



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • August 24, 2021



NHL Power Rankings: Teams with the best 5-year window

By Adam Gretz

In this week's edition of the NHL Power Rankings we are looking big picture and examining the teams with the best five-year outlook. Also the teams where things are looking bleak with some leaner years ahead.

What are we looking for here in terms of the window? Simply put, the chances of a team making a Stanley Cup Final and remaining a serious contender over the next few years.

Where does your team sit?

1. Colorado Avalanche. The most talented roster in the NHL on paper and it keeps looking better with players like Alex Newhook and Bowen Byram on the horizon. They have a couple of second round exits that might look disappointing now, but they will get there.
2. Tampa Bay Lightning. They have been in the Conference Finals/Semifinals five times in the past seven years, including three Stanley Cup Finals. They have also won it all two years in a row. And with their core and farm system and pipeline of talent they are not even close to finished yet.
3. Carolina Hurricanes. Losing Dougie Hamilton is going to be tough, but this is still an incredibly talented roster that has sky high potential (as long as the goaltending works).
4. Vegas Golden Knights. Probably the oldest team on this tier, but also one of the best teams in the league that should still have a nice window for contention. They need somebody else to emerge at center (Nolan Patrick, perhaps? Maybe Peyton Krebs? Or both ideally) but it is still a loaded roster.
5. Florida Panthers. Expectations should be at an all-time high for the Panthers right now. Hall of Fame coach, two superstar players at the top of the lineup, a strong supporting cast, and perhaps a franchise goalie waiting to take over.
Still a Contender but a lot needs to go right
6. New York Islanders. I get the reason people are skeptical of them. But they have been in the final four two years in a row (and advanced in the playoffs three years in a row). You do not do that by accident.
7. Boston Bruins. The core is getting older but it is still great. Losing David Krejci is a short-term setback, but there is still a lot of reason to buy into them making another deep run.

8. Washington Capitals. They have one of the oldest rosters in the league, but it is still a good roster for now. The window is still open at least for a little bit.

9. Pittsburgh Penguins. They are going to need a massive rebuild when Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, and Kris Letang retire but all three are still really good right now and there is still a good supporting cast.

Major potential, but need to prove it

10. Toronto Maple Leafs. Yeah there is a ton of talent here but this group is 0-for-4 when it comes to advancing in the playoffs, this roster is weaker than last year's roster, they are back in a tough division, and if they lose again this season that core is going to get broken up to some degree. It is time to do something.

11. New York Rangers. Absolutely loaded with young, high-end talent that they need to take a big step this season. Adam Fox has already taken his step. Now all eyes turn to Igor Shesterkin, Alexis Lafreniere, Kaapo Kakko, and Vitali Kravtsov. If they can reach their potential, that is a championship core.

12. Los Angeles Kings. Similar story as the Rangers only a year or two behind. Great farm system, but it needs to prove it can play at the NHL level.

Could go either way

13. St. Louis Blues. Team is getting a little older, has already lost Jaden Schwartz, seen some significant departures on defense, and who knows what Vladimir Tarasenko's future is.

14. Winnipeg Jets. They have a great goalie, some high-end forwards, and what should be an improved defense this season. The goalie is what really gives them a chance every year.

15. Edmonton Oilers. The fact this team has two MVP winners in the prime of their careers, the two best offensive players in the NHL right now, and they are only in the middle of the pack here as far as a five-year window goes is a damning indictment on the job of the past two front offices.

16. Philadelphia Flyers. Carter Hart will make or break what happens here in the short-term and the long-term.

17. Dallas Stars. They have a great defense and outstanding goaltending, but Joe Pavelski, Alexander Radulov, and John Klingberg are all unrestricted free agents after this season



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(can they keep all three?) while Tyler Seguin and Jamie Benn are both another year older.

18. Montreal Canadiens. They stunned the hockey world this past season and they do have some really intriguing young players. But they also have some real flaws while the two highest paid players (Shea Weber and Carey Price) are getting older and starting to show signs of breaking down physically.

19. New Jersey Devils. Jack Hughes should be a superstar, Nico Hischier is fantastic, and Dougie Hamilton is a huge addition. But they play in the wrong division in the short-term and depth is a major concern throughout the lineup.

20. Minnesota Wild. A lot depends on if they can get Kirill Kaprizov signed long-term and how well their farm system produces because that salary cap situation is going to be a major problem for the next few years.

21. Calgary Flames. Not a great situation, not an awful situation. Just kinda average. That usually means long-term sustained mediocrity.

Mystery Teams

22. Vancouver Canucks. Ton of potential at forward, a really good young goalie, but that defense and salary cap situation is messy. They should be higher, but they have been mismanaged.

23. Detroit Red Wings. The rebuild is well underway and they do have a great general manager that has assembled some intriguing talent, but things seem to be progressing slowly here. Still a few years away from really making some noise.

24. Ottawa Senators. There is a lot of young talent here but they seem to be lacking the potential superstar talent that

rebuilding teams like New York and Los Angeles have. Ownership worries me.

25. Seattle Kraken. The fact they seemed to leave a lot of talent and miss some opportunities in the expansion draft is not an encouraging sign for the long-term outlook here.

Trending in wrong direction

26. Nashville Predators. Competitive rebuilds do not work. They just lead to sustained mediocrity.

27. Chicago Blackhawks. They made a lot of moves this offseason, but a lot of them carry some risk (Seth Jones, Jake McCabe) or are short-term band-aids on larger problems (Marc-Andre Fleury) that still carry some risk. Still a lot of problems here.

28. Columbus Blue Jackets. They always seem to overachieve a little, but they are lacking a lot of high end talent. Patrik Laine should help with that, but who knows what sort of season is ahead for him or what his long-term future with the team even is.

29. Arizona Coyotes. The rebuild is well underway and it is going to take a lot of time.

30. San Jose Sharks. An aging team with a lot of bad contracts, no goalie, and little in the way of young impact talent.

31. Buffalo Sabres. They need a rebuild from their latest rebuild that was a rebuild from the previous rebuild. When Jack Eichel gets traded it really will be starting over from scratch.

32. Anaheim Ducks. What is the plan here again? They keep putting off an actual rebuild and just keep pushing back the timeline for contention again.



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About Last Season: Morgan Geekie 2020-21 Performance Review and Grade

The young forward took another step in his development this season, but Carolina won't get to see any of the potential fruits from it.

By Ryan Henkel

Morgan Geekie 2020-21 Season By The Numbers

- Age: 23
- NHL Seasons: 1
- Scoring: 3 goals, 6 assists, 9 points in 36 games
- Advanced Numbers: 54.24 CF%, 51.48 SCF%, 50.46 xGF%, 52.38 GF%
- Average TOI: 8:37 ES, 1:04 PP, 0:06 SH
- Contract Status: Signed one-year, two-way \$750,000 contract but was selected by the Seattle Kraken in the 2021 Expansion Draft

Since Morgan Geekie was selected by the Seattle Kraken in the 2021 Expansion Draft, this may be the last time we can make this joke, so please bear with me people.

Ahem...

So the 2020-21 season was a far cry from Geekie's 2019-20 campaign where he set the all time NHL record for points per game, huh?

Hardee-har-har.

I'll miss that joke which I have personally used about 10 different times on this site alone.

Jokes aside, Geekie seemed ready to take another step forward in his development with the Carolina Hurricanes and by all accounts he did that.

Coming into the season, it didn't seem as if Geekie was going to have a spot on the team's starting roster and so he started the year on the team's taxi squad.

He got in a few games here and there, but the playing time wasn't steady enough, so he got sent down for a stint in the AHL to get some playing time where he promptly scored four goals, had five points and got into a fight in just two games.

He was quickly called back up after that.

But it wasn't until mid-March that Geekie managed to carve out a solid chunk of playing time thanks in part to a plethora of injury issues throughout Carolina's lineup.

Primarily playing on the fourth line with a rotating cast of Steven Lorentz and Max McCormick or Cedric Paquette, Geekie was the highest scoring out of all of his linemates and along with that, all nine of his points were primary.

Geekie also got time on the second power play unit where he did manage to find the back of the net twice on the man-advantage, albeit both in the same game.

While his play driving hadn't really translated at the NHL level, he still managed to control a positive impact in chance generation.

Geekie still needs work in his overall defensive game, but he did manage to hold his own — although in a shielded role.

Even despite a lack of real playing time and more offensively gifted linemates, he did showcase pretty promising offensive talent because where Geekie really saw the most growth in his game was with his playmaking ability.

As the season progressed and as he got more comfortable at the NHL level, he was able to make more high-end passes and plays while under pressure.

The ability to read the ice and make plays in tight with split-second decisions is a pretty good talent to have, but if Geekie wants to take that next step, he'll need to be able to put those flashes together more often.

Geekie still has a ways to go to fully cement himself as a regular NHLer — particularly in his play away from the puck and his overall pace of play — but he has NHL size and the offensive acumen to be successful.

The Seattle Kraken, but more accurately, Ron Francis — the GM who originally drafted Geekie — still see that potential in him and perhaps will be able to give him the opportunity to really progress his game.

Geekie had some good moments in Carolina and if he should be remembered for one thing, it's that you can't out pizza the hut.



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

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The Athletic / 'I feel fresh again': Jaden Schwartz ready to move on after a season he almost didn't play following his dad's death

By Jeremy Rutherford Aug 23, 2021

Anyone who's heard Jaden Schwartz speak over the years knows it tends to be fairly monotone, with a low-key cadence. But on a phone call Friday — while he drove "in the middle of nowhere in North Dakota" — you could hear a tinge of adrenaline and adventure in his voice.

On his way from Saskatchewan, Canada, to St. Louis, Schwartz was planning to stop off in Minnesota and spend time with Justin Faulk that night. Then he'd be heading to St. Louis, where on Sunday he'd be celebrating Brayden Schenn's 30th birthday on the golf course.

Then on Monday, just as he has done many of the past nine seasons, Schwartz was scheduled to start skating with the Blues in preparation for the 2021-22 season. Only this year, after signing a five-year, \$27.5 million free-agent contract with Seattle on July 28, he'll be doing it as an ex-teammate and visitor at the Centene Community Ice Center.

"It's going to be a little bit weird," Schwartz said. "But it's going to be nice seeing the training staff, the equipment guys, and obviously my teammates — old teammates. I've been there since I came into the league, so I've got a lot of good relationships. It's going to be good to hang out with them again."

It's a trip Schwartz acknowledged Friday for the first time publicly that he almost didn't make last December, a month after the sudden death of his father, Rick Schwartz, to a heart attack at age 59. He said the pain was so deep that he almost didn't play the 2020-21 season with the Blues, which would have meant forfeiting his \$4 million salary. In the end, the 29-year-old forward did decide to play, and he said it was those relationships with the organization, and the memory of his dad, that pushed him.

"I didn't even know if I was going to come back," Schwartz said. "This past year was pretty tough on me and my family. I didn't have much motivation to play and didn't really have time to train. Back home, everything was closed and we had to quarantine, and with my dad passing, it was a lot on me. I wasn't in a very good place. It's tough leaving your family and friends behind and not being there for them and not having them to be around me, either."

"I didn't really know what to do, but I wanted to be there for my teammates. I knew my mom and family really enjoyed watching me play hockey, and my dad would have wanted me to go back and play. I mostly did it for them, but it wasn't easy. I think my teammates knew that I wasn't at 100 percent."

Schenn, who played nearly 3,000 minutes with Schwartz in their four seasons together in St. Louis, confirmed that.

"Yeah, it just wasn't an easy situation all around," Schenn said. "Obviously, it was tough on the family there, but they managed to get through it."

Schwartz finished the season with just eight goals and didn't look like himself. He missed 16 games because of an oblique injury, which may have been somewhat attributable to his lack of offseason training.

He wasn't happy with the Blues' first-round playoff loss to Colorado, but after he failed to put up a point in the four-game series, his mind and his body were exhausted. He had nothing left.

"I tried to do everything I could, but mentally and physically, I wasn't where I needed to be," Schwartz said. "It was the toughest year I've ever had in my life. I know I didn't finish well with the Blues, and that sucks, but I wasn't mentally ready for an NHL season at all. But I'm doing a lot better now. Mentally, I'm in a better spot, and I was able to train. I feel fresh again."

So why is Schwartz selling his condo in St. Louis and departing for Seattle soon? It could be that the expansion Kraken paid him an average annual value (AAV) of \$5.5 million for the next five seasons, likely higher than the Blues were willing to go. But the fact is that in the aftermath of his dad's death, he was also looking to begin a new chapter in his career.

Blues general manager Doug Armstrong initiated the discussion about a potential contract extension last year, but Schwartz decided to put those talks on hold until he was thinking with a clearer mind.

There was always a chance he would return to St. Louis, where he'd spent his 10-year NHL career, but he told Schenn privately that he was probably headed to the free-agent market.

In mid-July, Seattle had an exclusive negotiating window with pending NHL unrestricted free agents such as Schwartz, and the club made considerable headway on a contract with the Blues veteran. The Kraken didn't finalize a deal with him in that window, but he realized it would be a good fit.

"Seattle is such a good city, and being part of an expansion team in the new city is pretty special," he said. "I liked a lot of the things they were doing, with good ownership and (GM) Ronnie Francis leading the charge. They really thought highly of me, so they were definitely high on my list once I realized that I probably wasn't going to go back to St. Louis."



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In addition, Schwartz's mom will have a short flight to see her son play in Seattle. For years, Rick and Carol Schwartz would make a nearly 20-hour drive from Regina, Saskatchewan, to St. Louis over the course of a few days. But now, Carol can take a flight from Regina to Seattle, with a layover, in about four hours.

In the hours leading up to the opening of unrestricted free agency leaguewide, Schwartz decided that's where he wanted to be, and on July 28, he signed with the Kraken.

"It was one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make," he said Friday. "But at the end of the day, with how hard it's been, I kind of felt like a fresh start and a new beginning might help me be able to get back to having fun on the ice. And Seattle is pretty close to home, pretty easy to get to.

"The hardest part was just leaving the guys. Once you sign and it's official, you're kind of like, 'Wow, that's the end of St. Louis!' I definitely had those moments where you realize that you're not going back. That was difficult. But so many good memories, so many good teammates."

It was 11 years ago when the Blues drafted Schwartz in the first round (No. 14) in the 2010 draft in Los Angeles. His parents were at Staples Center, while his sister, Mandi, who was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia in 2008, remained in Saskatchewan awaiting a bone-marrow transplant.

When Schwartz's name was called at the draft, the family was immediately adopted by St. Louis, and the club and the community supported Mandi's cause before and after her death in 2011.

There were bone-marrow registry drives held at Blues games, one of which led to a fan saving the life of an Alabama teenager by being a perfect match.

A PERFECT MATCH: HOW A BONE-MARROW DONATION BY A BLUES FAN SAVED THE LIFE OF AN ALABAMA TEEN. #STLBLUES [HTTPS://T.CO/3CKNBIDQVD](https://t.co/3CKNBIDQVD)

— JEREMY RUTHERFORD (@JPRUTHERFORD) DECEMBER 27, 2018

There was also a trip in 2014 to Yale University, where Mandi played hockey, during which the entire Blues' team went to a women's game. Schwartz got to see his sister's locker, where her No. 17 hung. Later that summer, he switched his number with the Blues to No. 17 from No. 9.

"That was pretty special, going to Yale," Schwartz said. "That was a good day, having the whole team there. St. Louis was so good to my family. There were certain things they did for Mandi, on behalf of her, just raising cancer awareness. The support was incredible. The people are so kind and so caring, and that's what makes it such a fun place to play — people always have your back."

Schwartz struggled personally after the loss of his sister, but he became one of the Blues' most impactful players, scoring a career-high 28 goals and 63 points in 2014-15. He was a fixture on the left wing, learning how to be a professional from Alexander Steen, Paul Stastny, Barret Jackman, "and the list goes on and on," he said. "I've been lucky to have so many role models and older guys that cared for me and taught me a lot."

There was heartbreak with the Blues, losing to San Jose in the Western Conference finals in 2015-16 and missing the playoffs for the only time in his career on the final day of the 2017-18 regular season.

But that wound up just being the setup for a wonderful story in 2018-19: the franchise's first Stanley Cup.

"It was a dream come true, and, as people always say, you've got to learn how to lose before you learn how to win," Schwartz said.

During that postseason run, Schwartz scored 12 goals, including two hat tricks, in 26 games. He was known as a streaky scorer, but without that streak, the Blues wouldn't have won the Cup.

"The only thing I care about is that we won," Schwartz said. "Honestly, everyone stepped up. I just tried doing my part and bringing my best foot forward. You realize that you don't know how many chances you're going to get with such good teams, and we just got on an unreal run. Everyone brought their level up a couple extra notches for that playoff, and I just tried doing the same thing."

Schenn assisted on two of Schwartz's playoff goals.

"Regardless of scoring, you knew what kind of effort you were going to get from him every single night," Schenn said. "He was going to be one of the hardest-working guys on the forecheck. He was good on the backcheck. He was good at stripping pucks, stealing pucks, and (was) elusive in the corners. And when his stick got hot, he could put it in the back of the net. We all know that his time to shine is in the playoffs. He proved that, scoring 12 goals in the Cup final run."

A few days after the Blues' Game 7 win in Boston, St. Louis hosted the Stanley Cup parade on June 16, 2019, a day Schwartz will never forget.

"The whole city of St. Louis, I mean, that's what a good sports town that is," he said. "I couldn't even believe it. I turned the corner and I thought that that was the parade, and then we turned another corner. That one is going to be pretty hard to beat. That was an unreal day."

Rick was around for the whole experience. He was the ring-leader for the Blues' annual "Dads Trip," attended a lot of the playoff games, hoisted the Cup himself, and attended the parade.

Schwartz said knowing that has helped him mentally.

"He just loved watching me and loved the dads on the team," Schwartz said. "He was asking me a month in advance when the dads trips were and what the plan was, and I didn't even know. He was just super excited to spend time with the guys. I think, just as a dad, it was a dream come true for him to be able to watch me grow and play in St. Louis, and to see that run we went on, I know that meant the world to him."

TALES OF A DADS-TRIP LEGEND: REMEMBERING BLUES FORWARD JADEN SCHWARTZ'S FATHER, RICK. #STLBLUES [HTTPS://T.CO/WL61SGS9YB](https://t.co/WL61SGS9YB)

— JEREMY RUTHERFORD (@JPRUTHERFORD) FEBRUARY 12, 2021

Schwartz said, though, that you never really heal from the loss.

"It always hurts," he said. "You always get sad at certain points during the day, and you just try to do your best to move on. You try and make them proud and try to be happy at the end of the day, which is hard to do, but you've got to rely on your family and friends to help you get through it and find a way."

And moving on from St. Louis might be the best way to do that at this point in Schwartz's career.

"One thing I was always told from the veteran guys is whatever decision you make, you can't look back and say 'what if?' or 'maybe I should've done this,'" he said. "You've just got to go with it."

"I never really imagined leaving St. Louis, but sometimes things work out the way they do. It's a place that holds tight in my heart, and I'm going to miss it a lot. Yeah, I don't have enough time to talk about how great it's been for me, but it's a special place."

Friends and now former teammates are happy for Schwartz, even if it means not seeing him nearly as much.

"It sucks," Schenn said. "I played on his line quite a bit over the past couple of years and had a couple of good runs. He's the life of the locker room, and guys have a lot of fun with him. But things happen in life, and this is probably what he needs. In our locker room, we're just happy for him to feel good again playing hockey, and being back at the rink."

The Athletic LOADED: 08.24.2021



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TSN.CA / Leafs' core facing 'Last Dance' scenario

In this week's edition of Seven Questions, Travis Yost asks - if this is a final stand of sorts for the Toronto Maple Leafs core, is this year's roster deep enough to get over the playoff hump?

By Travis Yost

The eight best regular-season teams in the National Hockey League over the past three seasons have amassed 24 postseason series victories, with two championships to boot.

Within that group resides the Toronto Maple Leafs, our feature team for this week's edition of Seven Questions. We ask: If this is a 'Last Dance' of sorts for the Maple Leafs core, is this year's roster deep enough to get over the playoff hump?

The mix of eight playoff teams – from the Tampa Bay Lightning through the Maple Leafs – really can be split into two segments. Five of the teams (Tampa Bay, Boston Bruins, Colorado Avalanche, Vegas Golden Knights and Carolina Hurricanes) account for all the playoff success within our elite regular-season group. The Washington Capitals and Pittsburgh Penguins join the Leafs in another segment – three teams who have struck out in the first round of each postseason.

What differentiates Washington and Pittsburgh from Toronto is, of course, championships. Washington had their breakthrough moment in the 2017-18 season, and Pittsburgh has three titles in the Sidney Crosby era. The recent results have been similarly poor, but in the case of these two clubs, the tolerance for those failures is much greater. That's no longer the case in Toronto.

The Maple Leafs – and general manager Kyle Dubas, more specifically – have opted to bet on an ultra-talented, if top-heavy lineup again this season.

It's not lost on me that salary cap compression due to the ongoing pandemic probably made that decision for them; one way to maneuver around three players (Auston Matthews, John Tavares and Mitch Marner) commanding 41 per cent of the salary cap on long-term deals is through the annual three per cent cap growth the league has observed for years.

Without cap flexibility and with a pressing need in net, the Maple Leafs have only been allowed to tinker at the margins of their roster. If we look at the expected Maple Leafs depth chart for next season, we see a similarly themed lineup to those of years past – elite offensive options at the top of the lineup and particularly strong down the middle, with some observable weakness in depth positions.

Let's start with the forward group, using Goals Above Replacement as our production proxy:

This is the core strength of the Maple Leafs – an ultra-productive offence highlighted by tremendous firepower inside the top-six forward group.

Over the past two seasons, the Maple Leafs have scored 3.3 goals per-60 minutes across all situations, good for fourth best in the National Hockey League. It helps that two of the team's most dangerous scoring weapons are centres on competing lines – even capable defensive teams with shutdown lines have a choice to make between slowing down Matthews and his 146 points over the past two seasons or slowing down Tavares and his 110 points over the same timeframe.

Away from their core strengths, there are two notable items within the forward group.

The first is that we expect meaningful changes to the line combinations, changes we haven't seen in years past. Nick Ritchie, Alex Kerfoot, and

perhaps players like Michael Bunting and Ondrej Kase will get time inside of the top six, a byproduct of displaced minutes from the loss of Zach Hyman and Jared McCann (we hardly knew ye!) this summer.

The second: if there's risk with this group, it's the natural top-heaviness of the lineup and the reality that the team is betting on a continuance of strong play from 38-year-old Jason Spezza, and an increasingly elusive bounce-back season from 32-year-old Wayne Simmonds.

Overall, this is a strong forward group that should produce again next season.

Onto the defensive pairings:

We have talked about it being do-or -die time for this Maple Leafs lineup, and perhaps the best example of that is with defenceman Morgan Rielly.

A gifted skater and puck-mover, Rielly is part of a quality first-pairing that gets the Maple Leafs up the ice in a hurry in transition, opening up time and space for the forwards. Another season with big offensive numbers is expected, but I think the Maple Leafs are still trying to figure out what a long-term commitment looks like here – if not because of the challenges through salary cap compression, then because Rielly's defensive play has held him back just enough from being regarded as an elite first-pairing defender.

The focus area for this group are a collection of depth defenders beyond Rielly, T.J. Brodie, and Jake Muzzin. The organization is playing a bit of a numbers game here, trying to find two quality defenders amidst a mix of Justin Holl, Rasmus Sandin, Timothy Liljegren, and Travis Dermott.

There was a bit of debate over the organization's decision to protect Holl (subsequently exposing McCann to the Seattle Kraken) – but if nothing else, a combination of what Holl has shown in limited duty and the incredible cost of mid-pair defenders in free agency makes it worth exploring further.

That said, there is downside risk to this group. The NHL is a young man's league, but the Maple Leafs could have Sandin (21 years old, 37 NHL games) and Liljegren (22, 13 NHL games) in the lineup full time. There isn't much behind them, and the risk of burdening the Maple Leafs top four over the regular season increases substantially if this theoretical pairing cracks.

That brings us to the goaltenders. Jack Campbell returns, joined by a new face in net in the form of nine-year veteran Petr Mrazek.

Mrazek has had an interesting career – he's been on a bit of a performance downturn, some the result of injuries, other the result of playing on weaker teams in Detroit and Philadelphia. In Mrazek's last full season with Carolina (2019-20), we saw slightly below league-average performance.

The shot profiles courtesy HockeyViz:

A prospective Mrazek/Campbell platoon should hold up next season – Campbell has put together two quality seasons together now, perhaps enough to win the majority of starts at the end of next season. But this is not a core strength of the team, and it's also a group with downside risk. If not because Campbell's still just 86 games into his professional career, then because of Mrazek's health and play over the last few years.

This roster should be good enough for the playoffs and beyond, scoring their way out of most problems over the course of the regular season. If the goaltending holds up, this is a Stanley Cup-calibre roster.

If not, this may very well be the last dance for the Maple Leafs' core.

Data via Natural Stat Trick, NHL.com, Hockey Reference, Evolving Hockey

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USA TODAY / Former NHL forward Jimmy Hayes dies at 31

Chris Bumbaca

Former NHL forward Jimmy Hayes has died, the Boston College men's hockey program announced Monday. He was 31.

No cause of death was immediately given.

Hayes, a Boston native, played for Boston College from 2008-2011 and was a member of the 2010 NCAA championship squad.

"Boston College Hockey is heartbroken over the passing of Jimmy Hayes," Boston College said in its statement. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to the entire Hayes family."

The Toronto Maple Leafs selected Hayes in the second round of the 2008 NHL draft and then traded him to the Chicago Blackhawks in June

2010. He debuted with Chicago in December 2011, but his best years came with the Florida Panthers (2013-15) and his hometown Bruins (2015-17).

He played 33 games for the New Jersey Devils in 2017-18 before spending 2018-19 with the AHL's Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins. He scored a total of 54 goals and 109 points in his NHL career.

The Boston Globe reported authorities responded to Hayes' Milton, Massachusetts, home, where he was pronounced dead. USA TODAY's messages to the Milton Police and Fire Departments have not been immediately returned.

Hayes had two sons, ages 2 and 3 months, with his wife Kristen.

Hayes comes from a big hockey family. His brother, Kevin, plays for the Philadelphia Flyers and his cousin Tom Fitzgerald is currently the Devils' general manager.

USA TODAY LOADED: 08.24.2021