



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 10, 2021



Hurricanes Prospect Profile: Justin Robidas

By Matthew Somma

Justin Robidas has some major shoes to fill. His father, Stephane Robidas, appeared in 937 NHL games over the course of his career and was the Toronto Maple Leafs' Director of Player Development from 2017-2021. Robidas' 2020-21 season saw him score 19 goals and record 36 points in 35 games in addition to 10 points in 14 playoff games. This led to Robidas hearing his name called by the Hurricanes in the fifth round, 147th overall in the 2021 NHL Draft.

Shooting

Robidas' shot is his best asset, no doubt about it. I'd argue that his shot is NHL ready given how quick his release is, how quick the shot itself is and how accurate it is. Robidas is a sniper and a scoring threat from just about anywhere in the offensive zone. He isn't overly flashy with his shot fakes or dekes but he doesn't have to be since the shot itself is elite. Robidas will find the smallest amount of space and wire a quick snap shot through traffic and pick a corner with ease. I would argue that Robidas is one of the best shooters in the Hurricanes' pipeline, right up there with the likes of Noel Gunler.

It's a hard shot and QMJHL goalies had a tough time stopping his shots even when they got a clean look at it. Robidas likes to fire off snap shots with a lightning fast release, making it tougher for goalies to react to his shot. There are times when he'll hold onto the puck a split second longer than expected, force the goalie to make a move and then shoot where the goalie left an opening. Robidas can create a bit of space to shoot using simple toe drags, giving him just enough room to work with in order to generate a scoring chance. Here's one more clip, just to remind you all that Robidas can, in fact, shoot the puck.

Skating

Robidas' top speed is impressive, which has to be the case if he wants to have a shot at making it to the NHL. Robidas stands at 5-foot-7, meaning that he has a disadvantage in terms of reach. He has to work almost twice as hard as other players in order to keep up and make an impact in all three zones. Robidas isn't just able to keep up, though. He's a quick skater that can beat most QMJHL defensemen and get in passing lanes in the defensive zone. He's quick on the rush, a good forechecker and an important part of Val-D'Or's two-way game. All of that has to do with his skating. Robidas will need to get a step or two faster in order to keep the pace against better competition, but that can easily be developed over time with the Hurricanes' skating coaches. At this point

in time, Robidas is a quick skater that can play at a high pace, making it difficult for the opposition to stop him once he gets going.

Robidas plays at a high pace and is aggressive on the puck, constantly trying to force opponents to make a mistake and turn the puck over. He's pretty good at it, too. There are times where he'll intercept a pass because a defender got careless or was pressured into making that pass. Robidas will then try and turn it into a scoring chance. His reach will always limit how many passes he can intercept, but he'll be able to force players to make careless mistakes any time they try and exit the zone. I wouldn't say that Robidas is a Brad Marchand level of pest when he's in the offensive zone but he's a pain to play against nonetheless.

I'm going to couple Robidas' puck carrying abilities with his skating because they go hand in hand in a lot of ways. Defenders try and knock Robidas off of the puck, but he's certainly not a lightweight. In fact, he has a surprising amount of muscle for a kid his size and he's able to protect the puck and carry it to a safer area before making a pass to avoid a turnover. Robidas can protect the puck in double coverage, which isn't something that most players his size are able to do. The clip above shows just that. Robidas is able to not only protect the puck, he's able to get to the middle of the ice, pass the puck and get in position to score on the rebound. Little plays like that and the following clip make me think that Robidas' size isn't going to be a concern if he makes it to the NHL.

He holds onto the puck long enough for his teammate to enter the zone. There isn't a lot of space for Robidas to work with and all the defender has to do is push him over the blue line to nullify any sort of offense. Robidas keeps that play alive with his strength.

Hockey Sense

Robidas can see where a teammate's shot will end up and move to put home a rebound. He wants to score and will move himself to the best possible position to do so. I would say that Robidas sees the ice at an average to slightly above average level and can usually anticipate an offensive play before it happens. I saw Robidas' hockey sense on full display in the offensive zone. He would move past defensemen that got puck focused and would be wide open for a tap in goal at the back door. He'd make a cross-ice pass to a player that was making his way past defensemen for a scoring chance. And like I said earlier, Robidas would



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always know where a rebound was going to land and he'd be right there in order to get a second shot off.

Robidas showed some glimpses of high levels of hockey sense in the defensive zone, although there were more gaps in his decision making. I noticed a number of times when he'd react to a play and intercept a pass, leading to a breakaway or odd man rush on multiple occasions. Those usually wound up as goals, too. Robidas can lose his man on occasion, but for the most part, he sees the ice well in the defensive zone and can be relied upon to kill penalties and be an above average defensive forward. A player of his size getting PK minutes isn't necessarily unheard of, but it's a rarity.

Passing

Robidas isn't a fantastic passer and I noticed many times where his breakout passes would be intercepted and lead to long shifts in the defensive zone. While he isn't limited to simple passes, I rarely saw a pass from Robidas that I wasn't able to expect. That's to be expected from a sniper. Robidas might only be an average passer at the NHL level. That's not a make or break thing for a prospect, but it is something that I'd like to see him improve upon if he is going to make it to the NHL someday. His shot is a fantastic passing tool because even if a goalie stops it, it's not likely that they'll be able to stop it without giving up a rebound in the process. I was able to see a handful of occasions where Robidas would shoot and a teammate would attempt to put home the rebound. Robidas sees the ice well enough to become an above average passer and make more of an impact in the offensive zone beyond scoring goals. It may take some time, however.

Projectable Tools and Summary

Robidas could be an NHL player someday, but he is a project that will take at least four or five years to develop. The skills that I see translating directly to the NHL are his shot, skating and hockey sense. There's no question that Robidas' shot is close to, if not already, NHL ready. He skates well and if he can continue to get quicker, he'll be able to keep up and carve out a role for himself in the NHL. Robidas isn't going to be the smartest player on the ice at

any given moment, but he still sees the ice at a good enough level to be able to keep up at the NHL level.

Let's talk about what Robidas needs to work on before he can become an NHL player. First off is his passing. I don't see Robidas being a good enough passer at this present moment and he can turn the puck over in transition a lot. His shot is good enough to beat QMJHL goalies from a distance, but he'll need to explore more passing options once he gets to higher levels of competition. Robidas needs work on faceoffs, too. I could see it becoming less of an issue as he matures and adds more muscle, but as of right now, he can get pushed around in the faceoff circle too often for my liking. It's a smaller part of the game, but possession is important and winning those offensive draws can be critical for a team's success.

Most importantly, I need Robidas to discover a higher level in his game. I was unable to pinpoint any particular moments where he was able to take over a shift and become the catalyst of Val-D'Or's offense. This was a stacked team with a vast amount of NHL draft picks, so I'm willing to wait and see if Robidas becomes more of a dynamic presence when he's not in the shadow of so many draft picks. In the games that I watched, Robidas did little to distinguish himself in the offensive zone beyond his shooting ability. He doesn't stickhandle all that often, he won't make flashy passes and you don't see Robidas make too many players look out of position. He has a great shot that can beat goalies from almost anywhere and he's an average passer that can chip in assists here and there, but I don't see the top six upside that some scouts see. I absolutely see a top nine scorer if Robidas can hit all of the marks developmentally, though. He has the potential to score 20+ goals at the NHL level and become a key player on the Hurricanes' power play. I could see Robidas being a 40+ point player if developed properly, but it'll take time for him to reach his full potential.

I'll be taking a break from the 2021 draft class until there's more film available. Players on the list include Patrik Hamrla, Aidan Hreschuk, Jackson Blake, Bryce Montgomery and Nikita Guslistov. Prospect profiles will continue next week, however, with 2020 third-round pick Alexander "Boom" Nikishin. You'll find out why that's an apt nickname next week.



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TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.canescountry.com/2021/9/9/22659929/carolina-hurricanes-nhl-justin-robidas-draft>

SportScan

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

1220119 Carolina Hurricanes

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

Sara Civian

6-7 minutes 9/9/2021

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

Andrei Svechnikov (F), Russia

After Alexander Ovechkin, Artemi Panarin and Nikita Kucherov, Svechnikov is next in line as the top active Russian winger. He's such a no-brainer that the first edition of this story might have overlooked including him on the list. It can be assumed he'll be at the Olympics.

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



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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 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.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.10.2021

In the afternoon, I remember walking downtown on Broadway as far as I could, unsure of exactly where to go but wanting to go somewhere. There was smoke in the air, and I'll always remember how quiet that part of the city felt as hell had been unleashed just a few miles south. It was somber and devastating and most of us living in New York City knew families who were impacted by the tragedy personally, or through short degrees of separation. The city came back, as it always does, but things were never quite the same.

Over the past couple of weeks, I reached out to some well-known people in the sports media for their personal reflections on that day. Here is what they told me.

J.A. Adande, director of sports journalism at the Medill School at Northwestern

I was living in Los Angeles and working as a sports columnist at the L.A. Times. I got a phone call around 6 a.m. Pacific from a friend on the East Coast who worked in local television news. She said planes had been hijacked, headed for the Twin Towers, and we were under attack. At first I thought she was being a little bit overblown. I turned on the TV and saw the smoke coming out of the buildings. Then I heard about the Pentagon being hit and I was like, "This is an attack." I was watching NBC, and I'll never forget they showed firefighters emerging from the dust and just sitting down, taking off their helmets and their gear. The sheer exhaustion, grief and sadness overwhelmed them.

Within a day or two, the L.A. Kings, who had two scouts on one of the planes (Mark Bavis and Ace Bailey were aboard United Airlines Flight 175) held a press conference to talk about it. I remember driving down to their practice facility in El Segundo and all of a sudden I saw police cars, the bomb squad, fire trucks, sirens blaring, going the other way. I remember thinking, "Is this what it's going to be like now? What will I do for a career? I fly on airplanes to go to buildings filled with thousands of people. How am I going to have my career given these circumstances?"

We thought our lives would be forever altered by 9/11. To me, it really hasn't changed our daily lives. You notice it when you fly, of course, and any time you go to an arena and through a metal detector — that's all post-9/11. But we became accustomed again to being in large spaces, arenas, parks and restaurants after some apprehension. I do remember thinking how everything was going to be divided into pre-9/11 and post-9/11. But I think coronavirus has impacted us much greater on an everyday basis.

The first sporting event that I covered after Sept. 11 was that Friday, a high school football game. Obviously, the score of the game wasn't what mattered. It was just what it was like to be at a sporting event. Kids were in the stands and doing what high school kids do, flirting and talking and socializing. That was great to see. I remember being very moved by the national anthem. I felt like I'd never appreciated an anthem as much, and at that point, it was a unifying thing. I remember driving back and seeing

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The Athletic / The sports media world reflects on 9/11, 20 years later

Richard Deitsch Sep 9, 2021

Twenty years ago this week, on Sept. 11, 2001, a series of terrorist attacks against the United States of America killed nearly 3,000 people in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. I was a young reporter for Sports Illustrated at the time, living on Manhattan's West Side. That day, a Tuesday with a bright blue sky and perfect late-summer weather, was a scheduled off day for most of the editorial staff given the magazine published on Monday nights. Like millions around the planet, I followed the coverage for much of the morning on television.



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a plane landing at LAX and that was reassuring, a little bit of back to normal.

Adam Amin, Fox Sports broadcaster

I was 14 years old, which is weird to think about, a completely different human being. ... The way our freshman class was set up, we had something called "freshman studies," which basically combined three different subjects into one classroom. I remember there were two TVs in the corner of the room and then they rolled another one into the room. So there were like 50 or 60 of us in the massive room watching television, a bunch of 14-year-olds who are in high school for the first time, now watching this thing unfold. Years later, I always wondered if that's how people watching the Challenger explosion or the Berlin Wall falling felt. Just this room full of scared, hormonal teenagers in their first week of high school, all suddenly thrust together to watch arguably the defining moment of our lives at that point.

We stayed the whole day at school, but it was just a weird day. I remember being in a daze for a chunk of the day. But there were two incidents that I remember the most. One happened that day and one the next. On Sept. 11, we were in a little quad area and I was walking across from one side of the building to the other. A student yelled at me, "Hey, this was your people, wasn't it?" I turned around and was like, "What the fuck did you just say to me?" He's like, "This was your people, wasn't it?" In my head, I'm like, "I'm not going to have this conversation. I'm not going to sit here and listen to this bullshit." But I had very little recourse at that point, especially after an emotional morning, to get into a fight with somebody over it. But it stung so badly. Kids don't know any better.

The next day we were on the bus and there was this kid I'd known for a long time. I walked past him on the bus and he pulled his jacket over his head to mimic a hijab or something similar. He's laughing. I shoved him, and a buddy ended up punching up. Tensions were high. When people typically get scared, they want to blame someone or something so their worldview makes sense. They're outside of our realm of societal standard, so it's their fault and we can excoriate and alienate them. That's what people do when they're scared, and that's especially what a bunch of 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds are going to do when they're scared. Obviously, I have an understanding of that now.

That night I remember sitting down and watching coverage with my dad. We were all wondering what the next day was going to hold. We had the same thought throughout the day because this happened in Washington, D.C., and New York City. These are big, important metropolises of the country and we're in Chicago — granted, we are in the suburbs, but we're thinking something's going to happen here or Los Angeles or every big city. My dad, then in his 60s, was a very strong, even-keeled, unflappable person. And I felt tension in this man on that day. I remember that distinctly.

Roy Bellamy, Meadowlark Media producer and on-air talent

I was a senior at Miami Norland Senior High School, right by what we now call Hard Rock Stadium. I recall being in my American government class and over the P.A. our assistant principal said to us, "Everybody turn on your TVs. A plane crashed into the World Trade Center." We didn't know the extent of what happened. I mean, it could have been a Cessna that flew into the World Trade Center or a two-seater or something. The announcement came near the end of that class and I remember then going to my English honors class. The TVs were on there too. We were watching the NBC feed and I got to see the extent of the damage for the first time. This was not a Cessna. Then we saw another plane fly into Tower Two and we knew it was coordinated. This is not good. We found out later that, no, this is not just happening in New York. A plane has flown into the Pentagon. We are under attack. I was 17 years old.

There was nothing being taught that day. We just all sat there and watched TV. Then the building fell and we were in shock. Then snap, the bell rings and we have to go to the next class. I'm thinking to myself, "Maybe I should go home now. Maybe we shouldn't be here in school." But I stayed until the end of the school day.

I rushed to get home as soon as school was over. The entire day was filled with questions. Why is this happening? What are we going to do now? Here we are 20 years later, pulling out of Afghanistan, and wondering what exactly went wrong. I stupidly hopped on public transportation to get home — I took a bus because I didn't know what else to do. I didn't have a car. I went straight to my room to watch the coverage. I believe I went to school the next day. I don't think it was canceled.

That day brought us back into a war and I remember thinking a lot about our school's JROTC program (United States Army Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps) because we had students in our program. As soon as that happened, I knew that there would be some students in that program who would eventually have to fight. So I was thinking about them — and that was tough.

Jay Bilas, ESPN college basketball analyst

I remember that Tuesday morning was the second day of a two-day charity event that a friend of mine (former NBA-er Dell Curry, father of Steph and Seth) was putting on. It was a golf/bowling tournament and that morning we were all at the Park Lanes bowling alley in Charlotte. They had a bar area that was enclosed in glass and there was an old TV on a stand in the corner. Slowly, word got through that something terrible had happened.

By then I was with ESPN full-time and winding down my work with my law practice at Moore & Van Allen in Charlotte, where I worked as a litigation attorney. That day, I was supposed to be at the law office, but I was playing hooky for this charity thing. When the second tower was hit, everybody stopped, and we were all piled into this bar area watching it unfold on television. Rick Bonnell, who recently passed away and was a great writer for the Charlotte Observer, was standing next to me and there was someone near us who was an engineer. I remember he said the buildings could come down. I was like, what? I thought, what a crackpot. Like, who would say something like that? My first reaction was that was ludicrous. I heard him talk about the fuel and how much heat the buildings would generate. I just could not wrap my head around that.

I got hold of my wife and she had gotten our kids out of school. At home, we tried to keep them away from a TV set because we didn't know how they would process it. They were 6 and 4 years old at the time. I don't think I'll ever forget going to the airport for the first time afterward. There were so many people and the lines were so long. The security line went from one end of the airport to the other, and if you didn't leave 2.5 hours for the line, you weren't going to get through. My mother's father was in the Merchant Marines, and Pearl Harbor was something that he had spoken about with us. That was obviously different, but also a similar feeling for our generation, now having to deal with that kind of trauma.

Joe Buck, Fox Sports broadcaster

I had just dropped my oldest daughter off at school and I was driving back home, about a 15-minute commute. I was maybe five minutes from home when I heard it on the news. I think it might have just been a news flash about an airplane hitting the World Trade Center. This was obviously before the second plane, and the collapse and all that. It was all sketchy at the time. People just thought it was an accident or a mistake.

I went back to school and got my daughter. My then-youngest daughter was not in school yet. She had just turned 2 and her sister was 5-plus. It's hard to believe now, but everybody felt so vulnerable. It felt like that even sitting here in the middle of the Midwest. I headed home and then turned on the TV and it felt like I was glued to the television for the next six days until baseball came back.

I was doing Cardinals games locally and working for Fox then, and when baseball came back, it was an eerie feeling driving down to the ballpark here in St. Louis. You felt like, "My God, we're all going to be sitting ducks. It's 40,000 people in the stadium." That was the mentality, at least it was for me going down there. My dad (Jack Buck) gave a speech on the field on Sept. 17. It was a poem he wrote about 9/11 and that kind of



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gave the nod that it was OK to go and try to get back to life somewhat as we knew it. He died less than a year later. I told him afterward that everything he had done in his life had led to that moment. He was a World War II vet, earned a Purple Heart, and a Hall-of-Fame baseball announcer. It just all came together for him to give that speech. I remember the flood of letters he received from people all over Major League Baseball, all over government, just saying how special that poem was to them.

Linda Cohn, ESPN "SportsCenter" anchor and NHL host/reporter

I was born in New York City, but on Sept. 11, 2001, I was living in Connecticut, obviously working at ESPN. I was married at the time. Our daughter was 10 and our son was 5. The reason I bring that up is because my husband was not home. He happened to be on a scheduled bicycle trip in Nevada with four of his buddies. So I got up early that morning with the kids to get them off to school. My daughter had already gone to school before the first tower was hit, and I walked my son to his bus so he could go to kindergarten. What I distinctly remember is we had a workman come to the house that morning to measure our carpet for a new rug. I remember this because I'm not Miss Decorator. So this workman and I are watching what was happening on TV. No one knew what was going on after the first tower was hit. Maybe it was a plane mishap of some sort. We then saw the second tower get hit. I was born in Manhattan and on this worst day in the history of New York City, I'm talking about it with a stranger in my home and still not knowing what's going on.

Remarkably, my kids were not sent home from school. My daughter is now 30 and she said she remembered teachers rushing to watch television at school to see what was going on. I decided not to wait for the busses and went and picked up both my kids. Then I called my sister. My sister worked for a judge in Kew Gardens, Queens, and I was very concerned about her. She could smell and see the smoke from her office window in Queens. The last thing I thought about was work. All I thought about was being alone with my kids and keeping it together. I felt so far away living in Connecticut. When 9/11 happened, I didn't want to be in Connecticut. I really wanted to go to New York. Those are the people I grew up with, and I was born there. I felt very far away in Connecticut. Like everyone else, I was glued to the TV all night and glad that I brought my kids home and that I could be with them.

I always loved the way we came together as a country, flags everywhere, respect for the firefighters and first responders and police officers. I mean, are we ever going to see that again? I hope there isn't something that causes us to see that again, meaning another terrorist attack.

I can tell you that day has never left me. Every time there is a nice day in September in New York City, I think about it. Of course, there are the thousands of people that died on 9/11, but we have had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people dying in the last 20 years of 9/11-related illnesses. That's all over the country. It's not just a New York thing. It will never go away for me.

Charles Davis, CBS Sports NFL broadcaster

I was working on a sports-talk radio show in Orlando with my partner, Pat Clarke. He was the preeminent sportscaster in the Orlando area for like 30 years. We were working on a brand new venture for Sunshine Network, where we co-hosted a morning radio show from 6 to 9 in the morning, and then did TV in the evenings.

I remember when the first plane hit I was still at the building. I can't remember if we were still on-air or had just come off. Many people thought it was a small plane at first, just by the appearance on TV. I thought to myself: "Wow, that plane really went off course and what a horrendous accident." Then of course the second plane hit and now it's a whole different beast. I was still at the station and called home immediately. I remember my wife said, "I do believe we are about to be at war." I hopped in the car and drove home as quickly as I could. At that point, the TV was on 24/7. That night my family all huddled at our home in Winter Garden. Our kids were young, 7 and 3, and we tried to explain

what we thought was going on. But I had a pit in my stomach thinking, war, flat-out war, in my lifetime.

Rich Eisen, NFL Network host and host of The Rich Eisen Show on Peacock

I co-hosted the post-"Monday Night Football" "SportsCenter" early on the morning of Sept. 11 and as usual with that schedule, I went to sleep that night at 4 a.m. A couple of hours later I got a call from my then-fiancée and now wife, Suzy, who was living on the West Coast. She woke me up around 9 in the morning and I immediately knew something was wrong because I would usually not be waking up until much later. She said, "Turn on the television." I turned on the TV just literally at the moment the second plane hit the tower. I was flabbergasted. I could not believe what I was seeing. I stayed on the phone with her and then watched TV as much as I could. I watched the towers fall and life had changed.

I called into work and they had no idea what would be happening. ESPN wound up playing Peter Jennings on ABC News for most of the day. I did go to work later that day wondering if I was doing a show or not. They eventually told me I wasn't. I remember walking across the catwalk from one building to another at ESPN, watching the sunset, thinking what a beautiful day this was weather-wise. Yet, it was a horrible day.

The next day I did the overnight "SportsCenter." I don't remember if it was with Stuart (Scott) or Kenny (Mayne). But I remember thinking to myself, "Why are we on the air? What are we doing?" I'm from New York City. My hometown has got an open wound that at the time felt like it would never heal. I had an apartment on the Upper West Side, and I drove into the city after doing that "SportsCenter." I got there in the middle of the night. There were police checkpoints to get into the city. I just wanted to go to New York. I wanted to see what was going on or do any volunteering I could do. I was 100 blocks north of what was happening and I knew I wouldn't get there, but I just wanted to be on that island.

I grew up in Staten Island and one of my first memories was getting on the (Staten Island) Ferry and watching the World Trade Center get larger as I approached, the Statue of Liberty on my left. I could not believe those towers had been taken down by airplanes. Who thinks of such a barbaric thing?

Mike Golic, Learfield college football analyst and longtime radio host

Greeny (Mike Greenberg) and I were on-air doing the ("Mike & Mike") show (on ESPN Radio). In the studio where we did that show, we had six or seven TVs on different stations, whether it was on a sports or news station. I don't know if it was CNN or Fox, but one of the news stations that was on, just out of the corner of our eyes, we saw a breaking news flash. Then our producer told us in our ear that there had been a terrorist attack in New York. All of a sudden, we were telling everybody, hey, we have this news. We were talking on-air and watching TV at the same time. We saw the second plane go into the tower while we were on-air. Digger Phelps was on the air as a guest at the time. So we were talking to Digger and looking at the television and our producer is in our ear. After a couple of minutes, we obviously hung up with Digger. Then Greeny and I were talking about what we were seeing for those people who were in a car because it's morning drive. We were explaining what we were seeing and obviously dumbfounded with what was going on. I mean, just numb with what was happening. We thought in all honesty that they were going to pull this off the air and go to ABC News or something. They didn't. They told us to keep having our natural reaction and stay on-air.

As more and more information was coming out about it, we were just talking about our feelings and kind of explaining things to everybody who was driving. At the time, my wife was out at the store and we were touching base with family and loved ones during breaks. We finished the show and thought for sure tomorrow they're just going to go to ABC News. But they sat us down in the post-show meeting afterward and said you guys go on-air tomorrow and just be Mike and Mike the human beings and not the sportscasters. If people want to go to a news channel, they'll go to a news channel. People that wanted to tune in, they knew we



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weren't going to talk sports. We were just going to kind of react as human beings. We were just like everybody else, except we had a microphone and could amplify it to a lot of people. We couldn't believe what the hell was going on.

After the post-show meeting ended on Sept. 11, I went home. Two of my kids were in middle school and one was younger than that. We just all sat down and glued ourselves in front of the TV. We wondered what was going on and tried to get an explanation for what happened. Just like any other family that day.

Mike Joy, Fox Sports NASCAR broadcaster

That morning I was working in my home office in Simsbury, Conn. My business partner in our racing fuel business called me and said, "Hey, turn on the TV, you won't believe what's happened in New York." So of course I did, and the first plane had hit the tower. My reaction was shock and disbelief. That certainly could not have happened intentionally, and how in the hell could it have happened accidentally? My partner and I stayed on the phone and we were both watching the news when the second plane hit. Then it was very obvious that there was no accident at all. This was America under attack. As I processed the rest of the day, my first thought was for people I knew who worked at Logan Airport in Boston for the airlines. Then I thought about what was next. Everything I had ever read or learned about terrorism was that the goal of disruption is most easily achieved by hitting large groups of people in places where they feel safest. I wondered if we would be able to go to racetracks to broadcast events. At that time in 2001, we had just completed our first season of NASCAR on Fox.

My kids were very young at the time — 2 and 1. My wife (Gaye) and I stayed home the whole day. We were very quickly in hunker-down mode. I remember I did not go to the next NASCAR race at Dover and I would normally go to half-dozen Cup races even if we were not broadcasting them just to stay current with the sport. I don't think I left town for a couple of weeks. The first time I traveled was for a Fox seminar at year's end to prepare for the next year. For many years we would fly to Daytona, and I do recall that in February 2002 we drove down with the whole family. We drove mainly so we could react quickly to anything that happened unexpectedly, anything that would cause us to change our itinerary. When we were there, even though NBC had the race, I remember NASCAR and the speedway folks briefed us on safety protocols and government presence and things like that. Those were things that had not been a part of the event before, or if it had been, we were blissfully unaware of them.

Michael Kay, Yankees play-by-play voice for YES Network

I was in my house sleeping and I got a call from my mom. She said, "Are you watching TV?" I said no. I put the TV on and saw what was happening. Obviously, I was horrified and did not know exactly what was going on. Then you realize it's a terrorist attack and your mind starts to race. As I'm trying to process all this, I got a call from a very nervous and jumpy Al Leiter. We had become friends previously. The Mets were in Pittsburgh to play and he was supposed to start. He did not travel with the team because he wanted to take his daughter to school for her first day and then he was planning to fly to Pittsburgh. He was in a cab going to LaGuardia Airport and then everything got closed down. He's out of the city, things are closed down, and he knows no planes are coming in. So he called from the cab and said, "Michael, can I come by your house? I have no place to go and I can't get back into the city."

I lived in Westchester at the time and his cab driver took him to my house. I remember this woman cab driver following behind Al as he's coming to my door. She's crying. She's saying, "It wasn't our fault. It wasn't my fault. We didn't do it." It was a Middle Eastern woman. The whole world is spinning and Al says she's been screaming this for the last hour as she drove him here. Al said he kept telling her, "I'm not blaming you" and she kept saying, "Don't blame us, don't blame us, we didn't do it."

We were just sitting around my place and one lasting memory that I have is Al's butt sticking out of my refrigerator as he's looking for something to

eat. My family lived within shouting distance of where I lived, and so we all ended up going to my sister's house, including Al. My mom was there and my sister and her kids. We ended up ordering pizza and talking all night. At some point, New York was back open and Al left to be with his family. We were just glued to the TV and trying to figure out what's going on, what's going to happen, and what the future holds? You had an inkling the whole world was about to change and it certainly did.

The first game I called afterward was when the Yankees went to Chicago on Sept. 18. I remember this big sign which read something like, "Everyone Is A New York Fan Today." For the first week or two afterward, I couldn't summon up any emotion whatsoever to do the games. I just thought it was so frivolous and ridiculous. I felt almost ashamed and embarrassed that I was taking part in something like this with the still-smoldering ruins at Ground Zero. It wasn't like I was phoning it in. I just felt guilty about taking part in, like, a fun pastime when people were still trying to recover their loved ones.

I remember we got back to New York and this was before Twitter and stuff like that. There was mail I received from people who were scolding me, saying, "You cannot do this. We listen to these games to get us back to normalcy. If you don't have fun and are excited calling the games, we'll know that something's wrong." It kind of snapped me back into that. If you're in the entertainment business, which essentially this is, it's your job to entertain no matter what's going on around you. So I felt weird saying, "See ya!" (Kay's home run call), but I understood what people were saying. I got back to doing what I did. But for a week while we were on the road, I just couldn't bring myself to get excited about a baseball game.

Rebecca Lowe, NBC Sports host

I'll preface this by saying that it had been an interesting six weeks because on Aug. 3, 2001, my hometown was bombed by the IRA. That was Ealing in London, where I grew up. I worked in a pub during my summers off university, and that pub was bombed on the third of August that year. Growing up in London in the '90s and the '80s, IRA bombings in the U.K. were relatively frequent. It was a shock, but it wasn't a total shock. This is just what happened. So those kind of atrocities happened in British people's lives. I think part of why 9/11 was so extreme other than the fact that the act itself was just horrendous was because it was the first time that really so many Americans had suffered anything on home soil. So that was kind of the backdrop for me.

On that day I was in Spain on vacation with a college friend. It was our final day of my final summer before senior year of college. Our flight back to London was scheduled for 10 p.m. local time on Sept. 11. So my friend and I had to spend the day in and out of cafes and bars before we left for the airport. We were having coffee or lunch at some point and there was a television up in the corner. We saw a building on fire. But there was no sound to the television so we just carried on with whatever we were doing. Then we moved to another bar and at that point we started to get the sense that there was something serious going on. But still there was no sound on the TV and if there had been, it would have been in Spanish anyway. Then we saw the plane fly into the second building. I remember thinking, "Is this a movie? What's going on here?"

We managed to get a little bit of information, but of course, as I'm sure many people will remember, there was absolutely no way of finding information out like there is these days. We had cell phones, but you certainly were not going to use a cell phone in Spain because you'd end up with no money. So I found a payphone and used pesetas to phone my mom and tell her I was safe. I told her we were coming home tonight and she said, "Well, I hope you are, but I don't know whether you will be able to come home." We got to the airport and flights were still going on, which looking back on that now was quite interesting.

We got on the plane and I will always remember the atmosphere on that plane. This is a random vacation plane from Spain to London Gatwick — these happen every day — and the two-hour journey was as tense I've ever felt on a plane. Anyone who stood up, every single head turned to look at them. It was almost as if you couldn't move because by that point



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— 12 hours on — you kind of knew what happened. Being on a plane was not very relaxing and very worrying. We landed early hours of Sept. 12, and by that point, I think they started to shut down the airport. It was a very, very quiet night, which is weird. Obviously, London Gatwick is one of the busiest airports in the world. But what was weirder was I took a fast train into London and got the tube from Victoria Station to Ealing Common, which is where I was living with my mum. When you walked out of the Ealing Common tube station, there was a small news agency with newspapers and candy. All the newspapers are laid out in front in see-through boxes. As I approached this news agency as I had done many times before, I was confronted with a sea of front pages. The one that I remember was The Independent. The front page had a picture of the two towers on fire and the headline read, "Doomsday America." I remember crossing that road, seeing that headline, and thinking, "What is going to become of the world, our future, my future?" I was 20 years old.

Booger McFarland, ESPN NFL and college football analyst

That was leading into Week Two of our season (McFarland was a 24-year-old defensive tackle with the Bucs at the time) and Tuesday was our day off. But guys would still go into work for treatment or ice or to lift weights or whatever. When I got to the facility that morning, all of the TVs were on. You started to see the devastation. My first thought was this was the first time I'd really been fearful of something happening on U.S. soil. If you go back to when we were younger, you had the Persian Gulf War and other conflicts, but that did not take place on U.S. soil even though we were a part of it. And that's not to make light at all of our soldiers who were there, but it did not touch home the way this did. Here's a city that I visited that was under attack. I'll never forget calling my girlfriend, who is now my wife. I wanted to check on my loved ones, especially upon the initial reaction of finding out what happened. Throughout the day I was wondering, "What is the next thing that's going to happen? Do we know who did it? Did we understand why? What happened?" It was fact-finding and information-gathering for not only myself but for all my teammates. I remember everybody sitting in the training room and players' lounge just watching television. We did that for a couple of hours. You've got coaches and trainers, equipment staff, and some of the players, and they're just watching.

On the football side we were wondering what the NFL would do. You should know our facility was literally 50 yards from the airport. You could walk out onto a practice field and see two runways where planes took off and landed every day. I could throw a football and hit a runway. I'm wondering, "Should we really be in this building with these planes here?" We don't know what's going on and we're so close to the airport. Your thoughts are going in so many different places. I was living probably 15 minutes away from the facility at that time. It was a very quiet drive home, just listening for new updates.

We had a scheduled bye week the following week so we didn't play for 20 or 21 days. Our first game back was Sept. 30 at Minnesota. There was a lot of emotion in the locker room and just an outpouring of unity. It's amazing in life that we can be so divided as a country when it comes to political affiliations, or how you like your steak or how I like mine, and so many dumb things. However, when this country was under attack, it became united. It was a powerful thing. You almost forget what it feels like to not see color, not to see economic status. The United States of America. Those were the emotions that you felt as a player coming out of the tunnel the first time back on the field. You saw the crowd, the flag rolling, the Star-Spangled Banner playing, and everybody had their hand over their heart because everyone understood hey, man, we were under attack and it's not something to take lightly.

Al Michaels, NBC "Sunday Night Football" play-by-play broadcaster

We had opened up the "Monday Night Football" season the night before on the 10th of September — the Giants against the Broncos in Denver. I was working with Dan Fouts and Dennis Miller (for ABC) in those years. The game ended probably around 10 p.m. or so Denver time. We had a number of executives from Disney who had come for the game and I was able to fly back with them right after the game. I got home at around 12:30 a.m. back in Los Angeles. I went to bed.

The phone rang at about 6:30 in the morning. My wife picked it up and it was her sister, my sister-in-law. I'm groggy and (my wife) Linda is groggy. My wife says, "Diana says we are under attack. I could not really process it. Who is under attack?" So of course I turned on the television. My first thought was recalling that they had tried to bomb the Trade Center back in 1993 by placing bombs in the parking garage, or the lower parts of those buildings. I thought, "My God, now they've gone ahead and put bombs in the top of the building." I didn't know what had happened. It took three or four minutes before I began to see what had transpired. I said to my wife, "It will never be the same again."

There was such a sense of invulnerability living in the United States, certainly the continental United States. We had been attacked before, obviously on Dec. 7, 1941 (at Pearl Harbor). Even though we were attacked, it was 3,000 miles away from the mainland. Hawaii was in our territory and that was an attack on us. But to think that they could get inside our continental borders and in the most important city in the world and destroy two buildings was unfathomable. I couldn't wrap my head around it. I got up, grabbed coffee, and I can't remember being as sick as I was when the first building went down. Then the second building went down. We have recovered in some sense, but there are certain things that will never happen again that were able to happen prior to Sept. 11. When the buildings went down, I needed to get away from the television. It was just too depressing. I had to go for a walk.

I read the entire 9/11 Commission Report, all 500 pages. A few years later, when ABC did a documentary on the 9/11 report, Thomas Kean (the former Governor of New Jersey and Chairman of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks against the United States) was addressing the press in Pasadena. I asked a friend of mine if I could get 10 minutes with him. I had a lot of questions. I got 10 minutes which turned into an hour and a half. Because he knew I had read it.

The first game I called afterward came 13 days later. We did Washington at Green Bay. I remember thinking I really have to hit the right notes in the scene set, and I think I did. The stupidest cliché ever is "this puts everything in perspective." I hate when I hear that. I was just trying to capture the mood of where I was, which was in the middle of the country, talking to some people, talking to the players, just trying to get a feel for where we were without being dramatic or sappy or any of that stuff. The game started and there was something on the periphery that did not go away. The crowd was trying to get into it the way they normally do in Green Bay but it was somewhat muted. The season went on and I remember our next game was in New York (Jets-49ers). I was on Tony Kornheiser's radio show that week and he asked for a sense of what it was like. I said it was bizarre for somebody who grew up in New York. It's maybe the most vibrant city in the world, total energy, and it was almost like people were whispering to each other. They were afraid to speak at normal volume. Again, I hate the cliché of putting something in perspective, but the game was a diversion. And sometimes you just need a little something to begin to come back in the other direction.

Kevin Negandhi, ESPN "SportsCenter" and college football host

I was a 26-year-old sports reporter/anchor working at WWSB-TV in Sarasota, Florida, at the time. That morning I was heading to Riverview High School. Why was I going there? There was a lady who ran a mentoring program at the school and the main news anchor at my station went to the high school. He was part of the mentoring program and he asked me to be part of it. I told him I wanted in. It was my second year doing the program. My mentee that year was a student whose parents had emigrated from Iran less than two years earlier.

I heard the name-calling throughout my life and I was born in America. My parents came from India. My response was this young man is having a tough time adjusting and let me be around him to make him feel like he's not on his own in this. I suggested that morning to the person that ran the program, "How about I come in during lunchtime and eat with him?"

I remember the fear in his face when we watched some of the coverage in a counselor's office. Our sessions were an hour and I assured him that



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nothing would happen to him at school. I specifically told them I'm going to find a way to make you feel comfortable. I was covering local sports and I thought all the football players, basketball players, baseball players will see me and be like, "Why is the local sports guy having lunch here with this guy?" I said, "If I just sit with you once a week and we have lunch, you'll be fine. People will back off and not say anything to you or try to bully you." It worked. We did it for several weeks. It was just really tough for him. I'll never forget his face and just how concerned he was.

Later that day, I checked in with all the friends I knew in New York, and checked on my mom specifically with her being Indian-American in the Philadelphia region. I told her to watch what you do because people from the outside, they see somebody with tan skin and dark hair and they make assumptions. I said be careful and mindful. Not anticipating that something bad would happen but being proactive.

The next day I was on a golf course in Venice covering a story with a golfer. A guy comes up to me and says, "You may want to talk to me." I'm like, "Why?" He said, "I know two of the terrorist attackers." ... He said, "They trained here in Venice and I took flight school with them. They were in our class." He said they always paid cash, they wanted to learn how to fly, but never how to land. ... I immediately put him in touch with one of our news reporters.

Pam Oliver, Fox Sports NFL reporter

I was at home in Atlanta watching "Good Morning America." Diane Sawyer was anchoring and talking about the early stages of what was happening. I remember seeing a shot of the second plane crashing into the tower and then going, "What was that? Did I just see the right thing? Am I delusional?" I remember being so terrified and sick to my stomach and just like everyone else, I was glued to the television trying to figure out what was happening. At one point, I ran over to my neighbor's house to see if her husband was traveling because he traveled a lot as someone in sales.

The first time flying again I was very nervous. You could not help wonder what those people on that plane went through and your senses were heightened and you're looking around trying to see how everyone else is reacting. I remember so many people kind of burying their head in their work. I was really anxious, and I've had no fear before of flying ever.

While I didn't work either of their games, I did do a Jets and Giants feature for our pregame that ran the weekend the NFL resumed. It was how the New York teams were processing 9/11. My first game back for Fox was the Bears at Vikings (Sept. 23, 2001.) I thought the way league handled everything was impeccable and I remember not feeling such unity before. It was a very, very emotional day. I was choked up for much of the first half of the game.

T.J. Quinn, ESPN investigative reporter

I was covering the Mets for the New York Daily News and flew into Pittsburgh on Sept. 10, with a series against the Pirates to start the next day. I hung that night with one of my best friends from college, Annie O'Neill, and her then-partner, Lynn Johnson. Both are exceptional photojournalists. We spent a good part of the night talking about Lynn's current assignment for National Geographic: She was flying to New York in the morning to continue shooting a story about terrorism at the World Trade Center.

I crashed on their couch and the next morning, after coffee on their back porch under a perfect sky, Lynn drove herself to the airport. Twenty minutes after she left, she called Annie. A plane had hit one of the towers. They didn't have a TV, so we went to their computer to keep hitting refresh on AOL. Then news of the second plane. The towers were gone. We had no images to see, and the idea that the towers were gone seemed impossible. Lynn drove straight through to New York and within eight hours she had managed to talk her way into Ground Zero. I headed to my hotel and started calling Mets personnel to get some sort of reaction. Players were all in their rooms sitting in front of TVs. I think I typed up something about how some of them felt about it, but I don't really remember. Who in the world would care? That night Annie talked

her way onto a military flight that was hopping across the country, picking up blood as it headed to New York. She was on one of the only planes in the air, and the next day was shooting in Manhattan for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

I felt like I was on the moon, regretting that I had become a sportswriter, stuck in a Pittsburgh hotel while the biggest tragedy in decades unfolded miles from my home. But I was only about 90 minutes from Shanksville, where Flight 93 crashed. On the morning of the 12th, I found what seemed like the only rental car left in the area, and then headed east, into rural Pennsylvania. I finally came to a parking lot that was an ad hoc staging area with a white canvas tent and tables and chairs. There was a short walk down a dirt road, then dozens of reporters standing in a field behind a yellow rope. It was like visiting a Civil War battlefield, but at the other end of the empty field there was a deep black gouge in the earth, then a line of blackened trees silhouetted against a curtain of smoke. There were workers in yellow and white hazmat suits walking through the wreckage. I couldn't see a piece of debris that was larger than a piece of paper. The quiet, empty violence of the sight was the opposite of the scenes from Manhattan, except for the smoke.

I needed a landline to send my story to the paper, and walked a half-mile or so down a country road toward a house I saw. The owner set up a table for me in his garage, near a phone jack. His wife had seen the plane just before impact. It was upside-down, she said, and very loud. It hit the ground so hard that it flung their garage doors open from almost a half-mile away. I added that to my story. I filed and then drove back to Pittsburgh. Almost none of it made the paper the next day, but my name appeared in a byline box on Page 2, one of about 80 names. I still have it.

LaChina Robinson, ESPN WNBA and college basketball analyst

I had just started my senior year in college at Wake Forest (where she played basketball) and on that day I was scheduled to go home to Alexandria, Virginia. I was coming from North Carolina on Amtrak, and I was going home to have a pretty serious medical procedure done that had kept me off the court. I was on the train for maybe 30 minutes when we came to a screeching halt. We were sitting there idle for 90 minutes or more. I didn't have a cell phone when I was in college, so I had no way of finding out what was going on. But then there started to be some discussion on the train that something really serious had happened in New York and that maybe it was affecting us. The conductor eventually said over the loudspeaker that the train was going back to the station where we started. I'm freaking out at this point. What's going on?

I got back to the station and I didn't know what to do because again I didn't have a cell phone. I ended up finding a payphone and called a friend that lived in the area. Soon as I called she said something really bad happened in New York. Eventually I returned near campus and my friends and I were sitting in front of the television. About an hour after I had gotten back, I got a call from my mother.

This is something you should know: I grew up on a street that is 3.5 miles away from the Pentagon. My mother called and said she was doing yard work when a plane flew over her head. She said she said to herself: "That plane is flying really low." Where I live in Alexandria, we had planes flying over our heads all the time because while the Pentagon is close to my house, National Airport is also just a couple of miles away. So it wasn't out of the ordinary for a plane to fly over our house, but it was fairly rare. My mother said the plane was so low she did not know if it would land safely. Then she told me moments later, she heard this big boom. For weeks after that, there was soot all around our house. My mother was coughing and said how bad it was outside.

I remember my mother was just completely freaked out by everything. My experience was not anything dramatic, but my family living in that area and living that close to the Pentagon, it felt devastating. For a very long time after that, my mother refused to receive mail. She was very paranoid about mail. I think for her what had taken place so close to home was devastating. Obviously, anything we did as a team was canceled for that day. I remember our coach calling to check up on us. I remember we



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were all trying to console each other without our parents, without any adults around, just trying to make sense of it.

When our season started, I do remember we were all very afraid to fly. I remember that vividly. I was one that did not like to fly at all, so the fear was there initially. After Sept. 11, you could not step on a plane without looking around and wondering who the people were that you're sitting by and wondering if the proper precautions had been taken. Because I played in the ACC, the majority of our trips were bus trips. But we did have some non-conference trips where we had to fly, and that was very tough.

Taylor Rooks, Bleacher Report and Turner Sports host

I woke up that morning excited because my sister's birthday is actually on Sept. 11. She was turning 3 that year. I went off to school like normal — we lived in Gwinnett County, Georgia — and at one point at school a teacher said something was happening but they did not go very in-depth about the magnitude of what had happened. I remember when we took the bus home that everybody's parents were there to pick them up; normally we would all just walk home from the bus. But all the parents were there that day to grab everybody. I was still in the dark about the whole thing.

Maybe an hour after I got home, my mom was very adamant about saying we need to go to the store and get food. I think in my mom's head she did not know what would happen next so we needed to stock up. We were sitting in the car in the parking lot of Kroger, and I distinctly remember trying to listen to music on a radio station, 95.5 The Beat. But none of the radio stations were playing music. I said to my mom, "Why are none of the stations playing music?" She said, "Taylor, two planes crashed into a building so they need the radio to update Americans about what's going on." That's the first time I remember someone saying exactly what happened.

Obviously, I understand the magnitude of the day now and that it was an incredibly difficult and sad day for Americans. So many people lost their lives and some people lost their loved ones. That cannot be diminished or discounted in any way. A huge, devastating day. I think that for me because I was so removed from it, because I was just nine years old, I don't understand it in the same way that maybe some of the other people you will talk to for this piece do or my parents do. My mom told me it was one of the scariest days of her life. But I don't remember the day being like that. We even still had a birthday dinner for my little sister. Obviously, as I've grown older, I have a much deeper understanding of what that meant and just how tragic it was. But I don't have the same kind of visceral reaction to it when I immediately hear about it.

Holly Rowe, ESPN reporter

I was home in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was early in the morning and I got a phone call from my friend who said to turn on the TV. So I turned on the TV and one plane had already hit into the towers. I was watching television when the second plane hit. It was just absolute disbelief and shock. I just remember thinking, "I don't know that we will ever be the same as a country." It just made sports seem so trivial in that moment.

I remember being really scared and I went and got my son from school. He was young, in elementary school at the time. I went and picked him up because I wanted him with me. I wanted him to be safe with his mom. Maybe it was irrational fear, but I wanted my kid with me. We went to my sister's house that afternoon, which is where our whole family gathered together. It was just a sense of we all needed to be together because we did not know what was next. We felt some solace in being together.

I remember getting on a big conference call with ESPN maybe the next day or couple of days later. Obviously, our games that week were canceled and postponed. We started talking about how this was going to impact college football heading forward. Do we have to drive to games? Are we willing to fly to games? I think it was 10 or so days later that I went to my first game. I flew from Salt Lake to Houston for Texas at Houston. I remember Darrell Royal and Bill Yeoman and some of the legendary coaches were going to be there and we were going to do

interviews with them. The whole tenor was different, of course, but Mack Brown was really beautiful in that moment. He's always such a sage and father figure. He was so good at leading his young people through that really scary time. I can tell you I was terrified to fly. On our flight to Houston, anytime someone got up, it was just nerve-racking. But we got back to sports pretty quickly. I think what I've learned about Americans is sports is our catharsis. That's how we know things are normal, when sports are going.

Adam Scheffer, ESPN NFL reporter

At the time, I was covering the Denver Broncos for The Denver Post. I had just gotten back from a weekend in New York — visiting family, seeing friends — and then covered a "Monday Night Football" game in Denver, which happened to be the very first game played at the Broncos' new stadium, then called Invesco Field at Mile High. During that game, one of the Broncos' most popular players, Ed McCaffrey ... suffered a season-ending broken leg. Denver was in mourning.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, I was summoned into KUSA-TV in Denver to break down the Broncos' game and the injury to McCaffrey. I didn't realize it at the time — no one could — but it was one of the very last non-9/11 reports on that TV station, or any TV station in the country, for days. Moments after my in-studio live shot, at about 6:50 a.m. Mountain Time, I heard on a local Denver radio station that a plane had hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center. It didn't immediately occur to me that it was a terrorist attack. I just thought, "That's odd." But then another plane hit the South Tower, and at that moment, everyone everywhere knew we were under attack and the world never would be the same.

Amy Trask, CBS Sports NFL analyst

That morning I had just dropped my husband off at the Oakland airport. He was flying out on business. I was listening to the radio after I left the airport and started getting bits and pieces of the story. Soon thereafter the phone rings and it's my husband. He says his flight was canceled. As I'm talking to him, he's looking at the electronic board that lists the flights in the airport and starts seeing nearly every flight on the board read CANCELED. So I circled around and picked him up. We headed out of the airport together and listened to the radio. At one point he said to me, "I'm not going anywhere."

That was going on personally. Professionally, as the news broke and we all learned what happened, I made the decision to let our staff know (Trask was the CEO of the Oakland Raiders at the time) that our office would be open for anyone who chose to come in and those who wanted to stay home with their families should do so. When I say staff, I oversaw the business operations of the Raiders. It wasn't my role to tell coaches not to come in, but I did coordinate that. Some people did come in, and we all sat together and we watched the news together.

The other thing I remember is how many times that day I talked to Al (Davis, then the owner of the Raiders). Not many know that he was a tremendous student of world history and always extremely up to date on current world events. I remember having conversations with him throughout the day about that moment in time, what it meant, what it might mean going forward, would it lead to war, and would it be the first of many such incidents? I will always cherish the memories of the conversations I had with him because of the insights he shared.

Then, of course, we had discussions about work-related matters. Would there be NFL games the next weekend? Would the league stop the games? We were balancing two issues, if you will. On the one hand, it was recognizing the significance of this moment and did it seem irresponsible or insensitive to be carrying on with football? That was one school of thought. The other school of thought that people expressed was maybe the nation needs to see that life will carry on. There were also logistical issues, and I raised this with a number of people at the league office and other teams — staging a football game requires a tremendous amount of resources, local law enforcement and emergency personnel. You've got police, sheriffs, you've got ambulances, you've got fire. You've got all those resources at a stadium. Did it make sense to be



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diverting those resources at the time? Were stadiums themselves targets? People were just expressing all these varying views. I found these discussions to be reasoned and reasonable, although there were different viewpoints. It seemed very apparent to me early on in those discussions that the games would be canceled. I just felt that was going to be the decision, which within a few days, was the decision. We were the first team back in the air after 9/11. We were a West Coast team traveling to Miami and West Coast teams going East for a Sunday game traditionally left on a Friday night. So we were the first NFL team back in the air after 9/11.

I remember that night I left the office and I immediately realized how much work there was going to be as a result of this, meaning both in terms of when we traveled and then home games with respect to security. It was clear to me that the moment would necessitate a tremendous assessment of safety protocols, both for team travel and home games. So I was home with my husband, we were watching the news, and I was making lists and lists of security-related issues for both road and home games. Then I talked to Al a bunch of times that night as well. He would see something on the news and call me and or I would call him. I remember talking to him a number of times that night.

Adnan Virk, MLB Network and NHL Network host and Meadowlark Media podcaster

I was 23 years old, had graduated from Ryerson University a year previous, and was working behind-the-scenes at TSN (Canada). I had tickets that day to the Toronto Film Festival. I'm going to see a movie by the Hughes brothers called "From Hell." As I was rushing to get my stuff to leave, my roommate said, "You have to see this," and I saw the images that have been emblazoned in all of our minds of the World Trade Center. For some reason it just didn't register. I was like, "Oh, my God, that's crazy," but I was so wrapped up in my own bubble and headed for the movie. I rushed to downtown Toronto and saw the film. At the end of the movie they announced all of the screenings would be suspended due to the tragedy and the film festival had been officially suspended. It took that moment for me to realize how momentous this was. Then I went home and I was rapt with the coverage. I'm a little ashamed and embarrassed that I did not realize in the moment how impactful would be. It was a different world, pre-social media and texting. Once I heard the terrorists were Muslim, it was just a sinking feeling. It was, oh, no, this is a bad one.

What I noticed was that people were willing at least to have conversations around me. I remember being at TSN and you could feel the eyes on you a little bit. There were people who said, "Hey, I hope you're OK. I know you're Muslim, and I hope you're not going to face anything." I'm like, "Yeah, I hope so too." There was more conversation, which isn't a bad thing. Normally at most places you don't talk politics, you don't talk religion, you don't talk money. Here, there was a little more conversation. I was just trying to blend in with the camouflage of the scenery. I'm 23. I'm just trying to work. I'm trying to get an on-air job somewhere in Canada. I'm not a rabble-rouser. I didn't really want to engage too many people. I felt like it was such a hot-button topic and it was so painful and such a tragic moment. I just didn't want to say the wrong thing. I kind of listened to what people had to say and there was some to the effect of, "Oh, I have a neighbor who's Muslim and you guys are good people." I just kind of nodded and smiled and said I appreciated it.

I do feel I was kind of lucky. I definitely did think about if I was in New York or in a different part of America what it would be like. The one thing I did notice is that it became a tarnish not just for Muslims, but anybody really who was of South Asian descent. Like people are not going to be able to disseminate who is Muslim or not. Sikhs were being targeted. Hindus were being targeted. If you were Indian, Pakistani, Afghani, Iraqi, Iranian, anything in that area, there was starting to be a lot of vitriol. But thankfully, I was very lucky. No issues from it. In the moment, I just remember the uncertainty of everything and being baffled by it, being unable to look away.

Trey Wingo, chief trends officer and brand ambassador for Caesars Sportsbook

I was scheduled to co-host the 6 o'clock "SportsCenter" that day, and I remember I went for a run in early in the morning. When I got back home, it was sometime around 9 a.m. and I was immediately glued to the "Today" show. Before I went to work, the first plane had hit the North Tower. It was pretty clear that there was something very wrong. As I'm walking out my driveway, my wife yelled out the door that a bomb just went off at the Pentagon. That was of course another plane.

I remember driving into work the entire time thinking, "Why am I going to work today? What are we going to do that is in any way meaningful or impactful? Why would anyone care about anything we had to say?" I got to ESPN and there was just general confusion, for lack of a better term. At that point, we had ceded all our airtime to ABC News. There was five or six discussions that day about whether we should do a show. My thought was what could we possibly say or do that would matter in any way, shape or form in light of the events of the day? There was one meeting in an office with an executive where Bob Ley astutely said, "Look, I hear what you're saying and there's no wrong opinions today. But I think because of everything that's gone on, we should do a show about how the events of the day affected the world of sports, in no way making it a political statement and in no way making it anything other than these things happened and here is how they affected the world of sports."

To be honest I was like, this is dumb. We shouldn't be doing this. But Bob was adamant about it. He said, "Look, this is who we are. This is what we do. And we should absolutely do a show about how the events of the day affected the world of sports." At that point, nobody called it 9/11. That label didn't exist yet. So we went on the air and we did about an hour or so. I was extremely nervous prior to going on the air because this was something that was beyond the pale. You get into sports to talk about sports. You don't get into it to deal with death and destruction and global terrorism and an attack on American soil. I do remember the first sort of intro that I wrote was a little over the top. While it might have been accurate, it probably wasn't the best way to present the news of the day. You were trying to find the right chord because obviously, as an American, you were angry. You were very angry about what had just happened. The idea was to express the emotions and anger of the day, but also do it in a way that understood the somberness of the moment.

In hindsight, Bob was 100 percent correct. When it's all said and done, there should be some show of record about how things affected the world of sports. As of a few months ago, and I don't know if it still exists, the "SportsCenter" that Bob and I did that day was running at the 9/11 Museum. This is a weird thing to say because I wish the day had never happened, obviously, but I was very proud to do that show that day with Bob because there was no better person equipped to handle the day than him. His thoughts and his observations were the correct ones and I appreciated the ability to share the set with him that day.

After the show I just wanted to go home. I wanted to see my kids and my wife and give them a hug. I could not have gotten out of there faster. I just wanted to go home and be with the people that mattered to me the most.

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The Athletic / 'You cannot miss this window': As Olympics approach, what's next for pro women's hockey?

By Hailey Salvian Sep 9, 2021

Marie-Philip Poulin knew it was over. She started to raise her arms in celebration after her shot in sudden death overtime against Team USA in



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the IIHF Women's World Championship went in and out behind U.S. goalie Nicole Hensley. But the game went on.

Across Canada, 1.6 million people — a record television audience for a Women's World Championship final — were holding their breath. Inside Calgary's WinSport Arena, friends and family allowed in the stands were stunned, not knowing if it was a goal.

Forty-five seconds later, the buzzer sounded and everybody knew what it meant. Canada were world champions. Poulin had her third gold medal-winning goal, and the Americans had been dethroned for the first time in nine years at the worlds. Another dramatic chapter between Canada and the U.S. had come to a close. For a moment, the game was back in the spotlight for all the right reasons.

But, while the 2021 worlds brought the first meaningful hockey games in more than two years for the best women in the game, the cloud that's been hanging over the professional game since 2019 is still here. The divide between the two sides in the women's game is as deep as ever. The Professional Women's Hockey Players' Association (PWHPA) continues to fight for a truly professional league for the best players to play in. Meanwhile, the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL), which rebranded this week as the Premier Hockey Federation (PHF), remains steadfast that it already provides that option.

Buoyed by what the world witnessed in Calgary, leaders of both factions see opportunity in the coming months. The spotlight on the game in the next six months is going to be bright as the 2022 Olympics in Beijing approach in February.

That exposure presents a unique opportunity, and a major question: What, exactly, can professional women's hockey do to capitalize on a year in which the sport features prominently on the world stage?

"You cannot miss this window of opportunity," said Jayna Hefford, the PWHPA's lead consultant.

If Olympic viewership is any indication, there's an appetite for women's hockey. The sport's popularity peaks every four years — almost eight million people tuned into the 2018 Olympic final between Canada and the U.S. on CBC and NBC — but it wavers in between.

That's why the PWHPA hopes to capitalize on the eyeballs that will surely follow the women's game when it's at its best in Beijing and push forward their ultimate goal of having a truly professional league in place. A league of that nature would have a livable wage, access to proper equipment, resources, coaching and facilities befitting professional athletes.

"We've been pretty vocal about not missing this window of opportunity," Hefford said. "There's no better time than coming out of the games."

Picture this: Canada and the U.S. face off in the 2022 Olympic gold medal game. It goes to overtime, as it always does, and millions of people tune in. The rivalry, as it always does, delivers from a skill and entertainment perspective. Then, after the games, a new league is introduced with the same players from Canada and the U.S. and others from different countries to replicate the Olympic intensity — or best-on-best format.

The timing makes sense. But creating that league isn't that simple.

Since its inception, it was believed that the PWHPA hoped its stance would help facilitate the creation of an NHL-backed women's league. NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has been unequivocal in stating that the NHL will only get involved in the women's game if the slate is clean. If a professional option — such as the PHF — exists, the NHL will support the women's game in other ways. And in several statements over the years to The Athletic, deputy commissioner Bill Daly has reiterated that there is no plan to create a women's league. Especially in light of the financial challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has created for the NHL.

Most recently, in May, as reported by Sportsnet's Jeff Marek, the NHL informed both the PWHPA and NWHL that it is not in a position to operate a women's league in the foreseeable future. PWHPA critics

assumed this would be the end of the stalemate between the two sides. That is not the case.

"It was disappointing, but at the same time, it also just gave us the answer we'd been asking for," said Hefford. "And that allowed us to make the decision, that OK now it's on us."

"There is a great opportunity for us to take ownership of what we want to become a reality. And our group shares a lot of excitement in this idea. We have great people doing a lot of great work to make this a reality. We know the time is now."

To be clear: The PWHPA still hopes the NHL will play a role in the future of women's professional hockey. And surely individual teams could still be involved, as they have several partnerships with clubs, like the Calgary Flames, Toronto Maple Leafs and New York Rangers, for example. For now, the group are taking on the task themselves. The alternative, waiting for the NHL to step in, would likely mean waiting for the next Winter Olympics in 2026.

Details on what a league could look like and how the PWHPA might be working toward that goal is being closely held by board members. What we do know are the PWHPA's plans for this upcoming season.

There will once again be five training hubs for players to join, with Minnesota, Toronto, Calgary and Montreal all set to return. Boston will replace New Hampshire as the fifth training location.

Entering a third-straight season of exhibition games and no structured league, there is an increased risk that more current or prospective members could leave for the PHF or other opportunities in European leagues. That's especially true for players who may have been on the bubble, and ultimately cut, from national team rosters. It would be understandable to seek out more consistent games.

However, according to Hefford, the PWHPA has been able to retain "almost all" of the players from last season, with only a handful taking opportunities to play in Europe or the PHF. As of this week, over 140 players have registered for the 2021-22 season. Like last year, not every player will crack a roster spot in an attempt to keep the groups competitive.

Some notable members include current and former national team members who have been left off the Olympic centralization rosters for Canada and the U.S. including Laura Fortino, Geneviève Lacasse, Annie Pankowski, Ann-Sophie Bettez, Loren Gabel and Sarah Potomak, among others. The centralized national team players will not play in showcases, but will remain involved as "supporting members."

The PWHPA will also be bringing back what it calls the "Dream Gap Tour," a series of exhibition showcases played in various locations in North America. The first tour stop in Truro, N.S., was announced last week with the Toronto, Calgary, Montreal and Boston hubs participating. There will be five or six total Tour stops this season. The remaining locations are to be determined and may include NHL team partnerships.

There could also be a potential opportunity for crossover between the PWHPA and various national team federations as teams gear up for the Olympics. For example, we could see Team Canada play against a PWHPA roster in exhibition games to add to Canada's pre-tournament schedule.

It's going to be a busy few months, with what sounds like more to come.

"I'm excited for what's ahead," Hefford said. "When we look at the way we've been able to host events, the interest from NHL partners, and how our partner portfolio continues to grow ... we significantly increased our revenue last year in a pandemic."

"Partners want to support this, it's important to them, and that's not going away," she added. "We don't intend to do this for another five years. So we're going after it and going to see what happens."

Meanwhile, the U.S.-based (and newly named) Premier Hockey Federation is in the midst of a period of change.



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In October 2020, Dani Rylan Kearney stepped down as commissioner of the league, a role that she held since she founded the NWHL in 2015. Former baseball executive Ty Tumminia assumed the commissioner role on an interim basis, while Rylan Kearney took on a job as an adviser to the league and president of the entity (the women's hockey partners) that owned four of its six teams.

Not long after, Rylan Kearney resigned from the league. She was not quoted in the league's short statement and has not spoken about her departure since. Tumminia has continued her role as commissioner, and says it's been "a whirlwind."

The league's sixth season, Tumminia's first, was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial plans for the season were derailed, and a later attempt at a bubble season could not be completed. The league's six teams were in Lake Placid for a two-week season (24 games), but the season was halted after 15 games after two teams pulled out due to COVID-19. The Metropolitan Riveters pulled out due to an outbreak and the Connecticut Whale pulled out due to fears of exposure to the virus. A source told The Athletic that by the end of the tournament nearly every team had an outbreak. After the "bubble" burst, the league reconvened a few weeks later for a weekend championship in Boston to award the Isobel Cup, which the Boston Pride won.

"We are extremely proud of what we accomplished last season despite the difficulties," Tumminia said in an interview with The Athletic. "We produced record sponsorships, broadcast partnerships, digital engagements, and now we're looking forward to building on that momentum, especially with the opportunity to welcome fans back into our rinks."

Among the league's top sponsors last season was U.S. financial services company Discover, which was a six-figure deal that was signed thanks in part to the league's current deal with Twitch — the league's current primary broadcast partner.

Season 7 for the PHF, according to Tumminia, will be the start of a new era for the league.

This offseason has been highlighted by the announcement that the league would double the salary cap for each team up to \$300,000 from \$150,000 — the largest salary cap in the league's history.

"Yeah, our season was only two weeks, but we saw great success with that from a revenue standpoint. ... And that's an example of what happens, right?" Tumminia said. "The business model works when there's an infusion of revenue coming in and then we can treat these athletes to more of the monetary rewards that we would like to be able to do."

The league also announced new ownership for its teams. Previously, the Boston Pride were owned by a group led by Miles Arnone; the Toronto Six were owned by Johanna Boynton and her husband, John; and the remaining four teams were owned by an entity called The W Hockey Partners.

Now, the Six and Pride remain under the same ownership, a group called "The BTM group," which also purchased the Riveters. The Buffalo Beauts and Minnesota Whitecaps were purchased by the NLTT, an ownership group headed by two of the league's board of governors Andy Scurto and Neil Leibman. The Connecticut Whale, meanwhile, were sold in May to a group of investors led by Tobin Kelly.

"Four of our teams were sold to private ownership this offseason, and through that commitment, we've been able to enhance our player benefits," Tumminia said. "Not just the infusion of new ownership, but through senior leadership at the league office and across many of our clubs, we've had a lot of change."

"We want to remain steadfast in our commitment to raising the bar, and providing the best environment for athletes and the experience for our fans and partners."

The league recently announced its 2021-22 schedule, which will begin in November. Each team will play 20 regular season games, 10 home and 10 away. Tumminia says the plan, for now, is to have fans back in the stands for the upcoming season and that the league will be working with Cleveland Clinic — as well as federal and state governments — for their COVID-19 policies.

"I'm hoping to really just gain momentum from Season 6 and carry it to (Season) 7," Tumminia said. "I'm feeling really positive about that."

And although the PHF has only a few players (no Americans or Canadians) who will be at the Olympics, Tumminia hopes to capitalize on the attention, too.

"Next to an Olympic year, women's hockey is in the forefront of everybody's mind," she said. "And I'm hoping that you'll see that because there's an insatiable appetite for that content, that it's going to produce a good Season 7 for us."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' Bo Horvat on COVID-19 vaccine: 'I encourage everybody to go get it'

Iain MacIntyre

VANCOUVER — One of the longest trips of Bo Horvat's off-season was a two-hour drive to Toronto from his home in London, Ont. He got vaccinated.

"I was phoning around to see if there were clinics that had extra Moderna," Horvat said Wednesday, explaining that he didn't want to just wait passively for his age group to be summoned for its second dose. "I found one just outside Toronto. Just drove there, lined up and got vaccinated."

Horvat, 26, said nobody recognized him as the Vancouver Canucks' captain.

But his eagerness to become fully-vaccinated against COVID-19 should be recognized.

No team in the National Hockey League was ravaged by the coronavirus last season like the Canucks were at the start of April when 25 players and coaches were eventually stricken with the debilitating P.1 variant that drove COVID-19's third wave on the West Coast.

Horvat, his wife, Holly, and their baby, Gunnar, all eventually contracted the virus that caused the Canucks to shut down for two weeks.

Besides being the team's captain and longest-tenured player — after defenceman Alex Edler signed a free-agent contract with the Los Angeles Kings in July — Horvat also represents his teammates within the NHL Players' Association.

The league and its players' union last week released protocols for the 2021-22 season that do not force players to get vaccinated, but outline significant restrictions and stern consequences, including loss of pay, for players who choose to ignore science and become sick or otherwise unavailable to their teams.

"Considering everything that's gone on, there's obviously different situations that people get put in and they can be vaccinated or not," Horvat told Sportsnet. "But for me, if you're able to get vaccinated, I think you should. I've had COVID before and it's no joke. This vaccine works and it's helping people not get sick. I got (vaccinated) right away, as soon as I could."



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"So I encourage everybody to go get it. I think it'll get the world back to normal. Hopefully guys realize that and go get vaccinated — for everybody's safety and health and their family's health."

Horvat said the benefits of vaccination shouldn't be a tough sell among Canucks players.

"No team in the league — maybe a couple others — know what having COVID is like like we do and our families and our kids do," he said. "To protect all of them, I encourage everybody to go do it. Hopefully everybody does."

If there are any Canucks players who arrive for the start of training camp on Sept. 22 and aren't fully vaccinated, Horvat said a little peer pressure could go a long way in ensuring the team is able to play, practise and travel safely together for what the organization hopes is a major bounce-back year from last season's disaster.

A handful of Canucks, joined by several Vancouver-area pros from other NHL teams, have begun pre-camp skates at the University of B.C. The daily sessions will move inside Rogers Arena next week.

On Wednesday, Horvat's training group included regular linemate Tanner Pearson as well as rookie Vasily Podkolzin, veteran leader J.T. Miller, starting goalie Thatcher Demko and new third-line centre Jason Dickinson.

Key newcomers Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Conor Garland and Jaroslav Halak have yet to arrive on the ice, and young stars Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes remain unsigned as restricted free agents. But Horvat said there is already excitement about this season after the Canucks plummeted from last summer's playoff-bubble breakthrough in Edmonton to a last-place finish in the Canadian division in May.

He said he loved the aggressiveness of the Canucks' off-season, as general manager Jim Benning gambled draft picks and \$43.6-million of future cap space to take on Ekman-Larsson from the Arizona Coyotes in a blockbuster trade that also brought Garland, a top-six winger, to Vancouver.

"I think it's a great message: I think it means that Jim wants to win now," Horvat said. "I kind of went through the rebuilding stage, and it's not really fun. It's not fun losing and I don't want to go through that again. And I think my time to win and our time to win is now."

Horvat has played 502 games for the Canucks, but just 23 more in the playoffs, since making the team as a 19-year-old centre in 2014. With two more years under contract at \$5.5-million per season, the captain's competitive clock is ticking.

"Really loud," Horvat said. "This is going to be my eighth year already, and I haven't really done anything yet. I think I've gotten better as a player. But as a team, you know, we've made the playoffs twice. I want to make the playoffs every year. I think that's when I play my best hockey. I think that's when the Canucks play their best hockey. I think we have something to prove."

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Sportsnet.ca / Q&A: Oilers' Tippet on Keith, Hyman, turning hard lessons into playoff wins

Mark Spector

EDMONTON — Sports history is dotted with teams who had to learn why they lost before learning how to win.

In the National Hockey League, more pointedly, teams that finally figured out how to have regular season success, only to run into the wall that is playoff hockey, booted out of the playoffs after one uninspired, disconcerting round.

Dave Tippett's Edmonton Oilers have half of that equation covered. They have finished second in their division for the past two seasons and lost their opening playoff round both times. They're a playoff lock in the weak Pacific Division, which would make three straight playoff appearances after having missed 12 out of 13 seasons before that.

So they can win from October to April. But are they the team that will finally graduate from the School of Hard Knocks, taking those playoff disappointments and shaping themselves accordingly?

Tippet arrived in Edmonton on Thursday, with a fresh whiteboard behind his office desk. Zach Hyman is now his top left winger. Warren Foegele his 3-LW. Derek Ryan will be Foegele's centreman, likely.

Gone are Ethan Bear, Adam Larsson and James Neal. Signed to eight-year contracts are Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Darnell Nurse.

That much he knows.

Whether his team is ready to take the next step or not, well, that is still a mystery.

We spoke to Tippet before he hopped on the plane to Edmonton, where he enters his third season as head coach with a 72-44-11 regular season record. In the playoffs he is 1-7, and coming off a Round 1 sweep by Winnipeg.

Have the Oilers adapted? Are they ready to be graduate to the next level?

We asked Tippet exactly that.

Dave Tippett: Well, you're learning hard lessons. And those are lessons that usually sink in a little easier.

We've taken some steps forward in the regular season, but it hasn't translated into playoff success. That's something that we have to own. To build your team not to just be a good regular season team, but how are you going to play in the playoffs?

Those are things you learn as you learn these hard lessons.

SN: Does it concern you how the game changes come playoff time? Can your team change with it?

Tippet: There are changes you have to make in the playoffs. Some of it is the reffing. Teams tighten up. Players like Connor and Leon get focused on hard. You have to be able to win without (many) power plays; we've got to be able to win games as a team.

We have a saying we use all the time: Every play counts. Well, you look at (the Winnipeg series) ... it might be a puck that should have got out, or maybe a lost faceoff. It turns out, that's the difference in the game. So the more adept you are at dealing with the 'Every play counts,' the better percentage your chances are of winning (in the playoffs).

SN: Early impressions of Duncan Keith?

Tippet: One of the most motivated players I've ever seen. He wants to get back to having a chance to win a Stanley Cup. ... He thinks we're a young team with great upside. He's been very strong with our players so far, talking to everyone. He is anxious to come here and get back to the style of play he thinks maybe he's got away from in the past couple of years.

SN: Adding Hyman, Foegele and Ryan, how much better are you up front?

Tippet: It's a combination. You take Zach Hyman, Foegele, Derek Ryan, the continued growth of (Jesse) Puljujarvi and Yama (Kailer Yamamoto)... The one thing that's different between the regular season and a playoff series is, you have to be able to score grinding goals where



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you create off the forecheck. It can't all be off transition and rush and power play. You have to be able to score off the cycle. Hard goals. And those guys I just mentioned, they're all players who will enhance our group in that part of the game.

We don't need more scoring off the rush. We're fine there. I'll take all the pretty goals we can get, but you have to be able to score hard goals also.

SN: What about Nurse? Where do you see him going?

Tippet: Darnell is an amazing athlete, has the family pedigree, but the thing I don't think he gets enough credit for is, he's a very intelligent man. As his game has grown he is maturing as a person, so both of those are helping him become a leader.

A couple of years ago he was one of the guys I wanted to empower to get into that leadership group. Now, he has become a leader in the leadership group.

As a coach, when guys sign good contracts, you're happy. He loves Edmonton and wants to bring a championship to Edmonton.

SN: The Oilers have looked ready before, and it turned out they weren't. Are they ready now?

Tippet: You have to earn the right to be a playoff team, a good team. We've added some really good pieces, but now you've got to go earn it. There have been a lot of really good teams on paper, but they don't turn out to be good. It's our responsibility as players and coaches to maximize what we have, and be a good team.

There's no formula that says, just because you put a bunch of good names together on paper, that it works.

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TSN.CA / Wickenheiser takes the lead at Leafs development camp

Maple Leafs' senior director of player development Hayley Wickenheiser has had to be mindful of the impact that COVID-19 related shutdowns have had on the 39 young players participating in Toronto's annual rookie session. The focus during the next few days, Kristen Shilton writes, will be on "a little less thinking, and a little more playing and competing" so team staff can assess where each player is at in terms of their "full package" of skills.

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — Nick Robertson is still two days out from his 20th birthday, but the Maple Leafs already see their top prospect as a veteran. At least when it comes to development camps.

He'll be among 39 players Toronto is hosting for its annual rookie sessions this weekend, after the club conducted camp virtually last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And when everyone takes the ice once again, expectation is for Robertson, a second-round pick in the 2019 NHL Entry Draft, to be taking charge.

"Our message to [guys like Robertson] is that you're not here to just participate and develop; you're here to step up and lead and show why you belong at the next level and work on your leadership skills," said Leafs' senior director of player development Hayley Wickenheiser on Thursday. "We do have a chunk of players that know the drill, and they've been around and they don't necessarily need to learn all the things that they learned in their first development camp but they would be expected to step up and lead. We do expect more from those players that have been around."

Robertson, who turns 20 on Saturday, will be the only prospect in attendance with NHL experience. He skated in six games for the Leafs last season, registering one assist, and scored one goal in four appearances during Toronto's qualifying-round playoff series against Columbus in 2020.

While Robertson may be ahead of the curve professionally, he's been in the same boat as most camp attendees when it comes to recent playing time — or a lack thereof. Because of COVID-19 related shutdowns, Robertson hasn't played for the Ontario Hockey League's Peterborough Petes since the 2019-20 campaign. Other than his limited NHL action, Robertson has only appeared in 21 games for the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies over the last two years.

Wickenheiser kept that in mind while designing this year's development camp, her first major project since being promoted in May to head the Leafs' player development.

"Just thinking about some of these young guys that have not played hockey in over a year, that's a really tough thing both mentally and physically," she said. "So we acknowledge that; we know that COVID has had a real impact not only just on hockey but on their lives. What we want to do is not hammer them early on, but we want to put them in a situation where they can relax into playing the game again and compete and demonstrate their skills."

As Wickenheiser describes it, this weekend's work will be about "a little less thinking, and a little more playing and competing" so the Leafs' staff can assess where each player is at in terms of their "full package" of skills.

Normally, this work would be done at a rookie camp in June. But COVID-19 delayed the NHL calendar well into the summer months, and teams had to pivot accordingly. That means some prospects, like 2021 second-round pick Matthew Knies, won't be participating this year; Knies remains in the United States where he's getting set for freshman year at the University of Minnesota.

But physical distance will hardly prevent Wickenheiser and her staff — including Director of Development and Operations Will Sibley and Director of Player Development Danielle Goyette — from keeping in touch.

"Our goal is to have multiple touches with the players so we're in contact with every prospect about every two weeks," Wickenheiser said. "We just spent several video sessions with [2021 fifth-round pick] Ty Voit and Knies going through clips with them. I'd like to increase the amount of touches and contact we have with the players in multiple different forms, and make sure that we're closely tracking how they're progressing through the season so we can identify areas of their game that we maybe can help them with as they go forward."

There's a lot of different needs to keep track of, but Wickenheiser is an expert at finding her balance. While ascending through Toronto's front office, Wickenheiser was also finishing medical school in Calgary and is currently doing an ER rotation at a downtown Toronto hospital. She was on night shifts leading up to the Leafs' camp starting on Thursday, and will be back to medicine when things wrap up on Monday.

Fortunately for Wickenheiser, the three years she spent as an assistant until former Senior Director of Player Development Scott Pellerin and Director of Player Development Stephane Robidas gave her a good foundation to start from which to begin.

Now, just like Robertson, it's her turn to take the lead.

"In this development camp, we've opted to create a competitive environment versus a teaching environment," she said. "We've introduced concepts into gameified drills where we want to see how players think the game, how their compete level is, what type of character they can demonstrate under difficult circumstances. And then ultimately [reveal] their top-end skill. That really separates the best players from the next level down as you go up within the system. That's



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what we are trying to isolate and trying to get a read on with these players that we have in a very short time over these four to five days.”

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TSN.CA / Grading the defencemen on Canada's NHL teams

On Tuesday, Travis Yost began a position-by-position preview of the seven Canadian clubs, grading out the centre position for every team. Today, he focuses on the defencemen.

By Travis Yost

On Tuesday, we began a position-by-position preview of the seven Canadian clubs, grading out the centre position for every team. Today, we will focus on the defencemen.

Let's start with our player table. For the focus group here, I grabbed an expected top six for each team, though competition for a number of third-pairing spots will exist in most markets.

Here is how each team stacks up against one another:

And now, for grades.

Toronto Maple Leafs (A-)

For years, Canadian teams struggled to build credibility on the blueline, and the Maple Leafs were at the top of that list. It wasn't long ago you would look at Toronto's defensive options and shudder in fear.

But times have changed. The organization has invested aggressively at the position, acquiring veterans – and more importantly, gifted two-way players – Jake Muzzin and T.J. Brodie over the past two years. Add homegrown talent Morgan Rielly and that's as strong a top three as you will find in the National Hockey League.

The Maple Leafs have also done tidy work bolstering depth at the position through more internal development. Travis Dermott is a talented puck mover who can pick up spot power-play minutes. Rasmus Sandin has shown to be a brilliant decision maker who can offset a lack of size. Justin Holl is coming off his best season, tallying 20 points with an on-ice goal differential of +10, seventh best on the team.

It is also worth mentioning that Kyle Dubas' decision to expose Jared McCann instead of Holl in the expansion draft looks smart in retrospect; the price of second-pairing defenders in free agency was obnoxious this summer, and the cost to replace Holl in the lineup would have been larger than anticipated.

There are no real holes with this group, but one thing to watch this season will be Toronto's defensive play with the Rielly pairing on the ice. Rielly's defensive numbers dramatically improved last season, bringing rate goals and rate expected goals down by 15 per cent.

Some of that is the luxury of playing with a strong defensive teammate in the form of Brodie, but that was also the reason to sign Brodie in the first place. A capable defensive player should be able to let Rielly do what he does best, and that's play aggressively with the puck on his stick.

Winnipeg Jets (B+)

In many ways, Winnipeg is a clone of Toronto. Two seasons ago, players like Anthony Bitetto, Dmitri Kulikov, and Luca Sbisa were regulars in the lineup. How far we have come.

The Jets, similarly, recognizing they had a blueline comprised of depreciated veterans and young defensive prospects with zero

insulation, needed to invest at the position. They spent this summer doing just that, acquiring puck mover Nate Schmidt from the Vancouver Canucks and shutdown defenceman Brenden Dillon from the Washington Capitals.

That's two more top-four options to supplement a pair of players the Jets already have in-house from prior acquisitions in Neal Pionk and the recently extended Dylan DeMelo.

What this group may lack in obvious star power they make up for with versatility. Schmidt, Pionk, and DeMelo are all above-average puck movers and skaters, and that type of credibility from the back end in transition sequences or in the offensive zone has been lacking in years for Winnipeg. (Frustratingly, I would add, considering the calibre of their forwards.)

Dillon is a bit of an outlier, but it's clear why the Jets want him on one of their top-two pairings. Consider the shot profile the Washington Capitals faced with Dillon on the ice last season, and notice how well his pairing – generally with John Carlson – kept shooters from the dangerous areas of the ice, and limited those same shooters to one-and-done opportunities (via HockeyViz):

A rebound season from the likes of Josh Morrissey, and some clarity from a competition for third-pairing duty amongst Sami Niku, Logan Stanley, and Nathan Beaulieu should give the Jets a formidable blueline next season.

Edmonton Oilers (B-)

The Oilers are not without talent on the defensive side. But the team is particularly tough to grade because much of this will come down to how head coach Dave Tippett sees this new-look lineup. And it's a critical question to answer.

The Oilers are not going to have a problem scoring and are still playing in a weak Pacific Division. On the other hand, the goaltending situation isn't great, and the defensive pairings have historically been a considerable drag on team performance. This is the area where risk needs to be minimized.

How Tippett will go about that is one of the more fascinating questions heading into training camp. The team made two high-risk moves, acquiring veteran defencemen Duncan Keith (via trade) and Cody Ceci (via free agency) to offset the losses of Adam Larsson, Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones, and Oscar Klefbom.

At this point in Ceci's career we know what he is, and that's a third-pairing defender who can eat up a bunch of minutes on the penalty kill. Ceci is a good skater but is notorious for defensive-zone miscues and turnovers in tight coverage, which has held him back from coaches deploying him against tougher competition.

Keith is a wild card. I'd argue the divergence of opinion on Keith's true talent and what he might be able to contribute for Edmonton is as wide as any player in the league. The reputation and pedigree are extraordinary: three-time Stanley Cup champion, two-time Norris Trophy winner, and a Conn Smythe to boot (2015). For many years, Keith was regarded as one of the best two-way players the league had to offer.

But the data on Keith over the past few seasons is alarming. I mean blinking red lights alarming. Chicago has been bad for years now, but they have been particularly bad with Keith on the ice. He struggles mightily with gap control and breaking up plays in transition, and over the past two seasons, no Blackhawks player conceded more goals against or expected goals against (goaltender neutral) than Keith.

We are going to find out rather quickly if Keith was part of the problem in Chicago.

One other point: since the Darnell Nurse-Tyson Barrie pairing worked well last year igniting offence from the back end, it's very likely that Ceci and Keith will start the season together. I'm not sure how you insulate them – it's the ultimate trial-by-fire scenario.



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A name to watch is 21-year-old Evan Bouchard, who has looked like a gamebreaker at every competitive level. The Oilers used him in spot duty last season across 14 games, but we should see much more from the former first-round pick this season.

The dream scenario is Bouchard works his way quickly into top-four minutes, breaking up a harrowing Ceci-Keith pairing and putting another puck mover out there to support the forward group.

Montreal Canadiens (C+)

Shea Weber's storied career is coming to an end. In his absence, the Canadiens are turning to a stable of veteran defencemen to shoulder more of the tough minutes Weber will be leaving behind.

The Canadiens' blueline this season is an interesting group. What they lack in top-end talent they make up for in depth. And though the Canadiens drew tremendous accolades for how well they stifled opposing offences in the playoffs, it's important to remember that was a carry-over from the regular season.

The blueline and supporting forwards in the defensive zone were sensational at keeping the puck away from dangerous areas, routinely pushing shooters to the outside and up towards the blueline:

And to my point about depth – if we look at expected goal rates from last season for each pairing, we see how consistent the defensive strength was, particularly at even strength:

- The Jeff Petry/Joel Edmundson pairing conceded 2.0 expected goals per 60 minutes
- The Weber/Ben Chiarot pairing conceded 2.1 expected goals per 60 minutes
- The Brett Kulak/Alex Romanov pairing conceded 1.8 expected goals per 60 minutes

To give you an indication of how dominant that is, no team gave up fewer goals last season than the New York Islanders at 2.1 goals per 60 minutes of play in the same game state.

For head coach Dominique Ducharme, that's an encouraging data point. It's never easy to fill the skates of a player like Weber, but it also wasn't Weber alone who made Montreal's defence a tough nut to crack last year.

It does look like David Savard, signed away from Tampa Bay during the off-season, will move into one of the vacated top-four roles. Savard's reputation is that of a strong interior defender, which makes him a logical fit with this group.

Ottawa Senators (C+)

We talked earlier this week about how Ottawa's roster – young, raw, and talented – has a wide range of outcomes for next season, if only because so many players with sizable roles are in their key developmental years.

The same is true on the blueline, with two players are coming into focus: 25-year-old Artem Zub, and 22-year-old Erik Brannstrom.

There weren't many bigger surprise stories than Zub, who had an outstanding rookie season. In 560 minutes playing alongside Mike Reilly and Brannstrom, Zub's pairing was eight goals better than their opponents. That's already an impressive measure for a rookie defender, but it's doubly true when you are playing on a bad hockey team that was 26 goals in the red at even strength last year.

Zub isn't the fastest or most physical defender, but he can anticipate the run of play well and uses time and space to his advantage. On a \$2.5 million deal through the next two seasons, Zub looks like the exact type of cost-friendly defender you want on your roster – one who flourishes in minutes against weaker competition, but one who can also be moved up the lineup on a temporary basis as well.

Ottawa may have struck gold of sorts with Zub. Less clear is the future of Brannstrom, the key return piece in the Mark Stone trade.

The undersized defender figured to be the next electric puck mover playing for the Senators, a light version of what they once had with Erik Karlsson. The good news is that the skill is obvious, even at the NHL level – Brannstrom did manage 25 points in 30 games last season, and on a per-minute basis, was the 24th highest-scoring defender, on par with the likes of Toronto's Rielly.

On the other hand, the concerns about his size and how it may relate to interior play in the defensive zone still exist. The team is reticent to use him on any penalty kill, and attackers find opportunity at the heart of the Ottawa net and inside of the circles with his pairing on the ice.

That sort of shot profile is what you do not want to see, but it's worth remembering that the very early stages of Karlsson's career looked like this as well:

Ottawa doesn't need Brannstrom to be anything but an average defender if his offensive contributions can dwarf the defensive pressure. But I think Ottawa wants to see a bit more there before entrenching him into a top-four role, which may be why the Senators only notable free agent signing this year was veteran defender Michael Del Zotto. (The Senators also acquired Nick Holden via trade.)

Calgary Flames (C+)

No Brodie or Mark Giordano. In the absence of a dominating first-pairing, we expect to see a balanced deployment of Flames defenders. How much upside there is with this group will hinge on a gamut of younger defenders taking a step forward.

The Flames will enter this season with one of the youngest bluelines in the league – Rasmus Andersson, Noah Hanifin, Juuso Valimaki, Connor Mackey, and Oliver Kyllington are all 24 or younger. Discounting the upside potential of a group this young would be foolish.

On the other hand, we haven't seen many great seasons from anyone in this group. Mackey's six games aside, all four of these defenders have been outscored at even strength over the past two seasons.

I left Brodie and Giordano on to illustrate a couple of points. One, when Calgary has been the dominant team in recent years, it's been with their best players on the ice. Two, those best players on the ice do not seem to have the same struggles with goaltending behind them, as they continue to drive favourable goal differentials irrespective of who is in net.

Chris Tanev will remain the team's defensive anchor going forward, but what the Flames really need is for one or more of these younger defenders to reverse this trend. It's not as if they aren't capable of it. We saw a strong season from an Andersson/Hanifin pairing in 2019-20, and I suspect we may see that duo together once more this season.

Vancouver Canucks (C)

Quinn Hughes is the exact type of player you build your team around. He's that dominant when he's on his game, a fearless – albeit undersized – defender who uses top-end agility and passing ability to elevate the play of his teammates.

It's the rest of the defensive group that is of concern. Well, that and the fact that Hughes is still an unsigned 10.2(c) free agent.

The Canucks made a giant bet on Oliver Ekman-Larsson, taking on a punishing \$7.2 million AAV deal in a trade this summer. Ekman-Larsson, much like Keith in Edmonton, has been plagued by questions about his deteriorating play. In his prime, there was a very short list of defenders better at protecting the net than Ekman-Larsson, and it wasn't long ago we were talking about a player who routinely tallied 40-50 points a year.

But was Ekman-Larsson bad in recent years because the rest of the Coyotes lineup was, or was he part of the problem? There is a case that's what was happening in Arizona. Deployed against tough



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competition, the Coyotes bled goals with Ekman-Larsson on the ice, yet fared much better with him shelved:

Add to the fact that Ekman-Larsson's ice-time was cut dramatically by the Coyotes' coaching staff, and you have a very high-risk, high-reward bet here by Vancouver. Clearly, he can still play. But are we talking about a first-pairing defender, or a player you need to insulate?

If it's the latter, I have no idea how Vancouver does it since the rest of the blueline is ripe with guys who you also need to insulate. Players like Tyler Myers, Travis Hamonic, and Luke Schenn are notoriously prone to mistakes, either chasing the play out of position or turning the puck over in dangerous areas.

What Vancouver needs, sorely needs is for one or both of Olli Juolevi and Jack Rathbone to earn full-time minutes this season. Both are well-regarded prospects, and both had a cup of coffee with the Canucks last season. In a zero-sum game where you are ordinarily dressing just six defenders, the opportunity cost of not seeing them in the lineup is extraordinary for Vancouver.

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USA TODAY / Former St. Louis Blues captain David Backes retires after 15 NHL seasons

Chris Bumbaca

David Backes is retiring after a 15-year NHL career.

Backes, 37, signed a one-day contract Thursday with the St. Louis Blues, the team he spent 10 seasons with, to retire as a member of the organization.

Even after he left St. Louis in free agency in 2016 to join the Boston Bruins, all roads pointed back to the city. He and the Bruins lost to the Blues in the 2019 Stanley Cup Final. The final game of his NHL career came in St. Louis while wearing an Anaheim Ducks jersey.

"It was clear to me that I needed to retire as a member of the St. Louis Blues," he wrote in an essay for NHL.com. "That night reiterated that St. Louis was my home. It is where my wife and I grew into adulthood and it was the organization we needed to retire with. The feeling was mutual with the Blues and I am so humbled that this journey has come full circle for me to end this amazing ride with the same organization that called my name at the draft 18 years ago."

Backes was a second-round pick (62nd overall) in 2003, and he debuted three seasons later. From his first full season (2007-08) to his final year with the Blues (2015-16), Backes played in all but 24 regular-season games and had 437 points (196 goals, 241 assists).

His production declined in Boston, but the Bruins marched to the Final in 2018-19, where they fell to the Blues in seven games. He finished his career with 21 games over two seasons with Anaheim.

"The game got faster and younger and I haven't been associated with either of those adjectives in a long time," Backes wrote. "My final goal was to play 1,000 games, but I came up 35 short."

"In the end, it's not that all these numbers don't matter – they do, and I am damn proud of them. But the metrics that mean the most to me are the countless experiences and everlasting relationships that the game provided me. That's what I find is beyond measure."

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