



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 1, 2021

The Athletic

Have the Hurricanes trolled their way to 'heel' status? A 22-question Gentile mailbag

By Sean Gentile

Just when you thought mailbag season was over, Carolina saved the day. Thank you, offer sheet! Thank you, Jesperi Kotkaniemi!

The main reason we're doing another one of these is that the first batch of questions was really, really good. It was a blend of nonsense and well-reasoned points that I'd be stupid not to appreciate.

Lo and behold, The Athletic subscribers came through again. We went a little heavy on the Canadiens/Hurricanes drama, but there's plenty more. Let's go.

As much fun as it is, my read is that the Hurricanes trolling Montreal is only going to further reduce the chance that we see interesting offer sheets in the future, because no one wants to be a victim of revenge. Am I wrong? — Jared W.

Hmm. Let's start with the first part of Jared's question. I don't think the Kotkaniemi ordeal will reduce the odds of future offer sheets because you can't divide by zero. That's already, functionally at least, what we're dealing with; we've had two sheets since 2013, regardless of the motivations. That number comes from, literally, a pool of thousands of expiring restricted free-agent (RFA) deals.

Regardless, it'd be nice to see more often. On "The Athletic Hockey Show" this week, we talked about pie-in-the-sky rule changes that we'd like to see (subscribe wherever you get your podcasts), and Tim, one of our genius listeners, suggested "league-mandated offer sheets by every team." As in, "all right, everyone has to try to poach one guy." I'm obviously on board with this, full stop. All we can do is root for chaos.

As a more workable solution, though, how about a designated offer-sheet window? Early-ish in the offseason, each team has, let's say, one week to shoot their shot. If it works, great. People have a tendency to complete tasks when you give them a deadline, and GMs might be more apt to justify the risk — or less angry at the mere concept — if the time frame was a) regulated and b) over relatively early. If not, it's just another meaningless day in the offseason calendar, and everyone can ditch the looming-offer-sheet lip service whenever an RFA stays in the market a little longer than anticipated.

As for the concept of "revenge," the Canadiens could end up getting first- and third-round picks for a player they benched in the postseason. Kotkaniemi had five goals last season. Dom has his likely outcome as "good third center." I'm not sure that qualifies as revenge.

What would the price be for Montreal to acquire Dvorak from Arizona, and would Arizona be interested in KK if MTL matches the offer sheet? — Jeremy B.

If the Habs match, they can't trade Kotkaniemi for a year (which is just another reason not to match) and would be further into cap hell. Dvorak is a nice player with a reasonable hit (\$4.45 million) who'd make sense as a Kotkaniemi replacement — but not as an addition. If Montreal couldn't flip the picks as part of a package for a, uh, higher-profile player, and instead used them on Dvorak, they'd still come out of all this in better shape.

Can you explain why Habs fans think they have cap room? — Liz L.

Because their team successfully ignored math for three playoff rounds, and the mindset stuck.

What does KK agreeing to that specific signing bonus say, if anything, about his relationship with the Habs? — Jeremy B.

On one hand, they benched him in the playoffs, so ... On the other, he wouldn't have signed the sheet in the first place if he didn't want to play for Carolina, at least on some level. I think what's most relevant to your question, though, is that he was staring at a piece of paper that guarantees him more than \$6 million next season, and it appeared out of thin air. I'm not throwing that windfall away because of a cornball joke. Yeah fine, make fun of whoever you want. Enjoy your retweets. Where's the pen?

Have the Hurricanes turned full heel? If they have become heels, who are the NHL's babyface teams? — Connor N.

There are reasons to dislike any team. Do they win too much? Are they owned by creeps? Do they sign jackasses? Are their fans entitled? Obnoxious Twitter accounts? Ugly uniforms? The spectrum is wide, but there's plenty of hate to spread around. And that's fine; that's how sports work, actually. If there are folks out there who don't find the Hurricanes' whole 🤝deal🤝 particularly cute — if they find it, say, corny as hell — that's their right. If they were Canes fans, they'd be Canes fans. Nothing lasts forever.

To answer the second part of your question, Connor, I think the Panthers make sense. Good, but not that good; non-traditional market, they don't come off as overly thirsty, they haven't done anything outwardly repulsive in the recent past. Sign me up for a couple of years of that — but the shift will happen there, too. It always does.

Who trolled Habs fans better? Canes Twitter or Nikita Kucherov? — James B.

Kucherov. He actually won something.

What does it mean for your defense corps as a whole when Oliver Ekman-Larsson is maybe the 3rd best defenseman on your team? — Justin W.

Probably something similar to what it means when he's your highest-paid, longest-term player period. Imagine finding yourself in such a position. Couldn't be me.



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You seem to have a lot of free time for mailbags lately (no judgment, it's the summer/offseason), so what is one book you've never read, think you *should* read, but know deep down you never will? — Terry K.

Last year, since everything was so normal and cool, I seriously considered finally reading some Dostoevsky. Saved by laziness? Perhaps. Regardless, it's probably never gonna happen.

I once had a dream I was at a Pirates game in Three Rivers Stadium. My mind rationalized it by saying the Bucs were using the stadium a few times per year like a third jersey. I probably had taken NyQuil that night. Regardless, if you could bring back 1 demolished NHL arena for a team to use a handful of times per season, which one would it be? — Joe S.

Oh, man. You could put a dozen building names in a hat and I'd be fine with whatever came out of it, but I think if I had to stick to one, I'm going the boring, obvious route and saying the Montreal Forum. Too much history there to ignore. Also, it'd be nice to see Boston Garden, and I wouldn't mind dipping into the Civic/Mellon Arena in Pittsburgh a couple more times. Did some back-of-the-napkin math here, and I seem to have spent 17 percent of the first 18 years of my life there.

Given the 2020-2021 standings, what is the worst NHL team that could win a KHL championship? — Brian T.

Omsk was the KHL champ last season. Their best forward was Reid Boucher. Their best defenseman was Oliwier Kaski. Their best goalie was Igor Bobkov. Are you really going to pick them to beat, like, the Sabres? I think the defenseman/goalie gap is too great for any KHL team to deal with, whether that makes me provincial or not.

Mid-term: Which 3 2021 lottery teams (had a shot at #1 pick) have the best shot at making it to the Cup finals in the next three years?

Short-term: Which 2021 lottery team will be most improved in 2022?

Long-term: Five years out, of the 2021 lottery teams, who hasn't yet made it back to the playoffs? — Jelani L.

1. Summer of Grit aside, I still think the Rangers are set up better than the rest of the lottery teams.
2. I think the Devils are about to be much, much better than they were last season.
3. The Sabres, because they're the Sabres. Nah, it's the Coyotes. They're starting from scratch.

Proposal: Eliminating the offside rule. Your thoughts? — Zach B.

We talked about that on the podcast, too. Ian Mendes is dangerously close to being in favor of it, period. I convinced myself that it'd be worth trying in overtime, since overtime doesn't have to approximate actual hockey.

Can you make up a reason why the Sabres will be good, or is that not possible? — Christian E.

Because Buffalo is a nice place filled with good food and good people, and they deserve to have something nice.

What team is the NY Mets of the NHL? Not just a run-of-the-mill bad team like Arizona, but a team that constantly trips over themselves to make a bad situation worse. Is it Ottawa? Feels like it might be Ottawa. — Matthew W.

Ah, Matthew. Love the question, disagree with one of the examples — because buddy, the Coyotes are about as far from run-of-the-mill bad as you can get. That's a multi-level catastrophe. The Sabres are too obvious. The Sens, especially when you think about the Melnyk-Wilpon comparisons, make a lot of sense. They also wasted some really good teams, like the Mets did in the David Wright/peak Noah Syndergaard years. It's close. That said, a huge part of what makes the Mets so Metsy is the size of their market. The New York magnifying glass is what makes it so funny and so inescapable.

So, what are we looking for? We need a big city, a team that hovers between "bad" and "underachieving," no recent titles to speak of, and the overall sense that a streak of top-down organizational ineptness will always ruin everything. We are so, so close to a Mets/Rangers crossover. The Maple Leafs have been the pre-Joe Torre Yankees for, like, five decades now. So ... it's the Canucks. I take no joy in saying that.

Any progress on bedroom renovations during the offseason after Don Granato roasted you? — Ed C.

For anyone who doesn't listen to the pod, Granato came on with me and Culance a couple of months back. We did the interview over Zoom, which I was unprepared for, and thus sitting in front of what could've passed for a crime scene. Granato made fun of me so effectively that I had no choice but to move to a new apartment. Not kidding. I moved.

The Flyers and the Flames have been essentially the same team for the past 5-7 years, flashes of potential, coupled with bitter disappointment. This year, Fletcher and Treiving took two completely different strategies- aggressive/passive (no offence Blake Coleman). Who wins, who loses, and does that mean their job? — Richard T.

I think things could look superficially better for the Flames because they're in a weaker division, but all told, I think I'd rather have the Flyers' collection of talent. Calgary should be trying — hard — to win right now, and the fact that it isn't bothers me. Now, do I love Fletcher's offseason? No. I'm not a Rasmus Ristolainen guy, and Cam Atkinson-for-Jake Voracek seemed like a trade just for the sake of making one, but to me, that's better than just sitting in neutral.

Are we ever going to get a TV schedule? — Brian S.

I'd expect one not long after the Olympic situation is settled, which seems like it'll happen any minute now. If those negotiations fell through, the overall schedule would've gotten blown up. No point in tempting fate by announcing a bunch of games that would've ceased to exist.

Is there any info suggesting that Portland could wind up with the Coyotes franchise? — Nick R.

It always comes up as a possible destination, but from what I understand, the arena/ownership situation isn't ideal for an NHL team. They're at best four/five on the list if stuff continues to go sideways for the Coyotes.



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How do you think other GMs are viewing the game Lou Lamoriello appears to be playing by seemingly having free agents signed, but not announcing contracts to leave his true available cap space a mystery. Do you think this will result in a rule change by the league? Or do other GMs start adopting the policy, making life miserable for all hockey writers and not just Arthur Staple? — Jerome D.

I think Arthur has moved beyond anger about the situation and is hovering somewhere near acceptance. For me, it's one of those things where the, let's call it the "who cares, haha" portion of my brain, loves it — because I love seeing the league's gray areas backfire on them. It's funny. On the other hand, if 31 other GMs started pulling the same stuff, I'd have a stroke.

What percentage of the Athletic NHL viewership is composed of Minnesota Wild fans? — Anders N.

Without going into specifics, I have a little bust of Russo that sits on my desk, and I look to it for guidance.

What do you think is a fair contract for Kirill Kaprizov? — Patrick H.

Throughout all this, I always felt like a five-year deal in the \$8 million AAV range made sense. That'd be meeting in the middle on term. Minnesota buys a couple of unrestricted free-agent years, and Kaprizov sets himself up to sign another huge deal before he turns 30. Either way, it's trending in the right direction. Personally, I hope he's there for a while. I like having a reason to watch the Wild, other than them being blandly competent.

No question from me, just sad still that Big Buff (Dustin Byfuglien) isn't in the NHL. — Derek D.

Derek, my dear, that makes two of us. We had to fill out Olympic rosters last week, and I missed penciling in the big fella.

Who would win in an over-the-top-rope 32 person battle royale between the stereotypical fan from each fan base? — Timothy N.

It's tough to choose against Islanders fans here, but I feel like the #BillsMafia crossover in Buffalo makes it a pretty easy call. Lots of experience jumping off stuff. Pent-up rage. Latent death wishes. Talkin' proud.



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Is Jesperi Kotkaniemi worth \$6.1 million to the Hurricanes? His trajectory, fit, and why the signing makes sense anyway

By Sara Civian

Jokes, tweets and Uno reverse cards aside, the reality remains: The Carolina Hurricanes actually tendered an offer sheet to Montreal Canadiens center Jesperi Kotkaniemi on Saturday, and he actually signed the one-year, \$6.1 million offer.

This was a real-life thing that happened and will have real-life consequences.

We won't know what those consequences are until this coming Saturday, Sept. 4, the deadline for the Canadiens to match the offer or leave it be. Based on all the nuances that made this an effective offer sheet, there's a real chance that the Canadiens will become the first team since 2007 to not match an offer sheet. If that happens, Kotkaniemi will be a Hurricane for at least one year — and probably longer.

Is that a good thing for the Hurricanes, though? Is this more of a genuinely good move for the future of the team or a shortsighted revenge fantasy?

What has Kotkaniemi proved so far, and what he could become

On Tuesday, The Athletic's Arpon Basu and Marc Antoine Godin published a piece that offers a jumping-off point for the situation Kotkaniemi and the Canadiens find themselves in.

"Kotkaniemi's inability to find consistency in his game has always come with built-in excuses, and most of them were even legitimate," they wrote. "He's still a young player (he is), he hasn't had consistent linemates (he hasn't), he hasn't played with offensive wingers (also true)."

Montreal drafted Kotkaniemi No. 3 overall in 2018 with the hope that he'd become at least an above-average second-line center — the type of player who perennially hovers around the 50-point mark. Three seasons later, the 21-year-old's numbers are underwhelming, at least on the surface:

2018-19 79 11 23 34 1

2019-20 36 6 2 8 -11

2020-21 56 5 15 20 -1

Career 171 22 40 62 -11

He did have five goals and eight points in 19 games during the Canadiens' playoff run last season but was a healthy scratch during the finals.

This is the part where Hurricanes fans, hardened by years of Corsi dominance and unlucky shooting, might expect to see a chart showing much better underlying numbers to explain everything. You won't get that here.

Kotkaniemi's analytics paint a complex picture of a complex situation. There's fluctuation, starting with his at times great, at times bad, at times non-factor impact on defense.

These heat charts from HockeyViz show how Kotkaniemi has affected shot creation and suppression during his three-year NHL career, as well as the resulting expected goals for and against. Red means more shots, and blue less. The bottom is his impact on defense, so the bluer that part is, the better; that means fewer shots are being allowed in that given area.

Kotkaniemi's solid rookie year extended to defensive duties, then there was an alarming drop-off in 2019-20, and while he didn't return to his rookie-year excellence in 2020-21, everything was more or less back to being fine.

Speaking of fluctuation, Kotkaniemi's average time on ice ranged from 13:44 in 2018-19, to 13:00 in 2019-20 to 14:48 in 2020-21. His production, his shot rate and his shooting percentage (highest in his worst year) also were up and down.

Why?

I think it needs to be acknowledged here that two of his first three NHL seasons have happened in the context of a pandemic. Several younger NHL players, like the Flyers' Carter Hart, have spoken out about how difficult the isolation factor was — especially without a family to come home to. Then you have different divisions, strict protocols and the looming anxiety that you'll catch COVID-19 and take your team out of commission — something Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal has expressed guilt about.

I'd also point toward the extreme lack of consistency in usage that Kotkaniemi has experienced since he's been on the Canadiens.

It's not necessarily objectively harmful to a player's development to have a rotating cast of linemates. The same lines can help if a player likes routine, but that's not something you can plug into a database. And there was no reason for the Canadiens to outright sabotage Kotkaniemi. They had vested interest in the success of a player who was tied for being their highest pick since 1980. They just also had an interest in their own success, which includes optimizing the lineup for whatever it is.

As erratic as it seems, I don't think the musical chairs of linemates was the issue. It seems like no matter who he played with, the quality was what lacked. He played with a cast of second-, third- and fourth-line caliber players but rarely (almost never) with first-line players, according to analytics data not available to the public but confirmed by the public work of Jason Paul.

Understandably, given all of that, there's been a considerable amount of criticism about the way the Canadiens have handled Kotkaniemi's development. Did they rush him into the NHL?

Rachel Doerrie, host of Staff and Graph Podcast and former New Jersey Devils analyst, has a research focus in development. She's one of many prominent critics when it comes to the Canadiens' handling of Kotkaniemi — and the



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idea of rushing prospects to the NHL in general. She graced The Athletic with her thoughts on the situation:

Here's what Doerrie said:

"Kotkaniemi is a byproduct of an organization rushing a prospect who needed development. The Canadiens have long needed a high-end centre, and it didn't work with Jonathan Drouin (who sources say is making a return next season) or Max Domi. So Kotkaniemi was drafted and anointed that centre. It is exceedingly difficult to have success as a young centre in the NHL unless you are a special talent (see: Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews). Even Nico Hischier, Jack Hughes and other young centres struggled at age 18. Once Montreal realized Kotkaniemi wasn't ready, he was yoyo'd up and down the lineup, and that ruins any continuity a player has, negatively impacting confidence.

"Then he gets sent to the AHL, which is probably where he should've started (unless he stayed in Finland). In his draft year, he was a small build, and part of the development that young players need is to grow into their bodies and develop strength. If you rush that, the player gets knocked around and becomes ineffective — exactly what happened with Kotkaniemi.

"You can't go back and change any of that. For the player to develop, since he's still very young, he needs stability. In Carolina, he can play behind Sebastian Aho, Vincent Trocheck and potentially platoon with Jordan Staal. I know the Canes have had injury issues down the middle the last few years, but what he needs is middle-six stability.

"He needs confidence from his coach that he's not going to be thrown here, there and everywhere in the lineup, and he needs to be able to make mistakes without finding himself in the press box. Consistency is key. He can work on his strength and play with veteran players, learn from them, and that is what will help his development. None of this yoyo nonsense, because that destroys confidence.

"If he works on his strength on and off the puck, regains his confidence, he'll be a good 2C. He's a smart hockey player and defensively sound. It's about developing the rest of his game."

Here's my response to Doerrie's analysis:

The debate about "development" sends me into an immediate existential crisis, because no coach or general manager goes in trying to squander anyone's ability to develop. There's also no cure-all thing that makes an NHL team shrewd at developing players. It's about being able to see each individual player as just that — an individual, with individual needs.

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour has spoken a lot about how empathy is more important in his coaching strategy than X's and O's, which he jokes are the same anywhere you play.

I remember when the Hurricanes kept Martin Necas down in the AHL for a year, there was tons of criticism, and the

Canes still haven't unleashed him at center — but now he's excelling at wing, racking up points, moving the puck on the power play and having fun, and that's what the Hurricanes actually need out of him. You saw the same thing with Aho to a degree. He started out as a winger. Another example is Tyler Seguin. Look at how Aho and Seguin progressed.

I also think a lot of the perception of Kotkaniemi is a mix of the pressure of the Montreal market and the mistake the Canadiens made not selecting Brady Tkachuk, who went one spot later to the Senators.

Kotkaniemi was still 20 years old at the end of last season, and for comparison, a 20-year-old Teuvo Teravainen had nine points in 34 NHL games and 25 points in 39 AHL games.

I think the future is bright for a player with a vision like his, should he get better linemates and development.

I'd like to see him on the wing with Trocheck and Necas to start. Imagine how dynamic that could be.

What will make the \$6.1 million worth it?

Back to the original question: The honest answer is there's nothing Kotkaniemi can do to make this dollar amount worth it, and the Canes had better acknowledge that and let him relax a bit. Effective offer sheets are by definition overpays — you have to do that to make sure the other team doesn't match it (newsflash to Marc Bergevin) — but if the Hurricanes want Kotkaniemi to be successful, they have to now take that pressure off, because it's pretty much for sure that Kotkaniemi will not be worth \$6.1 million he's making in 2021-22.

When Andrei Svechnikov signed his eight-year extension last week, he kept citing "having fun" and "winning games" as the big two reasons he loves playing for the Hurricanes. That's what Kotkaniemi needs. And if any NHL team can Ted Lasso its way into making a player perform, it might be the Hurricanes.

If it's not \$6.1 million, though, how much will Kotkaniemi be worth? According to The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn's model, the expected win rate for a \$6.1 million player is 1.6 wins — a win rate on par with a solid second-line player. Luszczyszyn currently projects Kotkaniemi at 0.6 wins, which is third-line territory.

Luszczyszyn uses comparable seasons from comparable players in the past to project a player's trajectory. Here's how he has matched with Kotkaniemi:

So, maybe the money really could be worth it. All Kotkaniemi needs to do is make the jump to become a top-six player. No pressure.

If that doesn't happen, well, according to Georges Laraque, the Canes already have a multi-year extension on the table at a more fitting price (\$4 million).

That wouldn't be eligible to be signed until January. On Saturday, we'll know if that's a reality that will need to be faced down the line, as well.



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Quotebook: Svechnikov, Waddell on Extension

Winger, President/GM meet with media following eight-year contract extension

RALEIGH, NC - Winger Andrei Svechnikov and Carolina Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell met with the media on Aug. 26, following the announcement of an eight-year contract extension that will pay Svechnikov an average-annual value of \$7.75M.

On why it makes sense to sign an 8-year deal rather than a 2- or 3-year deal:

Svechnikov: It was actually an easy decision for me. I wanted it to be eight years to play in Carolina; I want to be a Hurricane. We've got a great team here, great coaches.

On how important was an 8-year team, and was it something both sides wanted:

Svechnikov: It was an easy decision because of course I wanted a long-term (contract). Like I said we have a great team and great coaches, and we just have to win the Stanley Cup, you know? A few of them.

Waddell: From Day One, when we started, we had always been talking about a long-term deal, so that was the good part: we were always on the same page and the right number for eight years, so we had great discussions for the past three weeks. We're very pleased, obviously. Andrei is one of our key players and moving forward he'll have an even bigger role. It's obviously nice our owner Tom Dundon was very supportive of the deal. It's a lot of money to commit but we all felt this was a very worthy investment.

On what his emotions were when they agreed to terms:

Svechnikov: I cannot really explain this emotion, but I was excited in the moment. My phone has been fired up a little

bit: my whole family, my parents, my brother trying to call me and I talked with them. They were excited, and that's most important for me, when my parents and my brother are excited.

On why it was important to get this deal done now before the season:

Waddell: I think anytime you're dealing with a contract the sooner you get it done I think it's better for everybody. We're going to start Training Camp Sept. 22, so we want to get Andrei back here and get him back with his teammates. We were always in a position to get it done as soon as we can. Certainly we feel like, with it being Aug. 26, that I didn't want to have this drag into training camp and neither did Andrei so we worked pretty hard on it, especially the last week to really close it up and get this deal done.

On what about this organization makes him want to be here for so long:

Svechnikov: I've loved this place for years, and it's going to be eight more years. It's a special place. We've got a great team, great coaches, and all the guys make this locker room special. You get there and you just want to have fun because all the guys are fun. All we're trying to do is have fun and win every game.

On how important playing for Rod Brind'Amour was to signing the extension:

Svechnikov: It's huge. He's a great coach, he's a great guy. He actually just messaged me 30 minutes ago and he said, "congrats". I'm very, very happy working with him. I've spent every minute with him on the ice and hopefully we can make it happen - a few Stanley Cups.



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Canadiens' options if they don't match Kotkaniemi offer sheet

By James O'Brien

When it comes to the Hurricanes trolling the Canadiens with that shocking Jesperi Kotkaniemi offer sheet, there's a lot to unpack.

It would have been entertaining and complicated any time during the offseason, but to happen in late August, aka the dog days of the hockey offseason? Gold, Jerry. Gold.

Granted, it's not such a delight for Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin.

Recently, PHT's Adam Gretz argued that the Canadiens shouldn't match the Kotkaniemi offer sheet, instead taking the picks while the Hurricanes would be on the hook for that \$6.1 million (plus some numerology trolling) for the 2021-22 season. I, too, subscribe to that argument.

Assuming the Canadiens don't match that Kotkaniemi offer sheet, what should Bergevin & Co. do next, though? That's a difficult question to answer, and it sure doesn't feel like a situation the Canadiens were structured for.

First, let's try to step into Bergevin's (shiny, no-doubt-expensive) shoes and try to ponder some of the factors on his mind. Then we'll consider different avenues the Habs can take.

Unfortunately, just about every road is bumpy.

Kotkaniemi offer sheet could make Bergevin, Canadiens look foolish in many ways

For us on the outside, it's easy to argue that the Canadiens should walk away from that Kotkaniemi offer sheet. He's not a \$6.1M player right now, and with the way qualifying offers work, the Canadiens would be stuck in difficult contract situations down the line, too.

But the situation — and finding solutions — gets more complicated when you realize how much egg is on Bergevin's face.

After all, he is the one who absorbed criticisms about arguably reaching when the Canadiens selected Kotkaniemi third overall in 2018. The reactions created a minor celebrity or two.

Truly, the jury's still out on that selection. On one hand, Kotkaniemi made an immediate jump after being drafted, and showed signs of brilliance. There have been stumbles, though, from AHL demotions to being healthy scratched as recently as the 2021 Stanley Cup Final.

From a perception standpoint, just think of all of the ways Bergevin could look bad:

- If the Canadiens don't match, there's an element of admitting that Kotkaniemi wasn't worth that third pick.
- If they don't match, and Kotkaniemi flourishes, then they'll look bad in a number of ways. Both letting him go, and maybe holding him back?
- Either way, there's a gnawing question: "Should Bergevin have seen this coming?"

The Hurricanes laid it on pretty thick with the wording of the press release following the Kotkaniemi offer sheet. This wasn't just about landing a young talent; there was some (gloriously entertaining) pettiness involved. Shouldn't Bergevin have expected some retaliation from that largely ineffectual Sebastian Aho offer sheet?

It's not like the Hurricanes pounced with the Kotkaniemi offer sheet during the first day of 2021 NHL Free Agency.

Instead, it happened on Aug. 28, deep into the offseason. You could absolutely argue that Bergevin was trying to squeeze Kotkaniemi for every last dollar, and instead got burned. (The Habs could have signed Kotkaniemi to an extension as early as last summer, too.)

Frankly, the Canadiens were already on shaky ground at center — even if Kotkaniemi was in the picture.

Essentially, they were asking Kotkaniemi to cement himself as a No. 2 center, and for Jake Evans to replace much of what they lost in Phillip Danault's exit. To an extent, they were also assuming that Nick Suzuki wouldn't stumble often as a first-line center.

That was already asking a lot, and now they might get backed into a corner.

Overall, there's a lot at stake here. Yet, while it's tempting to just go with cold, hard, facts, it's also crucial to realize the egos involved. Bergevin might need to swallow some pride to make lemonade from these lemons.

One option: trading for someone like Dvorak

If the Canadiens don't match the Kotkaniemi offer sheet, they'd receive one first-rounder and one third-round pick as compensation.

Theoretically, they could use one or both of those picks (plus others) to trade for a replacement. During the weekend,



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Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman floated Coyotes center Christian Dvorak as an option. That possibility is gaining steam.

Is a Dvorak trade the right move for the Canadiens if they walk away from that Kotkaniemi offer sheet? It depends upon who you ask, what the asking price would be, and how ambitious Montreal truly is.

On one hand, Dvorak isn't going to light the world on fire. For a Canadiens team some joke is a parade of middle-six forwards, this might feel like more of the same.

But Dvorak, 25, can thrive in the right circumstances. At a \$4.45M cap hit for the next four seasons, Dvorak also brings value, even if you feel like yawning about it.

If Dvorak didn't cost a ton in a trade, he could be a decent option for the Canadiens. Would he move the needle enough to warrant a package including a first-rounder, however? Maybe there's a better way ...

Is tanking an option? Or what if it happens anyway?

Considering that he's likely on the hot seat, Marc Bergevin probably wouldn't embrace the Canadiens "tanking."

Yet, even with Jesperi Kotkaniemi, the Canadiens were no guarantee to make the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs. Christian Dvorak wouldn't make them a no-brainer, either. The Atlantic Division could be brutal, and the Metro might gobble up a wild-card spot, or both.

On one hand, the Canadiens' free-agent moves didn't scream rebuild/retool. They loaded up on veterans, including giving considerable term to Mike Hoffman, David Savard, and retaining Joel Armia. The plan clearly wasn't to take a step back — at least not on purpose.

But there could be some potential silver linings.

If the Canadiens simply kept the first and third-rounders (or, at least the first-rounder), they'd suddenly have a pretty nice cache of picks. That's no small thing, being that the 2022 NHL Draft (and 2023 one) are hyped up as quite strong. As of this writing, the Canadiens have their customary seven draft picks, plus one extra 2022 NHL Draft pick in the third, fourth, and seventh round.

Add some premium picks to Nick Suzuki (22) and Cole Caufield (20), and the Canadiens' future looks a lot brighter. That's an even sunnier outlook if, deep down, they had doubts about Kotkaniemi's ceiling either way.

Whatever happens, the Canadiens ... uh, might want to be proactive about contract solutions for Caufield (two years left) and Suzuki (entering a contract year). Just saying.

Few easy answers for the Habs

Over nearly a decade as Canadiens GM, Marc Bergevin's shifted perceptions multiple times. He's won trades, such as shipping out Alex Galchenyuk, that once drew mockery. (The P.K. Subban – Shea Weber trade even looks more neutral.)

He's also surprised us many times. Perhaps that's what burns the most here: this time, someone else pranked him.

Maybe Bergevin and the Canadiens have another trick up their sleeves? Perhaps they'll find a happy medium; could Tyler Bozak hold the fort at a cheaper price? Might Jonathan Drouin rebound and even survive at center?

There are any number of ways that this could play out. Don't dismiss Bergevin's chances of slipping out of this snare. You know, like Bergevin seemingly downplaying the threat of, say, a Jesperi Kotkaniemi offer sheet.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 1, 2021



About Last Season: Coaches and Front Office 2020-21 Performance Review and Grade

The Hurricanes' coaching staff guided the team to its best regular season in franchise history in 2020-21.

By Andrew Schnittker

Hurricanes' 2021 stats:

- 36-12-8 record in 56 games
- 80 points, .714 points percentage, best in Central Division, third in league
- 3.13 goals per game (11th in league)
- 2.39 goals-against per game (tied for fourth fewest)
- 25.6 power-play percentage (second)
- 85.2 penalty kill percentage (third)

The Hurricanes enjoyed arguably their best regular season in franchise history last year, and the coaching staff was rewarded handsomely for it, with Rod Brind'Amour winning the Jack Adams Award as the NHL's coach of the year.

All throughout the season, Brind'Amour and his coaching staff guided the team through difficult circumstances - including the challenges every team faced of playing a condensed, 56-game schedule with rest at a minimum, playing the same teams over and over again and playing a good chunk of the season in front of empty stadiums. Any coaching staff that guided its team through all of that to a successful season deserves credit.

But the Hurricanes faced plenty of adversity right off the bat, including a 10-day COVID pause just two games into the season, and having to play without several lineup regulars due to COVID protocols for a few games upon returning.

While the Hurricanes were mostly healthy throughout the year, they did face some key injuries, as Teuvo Teravainen played just played just 21 games due to COVID and then concussion symptoms, Petr Mrazek missed a big chunk of the year with two injuries and No. 2 center Vincent Trocheck missed some time as well.

Despite all that, Carolina rolled through the regular season, winning its first division title since 2006 in a group that included two other top-eight teams in the league. Carolina excelled in just about every facet of the game, finishing 11th in goals per game, allowing the fifth fewest per game and finishing in the top three on both special teams units.

Goalie coach Paul Schonfelder should get some praise as well for managing the Hurricanes' crease so well despite Mrazek's lengthy absences, aided by Alex Nedeljkovic's breakout year.

While the Canes coaching did not enjoy nearly as strong of a playoff performance - Carolina was frustrated by Nashville and had few to no answers for the challenges Tampa Bay presented, Brind'Amour and his staff put out a great coaching performance as a whole last year, and the team should be glad to have Brind'Amour under contract for three more years.

Management probably doesn't get as strong of a mark for last season. Don Waddell and co didn't make many major moves going into the year, though, with limited cap space and core pretty much locked in, they didn't really need to.

In season, however, there may have been some missed opportunities. The Canes did fill a need and clear some cap space by trading Ryan Dzingel, who was never really a fit in Carolina, for Cedric Paquette, but never really did anything with that cap space.

Other than trading Haydn Fleury to bring in Jani Hakanpaa as a physical presence on the third pairing, the Canes didn't do much at the trade deadline. Might they have been well served adding some forward depth, especially in hindsight with the injuries to Vincent Trocheck and Nino Niederreiter in the Tampa Bay series?

The Hurricanes didn't need any major moves thanks to the strong core already put in place by previous shrewd moves by Waddell and his staff, but a team with Stanley Cup aspirations could have been just a bit more active.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 1, 2021



Q-and-A with Joey Keane

Chicago Wolves defenseman Joey Keane is the hometown kid making good. Growing up in south suburban Homer Glen, Keane climbed the youth hockey ladder by excelling for such teams as the Chicago Mission.

During his first year as a pro, the versatile blueliner earned a spot on the American Hockey League's 2020 All-Rookie team. Last year, Keane was an important part of the Wolves' Central Division champions and also played his first National Hockey League on May 10 for the Carolina Hurricanes.

We caught with Keane as the 22-year-old enjoys the final days of his Chicago summer before heading to Carolina's development camp.

Q: How has your summer has been going?

A: I've just been working out, golfing and spending some time on the lake waterskiing and tubing. I saw Joe Rogan do standup as well, but other than that not a whole lot.

Q: (Teammate) Jamieson Rees got a hole-in-one this summer. Any luck for you?

A: No hole-in-ones. "Reeser" plays with a foot wedge in his bag, so it doesn't count.

Q: Switching gears to hockey, what's your training been like this offseason?

A: I've been here all summer. There's a good group of around 10 pros who skate together every week. I've been working on my shot, skating and positioning. Pretty much just working on my game as a whole.

Q: This past season you made your NHL debut with Carolina. What goals do you have heading into Carolina's camp and for this season?

A: I'm just trying to take the next step in my game this year. Hopefully I can see my hard work pay off.

TODAY'S LINKS

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