



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 9, 2021

## The Athletic

### Hurricanes Olympic tiers: Which players could represent their country in Beijing?

By Sara Civian

According to our one-and-only Michael Russo, the announcement was “reluctant” for obvious reasons.

Regardless, for the first time since Sochi in 2014, the NHL and the NHLPA announced that NHL players can participate in the Winter Olympics, taking place in February 2022 in Beijing.

The agreement does allow “for the possibility of a later decision to withdraw in the event involving COVID conditions are deemed by the NHL/NHLPA to render participation by NHL players to be impractical or unsafe,” so don’t get too excited.

But you can get a little excited, especially if you’re a Canes fan with an affinity for Finland.

Locks

Nino Niederreiter (F), Switzerland

Give me fuel, give me fire, give me Olympic Niederreiter.

Of the 12 active Swiss NHL players, Niederreiter ranks second in career points. He trails only Roman Josi, who is a defenseman. Though there are only a few NHL players from Switzerland, the individual members of the group pack a pretty big punch. Niederreiter will likely join the ranks of Josi and Kevin Fiala on Team Switzerland.

Niederreiter made the team in 2014, playing a total of four games.

Sebastian Aho (F), Finland

Some of Aho’s favorite memories come from the loads of experience he has representing Finland in his youth, including three medals (one gold). You can bet he’ll revel in the chance to represent Finland on an international stage as huge as the Olympics. He’ll join a stacked lineup with names like Mikko Rantanen, Patrik Laine, Aleksander Barkov and ...

Teuvo Teravainen (F), Finland

Teravainen also has ample experience representing Finland, most notably captaining the Finns to gold at the world juniors in 2014. Despite a tough year with COVID-19 and injuries last season, Teravainen made a full recovery and had a strong playoff showing. Barring any more bad luck, he’s a shoo-in.

Dominik Bokk (F), Germany

It might seem like a stretch to consider a prospect who hasn’t yet played a shift in the NHL a “lock” for an Olympic roster.

But out of the seven total German forwards active in the NHL, only five have scored more than one point.

Bokk, drafted 25th in 2018, logged six goals and eight points in seven games for Germany in the 2020 world juniors, and nine goals and 18 points in 29 games for the Wolves last season. Clearly he’s adjusted to professional hockey just fine, and that combined with his success representing Germany and the lack of German players in the NHL makes this a lock to me.

Martin Necas (F), Czech Republic

If Petr Mrazek and Necas reuniting as teammates once again doesn’t make your heart melt, I don’t know what will.

I went into this exercise wondering if Necas would actually be a lock because of all the awesome Czech players that came to mind, but he’s quickly joining that group. Necas scored 41 points in 53 games in his 2020-21 breakout season — sixth among all Czech players in the NHL. He’s already 14th in points all-time among active Czech players in the NHL in far fewer games than all but one (Dominik Kubalik).

He can also play wing or center if needed.

Safe to say he’s a lock, and safe to say I underestimated the career he’s already had among his countrymen.

Frederik Andersen (G), Denmark

There are eight active Danish NHL players and Andersen is the only goalie among them. Further, he is the only Danish goalie in NHL history.

The door’s wide open.

Jacob Slavin (D), USA

This is one of those situations where you might overthink it because sometimes you wonder how much everyone is actually paying attention to how good Jacob Slavin is. But then you remember this is Team USA, and the coaches — Mike Sullivan, John Hynes, David Quinn, Todd Reirden and Ryan Miller — all have deep roots in college hockey.

Must have a strong first half

Jesper Kotkaniemi (F), Finland

It’s all eyes on Kotkaniemi at the beginning of the season, and the Olympics add another element. The 21-year-old is already No. 16 among active Finnish NHL players in points



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and significantly higher in points per game. He's also represented Finland in the world juniors.

I'd say there's a 98 percent chance he makes the team, but he's going to be thrust into a lot of changes — new team, (somewhat) new position at wing, new responsibilities and lifestyle.

Just add the Olympics to the laundry list of reasons why it's important for him to start out strong and confident with the Hurricanes.

Antti Raanta (G), Finland

There aren't an abundance of Finnish goalies to go around, but there are more than enough to fill out a three-man roster. Tuukka Rask and Juuse Saros are the locks — if Rask is

healthy. Rask is expected to be recovering from hip surgery well into the 2021-22 season. Will he be able to recover and return to form in time?

If not, Raanta will almost definitely make the team. But if Rask is healthy and willing to represent Finland, Raanta might be fighting with Wild goalie Kaapo Kahkonen for that third spot.

Long shots

Jesper Fast (F), Sweden

I mean, hey, if like three or four Swedes either don't want to play in the Olympics for whatever reason and/or get injured, Fast would be a serviceable addition to the team.



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## Kotkaniemi Excited to Join Canes

Finnish forward "can't wait" to get started in Carolina

When the Carolina Hurricanes tendered an offer sheet to Jesperi Kotkaniemi on Aug. 28, the hockey world was abuzz. After all, it came just two years after the Montreal Canadiens tendered Sebastian Aho an offer sheet, and the intrigue was set as to whether Montreal could match given their salary cap space.

The Canadiens decided not to match the Canes' one-year, \$6.1M offer, and with the 21-year-old officially joining the Hurricanes on Sept. 4, it became clear both he and Carolina view the deal as a win-win.

"I was really excited when I saw the offer sheet for the first time," Kotkaniemi said at his introductory media availability. "I've been talking with the Finnish guys over there and I've only heard good things about the team and the city, so I think it will be a great fit for me."

The forward, who Canes President and General Manager Don Waddell projects to play left wing, will get a fresh start in Raleigh with a team that's made three straight playoff appearances, and is fresh off a Central Division title in the shortened 2020-2021 season.

"He'll get to play with some very good players and we think he's got the skill to be able to do that," Waddell said. "We were looking to add to our top group there and to be able to add a player like Jesperi, who's only 21-years-old and will continue to get better, we feel very fortunate to do that."

Kotkaniemi was selected third overall in the 2018 draft, the same draft the Canes held the No. 2 pick. Just three years removed, there's still a familiarity between Carolina and Kotkaniemi, which led to a natural discussion between the sides.

"At that time we discussed the player (Kotkaniemi) at great length and did interviews, so everybody was very familiar with the player, not only as a player but as a person," Waddell said.

After a flurry of offseason moves - which have spanned the forward group, defensive pairs, and goalie tandem - the Finnish forward figures to be one of the last, if not the last, major acquisition before official team workouts begin Sept. 22.

"With this latest addition we feel very good up front," Waddell said. "As we approach training camp and the season, I think we all feel really good about our hockey club."

For Kotkaniemi, his former organization is in the rearview mirror, and the upcoming campaign is the focus for a player who knows a special season could be ahead in Raleigh.

"I'm just really excited for this opportunity and I can't wait to get things started," he said. "Carolina is a great team, and they will be a contender next year. It's always an honor to be part of a team like that."



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## Taking a look at which Canes may play in the 2022 Olympic Games

By Alec Sawyer

There was great news last week for fans of international hockey, as the NHL, NHLPA and IIHF announced an agreement that will once again allow NHL players to participate in the Olympics.

The NHL was absent from the 2018 Olympics in PyeongChang, last participating in Sochi back in 2014. Now as the Olympic eyes turn to Beijing in 2022, NHLers will return to Olympic ice once again.

For the Canes, there could be a lot of familiar faces on the ice for fans, as Carolina is loaded with a roster that could send as many as 10 or more players to the games.

Back in 2014, the Canes had four players participate, with none of those still on the Carolina squad.

But things are obviously a lot different for the current iteration of the Canes, as one of the most talented rosters in the NHL will certainly send quite a few players to the biggest stage in international sports.

There are 12 teams that will make up the men's ice hockey field at the Olympics: Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Russia\*, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

\*Like it did in Tokyo 2020 this year, Russia will participate in the 2022 Olympics as the Russian Olympic Committee

The Hurricanes currently have rostered players from nine of those 12 countries, with Latvia, Slovakia and host China being the only exceptions. Of those nine countries, the Canes should see a player play for at least six.

Here's a look at who could represent the Hurricanes at the Olympics, sorted alphabetically by country:

### Canada

Frankly, the Canes probably won't have a Canadian playing for the Olympic team. The Canes' best players aren't from Canada, and there are so many talented Canadian players across the league that it is hard to imagine the Hurricanes will get a player on this team.

Hockey analytics writer JFresh Hockey did a Twitter poll for the five major teams (Canada, Russia, Sweden, Finland, USA), and no Canes player even received a vote for the Canadian team.

### Czech Republic

Locks: Martin Necas

There are currently just 34 NHL players from the Czech Republic, so most of them will make the Czech team if they want to play.

Even if the Czech Republic was well represented in the league, it'd be a no-brainer for Martin Necas to play for his country at the Olympics anyway.

Necas is a budding star, one who scored 41 points in 53 games this past year. He's also played for his country plenty, appearing in the World Junior Championships four times and scoring five points in seven games as a 19-year old in the 2018 World Championships.

Barring injury or a personal decision not to play, Necas should be in Beijing come February.

### Denmark

Locks: Frederik Andersen

New Canes goalie Frederik Andersen is the only Danish goalie in the history of the NHL, so his inclusion on Denmark's first Olympic team ever will be obvious.

Andersen is by far the most successful goalie in the country's history, and he's played for a number of World Junior teams in the past. He also played for Denmark in the 2018 World Championships.

### Finland

Locks: Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen

Possible: Jesperi Kotkaniemi, Antti Raanta

The Canes have had a lot of success in recent years with players from Finland, and it will be the most heavily Canes-represented country at the 2022 games.

The first two are obvious selections, as Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen are elite NHL players among the very best from Finland. Their familiarity with each other will also certainly be a big boost for the Finnish team, as it's not too often that guys who have spent as much time as linemates as Aho and Teravainen can do the same for a national team.

Both have played plenty for Finland in World Juniors, World Championships and the World Cup of Hockey.

The other Finnish forward from the Canes that could play in the Olympics is the newest member of the Hurricanes, as the recently offer-sheeted Jesperi Kotkaniemi also resides from Finland.

Kotkaniemi is a very talented player, one who may be on the fringe of the Finland national team but should likely still make



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the roster. Kotkaniemi has been a World Juniors player for Finland in the past, and he was included on the roster in the JFresh fan vote mentioned earlier.

The fourth and final Finn from the Canes that could potentially make the Olympic roster is newly acquired goalie Antti Raanta, though his inclusion is much less likely. With Juuse Saros, Tuukka Rask and Joonas Korpisalo all from Finland, it would likely take one of them being injured or choosing to sit out for Raanta to make the team.

Germany

Possible: Dominik Bokk

Canes prospect Dominik Bokk may not play a ton for Carolina this upcoming season, but he should play for the German national team in the Olympics.

Germany currently has just nine players in the NHL, so Bokk being right on the cusp does make him among the country's better options. He's played a ton for Germany in World Juniors and other competitions, with over 70 points for the country at all levels and even a few games with the senior team.

Bokk isn't a lock to play in the same way that Aho and Teravainen are for Finland, but he's certainly a likely choice to be included on the German roster.

Russian Olympic Committee

Locks: Andrei Svechnikov

Russians love their hockey and there are a ton of talented Russian players both in the NHL and abroad, but it's a pretty safe bet to assume Svechnikov will be on the ROC team for the 2022 Olympics.

He's one of the brightest up-and-coming stars in the NHL, and he's already proven he can be a dangerous goal scorer on the top level. Barring personal decision or injury, Svechnikov will be on the Russian team, even though he hasn't actually played a ton for the country in the past. It's hard to play for the junior teams a lot when you're already in the NHL, after all.

Sweden

Possible: Jesper Fast

This one is a bit of a long shot, as Jesper Fast is probably a little bit further down Sweden's list of forwards than a lot of other players on this list.

He's a good NHL player, but there are a lot of good NHL players from Sweden. Fast's chances of making the Olympics are slim to none, but there's always a chance.

Switzerland

Locks: Nino Niederreiter

There are currently 12 active NHL players from Switzerland, and Niederreiter trails only Roman Josi in career points among that group.

Niederreiter has also spent a ton of time playing for Switzerland in the past, logging over 51 games played for the country over the years. He also has Olympic Games experience, playing in four games for Switzerland in 2014.

Niederreiter will be on the Swiss roster in February.

United States

Locks: Jaccob Slavin

Possible: Brett Pesce, Vincent Trocheck

The biggest question marks for the Hurricanes and the Olympics come on Team USA, as the Canes have a couple guys who are on the cusp of making or missing the team.

For starters though, one guy who is not on the cusp is Jaccob Slavin. Slavin has solidified himself as one of the best defensemen in the NHL over the past few years, and he is certainly a top-four American defenseman as well. He should be on the team.

Behind him though things get interesting, as both Brett Pesce and Vincent Trocheck have a decent claim to make the roster.

Pesce has shown he's a top-caliber NHL defenseman, but he's going to be fighting the likes of Quinn Hughes, Ryan McDonagh and Seth Jones for some of the final roster spots. A good start to the season for Pesce could certainly help his case.

As for Trocheck, he sits in a very similar boat. He'd make the roster for every other team besides Canada, but on the US squad he's going to be among the guys competing for one of the final roster spots.

Wrapping Up

The Canes seemingly have seven absolute locks to make the Olympics, but with guys like Bokk, Kotkaniemi, Trocheck and Pesce that number could easily reach double digits.

It will be fun to watch for Canes fans, and there should be some good matchups.

Svechnikov, Necas, Niederreiter and Andersen will all play group stage games in Group B, while Bokk could face off with the Americans in Group A.



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## Q-and-A with David Cotton

Last season, David Cotton became just the third rookie in the Chicago Wolves' 27-year history to lead the team in goals. The powerful center from Parker, Texas, produced 14 goals in just 26 games to help the Wolves capture yet another Central Division title.

With a year of professional hockey under his belt, the 24-year-old Cotton has set his sights higher for the 2021-22 season. We caught up with him as prospect camp approaches in North Carolina.

Q: What have you been up to this summer?

A: I was down in Dallas for most of the offseason just training. Outside of that I tried to golf and spend time with the family as much as possible. I came out to Raleigh about three weeks ago to get some training in here before camp gets started.

Q: Any other Canes prospects come down there with you?

A: Jack Drury and I came out here at the same time.

Q: Top memory of the summer?

A: Getting my first hole in one was definitely the peak of the summer!

Q: What have you been working on training-wise during the offseason?

A: I've been trying to focus on the base strength aspect as much as possible and starting to incorporate more explosive movements with that strength. I've also been working on the conditioning aspect too, especially because this season will be a full year. Overall, I always just try to come back stronger and faster than the year before.

Q: How would you describe your first year a pro last season and what are you looking forward to in Year 2?

A: The first year was overall a great experience given all of the obstacles we had to face between COVID and having two organizations, but we all were able to make it work and I think that showed with our record and success on the ice. This upcoming year, I'm definitely looking forward to getting in front of some fans and competing for a trophy.



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# SportScan

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

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The Athletic / 'This goes beyond me' — Coyotes create program for hockey coaches to improve diversity

By Ryan S. Clark Sep 8, 2021

Duante' Abercrombie and Nathaniel Brooks are hockey coaches. They are also Black men coaching a sport in which the number of those who look like them on a bench is still growing. Both were going about their lives when filmmaker Kwame Damon Mason reached out. The creator of the "Soul on Ice" documentary separately told Abercrombie and Brooks that he wanted to follow them with a camera crew to gain insight into what it was like to be a hockey coach for a day. Mason also asked them to keep a random week in September available on their calendars.

He could not explain why. At least not yet.

Abercrombie and Brooks agreed to all of it. Only to then have something else happen.

"We went a whole day of filming, and I did not even ask what this was all for because I felt like it would have been disrespectful," Abercrombie explained. "Kwame presented me with an iPad and it was a video from (Arizona Coyotes general manager) Bill Armstrong inviting me to development camp. I almost broke down, but I held it together."

Mason did the same thing with Brooks, giving him an iPad with a video message from Armstrong. The Coyotes GM explained how Abercrombie and Brooks would be the first participants in a coaching internship program designed to give diverse coaches a chance to learn from an NHL coaching staff. Coyotes coach Andre Tourigny and his staff will have Abercrombie and Brooks join them during the team's development camp in Arizona from Sept. 9-13.

The 34-year-old Abercrombie is a Washington, D.C., native who is entering his third season as an assistant coach at Division III Stevenson University's men's program in Maryland. He is also going into his fourth season with the Washington Little Caps program and will oversee the U-19 Triple A team. Brooks, 35, grew up in Richmond Hill, Ont., and is a

development coach for the Ryerson University men's program in Toronto, while also coaching in the Don Mills Flyers' youth setup.

Going through the program will allow Abercrombie and Brooks the opportunity to take part in the daily activities a coach encounters throughout an NHL development camp. They will be involved in meetings and training sessions, while also gaining as much knowledge as possible from an NHL coaching staff in an authentic environment. Furthermore, it will also be the first development camp for Tourigny and his staff since he was hired by the Coyotes this offseason.

"I know that this goes beyond me," Brooks said. "What makes this special is the doors opening for myself, but it is opening doors for all of the people who are going to come after us as well. What the Coyotes are doing is something special. I feel like this is a huge step in our quest for hockey to be more diverse."

Nathaniel Brooks (Courtesy of the Coyotes)

Hockey's attempt to gain a stronger understanding regarding diversity continues to be an ongoing discussion. So often, the conversation has shifted to getting more fans of color involved with the game, and seeing more players of color involved in both the men's and women's game. Yet questions have been raised in regards to finding more diverse coaches. The NHL has not had a Black head coach since Dirk Graham coached the Chicago Blackhawks during the 1998-99 season. But there are a handful of NHL coaches of color such as Frantz Jean, Samuel Kim, Nigel Kirwan, Sudarshan Maharaj, Manny Malhotra and Tim Ohashi, who are currently serving on staffs throughout the league.

Former NHL goaltender Fred Braithwaite and longtime forward Joel Ward recently completed their first seasons on the Henderson Silver Knights' staff in the AHL. Braithwaite is the team's goaltending coach, while Ward served as an assistant. Earlier this month, the ECHL's Cincinnati Cyclones promoted assistant Jason Payne to head coach. That made Payne the only Black head coach throughout any level of professional hockey in North America. Kelsey Koelzer was hired by Division III Arcadia University in 2019, and became the first Black female head coach in NCAA history, with the program set to begin its inaugural campaign this season. There are collegiate assistants at the Division I level, such as former NHL assistant Paul Jerrard at the University of Nebraska-Omaha and Leon Heyward who left Colorado College to join the staff at the University of St. Thomas.

The NHL Coaches Association, in a partnership with the NHL, started the BIPOC coaches program in 2020. The first year the program was



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comprised of 40 BIPOC coaches throughout the continent. Abercrombie and Brooks are both members of that program.

So while there has been some growth, more could be coming.

"I think honestly, we are on our way to that," Brooks said. "The way I gauge that is here in Toronto, we had Kevin Weekes who played in the NHL. We had my generation of guys like Anthony Stewart, Wayne Simmonds, and there was a handful of us playing in the (Greater Toronto Hockey League). Now, you walk into a rink and there are a handful of kids playing on every team. The more kids we get playing with the right leaders and right mentors, the more we are going to produce coaches. It will not be a novelty anymore and I am happy that I get to be a part of that first step. That is just in Toronto. I know in the United States, it is the same sort of thing. I think we are going to see over the next decade or two decades more opportunities for Black coaches."

Coyotes CEO and president Xavier Gutierrez said the idea started when Mason spoke at an NHL executive inclusion committee meeting about an opportunity to bring more diversity to the coaching ranks. Afterward, Gutierrez and Mason spoke in greater detail about an initiative that would see coaches of color come into an NHL environment and learn from NHL coaches. Gutierrez agreed with Mason's vision and presented the idea to Armstrong and Tourigny, who both immediately said they were on board.

Gutierrez said he deferred to Mason when it came to identifying which coaches would be the first in the program's history. Mason sent Abercrombie's and Brooks' backgrounds to Gutierrez, who felt strongly about having them as the first two individuals to take part in something the Coyotes plan to continue in the future.

"We saw this opportunity that they are great coaches and never had that experience," Gutierrez said. "That can only make them better coaches. That can only improve us as an organization with our coaching staff, our training staff and our hockey operations staff and as an organization by having talented individuals who are looking for an opportunity. ... You are going to be seeing talented coaches in Duante' and Nathaniel be in the room and be on the ice with the best coaches in the world and that makes all of us better. That makes our sport better."

Abercrombie and Brooks each have end-all goals they want to pursue. Abercrombie wants to become an NHL assistant someday, while Brooks would like to become an NHL coach.

They are each more than aware that getting there will take patience and time. It is another reason why they spoke at great lengths about why they were so thankful to be chosen. Even if they were both under the initial impression that they were just going to be the subjects of a documentary.

So what is the mentality for two coaches going into a program like this?

Brooks said his approach is to learn and, if he can, contribute in any way possible. He has already spoken with Coyotes development coach Alex Henry, who explained how the opportunities are going to be there to present his insight. Abercrombie admitted that he might be taking a bit of an extreme approach. He reached out to everyone he knows in the NBA, NHL and the collegiate level to see what they would do, along with what questions they would ask if they were in his position. He then asked them what questions they would want to be asked by someone who was shadowing them at their jobs.

"My mind went to something Brian Burke once said about always being prepared," Abercrombie said. "If you come in knowing every player, what shot they are and all those little details, and that is where my mind went. I started typing notes on my iPad and started looking at their draft picks over the last five years to know their names along with where they played. That way, I can give them as much energy as I can. I've heard that might be a bit too much. But they might want you to come in and I happen to be in a meeting. It could be that something is said and it could be about something I have researched with what we are talking about needs to be said. That is how I feel I can help the organization."

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The Athletic / Nielsen vs. the networks: The latest ratings controversy and what it means for sports TV viewing

Bill Shea Sep 8, 2021

The television industry is in another spat with The Nielsen Co., the longtime TV audience number-crunching service, this time over allegations that viewership of shows and live sports have been undercounted since the pandemic erupted last year.

Nielsen is in the industry crosshairs every so often, and the squabbling typically is of interest only to TV wonks (and those who cash a paycheck from the industry).

Until now. We'll get to why sports fans should care, or at least keep an eye on the situation, shortly. Let's start with the background. School is in session, after all.

First, what is Nielsen? The New York City-based company has measured TV viewership using a variety of technologies since the early 1950s, and broadcasters (who pay millions for the metrics) have complained about Nielsen's methods and data almost since Day 1. Yet Nielsen and its estimates — based today on electronic sampling of 41,600 volunteer U.S. households — remain the TV industry's currency for its lifeblood, i.e. commercial advertising.

"We've been down this road a million times," said Jon Lewis, who has analyzed sports viewership at Sports Media Watch since 2006. "The networks don't like Nielsen. They've never liked Nielsen. They tolerate it because they're all on the same ground."

In other words, even with an allegedly flawed system — the pandemic has reportedly resulted in Nielsen undercounting TV viewership, which means the networks didn't charge enough for ads — the overall scoreboard and standings are relatively accurate for how the networks fare against each other, industry observers say.

Even if it's a decent, if imperfect, system for tracking what people watch on TV, the networks demand something better. That's because Nielsen has been slow to tackle streaming and other non-TV audience numbers, which have grown into the millions in a relatively short time period. That's left networks trying to cobble together their own measurements — a mix of in-house data and metrics from third-party data tracking vendors like Comscore — so they can better price their content for advertisers.

Why should sports fans give a damn this time? Aren't we all tired and annoyed by all the ads?

This latest dispute comes amid a tempest of change across the broadcast industry because of streaming, and how Nielsen measures eyeballs, in theory, can affect what sports get the best time slot, and where viewers can find the games or events they want to watch.

But again, in theory. It's up to the networks and advertisers to sort things out if and when the viewership metrics get better, and that could be soon, or it could take years.

Before getting any deeper into the wild world of live sports viewership, an important thing to keep in mind is that audience metrics exist for networks to sell advertising to companies that want to peddle goods and services to American consumers. That's why the brands want to know details about who is watching what — their age, gender, race, spending habits, location, income level, etc.

The ratings sometimes are used by third parties as a proxy measurement for public sentiment about things for which Nielsen ratings were not



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designed to assess, such as whether political, social, cultural and economic concerns are driving viewing habits for certain programming.

Nielsen estimates cannot tell you with any accuracy whether the Super Bowl or World Series or East Oakland Roller Derby Finals had fewer viewers because players and leagues are “too woke” or not progressive enough. The Nielsen numbers aren’t an opinion poll.

“Ultimately, you cannot make any inferences about the real world based on this one company that the people who use it don’t even trust,” Lewis said.

Instead, the ratings are a tool to help networks make decisions on what to put on TV and when. And in today’s fractionalized media world, what to put on streaming, cable, online, etc.

While we might all agree that the tidal wave of ads during football games and other live sports is a nuisance, the commercials are how the bills are paid, and that money trickles down to the sports leagues in the form of the enormous broadcast rights deals that are a primary source of player salaries and team revenue. Commercials keep the lights on.

The recent Olympics are an example of the frustrating confusion many viewers experienced in trying to navigate a major sports extravaganza that’s spread across different channels plus streaming — some of which required additional payment. NBC sold more than a billion dollars worth of Olympics advertising for the games but had to provide free make-good commercial airtime because of lower than expected viewership (which partly was driven by time zone differences, too).

With a glut of programming and many options to distribute, the Olympics showcased how crowded the sports TV landscape has become — and how important it is to get accurate reporting. (Kyle Terada / USA Today)

Making things worse is the pandemic, which has accelerated already-occurring industry trends such as millions of people dropping cable for streaming, and millions watching less television overall, particularly primetime network and cable programming.

COVID-19 is a major culprit in live sports having lost their immunity to those trends and finally experiencing the audience declines suffered by the rest of television. It also led to the Nielsen undercounting — the company didn’t send field techs to homes to monitor the equipment — which means networks may have lost out on hundreds of millions of dollars it could have charged advertisers.

So far in 2021, we’ve seen some recovery of live sports viewership, but the industry remains in flux. A crossroads if you will, even as the ad dollars flow to live sports at a record pace.

Part of the problem is Nielsen’s data always has been, and will be for the foreseeable future, based on its samples that are highly educated guesses based on electronic measurement and demographic and marketing data from the thousands of households that volunteer to be part of the system. When you see a game had, say, 5 million viewers, that’s not a specific count of 5 million people. It’s a projection based on what the Nielsen participants are watching.

TV advertising is a roughly \$60-70 billion annual industry, and networks and advertisers covet accurate, detailed audience data in their never-ending war over how much to charge or pay for advertising.

With so many media and tech companies now streaming content — social media in particular — a new problem has emerged: Nielsen doesn’t measure all of those sources, and many of those companies closely guard their data. The information isn’t independently verified or accountable. And advertisers also collect their own data, too. Oh, and the public sometimes is reluctant to surrender its privacy (and sometimes not, since most of us allow Google and Amazon to capture an alarming amount of information about ourselves).

“People care about their privacy, the ability to control what people know about them,” Lewis said. “At least in theory if not practice.”

Nielsen’s alleged undercounting cost the networks anywhere from \$39 million to \$234 million in February alone, according to the Wall Street Journal.

That’s when the Super Bowl aired on CBS. The game had 91.6 million traditional TV viewers and 96.4 million with legal streaming factored into the total. That was the NFL title game’s smallest linear television audience since 2006. And while it certainly was lower than recent years because of the overall trends with TV viewing, and because of the pandemic and other factors, the game probably had a larger true viewership than the Nielsen data indicated.

That means CBS may have left money on the table — and no, you do not have to have any sympathy for a massive TV network failing to get richer. But it is worthy of paying attention to if and how this stuff ultimately trickles down to potentially affect viewers.

Broadcasters and advertisers may grumble, but they’ve long accepted Nielsen data as the industry’s coin of the realm. But with the advent of streaming, there are major unknowns. How many people are truly watching something that’s on TV but also streamed (not to mention illegal streams)? And how much should a network charge Pepsi or State Farm or Visa to place ads during those programs and games?

The industry needs a universally accepted set of metrics and measurement methods.

Nielsen has promised that its new Nielsen One product that deploys next year will provide advertisers a more holistic picture of viewership by including streaming. Nielsen One is supposed to be fully rolled out by 2024 — if it can get everyone to agree to the new system.

In the meantime, because of the pandemic undercounting and the ongoing industry dissatisfaction with Nielsen, a group called the Media Ratings Council last month stripped Nielsen of its accreditation as the gold standard of third-party TV viewership data. The MRC is non-profit trade group created in 1963 that represents the broadcast industry (the big networks and channels) and advertisers to audit audience measurement services and tools.

MRC basically gives companies like Nielsen the TV industry’s version of the Good Housekeeping seal of approval.

Now here’s where it gets a bit wild: NBCUniversal on Aug. 2 issued a request-for-proposals, with more than 90 companies (including Nielsen) responding, that seeks ideas for a new viewership measurement system that would better reflect how and where people consume content today, along with information about their demographics and their shopping habits.

“We’re looking across a broad spectrum of partners that can tell the full story,” said Joe Benarroch, a spokesman for NBCUniversal’s advertising and partnership unit. “No one company can tell the entire story. Nielsen is one yardstick but there should be multiple yardsticks.”

A basic framework for the new audience measurement system could be in place by next spring’s annual upfronts, which is when networks and advertisers meet to hammer out commercial deals, Benarroch said. Testing is expected to begin with NBC’s Winter Olympics broadcasts that begin in February.

The MRC and NBC actions may feel to some like industry-aimed public relations ploys because everyone involved is still using the Nielsen data. Why? Because there is nothing else. Nielsen is a natural monopoly, meaning it’s incredibly difficult to replace it.

“Nielsen will remain the currency for the media business,” said Patrick Crakes, a former Fox Sports executive who is now a media analyst. “It’s not perfect but it’s good enough, and the entire media business transacts upon it. Nobody can build a system to replace it.”

Benarroch said he’s confident that Comcast-owned NBC’s rivals will be on board with creating a new system, with or without Nielsen.

“The marketplace has already spoken,” he said.



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More and better data could lead to more blue-chip programming find a home on streaming. The NFL is moving "Thursday Night Football" exclusively to Amazon Prime Video in 2022. (Denny Medley / USA Today)

So if we get a better Nielsen mousetrap in a few years, what happens to live sports? Industry observers have varying opinions.

"Regardless of measurement system, any significant re-ordering of sports would surprise me," said Robert Seidman, a longtime TV ratings analyst.

Lewis, of Sports Media Watch, said something similar: "I would be surprised if one league was much better or worse than thought. It's hard to think ratings alone would result in any major shift."

A longtime executive at a regional sports network, who agreed to speak only on the condition of anonymity, said a Nielsen shake-up is beneficial for sports both with national data and local-market numbers. A universal set of metrics of linear and streaming is critical, they said.

"Anything that moves toward that one number is good for viewers," the source said. "If the viewer is watching it, that's where the money should go."

The task is to better find out who is watching what. A reallocation of sports TV ad dollars, based on viewership and on the desire for better representation outside of the five major leagues, is a net positive, the source said.

"Women's sports are under-represented in the amount of sponsorship they bring in," they said. "The smaller properties have a lot to gain. They'll tell you they have an audience. If you can find those viewers, everyone will benefit. Money will go to new places."

"No matter what happens, sports are going to shake out as the most desirable place to be," the RSN source said.

Crakes also sees a reorder of the viewership system as a net benefit, particularly because streaming has provided a local, regional and national platform that the networks and their sports partners of all size can monetize.

"Fractionalization has created opportunities for everything from women's basketball to rugby to cornhole," Crakes said.

Launch strategies for sports and other content could change under a new audience measurement regime, and networks could quickly shift programming from, say, a traditional linear TV half-hour or hour show to content that's streamed on a Peacock, or made into bite-sized chunks or short-form that airs on social media channels instead, NBC's Benarroch said.

"It does then give you the benefit of saying, 'Why don't we change content strategy to start on mobile or Peacock first,'" he said. "All of a sudden you have a wealth of information on how you create content going forward and you can test it. It totally does impact the content strategy."

NBCU has been increasingly monetizing its programming by where a specific audience spends its time — on what platform, on what content — rather than purely selling a show based on traditional metrics, Benarroch said. That allows it to charge a premium for audiences that are proven to engage more with advertisers during specific content — a concept that potentially protects smaller sports properties from getting lost in a tidal wave of new viewership data.

Example: A network airing a women's sport. It has a small but hardcore audience that is proven it will buy the goods and services brands tailor their messaging for to air during those live games. That specific audience could potentially be a much more valuable demographic to a particular brand during that sport rather than during an NFL game where the audience that doesn't much engage with the brand's commercials.

"If you have all the right data points, consumers will get right experience, right content, right ads," Benarroch said.

And as annoying as commercials are, the networks, brands and sports leagues want them to be useful to audiences, and the thinking is that a new viewership measurement system helps that.

"We understand how our audiences are engaging the content they choose to follow. That becomes a much more personalized experience," Benarroch said. "Advertisers can create better experiences within that content."

Nielsen didn't respond to a request for comment, but the company did post a formal statement to its clients from CEO David Kenny on its website that acknowledges the criticisms and lays out its plans to upgrade its services.

Regardless of who provides them, advertisers want trustworthy, audited third-party audience numbers rather than blindly trusting whatever data the networks themselves offer up. And that desire comes at a time when brands are spending record sums on live sports advertising — the major networks are selling national 30-second NFL regular-season ads this season for more than \$1 million in some cases, Sportico reported.

The NFL is the U.S. TV industry's ratings king, even with a mild 2020 decline. Nothing comes close to its scale, and even amid the Nielsen bickering, the networks will pump out ratings updates this season using Nielsen data.

This will be the first season with 17 regular-season games for each NFL team, and that's an estimated \$190 million in additional commercial airtime income for the networks, per TV insights and analytics company EDO Inc.

While it's doubtful that a revamped viewership ecosystem will radically affect the NFL game lineup fans see each week, a more robust and accurate audience metrics system that's adopted across the industry could hasten more blue-chip content moving to paid streaming.

"As the post-Nielsen landscape embraces alternative measures like engagement, it opens the doors for new streaming venues for live sports like 'Thursday Night Football' on Amazon/Twitch and Notre Dame on Peacock," said EDO president and CEO Kevin Krim.

There's a tension, too, when it comes to audience numbers for the networks and for the properties they're airing or streaming. Do they put a game on to get the best numbers for the sport, or for the network? Sometimes, that's in conflict.

Even with accurate data, the debate will continue over where to show games. ESPN kept the women's college basketball title game for itself even though better numbers were attainable on ABC. (Troy Taormina / USA Today)

For example, ESPN retains the women's college basketball national championship game rather than allowing it to air on Disney-owned sibling ABC, a broadcast network with a larger audience than a cable channel.

"It would be a huge hit for ABC to have the women's national championship," Lewis said. "ESPN wants that property for itself. A lot of the times these decisions are being made against what is best from a ratings perspective."

In other words, the women's natty could get more eyeballs itself on ABC, but ESPN wants more eyeballs for itself, he said.

In the end, the audience metrics like ratings, shares and viewership totals are tools, but they enjoy a mystique with the public that doesn't exactly align with reality. Bad numbers will get the latest replacement-level Fox animated "Family Guy" knockoff canceled but incremental fluctuations won't get the NBA sent to the ash heap of history. Live sports are simply too valuable.

So aside from network public relations departments jockeying for back-slaps, and from political pundits trying to score Twitter points, why do



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some sports fans give a fig that the PGA Tour or NASCAR or WNBA audience numbers are up, down or steady?

"I concluded — and I'm not saying I have this right — that the reason people outside of the TV business care about ratings is validation," Seidman said. "Lots of other people love the thing you love: You feel validated! Not so many people love it? You feel attacked! Ultimately, I find the psychology that drives some people to caring about that kind of validation (or resentment) far more broken than the measurement system."

Lewis is blunt in his take on the perceived importance of audience metrics.

"Nielsen ratings are not held in particularly high regard even by the people who spend millions of dollars using them as currency. It's not the be-all and end-all a lot of people think it is," he said. "Realistically, the ratings matter, but they're not as impactful as people assume."

And once we're on the other side of the networks-versus-Nielsen drama?

"Everyone will continue to make more money," Lewis said. "All Nielsen needs to do is get its act together."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.09.2021

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Celebrating 5 of the NHL's most breakable records (while we still can)

By Sean McIndoe Sep 8, 2021

The NHL's record book is pretty thick, as you might expect from a league with over 100 years of history. Get your hands on a copy, and you can spend hours learning about the players who set all-time marks in scoring, goaltending and just about anything else you can imagine.

But as most fans know, a lot of those records are unbreakable. Some of them literally so — nobody will ever top Ken Dorarty's record of three overtime goals in a single game (from back when the extra periods weren't sudden death). Others are unbreakable from a practical perspective due to changes in how the game is played, like Glenn Hall's 502 consecutive starts for a goaltender from the bygone era where backups were rarely used. And others, like Wayne Gretzky's 2,857 career points or Bobby Orr's plus-124 or even Dave Schultz's 472 PIM in a season are all-but unbreakable unless the game reverts to the way it was played in previous eras.

Those unbreakable records are fun. But there's another category that I like to kick around now and then: the breakable record. As in, the marks that just don't seem that impressive and feel like they should be broken any day now.

Today, let's celebrate those records while we still can, with five of my favorite breakable NHL records.

Now, we could get cute here with overly obscure marks — hey, this guy holds the all-time record for most shot attempts by a left-handed Scorpio on Feb. 29, that sort of thing. We'll try not to do that, although we'll obviously have to dig a little bit beyond the standard records we all know. Let's see if we can find five reasonably straightforward records that feel like they should be easy enough for somebody to break — then see if anyone in this coming season can prove us right.

(Thanks to reader Eric for suggesting this topic.)

Most assists in a season by a left winger

The single-season record for assists by any player is, not surprisingly, held by Wayne Gretzky. He had an unfathomable 163 in 1985-86, plus 10 other years with over 100. Next up for the centers is Mario Lemieux with 114 in 1988-89 and seven other centers have had at least 90 in a season (with Joe Thornton being the most recent). Among defensemen, the assists record is held by Bobby Orr, with 102. For the right wingers, it's a tie between Jaromir Jagr and Nikita Kucherov, who both had seasons of 87.

And then, there are the left wingers.

If you've followed my various roster-building quests over the years, you know that left wing has historically been the NHL's weakest position. But it's not like there haven't been some legitimate legends who've played the position. Bobby Hull was a left winger. So were Frank Mahovlich, Ted Lindsay and Johnny Bucyk. So were members of the 600-goal club like Luc Robitaille, Brendan Shanahan and of course Alex Ovechkin. And today's left wingers include perennial Hart candidates like Artemi Panarin and Brad Marchand.

So it may surprise you to learn that the record for assists in a season by a left winger isn't held by any of those guys. The record-holder isn't a Hall of Famer or even much of a star.

According to most sources, including the NHL itself, the record is held by Joe Juneau, who had 70 assists as a rookie in 1992-93. That was the year he played on a line with Adam Oates and (when healthy) Cam Neely. It was also his only full season in Boston; he was traded to the Capitals at the 1994 trade deadline. To give you an idea of how impressed the hockey world was by his record-breaking feat as a rookie, he didn't receive a single first-place Calder vote that year and was left off 11 of the 50 ballots entirely.

You could also make an argument for Bob MacMillan of the Atlanta Flames in 1978-79, as he's the guy who heads up the hockey-reference list. MacMillan was mostly a right winger in his career, but apparently played the left side for much of that season. He had 71 assists, so whether you give the nod to him or Juneau, the point remains: Left wingers just don't get many helpers. Despite leading the position, neither Juneau nor MacMillan ranks in the overall top 100 for assists in a single season. Connor McDavid had more assists last season and the schedule was only 56 games.

Will the record be broken soon? It's starting to feel likely. Several active players have come close, including Marchand (64 in 2018-19), Claude Giroux (68 in 2017-18) and a pair of 60-plus seasons from Johnny Gaudreau. But the biggest near-miss was Artemi Panarin, who was well on the way to breaking the record in 2019-20 when the season was cut short by the pandemic. He was on pace for 74 assists that year, and last season he was racking up helpers at a record-shattering pace of almost one per game. There's a decent chance he breaks the record this year if he plays close to 82 games.

If so, it would be the first major position-based season scoring record to be broken in decades. But for now, the record remains with a guy you may not even have heard of.

Longest season-opening goal streak by a rookie

A rookie makes his debut on opening night, the way dozens of rookies do every year. He lives up to the hype by scoring a goal. Then he keeps on scoring, in each of his team's games. How long can the kid stay hot?

At first, the record book looks pretty intimidating. If you check the NHL's page for this mark, you'll see that they list the record as 14 games. There's also a 12-game streak, and another that clocks in at eight. But then you check those names — Joe Malone, Cy Denneny and Newsy Lalonde — and realize they're all from 1917-18. That was the first season in league history, meaning everyone was technically in the first season of their NHL career. Malone and friends were all established pros, not rookies, so they don't fit the spirit of what we're looking for.

If you limit the list to guys who were actually rookies, you find that the longest season-opening scoring streak to start an NHL career is just



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three games. That's it. One good week, basically. And only two guys have even managed that.

Ken Smith was the first, for the 1944-45 Bruins. Billy Harris pulled it off for the Islanders in 1973. And that's it. The NHL page lists several more guys, including current players like Sonny Milano and Alex Chiasson, because it's counting streaks by anyone who was technically a rookie by the Calder Trophy criteria, even if they'd played in previous seasons. We can count them too if you'd like. But as best I can tell, Smith and Harris are the only rookies to begin their NHL careers by scoring in each of their team's first three games in a season.

That's it. None of the great goal-scoring rookies in NHL history make the list. Teemu Selanne didn't do it — he scored in his second and third games but not his first. Mike Bossy had goals in his first two games but not his third. So did Eric Lindros. Auston Matthews debuted with that memorable four-goal performance but was held off the scoresheet for the next two. Mario Lemieux famously scored on his very first shift but then didn't get his second goal until his ninth game. Ovechkin couldn't do it. Neither could Rocket Richard or Sidney Crosby or even Gretzky.

You wouldn't think it was that hard for an NHL rookie to score in his first three games. Heck, Evgeni Malkin scored in his first six — but they weren't the Penguins' first games, so he doesn't make the season-opening list. Still, if Malkin could ring up a half-dozen, surely somebody can start a streak on opening night that lasts a measly four.

But it's never happened. Yet.

Most consecutive shutouts to start a career

Maybe you thought the whole "season-opening" qualifier in the last section made things too complicated. Let's ditch that for this one, and keep it simple. What's the record for the most consecutive shutouts to start an NHL career?

Would you believe ... one?

Plenty of goalies have recorded a shutout in their NHL debut. The list includes names you know like John Gibson in 2014 and Mike Smith in 2006, plus Daren Puppa, Michael Leighton and Tiny Thompson as well as guys like Jussi Markkanen, Mario Gosselin, Troy Grosenick and even Garret Sparks. The debut shutout certainly isn't common, but we typically see someone do it every few years or so.

But in the 100-plus year history of the NHL, nobody's ever followed that first shutout with a second. So the record for consecutive shutouts to start a career is one, shared by, well, a ton of goalies.

If you want to get even weirder, we could look at the longest shutout streak to start a career in terms of minutes. That one's also not especially impressive — it's 102 minutes and 48 seconds, a little over five periods' worth of hockey, and it's held by Matt Hackett, who played for the Minnesota Wild in 2011. The fun part is that Hackett managed to rack up that streak without ever getting credit for a shutout at all. He started the streak with a relief appearance, then gave up a goal late in his first career start, so neither game went in the books as an official shutout.

In fact, Hackett never went a full start without allowing a goal in his 26-game NHL career — meaning one of the NHL's all-time shutout records is held by a goalie who never actually had a shutout.

Playoff shorthanded game-winners in a career

OK, yes, it feels like we're digging a bit on this one. But only a bit, because shorthanded playoff winners aren't all that rare. Note that we're not necessarily looking for overtime goals here, just run-of-the-mill game-winners. Those can come at any time in a game, including early enough that today's refs are still calling penalties.

And sure enough, according to the hockey-reference database, there have been at least 136 shorthanded game-winners in NHL playoff history, so we're talking an average of well over one a year. They've also become more common in the modern era (because there are more rounds).

There was two last year — Paul Byron's diving effort against the Leafs and Yanni Gourde in Game 7 against the Islanders — and in 2020 we saw five, one short of the high of six we had in 1988. The list of guys who've scored a shorthanded game-winner in the playoffs includes Nicklas Lidstrom, Marian Hossa, Wayne Gretzky, Doug Gilmour and Mario Lemieux. It's basically a who's who of NHL royalty.

So what's the record for the most in a career? Just two.

It's a record shared by an even dozen players. That list features some Hall of Famers, including Jarome Iginla, Martin St. Louis and Dave Keon as well as some other recognizable names like Ed Olczyk, Brent Sutter and Brian Gionta. But the list also includes obscure player of the week alumni Brad Palmer, whose career lasted just three seasons, which is the kind of weird find that makes this stuff fun.

After those 12 two-timers, there are 112 more names tied with one. When it comes to this record, NHL history has done a good job of spreading around the love.

Will somebody break this one soon? Maybe, although none of those dozen guys on the two-goal list are active. There are lots of current players with one, though, so we might at least see somebody tie the mark this year. Keep an eye on Corey Perry, Tomas Hertl, Zack Kassian and Josh Bailey, among others.

Oh, and one more name who makes the list: Mitch Marner, who joined the club in 2019 in Game 1 against the Bruins. Maple Leafs fans will remember that one as the last postseason goal of Marner's career to date, launching his well-documented drought of 18 games and counting. Wait, is it possible that shorthanded playoff winners are cursed? You know what, let's forget I brought this up.

Most penalty shot goals in Game 7

How often do you see a penalty shot in a playoff game? Not all that often, although probably more than you think. According to the NHL, it's happened 84 times in history. And the vast majority of those have been in the modern era — there were nine from 1917 to 1942, somehow only one for the entire Original Six era and just five more before the end of the 1970s. But there have been 69 since 1980, including four in both 1990 and 2010 and a record five in both 2008 and 2019. In the 2020 qualifier, there were three in a week, including two in the same game between the Penguins and Canadiens.

Playoff penalty shots are cool. And that's especially true when they happen in a winner-take-all Game 7. So who holds the record for most penalty shot goals in a Game 7?

Uh, nobody. It's never happened in the history of the NHL.

A big part of that is a factor you probably already suspect: Refs don't seem to like to call penalty shots in Game 7. That makes sense; we know that refs don't like to call anything in a Game 7 at all, even obvious minors, so we wouldn't expect them to make the most dramatic call possible. And sure enough, only two of those 84 playoff penalty shots in NHL history have come in a Game 7 — Vancouver's Alexandre Burrows against Chicago's Corey Crawford in 2011 and Anaheim's Corey Perry against L.A.'s Jonathan Quick in 2014.

Neither player scored, meaning the skaters remain oh-for-life against the goalies in Game 7. The next guy to get the chance and score will be the very first and have that page of the record book all to himself. And the fans that are watching will get to see something that's literally never happened before in league history.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.09.2021

1191677 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Q&A: Brian Burke talks offer sheets, Sidney Crosby, Olympics



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Eric Francis

Brian Burke's reputation as a straight shooter was reinforced Tuesday when he flew out to Calgary to host his fifth annual Targets for Kids trap shooting event.

After demonstrating his marksmanship at the sold-out charity event full of local celebrities, the 66-year-old Penguins executive shared his thoughts on everything from offer sheets, Sidney Crosby and the Olympics, to his hatred for golf and his love for Calgary and hunting.

Despite moving from Sportsnet broadcaster to Pittsburgh's president of hockey operations in February, he also wasn't shy about predicting who would win a barn fight between Marc Bergevin and Tom Dundon.

(Editor's Note: This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.)

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SPORTSNET: What did you learn about Sid you didn't know?

BRIAN BURKE: We have the best practice habits of any team in the NHL, and he drives all that.

Our practices are high-tempo, difficult practices with thoughtful drills and the guys really work hard. Mike Sullivan does a great job, but Sid drives it.

Can we assume your early assessment of the Penguins is that the team isn't ready to rebuild just yet?

Correct. This group is under contract for another year and we're going to keep seeing what we can do. We believe in the group.

We've made the playoffs 15 straight years. We won two Cups - five and four years ago - and then we were eliminated in the first round the last three years. We've got to reverse that trend.

What was the biggest adjustment to getting back into management?

The part that was different was we got right back into it - I signed my deal on a Thursday and went to Pittsburgh on a Sunday or Monday and we were right in the bubble.

No bars, no restaurants or going out. We'd play the games, fly home and it was regimented and no social life at all.

I actually had a hard time spending time with my players, which I love to do.

Do you miss anything about being in the media?

I liked the people at Sportsnet and Hockey Night that I worked for, and I liked the people I worked with. That's a great combination. I really enjoyed it. I thought, 'that was it - I was going to stay with this for a long time.' I enjoyed it immensely.

But a chance to go back and work for the Pittsburgh Penguins was too good to say no to.

What did you learn about being in the media you didn't know before?

I had all the answers before I got to the media and have still got them all.

Has your opinion on offer sheets changed following Carolina's acquisition of Jesperi Kotkaniemi?

I don't understand the fuss over offer sheets.

Offer sheets are part of collective bargaining. If it's appropriate to use one, use one.

I was prepared to offer sheet Phil Kessel when I signed him in Toronto, and I told the Boston Bruins that. They were trying to make a deal with the LA Kings and trying to talk to Nashville, and I said, 'either you guys make a deal with me or I'm going to offer sheet him.' So they made a deal with me.

My anger about it, going back (to Edmonton's signing of Dustin Penner) was I didn't like the player they signed and I didn't like the way they did it.

The fact that the player took advantage of our cap situation and signed an offer sheet we couldn't match made sense.

I thought it was a smart move by Carolina to handcuff Montreal, and I think it was a smart move to take the picks, which they managed to flip for a player I think will be useful.

Do you think we will see more offer sheets moving forward?

I think some people think there's bad intent involved, or that it's a bad thing to do them.

The missing component is you've got to think you're going to get the player or there is no point doing it.

If you get teams that are exposed cap-wise you're at risk for an offer sheet.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

Who would win a barn fight between Marc Bergevin and Tom Dundon?

Marc Bergevin is pretty well put together. He played for me - he's a big man. I think I'd take him.

Why was it important to keep your name on this event and make your way back to Calgary for it?

I've worked in six NHL cities, and in some great markets like Anaheim, Vancouver and Toronto, but my favourite market to work in was Calgary.

It's such a beautiful city with so much open space and the mountains, but the people of Calgary from Day 1 were special. People in Calgary give back, more than any place I ever worked, and that was special to me.

That's part of the origin of this event. With the guns, the celebrities here, dogs running around, this event has Calgary all over it.

We'll do it again next June for year six.

Burkie's Targets for Kids started as a trap shooting event and it has grown. We've had the same participants and sponsors the last five years and people have said right from the start this is a great event.

We put in a team from the Calgary Police Service that has an LGBTQ component, and we have a military team.

People have fun, we feed em' and we make some money for KidSport, which is a wonderful organization.

Where did your love for guns and hunting come from?

Well, my mom was a nurse, so we weren't allowed to hunt.

So, I took up hunting when I was GM of the Hartford Whalers. I heard Harry Sinden and Glen Sather talking about going hunting so I asked them, 'if I got my licence could I tag along?'

I called my buddy at the Connecticut State police and got my licence and went pheasant hunting with them. I love to hunt birds and have been doing it ever since.

Why don't you golf?

I lack the fine motor skills and I lack patience. I already know how to swear and I know how to fight. There's no fighting. I don't get it.



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I know why people like it, but I've never had any interest in golf, it's a waste of an afternoon for me.

Who is the early favourite to win the Olympics?

I haven't spent that much time looking at the teams, but obviously Canada has been the class of this event for many years, in many capacities, but if you look at the teams these countries are putting together it's going to be a toss-up.

Canada has a great team – they always do - but you look at the U.S. and they've got a great team too. So do the Swedes and the Finns and the Russians.

If these lineups go in as scheduled, and everything goes as planned, you're talking about one of the most special tournaments that's ever played, if not THE best tournament ever played.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.09.2021

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Sportsnet.ca / As Senators extend GM Dorion, contract still looms for beloved Tkachuk

Wayne Scanlan September 8, 2021, 12:37 PM

Any minute now, my ship is coming in

I'll keep checking the horizon

And I'll check my machine, there's sure to be that call

It's gonna happen soon, soon, oh so very soon

It's just that times are lean

— Colin Hay, longtime Australian-American songwriter

Brady Tkachuk's ship is coming in soon, right?

It isn't often that a team's fan base is hung up on getting a new contract for a restricted free agent — RFA players are generally considered to hold few real options and little leverage — but in Ottawa, this is where we are. And where Senators fans have been all summer, waiting on Brady.

Brady, Brady . . . to borrow from the title of a young reader hockey series written by Mary Shaw.

With the calendar counting down the days to a Sept. 22 camp launch, the two sides have yet to come up with a deal — the Senators discovering just how much leverage the kid truly has. General manager Pierre Dorion said on a Zoom call Tuesday that negotiations with the Tkachuk camp continue.

"We talked as recently as Friday," Dorion said, as he spoke to reporters about his own contract extension. "We're not going to negotiate in public, but talks are ongoing and they've been very positive so far.

"So, hopefully the next announcement is definitely more important than this announcement."

Remaining Time -1:55

Senators GM Dorion ready to enter 'fun part' of rebuild

Who is Brady Tkachuk?

In case you have been living under a rock for the past couple of years (or don't watch Senators hockey), Tkachuk is a player beloved in this marketplace almost beyond reason. A six-foot-four beast of a left winger who doesn't turn 22 until Sept. 16, yet has the kind of trench-forged

reputation and opposition loathing of a veteran Mark Messier or Gordie Howe. No one wanted to tangle with their elbows, either.

A fourth overall draft choice out of Boston University in 2018, Tkachuk is no sniper, yet he led his young Senators team in scoring last season with 36 points in 56 games. Not many of his 17 goals were things of beauty, they were more like rewards from the hockey gods for Tkachuk's willingness to dine so regularly on the blue tablecloth of the goal crease.

When Tkachuk lost a couple of front teeth in the line of duty one night, he smiled and carried on, laughing at his good fortune that the loose teeth were stuck inside his transient mouthguard for safekeeping, to be reconnected the next morning by team dentist Dr. Bill Henry. Tkachuk wasn't home from the dentist five minutes before he was on the phone with this Sportsnet reporter, fulfilling an obligation he had made. Typical Brady. Answering the bell.

For his bravado, for his swagger, for his lust to compete, for his 'Frank the Tank' shimmy-shake goal celly, for his willingness to "drag his teammates into battle," as head coach D.J. Smith says so often, Tkachuk wouldn't be able to pay for a beer in this town over the next eight years if he should happen to sign a contract for that length — for terms likely close to teammate Thomas Chabot's current eight-year, \$64M deal.

Or, perhaps higher than \$8M per, given Tkachuk's importance to the franchise/fan base and the time that has elapsed since Chabot's deal.

The organization would love to have Brady locked up for eight years, to the point where management has publicly dangled the captaincy in front of Tkachuk. That is, as long as he is willing to go long, as they say on the football sandlot fields.

"You can't have a captain on a bridge deal," Senators owner Eugene Melnyk famously said on a Toronto-based broadcast in May. "You can't have a captain there on a bridge contract, it's not going to happen."

Daniel Alfredsson wore the 'C' for more than a decade, but opted to finish his career in Detroit after a contract dispute in Ottawa. Jason Spezza was captain for just one year (2013-14) before he asked for a trade, feeling he bore too much of the blame for team defeats. Erik Karlsson took on the captaincy from 2014-18, but was traded away during the 2018 camp when no contract extension was worked out. Mark Stone, Brady Tkachuk's Ottawa landlord, was thought to be the heir-apparent as captain, but left for Las Vegas riches at the 2019 trade deadline.

So, you can understand a touch of sensitivity where the captaincy is concerned. Ottawa hasn't had a captain since Karlsson, but coach Smith has said he feels it is time to appoint one.

Both Tkachuk and Chabot would make fine captains. In fact, you could make a case that Tkachuk should be left to wreak havoc and do "Brady" things while the calm and steady Chabot speaks on behalf of the team in both official languages.

I would be fine with that. Most would.

But if Tkachuk IS your guy, he is your guy. Whether he signs for three, four or eight years, if he is the guy you want leading, he should wear the 'C.'

Otherwise, the Senators are sending two clear signals to players and fans: 1. The organization doesn't believe it has the ability to sign Tkachuk to a second contract, after a bridge deal. And 2. That Chabot is the backup choice.

Chabot as Plan B for the 'C'

After waiting three years to name a captain, this is no way to begin this critical next phase of growth into contention — by letting on that you opted for Plan B as punishment to Tkachuk for not playing ball in negotiations.

In a perfect world, that point will be moot, as Tkachuk signs a long-term deal and puts on the No. 7 jersey with a 'C' stitched on the front.

GM Dorion extended through 2024-25



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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While it wasn't the contract fans were longing to hear — the Brady one — few would dispute that Pierre Dorion earned the added security that came with the three-year contract extension announced Tuesday. As with most GMs, there have been trades and acquisitions that didn't work out, but Dorion's record as a scout and draft overseer is excellent. As the architect of this deep rebuild, Dorion and draft guru Trent Mann have drafted the likes of Chabot, Tkachuk, Tim Stütze (part of the Erik Karlsson trade windfall), Jake Sanderson, Shane Pinto and more.

Dorion feels his young group is ready to take the next step.

End of the rebuild?

"To me, this is going to be the fun part," Dorion said. "The rebuild is over. Now we're stepping into another zone and I'm excited about the group of players we have, with the maturity they've brought or gotten over the last few years. I'm excited about some of the veterans and how they've taken a big step."

Dorion, 49, would have been entering the final year of his contract, although there was a team option for another year. Now, that option is tacked on to the end of this extension.

The move gives Dorion the freedom to operate without worrying about his future with the organization, or looking over his shoulder at Pierre McGuire, who was hired this summer as senior VP of player development. Dorion deserves a chance to see this plan through.

Now entering his 15th year with the Senators, Dorion moved into the GM role in April of 2016.

"Stability is the message that it sends to the players," Dorion said. "I'm going to be the GM here for the next four or five years. As the head of hockey (operations) I've brought in most of these players as the GM, chief scout or director of player personnel, and I've had a big say here in many of these players coming along with many of our quality staff members."

"Stability is important," Dorion added.

Considering the recent extensions for Dorion and head coach D.J. Smith, plus the hiring of McGuire, owner Eugene Melnyk certainly has his staff lined up for the next several seasons — years that should involve Stanley Cup playoff contention for the Sens.

Batherson skates in Ottawa

Remaining Time -1:00

Batherson looking forward to building something special with Senators

Fresh off his new six-year, \$29.85M deal he signed last week, winger Drake Batherson was in Ottawa Tuesday, skating with about 15 of his Senators teammates before speaking to media on a Zoom call.

Batherson said that signing long-term was an "easy decision," considering how welcome he feels in Ottawa, and how bullish he is about the team.

"I think we are just going to keep building and hopefully have a great year," Batherson said. "We're all competitive guys in there, we all want to win, so we're definitely not going to go down without battling every night and obviously try to push for a (playoff) spot."

With 17 goals last season, the 23-year-old Batherson was tied with Tkachuk and Josh Norris for second in the team's goal-scoring department, behind Connor Brown's 21. Tkachuk, Brown, Norris and Batherson were also jammed together in points -- 36, 35, 35 and 34. The essence of Ottawa's top six forwards is an ability to make plays, but with that shooting element as well.

Last week, Dorion said he could see Batherson hitting the 30-35 goal range if he shoots a bit more.

Batherson doesn't expect the weight of the new, albeit back-loaded, contract to slow him down.

"I'm pretty hard on myself to just be good every night," Batherson said. "Every single game, every practice, I'm always trying to get better. I hate to lose — super competitive guy — that's the driving point for me."

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Sportsnet.ca / How a league-wide Drive To Survive-type docuseries could help the NHL

Justin Bourne

One of the more grating things from the business side of society over the past 10 or 15 years has been every business branding itself as "Uber, but for..." "Our company is Uber, but for cereal."

Sports has its own version of that Uber framing in the aftermath of the Netflix F1 series Drive to Survive, which I've now referenced in consecutive columns because it deserves it. "They need to do a Drive to Survive series, but for..." is the new phrase that pays, only this one feels justified.

It's been a revelation, largely because of its two unique angles: they've focused on the drama and competition that exists within teams (a capital sin to acknowledge in hockey), and they've shone a spotlight on all tiers of the competition including the bottom one, highlighting how there's still individual drama that rages within those groups. It sounds like the latter was a happy accident, as they weren't granted access to top teams in the initial season, but they covered those lesser teams so thoroughly you became invested in their stories.

Because of that show, F1's popularity has boomed in North America. Diehard racing fans will tell you they don't enjoy the show, that it didn't get all that deep on anything. Some may even resent the show for dragging all us noobs along. But guess what: it wasn't for them to begin with. It converted new fans for the sport, which means new pockets to drain, which is an unbelievable win for any league.

As a result of the A to B dynamic "make docuseries, get fans," leagues are lining up to try the same (the NFL and Hard Knocks is another successful template). I include the NHL in that, and they should embark on creating it immediately.

31 Thoughts: The Podcast

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

Let's start with the few advantages F1 has that the NHL does not: For one, all F1 teams are together every single week at a shared venue. Logistically, that takes care of a massive hurdle that the four major North American sports must find a way to clear. Incidentally, this is why the PGA Tour — which has announced its own F1-inspired show next season — has a real chance at having success.

There's also the simplicity factor with F1. Their league consists of just 20 drivers (and some others on the fringes in F2), made up of 10 teams with two "seats" per. A single NHL team contains that many personalities alone, and so the breadth of teams and stories can feel daunting. Where to start?

What an NHL version of this show could steal, though, are the unique Drive to Survive features we already mentioned: a focus on the "non-traditional" markets to start (more Racing Point and less Mercedes at first) who would be more prone to giving access for dollars and exposure. I know I watched a docuseries on the soccer team from Sunderland (called Sunderland Til I Die, which I also recommend) and immediately



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started looking for a shirt to buy. You can't tell me generating that reaction from utter outsiders wouldn't appeal to just about every team in hockey.

Another perk of focusing on internal drama is that it largely exists away from the biggest names. In both cases -- using non-traditional market teams with a focus on the middle of the roster and fringe players -- your odds of getting a team to agree to being the subject matter are higher than, say, trying to do a docuseries on the Boston Bruins that focuses on Brad Marchand and Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak. (That may not be all that interesting anyway. They're good, they get ice time and dollars and try to win the Cup. We know that.)

Christian Horner on F1's North American boom, "Drive to Survive"

Yes, the Toronto Maple Leafs are the subject of an upcoming docuseries -- an "All or Nothing" show put together by Amazon, but having seen All or Nothing's in the past (I watched the one on Man City), it's safe to say the camera will be aimed away from internal strife. If I had to guess, there's little chance you'll finish watching that upcoming documentary and feel like there were massive internal failings despite their results. (I'm guessing the team itself was guaranteed final approval before it goes to air.)

Leaving the F1 series, I found myself wondering how Haas could possibly continue to employ Guenther Steiner or how Roman Grosjean continued to hold one the 20 available seats. That's not great for those individual guys maybe, but as a trade-off for converting me to a fan of the sport I'm guessing F1 as a whole is OK with that. I think most NHL players and staff see themselves as competent, and wouldn't think they'd come off that way in a potential show, so that wouldn't be a turn-off to getting initial agreement.

If you started the show with non-traditional market teams that are competitive -- Columbus, Florida, Carolina, maybe Dallas or Nashville come to mind -- I think you'd get illuminating commentary from players and coaches given they aren't normally inundated with media. In the NHL the highs and lows come and go quickly based on the frequency of play, but because of that we can miss how a team felt during those swings. We see that in the big picture they're fine, but miss the process they took to correct course.

When a team loses twice in a row and then wins, we as fans only see a slightly imperfect week. But internally after those two losses you never know when the losing will end, and you start to worry it's all about to go horribly wrong. It gets tense.

What's fascinating to me, having been on both sides of the player/media perspective, is how a media member will correctly state that a player will break out of a scoring slump eventually, and the stat guys will state that a poor shooting percentage is unsustainable, but for the players and teams involved it's not always as simple as "stick with it and it will eventually come." You need it to come next game, not "eventually," and not scoring/winning is often a symptom of a bigger problem. You can't always just shrug and say "Ah bad luck we'll get the bounces another day."

Maybe a player isn't getting to the net in the same way and they need to Watch video to see how their attacking style has been different of late. Maybe they're playing with a linemate who doesn't pass as much or as well. Maybe they're struggling with an injury. Or maybe they're squeezing the stick because they know their opportunity is about to go to someone else on the team. Being a part of that process, which cameras could illuminate, is a fun part of understanding the direction and ambitions of a pro hockey team.

I'm interested in the players fighting for jobs across the waiver wire within the NHL too, and just how tough those opportunities are to come by. Every organization's roster construction creates certain needs, and the guys who are fringe AHL/NHL are working to tack a literal zero on to their paycheck. Guys will become whatever the team wants them to for the chance to make \$750,000 instead of \$75,000. Maybe a team needs speed or toughness or a PK guy or a faceoff man. It's crazy watching

players who aren't necessarily specialists in those things contort themselves to try to fit the needs of what their organization is after, and highlighting what's happening with their style of play would be illuminating.

There are plenty of times after a win when individual players are left dejected in the dressing room. The team sees those things, the coaches in particular, but those moments are usually hand-waved away and ignored. Maybe a certain guy got benched and whoever stepped into their spot had success. Maybe the guy they're competing with for PP time got a chance on the top unit and scored. Maybe they blew an opportunity or just played poorly and they know that the next day at practice the colour of the jersey in their stall is going to be "fifth line" or "fourth pair."

It's often at practice the following day where players see how their play will impact them going forward. We never have cameras there.

The NHL's best bet would be to have a presence in a handful of cities at once, maybe five or so, and to focus on those middle/fringe athletes. They'd be best doing interviews with the equipment managers, who know the players and internal stories better than any other staff member in the building, head coach included. They'd be wise to interview the beat writers, who are most adept at pointing to the internal jockeying for opportunities that the players rarely acknowledge exist.

One of the strengths of the F1 series is that the drivers are on their own in those cars, and they don't depend on their teammates to have success. That means in their interviews they can let their egos shine through. They can say they believe they're the best, and their team can say "Good, we want him to think that way because the better he does and more confident he drives, the better for all of us." Ego is encouraged. In hockey, putting yourself out there like that can get a guy alienated in the room. And so, I think you also need a translator, so to speak. You need to interview the players involved in the drama, and have someone else shining a light on what they've carefully said (or didn't say) could really mean.

With these shows not coming out until after the season is finished, I think you're at very little risk of putting a player in a bad spot, and even still, it's not the end of the world if a player says something interesting (perhaps self-first rather than team-first?) and not everyone on his team thinks it's perfect.

We need to get there in hockey: acknowledging that so much of why players say "it's all about the team" is about continuing to be employed by said team, or at least, finding employment with another team down the road. It's not that hockey players are better guys than the next athletes with all this "team" stuff, it's that they know part of earning "seats" in the league involves being a team-first guy. That's where the disconnect is: players and staff all say team, team, team, but are at least partly aware that doing so is in the best interest of self. We don't seek out those individual motivations well in hockey media.

The NHL has a culture that leads to the burying of some of the best internal storylines because it's a sin to admit you care about your own career, for some reason. I think with enough access, enough interviews, and perhaps that translator, we can get to some great stories.

At the end of the day professional sports are about entertainment -- it's the world's best form of reality TV -- and embracing another angle of that can only be good for fan engagement, and in turn, the health of the league as a whole.

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TSN.CA / ormer NHL player JT Brown pledges brain to science



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The former Lightning, Ducks and Wild winger made the commitment during his final NHL season in 2018-19 but has not talked publicly about it until now, Rick Westhead writes.

By Rick Westhead

While playing with the Minnesota Wild in his final National Hockey League season in 2018-19, JT Brown became the second active NHL player to pledge his brain to the Concussion Legacy Foundation in Boston.

"We need more information about brain injuries and concussions, the kind of information you can get from studying brains after someone has died," Brown said in an interview on Tuesday with TSN. "I love hockey and want to see the game grow and would love to try to do what I can to make it safer for future generations."

Brown, 31, grew up in Rosemount, Minn., and played 365 regular-season games in the NHL with Tampa, Anaheim and Minnesota. Brown played during the 2020-21 season in Sweden before he retired and joined the expansion Seattle Kraken as a TV analyst. He was undrafted after playing NCAA hockey at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

Brown made his brain pledge in early 2019 but has not talked publicly about his decision before now. He was the second active NHL player to pledge his brain to science, following former New Jersey Devils player Ben Lovejoy, who made the commitment to the same foundation in 2017.

Brown said that he was in 26 fights as a professional and had three fights in junior hockey.

"I think about my brain health, with the style of game I played," he said. "I was a small player, stature wise, and played gritty and played with lots of energy and tried to hit everything that moved... I don't know what the impact of the fighting has been on my brain. That's part of the reason I'm doing this."

Brown said he suffered at least two documented concussions playing professional hockey, the worst of which occurred during a random play.

"It was innocent," he said. "Wayne Simmonds and I were skating through the neutral zone. Neither of us was looking at the other. He barely clipped my chin. He wasn't trying to do anything. There are times you get your head rammed into the boards and no problem; you don't feel anything. Then you barely get touched and you have to miss time."

"I missed two weeks with that. I had headaches, the sensitivity to light. I was feeling down, feeling foggy. Then you think you can go and play but working out you can just tell your body isn't right. You're out of synch."

Lexi Brown, JT's wife, said she began researching brain injuries and looking for ways to help advance science after former NHL player Dan Carcillo began sharing his mental health struggles publicly.

"Dan talked about battling depression and his brain health and that's something hockey wives think about and worry about," she said. "An [NHL player] gets knocked out or they have to bring a stretcher out for him, there's always a group chat with women saying, 'Hope he's okay,' and reaching out to his significant other."

"When JT breaks a hand or something like that, we know how it's going to be fixed. You know he's going to be okay. But with the brain, you don't have that same assurance. It's scarier... The challenge is hockey culture, where guys don't speak out on a lot of issues."

Lexi said many players are leery about talking publicly about brain injuries until they are retired.

After researching the science of brain injuries, Lexi contacted the Concussion Legacy Foundation, which works alongside scientists at the CTE Center at Boston University. Dr. Ann McKee, a neuropathologist there, has studied the brains of more than 100 former pro football players and a handful of former NHL players to establish whether repeated head trauma leads to chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE.

CTE can only be detected through a postmortem examination of the brain. The disease has been linked to mood swings, depression and violent behaviour and is caused by repeated blows to the head, researchers say.

Dr. McKee has diagnosed CTE in former NHL players Derek Boogaard, Reggie Fleming, Rick Martin, Stan Mikita, Jeff Parker, Bob Probert and Larry Zeidel. Former NHL player Steve Montador also had CTE, according to researchers with the Canadian Sports Concussion Project in Toronto.

Dr. McKee also has discovered CTE in the brains of four former junior hockey players. All four – none of whom advanced to the NHL – died by suicide before the age of 30.

In 2008, Keith Primeau became the first former NHL star to pledge his brain to the CTE Center. Former NHL players Jeff Nielsen, Matt Walker, Craig Adams, Ted Drury, Shawn McEachern and Bob Sweeney in retirement have also pledged to donate their brains.

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