The Athletic

NHL Pipeline Rankings: No. 3 Carolina Hurricanes carried by more than Andrei Svechnikov

By Corey Pronman

Carolina had a lot of draft picks the past three years, 35 to be precise. The system's high ranking is primarily due to Andrei Svechnikov being one of the premier young forwards in the game and Martin Necas emerging into a core player. Behind those two, though, is a very long list of players who project to play in the NHL or have a decent chance to play games. You can nitpick the system, there is no premier young defenseman yet, and the goalie depth is just OK, but there is a long list of skaters you can envision playing in the NHL.

Key additions: Scott Morrow, Aleksi Heimosalmi, Ville Koivunen, Aidan Hreschuk, Jackson Blake, Justin Robidas

2020 Ranking: No. 6

2021 NHL Draft grade: B

Player Ranking

1. Andrei Svechnikov, LW, Carolina-NHL

Mar. 26, 2000 | 6-foot-2 | 188 pounds

Drafted: No. 2 in 2018

Tier: Projected elite NHL player

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Above-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Above-average

Svechnikov is everything you want in an NHL player. His point production took a minor step back this season, but I have no doubt he'll rebound and continue to put up big numbers for a long time. He has so many assets. He's a big, strong, competitive forward who can skate well and play a powerful style in how he wins battles and attacks the net using his speed and physicality. Svechnikov also has a ton of skill and playmaking ability, showing great creativity as a handler and making tough passes often. From the perimeter he's a pass and shot threat. I think he will become one of the best forwards in the league in due time.

2. Martin Necas, RW, Carolina-NHL

Jan. 15, 1999 | 6-foot-1 | 167 pounds

Drafted: No. 12 in 2017

Tier: Projected bubble NHL All-Star and top of the lineup player

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

Necas took a big step forward this season, becoming an important player on a good NHL team. He's a dynamic offensive player. His skating drives his game, as he can explode up the ice and be a real threat against most defenders with his speed. Necas combined his quickness with a high skill level and ability to make highly skilled plays on the move. From the perimeter he's a shot and pass threat, and can create a lot from the outside. The main criticism of his game is he can be too perimeter, with a lack of net drive and physicality. Even if he is not the most physical or best defender, he's such a talented scorer that he's a true first-line forward with a chance to be a star.

3. Seth Jarvis, RW, Portland-WHL

Feb. 1, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 175 pounds

Drafted: No. 13 in 2020

Tier: Projected bubble top of lineup and middle of lineup player

Skating: Above-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: High-end
Shot: Above-average

Jarvis opened eyes with how good he was right away in the AHL this season, scoring seven goals and 11 points in nine games right out of his draft season. He wasn't quite as dominant in the WHL as expected, but he was still very good. He has so many NHL assets. Jarvis is a great skater and an even better competitor. He's a force to deal with coming down the wing because of how well he attacks the net, and how quick and relentless he is on loose pucks to create rushes. He has great skill and can make creative plays to generate offense, on top of being a mid-range shot threat, but it's his quick, direct style of play that makes me think he'll be a good top-six forward in the NHL.

4. Dominik Bokk, RW, Chicago-AHL

Feb. 3, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 180 pounds

Drafted: No. 25 in 2018 by St. Louis

Tier: Projected middle of the lineup player

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Below-average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

Bokk's season was really up and down, with a terrible first half in Djurgarden in the SHL but a much better second half in the AHL. That somewhat symbolizes him as a prospect. The talent jumps out at you. He has great puck skills. He can

skate, score, make plays and has good size. But he's so inconsistent with his offense and overall effort at times. Despite the great flashes of skill and playmaking, he doesn't generate as much offense as I thought he would by this stage. I still think he plays a middle-six role because of the talent, but I can see him frustrating an NHL coach, too.

5. Ryan Suzuki, C, Chicago-AHL

May 28, 2001 | six-foot | 176 pounds

Drafted: No. 28 in 2019

Tier: Projected middle of the lineup player

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

Suzuki held his own versus men this season as a teenager and played a semi-important role for Canada at the world juniors. He's a talented offensive player, showing great skill and playmaking frequently. He can run a power play and hit seams at a high rate. Suzuki isn't as dynamic a playmaker as his brother Nick in Montreal, but he's a better skater. He can generate clean entries with his speed and skill in the NHL. Some scouts think he's soft, but I've never had issues with his compete, and whichever coach he plays for he often ends up on the penalty kill. I think he can be a middle-six forward, if he stays down the middle he would likely be a 3C.

6. Jamieson Rees, LW, Chicago-AHL

Feb. 26, 2001 | 5-foot-11 | 172 pounds

Drafted: No. 44 in 2019

Tier: Projected middle of the lineup player

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

Rees was solid in the AHL as a teenager with no OHL season. He stands out with his skill level, he can put a lot of pucks around defenders to create chances. He's not a soft skill type, as he will make a lot of hard plays toward the net. He has an edge to his game and doesn't shy from physical play. Rees isn't the biggest or quickest forward though, so there is some skepticism about how his game will translate to higher levels. Given his strong compete though, I think he finds a way to make it work in the NHL, and I see him as a potential middle-six winger.

7. Noel Gunler, RW, Brynas-SHL

Oct. 7, 2001 | 6-foot-2 | 176 pounds

Drafted: No. 41 in 2020

Tier: Projected middle of the lineup player

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average
Shot: Above-average

Gunler had a solid season in the SHL between Lulea and Brynas, and was good at the world juniors. His style lends itself to being used in a specific way. He's a great passer and shooter who can excel on the power play and make things happen in the offensive zone. The skill and shot, along with his good size and physicality, are NHL assets. But his effort can be inconsistent and he drifts to the perimeter. Gunler also lacks the footspeed to generate a lot of clean entries at even strength. I see a potential middle-six winger due to the talent, but I could also see it be an uphill climb to get regular NHL minutes.

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

Mar. 13, 2003 | 5-foot-8 | 173 pounds

Drafted: No. 147 in 2021

Tier: Projected middle of the lineup player

Skating: High-end
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

Robidas was an important player on a great junior team this season. He plays the game with a lot of speed and energy which is why despite being 5-foot-8, I think his game could translate to higher levels. He's a great skater, who often takes pucks up the ice with speed and charges right for the net. Off the puck, he hustles to win battles and can kill penalties. Robidas shows good instincts as a playmaker, and flashes of good puck skills but I wouldn't call his puck game what gets him to the NHL. Robidas projects as a middle-six NHL forward, likely on the wing, who will be a fan and coach favorite due to his speed and work ethic.

9. Scott Morrow, RHD, Shattuck St. Mary's-U.S. High School

Nov. 1, 2002 | 6-foot-2 | 195 pounds

Drafted: No. 40 in 2021

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Below-average

Morrow played most of the year at Shattuck's U18 team — for a third season — but did get some time with Fargo in the USHL to end 2020-21. It's been tough to get a read on him due to the caliber of opponent he's played, but he has a clear NHL toolkit. He's 6-foot-2, highly skilled, and can skate with NHL players. His skating has progressed over time into a strength, showing the ability to lead an attack and walk the line. He is very confident with the puck and attacks with his skill. He can make plays, but he overcomplicates the game and makes some questionable decisions. Defensively he's just OK. He can be a bit soft on his checks and lack physicality. Morrow projects to be an NHL player due to his offensive talents but as a third-pair defenseman until he shows he can clean up his defensive play.

10. Jack Drury, C, Vaxjo-SHL

Feb. 3, 2000 | 5-foot-11 | 175 pounds

Drafted: No. 42 in 2018

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Below-average
Hockey Sense: Above-average
Compete: Above-average

Drury was an important player for the SHL champion, going to Sweden with Harvard's season not going forward. There's not a whole lot that's flashy about how Drury plays. He's not that big, not that fast and his puck skills won't jump out at you. He accomplishes a lot though because he's a very smart, detailed and competitive player who coaches lean on. You can see him killing penalties in the NHL, taking defensive zone draws, and contributing just enough offense through his playmaking to take a regular shift in an NHL team's bottom six.

11. Jackson Blake, RW, Eden Prairie-U.S. High School

Aug. 3, 2003 | 5-foot-10 | 158 pounds

Drafted: No. 109 in 2021

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

Blake was a great high school player, leading his team to a title in Minnesota. In the USHL he was up and down but had good stretches. Blake is a highly creative offensive player. He shows great puck skills consistently in how he attacks defenses and beats his checks. He is a very good passer, who can find seams, and makes plays from a standstill and on the move. Blake is undersized, but works hard to win pucks, plays in the tough areas of the ice and can take a hit. He's not a great skater for a player his size, which might challenge him at higher levels. Blake projects to play NHL games due to his skill and work ethic but might have issues sticking due to his size and skating combination.

12. Aleksi Heimosalmi, RHD, Assat-Finland Jr.

May 3, 2003 | 5-foot-11 | 170 pounds

Drafted: No. 44 in 2021

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

Heimosalmi was fine but didn't do a ton last season. At the U18 worlds, he really popped and was named defenseman of the tournament. Heimosalmi has very intriguing offensive elements with the puck. He's a strong skater, who can make a good first pass, and I've grown to appreciate his individual skill more with time as someone who can create in transition and moving off the blue line. At the junior level he's a solid defender due to his skating, but versus men that will be the question at his size without a ton of physicality in his game.

Heimosalmi projects to play games but might have an issue defining a clear NHL role.

13. Aidan Hreschuk, LHD, U.S. NTDP-USHL

Feb. 19, 2003 | 5-foot-11 | 188 pounds

Drafted: No. 94 in 2021

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Average

Hreschuk was an important player for the U.S. NTDP and played all situations effectively. He does a lot of good things with the puck. He makes skilled plays often, be it quality outlet passes, creative seam plays, or putting pucks around opponents. He's not a blazing-fast skater, but he's quick enough to skate past guys and generate clean exits/entries with his skating and skill. Defensively he's OK. Due to the lack of size and high-end skating, he can get beaten wide now and then but he's good enough in that area to make stops. Hreschuk projects to play NHL games, but might have issues sticking due to his size and skating combination.

14. Ville Koivunen, RW, Karpat-Finland Jr.

June 13, 2003 | 5-foot-11 | 161 pounds

Drafted: No. 51 in 2021

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Below-average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average

Koivunen had an impressive season between the Finnish junior level and the U18 worlds. Koivunen is a forward with a high skill level who can make a lot of plays. He shows great individual creativity to beat defenders with his stickhandling. He can make tough passing plays in small areas, but also can run the power play and create from the perimeter. He's not an exterior player as Koivunen works well in traffic and doesn't shy from going to the net. He's an undersized player, though, who lacks NHL footspeed. Koivunen projects to play NHL games but may not stick in a lineup due to his size and skating combination.

15. Vasili Ponomarev, C, Shawinigan-QMJHL

Mar. 13, 2002 | 5-foot-10 | 180 pounds

Drafted: No. 53 in 2020

Tier: Projected to play NHL games

Skating: Average
Puck Skills: Average
Hockey Sense: Average
Compete: Above-average
Shot: Below-average

Ponomarev was a quality QMJHL player this season and was arguably better with Russia's U20 team. He's a skilled playmaker who can make creative, unique plays with the

puck and do so under pressure. I don't see his offensive ability as dynamic, particularly since he's a fine not amazing skater for his size. But he has enough offensive touch to create in the offensive zone. Ponomarev lacks size, but he's a worker who can kill penalties and win battles. I think for that reason, with some offense, he plays NHL games; but without more speed he may not be a long-term guy in the NHL.

Has a chance to play

Joey Keane, RHD, Chicago-AHL: Keane can skate and make a good first pass, allowing him to create offense as a pro and his skating helps him make stops. The toolkit isn't overly exciting but has enough NHL elements to give him a real shot.

Beck Warm, G, Chicago-AHL: Warm was impressive in the AHL last season. He's got some quick-twitch in his lower half to help him make tough stops. He squares up a lot of pucks, showing great intelligence and play-reading skills. His only real drawback for the NHL is his size.

Pyotr Kochetkov, G, Nizhny Novgorod-KHL: Kochetkov is an athletic goalie with size who's been up and down as a pro. He can make tough stops, but I find his game a little erratic, and he doesn't always make the best decisions.

Ronan Seeley, LHD, Everett-WHL: Seeley is a strong skater with good hockey sense who can make plays at both ends of the rink. His game can be a bit bland, but the skating gives him a real chance to make it.

Zion Nybeck, RW, HV71-SHL: Nybeck has a lot of skill and is a great playmaker, but he's small and his lack of speed at his size is a concern.

Domenick Fensore, LHD, Boston University-Hockey East: Fensore is a fantastic skater and playmaker, which gives him a real chance. But he's very small and scouts have real concerns on if he'll be able to defend in the pro game.

Stelio Mattheos, RW, Fort Wayne-ECHL: Mattheos is a worker with good hockey sense and size, but may lack enough standout speed and skill to be an NHL player.

Lenni Killinen, RW, Assat-Liiga: Killinen has size, speed and some offense, which makes him intriguing. But he isn't that skilled or reliable off the puck.

Tuukka Tieksola, RW, Karpat-Liiga: Tieksola is a very strong skater with legit playmaking ability. He's not that big, but showed he could play in the interior. For a smaller player he may lack enough high-end qualities needed to be an NHL player.

Anttoni Honka, RHD, JYP-Liiga: Honka is a very skilled, elusive and creative defenseman, but he is a small, subpar defender, which causes concerns on his NHL projection.

Joel Nystrom, RHD, Farjestad-SHL: Nystrom is a very skilled and creative puck-moving defenseman, but he's undersized and not overly mobile for his frame.

Patrik Puistola, RW, JYP-Liiga: Puistola has great offensive skills with the ability to create and finish plays, but his lack of speed and physicality may keep him from doing a ton of damage versus pros.

MONTREAL GAZETTE

Stu Cowan: Hurricanes show confidence in Jesperi Kotkaniemi

By Stu Cowan

That's something Canadiens didn't show in 21-year-old centre when they made him a healthy scratch at the start and at end of playoff run.

When the Canadiens started the playoffs last season, Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Cole Caufield and Alexander Romanov were healthy scratches.

It's hard to argue with the personnel decisions GM Marc Bergevin and head coach Dominique Ducharme made during the playoffs because the Canadiens advanced to the final for the first time since winning the Stanley Cup in 1993, losing this time to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

TIME WILL TELL IF OFF-SEASON MOVES PAY OFF FOR CANADIENS | HI/O SHOW

But making Kotkaniemi, Caufield and Romanov — seemingly three of the key building blocks for the Canadiens' future — healthy scratches for Game 1 of the first-round series against the Toronto Maple Leafs highlighted the lack of trust team management has in its young players.

Jake Evans was injured in the Canadiens' 2-1 win over the Leafs in Game 1, opening a spot in the lineup for Kotkaniemi in Game 2, while Caufield and Romanov remained healthy scratches.

Kotkaniemi scored the only goal for the Canadiens in a 5-1 loss to the Leafs in Game 2. After scoring to give the Canadiens a 1-0 lead in the first period, Kotkaniemi took off his right glove and held up four fingers while looking into the stands.

What did it mean?

"We had a good week of practice with the (four) guys who didn't play tonight, so we've been in the locker room before so that was our thing," Kotkaniemi said after the game.

A bond had obviously been formed with the young players and Kotkaniemi was solidifying it with his salute.

Kotkaniemi didn't have a good regular season with 5-15-20 totals, but he and Nick Suzuki were the only two Canadiens to play in all 56 games. That made it surprising to see Kotkaniemi as a healthy scratch to start the playoffs.

It was also surprising to see Caufield as a healthy scratch for the first two games against Toronto after he posted 4-1-5 totals in 10 regular-season games and provided a much-needed spark to the Canadiens' offence. Caufield was in the lineup for Game 3 against the Leafs and played every game after that, posting 4-8-12 totals in 20 games.

Romanov ended up being a healthy scratch for 18 of the Canadiens' 22 playoff games after being scratched from the lineup only twice during the regular season. This was after the Canadiens brought Romanov into the playoff bubble the previous season in Toronto, burning the first year of his NHL entry-level contract even though he wasn't eligible to play after leaving the KHL. The idea was that the young defenceman could practise with the team and gain valuable experience in a playoff environment.

That experience, followed by 54 regular-season games wasn't enough for the Canadiens when the playoffs started this year.

The Canadiens decided they wanted the experience of centre Eric Staal and defencemen Jon Merrill and Erik Gustafsson — three veterans acquired by Bergevin before the NHL trade deadline — in the lineup. Again, it's hard to argue with the decision because the Canadiens advanced to the Stanley Cup final, but it probably didn't help the team moving forward.

Romanov missed out on a valuable learning experience and can't be happy about it, and neither can Kotkaniemi, who was a healthy scratch again for the last two games of the Stanley Cup final after posting 5-3-8 totals in 19 playoff games, matching his goal total from the regular season. Kotkaniemi also scored a huge overtime goal in Game 6 against the Leafs to keep the Canadiens alive in that series.

It appears Kotkaniemi will be going to Carolina after agreeing to a one-year, US$6.1-million offer sheet with the Hurricanes last Saturday. If the Canadiens don't match the offer by this Saturday, they will receive a first-round pick and a third-round pick at next year's NHL draft as compensation from Carolina.

The Canadiens have struggled developing young players for more than a decade — especially first-round draft picks like Kotkaniemi — and part of the reason seems to be a lack of trust and/or an unwillingness to live with their mistakes and let them learn from them.

Defenceman Victor Mete only played in 14 of the Canadiens' first 38 games last season before being claimed on waivers by the Ottawa Senators.

"It's a new lease on life, getting claimed by Ottawa," Mete told TSN 1200 radio shortly after joining the Senators. "It's been great here. I was able to go out and play my game knowing if I made a mistake, I wasn't going to (get) pulled."

TSN Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun reported that the Hurricanes had tried to make a trade for Kotkaniemi before

giving him an offer sheet that will be very difficult for the Canadiens to match. It's an offer Kotkaniemi couldn't turn down, sort of like winning the lottery at age 21 with financial security that should last a lifetime no matter what happens in his hockey future.

The Hurricanes have definitely shown much more confidence in Kotkaniemi than the Canadiens did during the playoffs.

If Kotkaniemi ends up in Carolina it will be very interesting to see how he develops with a new team and a new environment.

Breaking Down the Jesperi Kotkaniemi Offer Sheet

By Brett Finger

The Hurricanes offer-sheeted Montreal's Jesperi Kotkaniemi over the weekend, and now there are a plethora of questions surrounding the move and where the former third overall pick would fit in Carolina's depth chart.

The last few days have been an absolute whirlwind of news, vindictiveness and unmitigated sass.

The Carolina Hurricanes got Jesperi Kotkaniemi to sign an offer sheet.

Did the Hurricanes do it purely out of spite for the Sebastian Aho offer sheet? Did they see an opportunity to secure a young player with a perceived massive upside? Was it a combination of both?

The "why" doesn't really matter at this point. It happened, and we will learn the outcome of the move in the coming days. If the Canadiens don't match the one-year, $6.1-million offer sheet, Kotkaniemi will be a Hurricane.

Montreal has a tricky decision to make, and there's an argument to be made both for and against matching the offer sheet.

If the Habs don't match it, they will dodge having to overpay for Kotkaniemi in 2021-22 and then having to deal with the potential of a $6.1 million qualifying offer at the end of the season, which, in all likelihood, will still be a huge overpay for a cap-strapped team. The flip side is that Montreal's center depth is already dreadful, and losing a full-time center from their roster would only exacerbate that problem unless they can then flip the compensatory picks (a first and third-round pick in 2022) for a top-six center.

There's also the ego side of this, which appears to be a very real factor.

Based on Kotkaniemi's recent track record and the fact that they scratched him in the Stanley Cup Final despite having five goals and eight points in 19 playoff games, it feels like Montreal will let Kotkaniemi walk and take the picks.

If that happens, the focus for the Hurricanes will be on where he fits, and the answer isn't overly simple. The 21-year-old Finn has been a full-time center in the NHL, and the Canes seem to have their center group all but solidified with

Sebastian Aho, Vincent Trocheck, Jordan Staal, and Derek Stepan.

This season, it seems likely that Kotkaniemi will slot in on the wing and perhaps get some run at center in case of injury or for faceoff matchups. Don Waddell and company have been trying to fortify their forward group since the opening of free agency.

The problem is that it's difficult to look at Kotkaniemi's last two seasons and see a bonafide top-nine forward that can put the Canes over the top in the short term, at least not without some context.

Over the last two seasons, Kotkaniemi has tallied just 11 goals and 28 points in 93 games and has been far less productive than he was in his 2018-19 rookie season, wherein he scored 11 goals and had 37 points.

His performance goes beyond the counting stats, though.

It's been well documented that Montreal has made a series of mistakes with his development. He came to North America and played in the NHL right away after getting drafted despite being undersized and likely needing time in the AHL, got moved all over the lineup when his production started to fade, and seemingly didn't have much trust from the coaching staff.

While Kotkaniemi's play on its own is a cause for concern, the way the Canadiens managed his development certainly played a role in him regressing instead of taking the next steps that you'd expect out of a third-overall pick.

There are areas in his game that are actually pretty attractive for a team looking for a top-nine forward. He is a playmaking forward, and Corey Sznajder's tracking data shows that he was a dynamic offensive generator in 2021 despite his lacking numbers.

Jesperi Kotkaniemi shots vs. passes and rush vs. forecheck chances in 2021. Corey Sznajder

Next to talented finishers, Kotkaniemi's playmaking ability should be valuable in the middle of a forward depth chart. He also bounced back from a bad defensive season in 2019-20 and was a well-above-average defensive forward in 2021,

excelling at moving the puck out of the defensive zone with possession.

Right now, he's a defensively stout playmaking forward whose playmaking hasn't led to goals.

He may play better on the wing, but even if he does, the possibility exists that he could find his way back into the middle of the ice. Trocheck will be a free agent after next season, and Staal's deal runs out after 2022-23. According to Georges Laraque, if Kotkaniemi does end up in Carolina, the two sides have tentatively agreed to a multi-year extension worth $4 million AAV. That deal can't be signed until January.

More than anything, it feels like the Hurricanes are trying to lock in a young, former third-overall pick for the future with hopes of him turning into a top-six center that gives them flexibility regarding their future moves in the middle of the ice.

For that to happen, Carolina has to give him the confidence to go out there and play his game. With consistent ice time and quality line mates, Kotkaniemi certainly has an opportunity to make good on his upside, which I perceive to be a quality two-way second-line center.

This has to happen quickly, though, because Waddell has stated that this team is firmly in win-now mode. Instead of going out and getting a proven top-six forward, they opted to take a pretty substantial risk by way of an offer sheet for an underperforming young player.

Carolina is banking on Kotkaniemi's last two seasons of offensive regression not being the red flag it can appear to be and that he can regain and build off of his rookie season production. If he manages to do that, the $6.1 million and compensatory picks will be worth it in the long term.

If he can't hit his stride with the Hurricanes, it's another questionable decision in an offseason full of questionable decisions.

Wolves sign Daniel Brickley

The Chicago Wolves announced Wednesday they have signed defenseman Daniel Brickley to a Standard Player Contract (SPC) for the 2021-22 season.

The Salt Lake City, Utah, native spent last three seasons with the Ontario Reign of the American Hockey League (AHL), recording five goals and 15 assists in 76 appearances. Additionally, Brickley skated in two games for Manitoba (AHL) on a loan to conclude the 2019-20 season.

A product of Minnesota State University, the 26-year-old played three NCAA seasons and notched 74 points (18 goals, 57 assists) in 107 appearances before forgoing his last collegiate year to sign with the National Hockey League's Los Angeles Kings. Brickley made his NHL debut and recorded his first NHL point for the Kings on April 5, 2018, against the Minnesota Wild.

Brickley joins forwards Stephen Harper, David Gust and Kyle Marino, goaltender Dylan Wells and defenseman Artyom Serikov as recent Wolves signees.

The Chicago Wolves open the 2021-22 season against the Rockford IceHogs on Saturday, Oct. 16, at Allstate Arena. The first 2,500 fans through the doors on Opening Night receive a Wolves Static Cling Schedule, courtesy of Turtle Wax.

Wolves Flex Packs consist of 10 ticket vouchers you can use for any game in any amount. To take advantage of this flexibility and savings, email a Wolves ticket representative here or call 1-800-THE-WOLVES.

Wolves set two exhibition games

The Chicago Wolves and Milwaukee Admirals will meet for a pair of exhibition games to close out training camp for the 2021-22 American Hockey League preseason.

The Wolves travel to Panther Arena for a 7 p.m. game on Friday, Oct. 8, in Milwaukee, then host the Admirals for a 7 p.m. game on Saturday, Oct. 9, at the Wolves Training Facility in Hoffman Estates.

Both teams figure to feature players who suited up together for the Wolves last season. When Milwaukee was unable to field a team for the shortened 2021 regular season, the Wolves and the NHL's Nashville Predators created a one-year affiliation in addition to the Wolves' long-term partnership with the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes — which

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meant Wolves head coach Ryan Warsofsky directed a squad filled with both teams' top prospects.

For the Wolves' home game Oct. 9 at the Triphahn Center, tickets are $8 and will be available via the Hoffman Estates Park District. Tickets can be purchased here starting Tuesday, Sept. 7. In accordance with the Cook County Department of Public Health's recent mandate, everyone over 2 years of age must wear a mask inside the arena.

The Wolves' 28th regular season begins with Opening Night, presented by Turtle Wax, on Saturday, Oct. 16, when the Rockford IceHogs make a 7 p.m. visit to Allstate Arena. The first 2,500 fans to enter the arena will receive a Wolves Static Cling Schedule.

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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

Sep 1, 2021

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:

SEASON	GAMES	GOALS	ASSISTS	POINTS	+/-
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.

HockeyViz.com

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.

ATTENTION, EVERYONE:

THIS IS JESPERI KOTKANIEMI'S EIGHTEENTH (18TH!) UNIQUE LINE COMBINATION IN 56 GAMES.

MATHEMATICALLY THAT'S THE EQUIVALENT OF HAVING A DIFFERENT TRIO ONCE EVERY 3.1 GAMES.

REASON WHY HIS OFFENSE HAS DRIED UP & HIS CONFIDENCE IS SHOT. NO QUESTION. HTTPS://T.CO/B8AZRLK36D

— ERIN MANNING WRITES (@EMANNINGWRITES) MAY 12, 2021

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, the 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 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 center, 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 center. It is exceedingly difficult to have success as a young center in the NHL unless you are a special talent (see: Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews). Even Nico Hischier, Jack Hughes and other young centers 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 who he has matched with Kotkaniemi:

So, maybe the money really could be worth it. All Kotkaniemi needs to do is make the jump to becomes 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.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.02.2021

1219911   Websites

The Athletic / How Canada (finally) beat Team USA at the women's worlds — and what it means ahead of the 2022 Olympics

By Hailey Salvian

Sep 1, 2021

Marie-Philip Poulin in overtime against the United States.

Eleven days ago, if you'd tried to predict how Canada might break its nine-year drought at the Women's World Championship, that's probably where you should have landed. After all, we've been here before.

On Tuesday night, in overtime against Team USA — on home soil, in front of family, friends, but no fans — of course, it was Poulin who scored the game-winner for Team Canada. With the game on the line, there is simply nobody better.

"When she had that puck streaking through the middle, who else do you want to have the puck on their stick than Poulin?" Canada coach Troy Ryan said postgame. "It's amazing how many big goals she's scored for Canada over her career."

For the record: It was Poulin's third gold medal-winning goal at the world championship or Olympics, after scoring the winners in the 2010 and 2014 Olympic finals, both against Team USA.

"She's a special player," said Brianne Jenner, who finished second in tournament scoring. "When you have that much talent and you have the work ethic that she has, I mean that's why she wears the C for us and that's why she's been so clutch for us. She has everything that you need in a great hockey player. And it was an honour to have the assignment of getting the puck on her stick."

It was Jenner who opened the scoring for Canada in the second period, and later got the assist on Poulin's winner. The goal, scored less than eight minutes into the first overtime period, was not initially called on the ice after going top corner past U.S. goaltender Nicole Hensley's glove and out. Poulin started to celebrate and signalled to the officials that it was a good goal, but play continued. Not for long though, as the buzzer sounded 45 seconds later.

"To be honest," Poulin said after the game. "I knew it was in."

Team Canada is now world champion for the first time since 2012, ending a near-decade of dominance by Team USA at the tournament.

"It's been a long time coming," Poulin said.

How they got here probably wasn't as easy to predict heading into the tournament after such a long layoff. Canada went 7-0 en route to the gold medal, beating their rivals twice in six days. They were dominant, outscoring their opponents 34-7. There was a fresh attitude among the group and a complete buy-in. They were fast, skilled and a pain to play against. There were new-look line combinations and emerging bright young stars. It was, without question, the best version of Team Canada hockey that we've seen in years.

And just like that, Canada — coming off a bronze at the 2019 worlds and a silver at the 2018 Olympics — has re-established itself as the dominant hockey nation leading into the 2022 Olympics, which is only six months away.

As Melodie Daoust said: "There's another medal coming up pretty soon."

So, with that in mind, let's dive into some of what we learned about Team Canada through world championships and what it means moving forward.

Defeating Team USA (again)

I started this way after the preliminary rounds, and it only feels right to do it again. Especially after I raised the question of whether Canada could beat the Americans again when it mattered.

While last week's 5-1 win against Team USA was a major surprise, this game was about what you'd expect from a Canada-U.S. final. It was a lot closer in terms of puck possession, shots and actual goals scored. It was chippy. It needed extra time (three-on-three overtime as per new IIHF regulations) before a gold medal was awarded.

And the game delivered, as this rivalry always does on the international stage.

The official shots on goal at the end of regulation were 26-24 in favour of Canada and 32-26 at the end of the game — Canada outshot the U.S. 6-1 in overtime. And, according to data tracked by contributing analyst Alyssa Longmuir, the total shot attempts were similarly close at 57-55 in favour of Team USA at the end of regulation.

This game taught us a few things.

First, that Canada is resilient. It can be down by two goals, not panic, and come back and win. It also shows that Canada can battle in a tight game against the best teams in the world and still come out on top like it also did in Game 1 against Finland.

Analytically speaking, only 24 of the 57 U.S. shot attempts were on goal, and that tells us a lot about the Canadian blue line, too. Except for a two-goal first period, Canada's defence corps did a good job keeping the U.S. attack in check, either by keeping the Americans on the perimeter, blocking shots or forcing missed shots by getting their sticks into shooting lanes. For a blue line with only two 2018 Olympians, Renata Fast and Jocelyn Larocque, that's a good sign.

This win also served as a confidence builder for Canada.

Canada's losses to the United States at the worlds and at the last Olympics in Pyeongchang have hung over them for quite some time. In fact, only five players on this roster had ever won a world championship before Tuesday night.

There will be no more referencing of Team USA's nine-year winning streak and no more second-guessing whether the Canadians can beat the Americans when it counts. They can and they did. They will head into the Olympics believing in their group, and knowing they can beat anybody, and what that does for a locker room cannot be understated.

Top-six depth

One of the biggest takeaways from this tournament is that Canada can roll, essentially, two No. 1 lines. Call it, their 1A, and 1B lines, if you will. And that is largely due to Canada separating the former top-line duo of Poulin and Daoust.

Throughout this year's worlds, Poulin centred the top line with Jenner and Victoria Bach, who would often exchange shifts with Jamie Lee Rattray. Poulin and Jenner ranked in the top four in tournament scoring and combined for six goals and 19 points. Rattray added four goals, second on the team, and five points. Bach added two assists in her worlds debut. That's 10 goals and 26 points for the 1A line.

Meanwhile, the Daoust, Spooner, Fillier line was arguably Canada's best and most consistently impactful line. Through seven games, their line also combined for 26 points. The chemistry on this line was evident from Day 1, and all three players complemented each other well. Daoust brought the elite hands and vision, Spooner brought the net-front presence and scoring touch, while Fillier brought an entire toolkit that makes her one of the bright young stars on this roster.

I'll admit, I was skeptical when I first saw Daoust and Poulin split up. Why fix what isn't broken? But now, Canada has a solid one-two punch in its top six that it will surely dip back into come Beijing.

Daoust is now the MVP of a world championship and Olympic tournament. She should no longer be looked at as a product of playing with Poulin. This is a lethal player who has shown she can drive her own line and come up big for Canada.

The kids are all right

Canada's young rising stars have been one of the hot topics over the last two weeks. And rightfully so.

Fillier is a generational talent and has been tapped as the future cornerstone for Team Canada. She scored three goals and three points in seven games in her first world championship, while playing top-six minutes and being used on the power play and penalty kill. Her former Princeton teammate Claire Thompson stepped into a top-four role in her first world championship and looked confident and poised in every game. She's smart defensively, can make a good first pass and started to show more confidence jumping into the rush as the tournament went on.

Bach, Ella Shelton, Emma Maltais, Ashton Bell, Kristin O'Neill and Kristen Campbell also played in their first worlds. They maybe weren't as productive as Fillier and Thompson or used as much in the gold medal game in some cases, but Hockey Canada officials see a bright future for each young player on their centralized training camp roster. And they believe these players will only get better once they are training daily with their teammates and Team Canada staff.

"From a team-building perspective, you think of what six months of centralization will do to them, and you get really excited," said Gina Kingsbury, the director of the senior women's team. "It's that feeling of, 'If I can get my hands on these athletes for six months, I know I can really bring her to a whole new level.'"

There was a lot of promise at worlds from Canada's young core. And from now until Beijing, Hockey Canada will be looking to see how each young player improves over the next six months and who can grab an Olympic roster spot.

It's Ann-Renée Desbiens' net

Heading into worlds, one of my storylines to watch was what I projected to be a healthy battle between Desbiens and Emerance Maschmeyer for the No. 1 goalie job.

Maschmeyer had two wins and two shutouts (facing a total of 15 shots) in two starts, but Desbiens earned her place as the No. 1 goalie.

Desbiens started five games, won five games, got one shutout and posted a 1.37 goals-against average and allowed only seven goals on 76 shots again. (Around a 91 percent save percentage). It was a successful tournament for a player who was cut from Team Canada just a few years ago and "told to try out again next season." After a successful college career, Desbiens walked away from hockey, she thought, for good. Making the journey back wasn't easy for Desbiens, as told by Sportsnet's Kristina Rutherford. But she's back, and was a central piece of Canada's

gold medal on Tuesday, making 23 saves, including 17 straight from the second period until the end of overtime.

There were some bad bounces and some uncomfortable moments along the way, but it's clear that, right now, she is the No. 1 goalie for Canada. It's her net to lose.

Olympic roster decisions

Once Canada is done celebrating its victory, the team will begin its Olympic preparations via a centralized training camp in Calgary for the next several months. Twenty-nine players will be at the camp, and Hockey Canada expects to name its Olympic roster around December before breaking for Christmas.

Because the world championship was cancelled in 2020 and pushed back until August, Canada has a nice sample size from 25 of their players to take into consideration when looking to name the team going to Beijing. And there will be no shortage of questions around that process.

Did any players rise or fall on the depth chart? Who is on the bubble? Did Erin Ambrose do enough to crack her first Olympic roster?

Someone like Jamie Bourbonnais, who had a tough tournament, likely has a bit more to prove in centralization. O'Neill and Laura Stacey will need to show what their role can be after getting limited opportunities during the tournament.

Finally, I say Ambrose has done enough to make the Olympic team. Ambrose was named to the Media All-Star team as one of the top defenders in the tournament. She scored two goals and five points for Canada, was a figure as the power-play quarterback and paired off with Thompson, forming a reliable duo in the top four.

To be fair, it's probably a little early to make any concrete decisions as anyone could improve their standing over the next six months, but this tournament gives us a great place to start in terms of projecting the next Olympic roster.

Poulin is still clutch

We covered this already. But it's worth remembering before you place your bets for Beijing.

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1219912   Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL teams have more data than ever; figuring out what matters is new test

Justin Bourne@jtbourne

September 1, 2021, 2:34 PM

When I left sports media to join an American Hockey League coaching staff in November 2017, I felt like I had a pretty good grip on how to evaluate players and teams. I grew up around the NHL and eventually played up to the AHL myself, and I was always a player who wanted to understand our systems thoroughly before I went over the boards, so I had a good grip on what's supposed to happen out there.

Having spent years after my playing days watching and talking about the league for a variety of outlets, I had come to trust the ol' eye test too. To go with that, I had enough fear of the analytics movement to recognize I should either force myself to learn what the numbers meant or risk getting left behind. It was that mix that got me the job in the first place, and I was eager to put my abilities to the test in the real world.

It wasn't long after I started – a month into the season or so - that I saw our first coach's packet from the analytics department, which presented us with everything we needed to know about our upcoming opponent and our own team over the season's small sample to date. It was a little overwhelming at first, as pages of numbers can be when you don't know what you're looking at.

I remember seeing a number that showed that over the past few games, our zone exit percentage was ... well, whatever it was. If I told you it was 62 per cent, or it was 28 per cent or really anything outside the most extreme percentiles, most hockey fans probably wouldn't blink. Because, y'know ... what's good anyway? It was one of those moments where I was stuck in my own head, new in the coaches' office, wondering: "Should I ask if that's good or bad? Would that look dumb?" I finally had the type of internal information in front of me I had been excited to see but didn't know what it was telling me.

Of course, the only dumb thing would be not asking, but I wasn't pumped about exposing myself so early. I ended up trying to make a joke about it to get the conversation going, and in the end, asking wasn't dumb at all, because others had questions too.

*I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Eventually "league average" and "team average" were added to a variety of numbers for quick reference points. With statistics, context is everything. Who had we dressed in those few games (did we have injuries?), who had we played (were they a good forechecking team?), what's typical, in many cases, the answer to "Is that good" doesn't even exist as a yes or no without more information.

It was a small example of a major challenge in data analysis that's gotten much more difficult around the NHL today: Here are the numbers, but what do they mean, what useful bits of on-ice information can be pulled from those oceans of data? I say "data analysis today," but I'm sure that's forever been at the root of statistical analysis, it's just that the NHL is at a crossroads of information where more advanced numbers are commonly accepted across 32 teams (to varying degrees), but there's just so damn much of it coming into existence right now, so do you have the right people to find the relevant context to read the proper meaning into those numbers?

It's the "so damn much of it coming into existence right now" part that I'm focusing on here today. I left the Marlies to spend more time around my growing family before the 2018 season, and since then, there's been a boom in available information, thanks in large part to the emergence of quality tracking data.

NHL teams have some amount of proprietary information and have built their own internal databases to pick through. Most teams have had that for years. But more recently the NHL has given them access to the player tracking numbers they've been working on, with far more coming as puck tracking hopefully integrates smoothly into gameplay in the year ahead. At first, that mountain of information from the league would've been daunting and so the question will be asked of teams: do you have people who can make sense of it? Do you have people who will misinterpret it or not even bother with it? Can you learn anything good from this information aside from neat trivia like, "Did you know Connor McDavid skates fast?"

It reminds me a bit of one of the first windows for improvement teams had when analytics first emerged as relevant for teams from the Great Corsi Wars of almost a decade ago. The early adopters got an advantage, the next wave didn't generally fall behind, and the last accepters, well, they had fallen behind. Similarly, right now it'll be about the quality of people teams have internally, not whether they have people or not. There's useful information in tracking data, and those with good people will get ahead, those in the middle won't fall behind, and you know what comes after that.

Further to the NHL's tracking data, there are companies like SportLogiq who do their own tracking and many NHL teams have signed up to get their hands on their information. While the company provides them

access to their database, teams are free to do what they like with the numbers once they've paid for them.

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.

Some may integrate it into their internal systems, some may use it as it's provided, but ultimately what it comes down to is, "What answers can you find within and can those answers help your team get even a small percentage better?"

To go along with this data is the improved access to global video, meaning there are few players around the world you can't watch play. Teams now cannot just rely on a few scouts or pure stats to assess the progress of international skaters. That's only a good thing if the additional eyeballs you have on those games are any good at scouting. You're seeing a theme here.

More than ever, NHL teams will be punished for hiring buddies, while those who seek out legitimate front office talent should thrive in the decade ahead. It's impossible to perfectly predict how people and teams will develop, but in theory anyway, there should be less abject guessing in the years ahead.

There are no more "analytics" teams in the NHL, as all organizations embrace increased volumes of information. What there will be, are teams who excel at handling the oceans of it they're being given, while others do their best to simply tread water, and end up going under.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.02.2021

1219913   Websites

Blackhawks resolve lawsuit over alleged use of facial recognition software

By Rick Westhead

An Illinois man who claimed the Chicago Blackhawks inappropriately used facial recognition software to obtain and store his biometric data and pursued a proposed class-action lawsuit has agreed to voluntarily dismiss his lawsuit, the team says.

In an amended complaint filed March 20, 2020, in Cook County, Ill., court, James Allen said he attended a Blackhawks game at the United Center on Dec. 18, 2018.

While Allen's claim was filed in 2020, details of his case and the Blackhawks' defence had not been widely reported before now. The plaintiffs and Blackhawks have argued this year over discovery issues, according to court records.

In an email sent to TSN on Wednesday, Blackhawks spokesman Adam Rogowin wrote Allen agreed to withdraw his complaint, citing an Aug. 23 court document.

"This matter has been resolved and plaintiff moves to dismiss this case with prejudice," the court document says.

The lawsuit alleged the Blackhawks "scanned Mr. Allen's facial geometry from security camera footage and stored a facial geometry template for Mr. Allen. The defendant failed to inform Mr. Allen in writing that it was collecting his biometric identifiers or information, the purpose and length of term for such collection, and failed to obtain their written consent before defendant collected his facial geometry scan."

Allen's attorneys did not respond to requests for comment.

The Biometric Information Privacy Act of Illinois, or BIPA, passed in 2008. State lawmakers were concerned at the time about the use of personal information by corporations after a local company that let customers pay in stores with their fingerprints went bankrupt, and it discussed selling the fingerprint database.

Of the U.S. states that have stand-alone biometric privacy laws, Illinois' law mandates that companies obtain written permission before collecting a person's fingerprints, facial scans or other identifying biological characteristics. The law gives residents the ability to sue companies for up to $5,000 per violation.

Allen's claim also alleged the Blackhawks "never established or followed a publicly available written policy establishing a retention schedule and guidelines for permanently destroying scans of Mr. Allen's facial geometry."

The Blackhawks denied Allen's claims.

"[The Blackhawks franchise] denies it collected Mr. Allen's 'biometric identifiers or information,' denies it violated BIPA, and denies any remaining allegations…," the team wrote in a July 23, 2020, response.

Allen was asking a judge to approve a class action that would include all customers who attended a Blackhawks game between Oct. 15, 2014, and the date his lawsuit was filed.

"Based on the investigation by his counsel, Mr. Allen reasonably believes that the class comprises tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of members," Allen's claim said. "The exact number of persons the class can be determined from records maintained by the defendant."

The Blackhawks said since Allen filed his claim in 2020, a two-year limitations period would prevent the team from legal exposure earlier than that. The team also cited legal language written on game tickets in which the holder of tickets "expressly releases United Center joint venture, performers, athletes, playing teams, leagues and their current and former players" from "all actions, suits, claims, judgments, injuries and/or damages" in connection with events at the Chicago arena.

Facial recognition software was first developed in the 1960s. The technology can identify thousands of points on a person's face – determining the distance between the eyes or the shape of the nose – and compare that data with other photos, such as those kept on a police database.

Computers can now compare more than one million faces per second, meaning companies and law enforcement can use the software in real time as fans file into venues.

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