-Andre Fleury and Robin Lehner. Granger said, "I just don't see how they can move a goalie," and mentioned that Fleury and his agent said the popular netminder wants to stay and is willing to sign an extension.

Fleury, 36, is under contract for one more season, while Lehner is signed through 2025.

Granger added that pending UFA Alec Martinez wants to re-sign with the team, but might have played himself out of a job since the blue-liner has earned a raise from the \$4-million cap hit he has had since 2015.

Are stars aligning for Jones to join Blackhawks?

The Chicago Blackhawks were already believed to be among the frontrunners to target Columbus Blue Jackets defenceman Seth Jones in an off-season trade. Now that his younger brother, Caleb, is in the organization, following Monday's Keith trade, it makes even more sense.

One somewhat surprising aspect of that trade was Chicago didn't retain any of Keith's remaining salary, which gives GM Stan Bowman more leeway to pull off a substantial move.

Tarasenko receiving interest from teams in East

Vladimir Tarasenko's tenure with the St. Louis Blues appears to be nearing its conclusion. The skilled winger has reportedly requested to be moved despite having two years remaining on an eight-year, \$60-million contract that has full no-trade clause.

According to Jim Thomas of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the 29-year-old is drawing interest from the Washington Capitals, Boston Bruins, New York Rangers and the New York Islanders. Tarasenko, who is coming off back-to-back injury plagued seasons, would need to waive his no-trade clause to facilitate any trade. The Russian ranked third in the NHL in total goals between 2014-15 and 2018-19 before his injury problems.

Will Kraken take conservative approach to expansion trades?

We all remember how the Golden Knights took advantage of some desperate teams on the trade market during their 2018 expansion draft. Seattle Kraken GM Ron Francis could go about things slightly differently in the latest NHL expansion draft, per Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman.

"I think Seattle's No. 1 priority is maintaining financial flexibility," Friedman said. "They're being handed a clean slate. You don't want to make the mistake of ruining your financial clean slate by taking too many of other people's problems. ... I think there's a lot of teams that want Seattle to help them. I don't think Seattle's moving that quickly and I don't think it's going to be painless."

Getzlaf likely remaining with Ducks

It shouldn't come as a surprise that Anaheim Ducks captain Ryan Getzlaf is probably staying with the team with which he has spent his entire 1,101-game career.



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He likely won't sign a new deal until after the expansion draft, though, to ensure the team won't have to protect him.

"My understanding is that Ryan Getzlaf isn't going anywhere," Daily Faceoff's Frank Seravalli said of the 36-year-old pending UFA centre. "He's very likely to remain a Duck next season, I think on a one-year extension and I think at this point the hold off is to get through the other side of the expansion draft so that the Ducks don't have to expose any other players, especially some of the young forwards that they have."

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Sportsnet.ca / With Ducharme signed, new deal for Danault among Canadiens' top priorities

What's the future for Ducharme & Danault with Canadiens?

Eric Engels and Sean Reynolds look at the Canadiens' end-of-season media conferences, and what fans learned about the futures of Marc Bergevin, Dominique Ducharme, and key players like Phillip Danault.

Eric Engels

MONTREAL — We may be approaching Construction Holiday in Quebec, but this will be the busiest two weeks of the year for the builder of the Montreal Canadiens.

From July 18-Aug. 1 in the province, the cranes outside downtown developments are abandoned, the road projects are paused, and businesses swing into summer hours. Traffic flows in a steady stream, tensions release and everyone relaxes.

But for Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin, who came out of the most action-packed off-season of his nine-year tenure to see his team all the way to the Stanley Cup Final, there's no rest coming. There was none taken, either, after the Canadiens lost Game 5 to the Tampa Bay Lightning last Wednesday.

"I started putting together next year's team last night," Bergevin said during his end-of-season Zoom conference last Friday, and we'd imagine he's worked every day since.

Bergevin ironed out a new contract with head coach Dominique Ducharme that was announced on Tuesday, agreeing to a three-year extension that officially made him the 31st head coach in Canadiens history, but Bergevin's to-do list doesn't stop there. He's got two vacancies to fill on the bench of the Laval Rocket, he's got the Seattle Expansion Draft to prepare for and a massive debrief to do with assistant GM Trevor Timmins on the upcoming NHL Draft — how many of the eligible prospects do you think he has a good handle on after COVID-19 ravaged junior seasons? — and he must negotiate with the team's free agents.

Mix in a trade or two and pitches to unrestricted free agents from other teams on top of every other administrative task that needs to be tackled over the coming days and Bergevin will be lucky to have time to celebrate his 56th birthday come Aug. 11.

With Ducharme's extension done, he'll have to figure out these four things before he can blow out the candles on his cake.

Phillip Danault's new contract

Not exactly an easy one to sort, but the clock is ticking and it's essential Bergevin get this player signed before he even thinks of the free market and lands with any one of a number of teams who watched him shut down some of the best players in the world throughout the playoffs and figured he'd be the piece to complete a Cup contender.

And you may have watched Phillip Danault do his thing while scoring only one goal and four points in 22 playoffs games and thought, "Meh, the Canadiens can live without him," but his teammates watched him do it and (rightly) thought this:

"Obviously, I've been competing against Phil for a couple of years now, and every time I have, I didn't enjoy it," said Eric Staal last week. "So, I can see now first-hand why I didn't enjoy it, because he's an extreme competitor. Phenomenal in the circle, but I love the way he competes every day. As you can tell, and as you could see on our run, you don't win without players like Phil Danault, and that's pretty evident. Vastly important to a team and to winning — especially at this time of year. And he's, I want to say, a lot similar to my younger brother, Jordan.

"You win with players like Phil Danault, and he had a phenomenal playoffs for us. Great person, good teammate. And obviously an uncertain future for him, but if he ends up back here they're going to be very lucky to have him."

And let's get a misnomer out of the way here: It wouldn't just be defence that the Canadiens would be buying from Danault.

While he did only score a single goal over his first 24 games of the season, he still finished with 24 points in 53 games, which would've been 37 points over an 82-game season.

That's not exactly bad production for a player who starts 70 per cent of his shifts outside the offensive zone and lines up for virtually all of them against the top players in the world—even if it was slightly off the pace Danault had established over his last four seasons in Montreal.

Remaining Time -0:49

Danault on why role changes in Canadiens lineup could sway contract talks

Meanwhile, Danault finished sixth in the voting for this year's Selke Trophy, and he'd have taken home the playoff version of the award if it existed.

There's no question Bergevin values him.

"We love Phil," said the GM. "He's still in our plans and we hope he remains with our team."

It was the case last fall, when Bergevin reportedly offered Danault a six-year deal worth \$30 million, and it remains the case now.

As for everything that happened in between, Danault explained:

"I was worried about the role that 'Suze' (Nick Suzuki) and 'KK' (Jesper Kotkaniemi) would eventually play," he said. "But I think we see across the league that if you want to win, then you need three quality centre players — that was the case for the New York Islanders and ourselves this year — and players who are good at both ends of the ice. That played a part (in his performance through January), but I've found my style of play (as the year progressed), I know who I am, and I know what I can bring to a team. And I know I can win."

The sense is that Danault wants to do it Montreal—even if, on the day Jonathan Drouin took personal leave from the Canadiens, he made several comments indicating that being among the only French-speaking players in the market had worn on him considerably.

"Montreal is such high highs and such low lows, without much middle ground," Danault said on Apr. 28. "When everything goes well, you're super up and very happy. When it's going less well, it's harder. Speaking for myself, and probably everyone feels the same, we put so much pressure on ourselves already and it's amplified in Montreal. We put it on ourselves, but we know how high the expectations are around us also.

"Sometimes it's hard not to take what's said about us personally. We all want so badly to perform well and to bring pride to the jersey we wear. It's an extra pressure we put on ourselves, and sometimes it gets harder on the ice but off the ice, too."

Remaining Time -1:47

Danault on the grind of this season and pressures of playing in Montreal

Danault experienced it on a level he previously hadn't in Montreal when his contract denial got leaked to the press in late January, right as he was mired in the biggest slump of his Canadiens tenure.

"I think it affected me, even if you say it don't affect me," the 28-year-old from Victoriaville, Que., said. "But it affected me because I wasn't playing



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that good, I wasn't playing my best hockey at the start of the year with everything that was going on. It was tough. It was tough mentally.

"But you know what? I got way stronger mentally, and I really believe that's why I played that type of hockey in the playoffs. It made me stronger mentally and made me realize nothing could push me (from) outside... And for all the guys, too, I think we all got stronger this year with everything and all the schedule. But if I talk personally about that event that happened, it got me stronger definitely, like many events this season. But yeah, it was tough when I heard about that."

We'd imagine the appeal of the open market grew stronger right then and there.

But the run to the Cup Final certainly helped mitigate that, at least in part.

"I think everyone knows I'm really proud to be a Montreal Canadien, to wear that jersey," Danault said. "I put my heart on the line for the team. If I wasn't proud, I wouldn't have played that way in the playoffs; I would've packed up and got ready for free agency. So, I think it shows a lot of my character and my desire to win. I'm obviously very honoured to wear a Montreal Canadiens jersey—especially with the Stanley Cup logo here (points to chest). So, it's awesome."

Remaining Time -0:47

Danault fist bumps Caufield after the rook talks up his talents on defence

Now Bergevin has to find a way to keep him in one without overpaying him.

Two contracts in the GM's favour were signed over the last 12 months. The first went to Dallas Stars centre Radek Faksa — the 27-year-old who has produced a bit less than Danault annually but been just as serviceable in the same role — and it came in at five years, \$16.25 million after Faksa helped fuel a run to the Cup Final. The second went to 28-year-old Adam Lowry, who has also produced less annually than Danault, but has been an effective and consistent shutdown centre for the Winnipeg Jets over the last seven seasons.

Lowry's deal is near identical to Faksa's, with both players earning \$3.25-million as an annual average and neither of them obtaining signing bonuses. Lowry got a no-trade clause that enables him to choose six teams he wouldn't go to, and Faksa got one that enables him to choose five.

Both deals were obviously pandemic-adjusted, and Danault's will have to be as well. He originally had a case to earn at least the equivalent of what Jean-Gabriel Pageau did with the Islanders (six years, \$30 million), but he'd be beyond fortunate to still have it with any team.

Still, there will be bidders for Danault's services driving the price up on Bergevin, which makes this dossier a tricky one. It's also a timely one, with every passing day bringing Danault closer to exploring what's out there.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

Gain some certainty on Jonathan Drouin's future

When Drouin took leave from the Canadiens for personal reasons, he requested privacy, and he's gotten it.

What we've heard since came from assistant coach Luke Richardson on June 28.

"We've respected Dru's need to have a break," Richardson said. "As far as I've heard he's taking some time and getting the help that he needs."

When Bergevin was asked about Drouin's future last Friday, he said the 26-year-old winger was doing "much better," but couldn't comment on anything else.

Until Drouin returns, there will be speculation he may never.

Speculation will rule in the public domain, but Bergevin needs to know privately where this is going now, if he doesn't know already. Drouin's

future plans will dictate how Bergevin handles the expansion draft, the draft and free agency over the coming weeks, with the player set to earn \$5.5 million on the cap in each of the next two seasons.

Jonathan Drouin Montreal Canadiens winger Jonathan Drouin. (Graham Hughes/CP)

Submit Expansion Draft protection list to Seattle

Bergevin has until this coming Saturday to decide who he's protecting for the Expansion Draft.

The big question will be whether he opts to go with the standard seven forwards-three defencemen-one goaltender model or decides to just protect eight players and a goaltender.

If Bergevin goes with the former, it could mean exposing a player like captain Shea Weber — a low-risk gamble, considering the 35-year-old (who likely needs off-season surgery on his left thumb) has five years remaining on a contract that pays him \$7.85 million annually, but a gamble nonetheless. It could also mean protecting Weber and leaving one of Joel Edmundson or Ben Chiarot unprotected.

And if Bergevin chooses to go with the 8-1 model, it's likely because he wants to protect all three defencemen on top of Jeff Petry, and that would mean leaving an extra forward or two available to Seattle.

The GM also needs to consider incentivizing Seattle to take a specific player off his roster to enable him to retain backup goaltender Jake Allen, who's the most likely target for the Kraken no matter which protection model Bergevin opts for.

Remaining Time -1:30

'The culture here is phenomenal' Staal on the Canadiens future

Take or leave other free agents

Bergevin already said he's certain Tomas Tatar would like to skate to free agency, but it's not a foregone conclusion that the GM wouldn't try to convince him to come back for one season.

It's a long shot but, depending on what happens with Drouin, the Canadiens' need for Tatar could increase. After all, there's no question the Slovak could have a considerable impact on helping the team make the playoffs, which is going to be a tougher task in returning to the Atlantic Division.

That they don't see Tatar as a player who can help them through — the 30-year-old was scratched from all but five playoff games — probably takes him elsewhere.

It sure seems like unrestricted free agent Joel Armia might find himself elsewhere, too. When he was asked about re-signing, he said he would return to Finland and mull over his options, saying, "I won't close any doors."

One player who would like to stay and should be kept is Corey Perry.

"Yes, I intend to play hockey next year, and I think there's still a lot of good hockey left in me and I would love to come back here and experience Montreal for being Montreal," the 36-year-old said. "It was a weird year with family not being here and all that, but... to people out there who are looking at Montreal as a spot to land and come play, it's been everything that you could imagine. It's a first-class organization and everything that they do here is done with a purpose, and I really enjoyed my time."

Staal appreciated his experience with the Canadiens but has much to discuss with his family before deciding what he'll do next season. There's likely no place for him in Montreal, regardless.

Same goes for free agents Jon Merrill and Erik Gustafsson, who will probably be permitted to shop their services on July 28.

Artturi Lehkonen is a restricted free agent with arbitration rights, so his contract will need to get settled in time. He's 26 and is coming out of a two-year contract which paid him a \$2.4-million AAV.

Jesper Kotkaniemi is coming out of entry-level and is likely looking at a bridge contract. Ditto for Ryan Poehling, who's a 10.2(c) restricted free



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agent (meaning he hasn't accrued enough professional experience to have Group 2 RFA rights, which means he can't sign an offer sheet).

Cale Fleury, a promising defence prospect who spent the season in Laval after playing 41 games with the Canadiens in 2019-20, also needs a new deal.

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TSN.CA / Sopel: Former Blackhawks teammates should be 'telling the truth publicly' about assault allegations

By Rick Westhead Brent Sopel Rick Westhead TSN Senior Correspondent

Former Chicago Blackhawks defenceman Brent Sopel, a member of the 2010 Stanley Cup championship team, said almost every player and coach was aware of the allegations of sexual misconduct levelled by a former Blackhawks player against former video coach Brad Aldrich.

In an interview with TSN on Tuesday, Sopel, who played 22 games for the Blackhawks during the 2010 playoffs run, said that the Blackhawks locker room was abuzz for days with discussion about Aldrich during the 2010 Western Conference finals, after then-skills coach Paul Vincent asked Blackhawks management during a meeting in San Jose to report Aldrich's alleged sexual assault of two players that season to police.

"...I'd say pretty much every player said, 'Holy s--t' and was shocked by it," Sopel said. "We were all in the same dressing room. It was something that was discussed for at least two or three days. [Then head coach Joel] Quenneville was in the same office as [Aldrich]. We heard about it."

In a statement sent to TSN on Tuesday, Quenneville, who is now the Florida Panthers head coach, denied being aware of the abuse allegations in 2010.

"The allegations in this lawsuit are clearly serious," Quenneville wrote. "I first learned of these allegations through the media earlier this summer. I have contacted the Blackhawks organization to let them know I will support and participate in the independent review. Out of respect for all those involved, I won't comment further while this matter is before the courts."

Vincent told TSN in an interview that Blackhawks management, including president John McDonough, general manager Stan Bowman, and vice-president of hockey operations Al MacIsaac, refused to share the information with Chicago police.

Montreal Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin, who was Blackhawks director of player personnel during the 2009-10 season, has also said he was not aware at the time that players had made complaints against Aldrich and was not involved in a meeting to discuss them.

Sopel said he assumed for years that Blackhawks management had alerted authorities following the 2010 season. He said he was wary about speaking publicly about the scandal for the past few months out of concern the Blackhawks might attack his charity, The Brent Sopel Foundation, which raises funds for children who, like him, have battled dyslexia.

Sopel now hopes that other players from that Blackhawks team will speak publicly about what they were told about Aldrich in 2010.

"I understand that doing the right thing is hard," said Sopel, who played three seasons with the Blackhawks before he was traded to the Atlanta Thrashers after the Cup championship in 2010.

"A lot of those guys who were on that 2009-10 team are still with the Blackhawks getting paid and they're either still playing, or in broadcasting or coaching, management or scouting or being an ambassador for the team. That's why they are not saying anything. Guys want to protect their jobs. But they should still be doing the right thing and telling the truth publicly about what happened."

Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews told The Athletic website in late June that he first heard about allegations against Aldrich right before training camp before the 2010-11 season. Toews said he was "annoyed" when The Athletic quoted an unnamed Blackhawks player saying every player on the 2009-10 knew about the alleged assaults because "it seemed like it fed the fire a little bit."

"As far as I know, some guys may have caught whispers of it and some guys were clueless until the next year," Toews said. "I don't think that was an accurate statement."

Sopel's interview with TSN marked his first public interview about the scandal after he posted comments on Twitter on June 25 criticizing the Blackhawks and National Hockey League for how they have responded to the abuse allegations.

The allegations against the Blackhawks, first made public in a pair of lawsuits against the team in May, have rocked the hockey world.

A one-time Blackhawks player who is identified in court documents as John Doe 1 filed a lawsuit against the NHL team that alleged Aldrich sexually assaulted him and a teammate during the 2009-10 season. After the team's sports psychologist James Gary told the player he was to blame for the incident, Blackhawks management then covered up the assaults, the player alleged.

A second lawsuit against the NHL team alleges that the Blackhawks gave Aldrich a job reference after he left the franchise during the summer of 2010. That lawsuit was also filed in May by the family of a former high school hockey player in Michigan who Aldrich was convicted of sexually assaulting in 2013.

"That's the most disgusting thing I've ever heard in my life," Sopel said. "They gave him a job reference after what he did to their players. Everybody assumed the Hawks would do the right thing but clearly, they didn't."

After he left the Blackhawks, Aldrich also worked as director of hockey operations with Miami University in Ohio. During his four-month tenure at that school, two adults filed complaints of sexual misconduct against Aldrich.

Sopel said he also understands why some players would be hesitant to speak out publicly about sexual abuse.

"Other sports like baseball, basketball and football, most of those guys are going to university for at least a few years and growing up a bit more," he said. "In hockey, we're moving away from home at 15 to play junior hockey, riding 25 hours on a bus. Our lives are only hockey. That's it. Everything revolves around the sport. Many guys aren't equipped to talk about anything else."

Former NHL player Sheldon Kennedy said in an interview on Monday that he has been disappointed by the Blackhawks' response and hopes that other players from the 2009-10 team publicly corroborate that the alleged abuse was well known within the NHL team.

While the Blackhawks have hired the Chicago law firm Jenner & Block to investigate the abuse allegations, the team filed court documents on Friday, July 9 claiming the team did not have a legal obligation to report the abuse claims to authorities because the alleged victim was not a minor, disabled, or over the age of 65 and living in an assisted care facility.

The Blackhawks on Friday also alleged that the team should not be held responsible for the abuse of the teenage hockey player in Michigan because any job reference letter that the NHL team may have given Aldrich was not meant specifically for that coaching position.

"It's always deny, deny, deny," Kennedy said. "When you're making a conscious decision to sweep abuse away and hide it, this is not a mistake. A decision was made and now there's an ethical responsibility for them to do the right thing. Do they not consider themselves role models for communities and young people? Is this how we want to teach our kids and those people who look up to us how to handle problems?"

Kennedy said he remembers how he felt in 1996 after coming forward to make an abuse allegation against his former junior hockey coach, Graham James.



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"I was the fucking liar," Kennedy said. "Nobody believed Sheldon Kennedy until Graham James pled guilty. I was alone big time. Nobody believed me."

Kennedy recalled the many times NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has referred to the league as a "family."

"The silence in this Blackhawks case speaks loudly," Kennedy said. "This hockey family. Any time anyone in the family says anything to contradict the NHL, they get shunned from the family. What kind of family is that?"

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TSN.CA / Culture could be key to Flames' off-season plans

With the NHL off-season under way, TSN's Salim Valji looks ahead to a summer of potential lineup - and culture - changes in Calgary.

By Salim Valji Johnny Gaudreau Salim Valji

In May, veteran Calgary Flames forward Milan Lucic spent much of his season-ending Zoom call with reporters talking about the team's culture.

The 2011 Stanley Cup champion spoke about the need for players to collectively buy in to a team-first mentality.

"It's just getting back to the mindset of being resilient and getting back to the mindset of wanting to win," he said. "What's missing? I think what's missing is between the ears, more than anything."

Flames head coach Darryl Sutter made similar observations after taking over for Geoff Ward in March, calling out the team's work ethic and preparation habits.

"There's a little bit of entitlement that went on here and that impacts your team in a negative way for sure," Sutter said two months into the job.

"You don't play guys more to help them get better. They have to help themselves get better based on their training, based on their preparation, based on their compete level, not just the skills that they were drafted on."

The Flames have won just one playoff series (back in 2015) with a core group of captain Mark Giordano and star forwards Johnny Gaudreau, Sean Monahan, Matthew Tkachuk, and Mikael Backlund.

To what extent Flames general manager Brad Treliving believes Lucic, one of last season's few bright spots, and Sutter will determine much of how Calgary's off-season plays out.

Does Treliving feel that a major culture reset and leadership shift is necessary? Does he think the team needs more character veterans, or an injection of youth? Many of his moves will hinge on those answers.

Those transactions could involve the team's two biggest names up front.

Gaudreau, a free agent next off-season, is eligible to sign an extension and his 27-team no trade clause kicks in later this month. Treliving will have to sign him to a new deal before then or risk having just a handful of potential trade partners.

Fellow winger Tkachuk, who had growing pains under Sutter before finding a role on the top line with Gaudreau and Elias Lindholm at the end of the season, is also eligible to sign a new deal (and due a hefty \$9 million qualifying offer next summer).

Then there is the Seattle Kraken expansion draft. The Flames' quandary is who to protect on the back end: Chris Tanev or Giordano?

On paper, Tanev is the logical choice to protect. He's six years younger than Giordano, makes less money, and has proven capable of playing top-pairing minutes.

If the Flames expose Giordano, do they entice the Kraken with a draft pick to select another player? Under Treliving, Calgary has had fewer draft picks than all but a handful of teams. Does Treliving risk losing his captain for nothing, or sacrifice more of Calgary's future so Seattle takes someone else?

The Flames have the 12th selection at the entry draft. While they have noteworthy prospects in Jakob Pelletier, Connor Zary, and Dustin Wolf, they don't have anyone projected to be top-line wingers or top-pairing blueliners at the NHL level.

Centre Chaz Lucius of the U.S. National Team Development Program could fit as a natural goal scorer. TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button compares him to New York Islanders winger Brock Nelson.

Button had the Flames choosing American centre Cole Sillinger in his June mock draft. Sillinger had 24 goals in 31 games for the Sioux Falls Stampede in the USHL last season.

There's also the possibility Treliving packages the pick with a veteran like Monahan in exchange for a higher choice or roster upgrade.

Outside of the trade market, Treliving's most significant chance to reshape the roster is in free agency. Calgary needs a top-nine winger, third-pairing blueliner, shutdown centre, wing depth, and backup goalie. They may also require another top defenceman if Giordano moves on.

Should Treliving value youth, the Flames could theoretically plug those holes with the likes of prospects Adam Ruzicka, Glenn Gawdin, Connor Mackey, and Matthew Phillips.

If the goal is to alter the team's culture, add experience, and contend for the playoffs next season, Nate Thompson, Luke Glendening, Darren Helm, and Trevor Lewis would fit as defensively reliable veterans.

On the back end, the Flames may target the likes of Brendan Smith, Mark Pysyk, or Erik Gudbranson to slot in on the third pair to help Juuso Valimaki, who had an inconsistent first full NHL season.

Should Giordano get taken by Seattle, would Treliving ante up for winger Nick Foligno as both a top-nine forward and to fill the ensuing leadership void?

Treliving and co. have many decisions on the horizon.

Flames fans will soon find out just how much he's heeded the words of Lucic and Sutter.

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