



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

The News & Observer

Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho gives his take on offer sheet to Jesperi Kotkaniemi

By Chip Alexander

Remember how disappointed Sebastian Aho was after the Carolina Hurricanes' last loss in the 2021 Stanley Cup playoffs? How mad he was after being ousted by the Tampa Bay Lightning?

The pain and anger didn't go away quickly.

"I tried to use that fire in this offseason," Aho said Tuesday. "You've got to learn from those things. It's been three years now that we've had good years but not quite good enough and I truly believe those experiences will help us in the future. We just have to remember how it feels to lose."

Aho said that in an interview session at Wake Competition Center. No Zoom. No phone hookup. The Canes center came off the ice after an informal on-ice preseason workout with a group of his teammates, sat down on a bench and answered questions from a pair of reporters.

For the first time since September 2019, there was a sense of normalcy. NHL training camps will start later this month and the regular season in October. The Canes will return to the Metropolitan Division with a regular-season schedule comprised of 82 games.

So much changed during the coronavirus pandemic. Life has been anything but normal. The NHL's 2019-20 regular season was brought to a halt by the pandemic in March 2020, and the 2020-21 regular season did not begin until January 2021 and lasted 56 games.

In September 2019, Aho returned to Raleigh from Finland and answered questions about the offer sheet made to him by the Montreal Canadiens that summer. This September, he was asked about another offer sheet — the one made by Carolina to forward Jesperi Kotkaniemi of the Canadiens on Aug. 28.

The Canes matched the 2019 offer to Aho. The Canadiens, after taking their allotted seven days to make a decision, with zero media leaks, then passed on Kotkaniemi, not matching the offer, taking two draft picks in return and adding another young Finnish player to the Canes' mix.

Aho, 24, said he has never played in international competition with Kotkaniemi, 21, and does not know him well. He did say they "talked a little" after the offer sheet was made.

"I'm going to help him as much as I can," Aho said. "At the end of the day you have to just forget all that talk and keep doing what you do and play hockey. I'm sure he is going to help us a lot as a team. ... We got a great player out of it. That's my take on it."

Kotkaniemi, who was a restricted free agent, signed for a one-year, \$6.1 million contract that includes a \$20 bonus — 20 being Aho's jersey number and a bonus, Aho quipped Tuesday, he was willing to pay "if it comes to that."

In Aho's case, his 2019 offer sheet was for a five-year contract with an \$8.454 million annual cap hit, with millions of dollars in front-loaded bonus money.

In both cases, the players had to sign the offer sheets. With that comes the risk that should the offer sheet not be matched, the player could change teams.

"Everyone knows when you signed that contract what can possibly happen," Aho said. "To me, I always wanted to stay."

Aho stayed with the Canes. Kotkaniemi, who has yet to get to Raleigh, will be with a new team and wearing a new number, No. 82.

Aho said with the seven-hour time difference in Finland, he was asleep soon after his offer sheet was announced, unaware of the drama being played out in Raleigh while Canes fans were fretting they might lose a star center and questioning why Aho had signed an offer sheet from Montreal. The next morning, Canes owner Tom Dundon said the Canes would match. Drama over.

Not so for Kotkaniemi.

"I guess it's a long week not knowing exactly what's going to happen," Aho said. "I was pretty confident with Carolina. Tom (Dundon) told me and the whole world that he's going to match right away, so I guess it wasn't too bad for me."

While Kotkaniemi is a newcomer to the Canes, there are others. Aho was on the ice Tuesday with defensemen Ethan Bear and Tony DeAngelo, Josh Leivo and Brendan Smith.

"A lot of the new faces but there's still a lot of the same, more familiar faces," Aho said.

No longer will there be defenseman Dougie Hamilton on the back end, looking to push the pace, get off shots and be a big part of the offense. Hamilton signed as a free agent with New Jersey, leaving Carolina for a big contract.

"It is all part of the business and I think we all knew there was a chance that he might not be here this year," Aho said.

Aho will be entering his sixth NHL season and has been a vital part of the franchise resurgence, with playoff appearances the past three years. One preseason ranking has him No. 21 among NHL players, as if he pays much attention to such things, to the outside noise.

He just doesn't want to be mad, again, when the season ends.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

The Athletic

Sebastian Aho Q&A: On offer sheets, sleeping through the drama and how the Hurricanes can take the next step

By Sara Civian

As the Hurricanes trickle back into Raleigh ahead of training camp, many new faces are gracing Wake Competition Center (all of whom are vaccinated, including coaches, according to the team).

So much has changed between a brand new goalie tandem and a revamped, Dougie Hamilton-less blue line. But much has stayed the same as well, like Jordan Martinook's voice booming through the practice facility and budding star Sebastian Aho giving the media a little wave while shooting around.

After the team's informal practice Tuesday, Aho caught up with a few members of the media, answering questions on where the Canes have been, where they need to go and a certain \$20 bill.

(Note: Some questions and answers are edited for length or clarity.)

What did you get up to during the offseason?

I was just spending some quality time with my family and friends as much as I possibly could. And obviously I worked hard. I did some things to take my mind of the hockey but still every day worked to get better. Body feels good. Just excited to be back.

How can the team be better this season?

We need to start on time, first of all. We can't expect that it's going to come easy because we had a good regular season last year. We have to do all the work again, and over and over again. Just try to build every day, piece by piece, small steps. I'm confident that we can be better than last year — that's my goal. ...

I see it as a process. I've been doing this pretty much the past 10 years, trying to get just a little bit better each day. I know it's cliché, but that's exactly how I feel, and that's how I get my confidence on the ice. I know that I've been doing my stuff off-the-ice in the offseason, and doing everything as well as I can. ...

I've tried to use the fire (from last year's disappointment) for my workouts this offseason. You've gotta learn from those. It's been three years now that we have had good years, but not quite good enough. I truly believe that those experiences are going to help us in the future. We just have to remember how it feels to lose a tight playoff series and use that in the future.

What's it like coming back to so many new faces?

I guess it's somewhat normal. It's just part of business when teams try to get better. There are a lot of new faces, but there are still a lot of the more familiar faces. Every new guy I've met so far has been great, and I'm sure they'll help us as a team.

What were you thinking when you heard the Canes tendered Jesperi Kotkaniemi an offer sheet?

We got a great player out of it. That's my take on it. I guess that's part of the business as well, I guess it doesn't happen too often. (Laughs.) I really don't know what to say, but I'm excited to see what Kotkaniemi can bring to us. I talked to him a little after it happened. I know him a little bit from before so I'm excited.

What's it like for a player to go through the offer sheet process?

Everyone knows when you sign that contract what could possibly happen.

To me, I always wanted to stay here and Carolina matched. ... I was pretty confident Carolina was going to match. Tom (Dundon) told me and the whole world he was going to match right away. I guess it wasn't too bad for me. I slept through (the Canes matching) because of the time change. Everyone's talking, and I was just sleeping at home and it was great. ... In the morning, social media was (blowing up).

It's a lot of media asking questions about it, but it's only a little bit more than a normal extension (to the players). I'm going to help him as much as I can — if there's anything on his mind. But at the end of the day you just have to forget all of that talk, keep doing what you do and play hockey. I'm sure he's going to help us a lot as a team.

I can't say I was too surprised (to hear about the Kotkaniemi offer sheet). I had heard they were trying to trade for him. I actually got a text from (VP of Communications and Team Services Mike) Sundheim.

Did he tell you about the \$20 signing bonus?

(Laughing) He told me about that.

What are you most excited about coming into this season?

Just getting back at it again. We have an exciting team. ... We have a lot of new faces but some of the same core. I'm happy to be back and excited to get going.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021



Hurricanes announce team is 100 per cent vaccinated

The Carolina Hurricanes announced Tuesday the team is 100 per cent vaccinated with the 2021-22 regular season getting underway in just under a month.

The NHL has implemented new COVID-19 protocols for the upcoming season.

Unvaccinated players will be subject to regular testing and will have restrictions on what they can do and where they

can go while on the road. Additionally, if an unvaccinated player is unable to participate in club activities because of protocols, teams will have the right to suspend the player without pay.

Vaccinated players who test positive for COVID-19 will be treated as a hockey-related injury and will be paid fully.



Carolina Hurricanes State of the Position: Centers

The Carolina Hurricanes retained their top three centers and made a move to bring in a veteran with 100 games of playoff experience to increase depth down the middle.

By Zeke Lukow

Yesterday we broke down the wingers for the Carolina Hurricanes and today we will look at the center position.

In an offseason of turnover, the Carolina Hurricanes held on to their top three centers and lost fourth-line center Morgan Geekie to the expansion draft. The Canes added center depth in a combined effort of veterans and prospects who can contribute in future seasons.

Sebastian Aho

Last Season Stats: 24 Goals, 33 Assists, 57 Points in 56 Games

Sebastian Aho has quieted all his doubters over the last two seasons while playing center. The biggest issue when he moved to center was his ability to play against the top lines of other teams. He has proven that not only can he continue to score but he can also play the game's toughest position against the superstars of the league. He leads all Canes centers in the major possession stats.

If last season were a full season he was on pace for 35 goals, which would have marked three straight seasons with 30 or more goals; he finished just six shy of that mark with 24 in the shortened 56 game season. His 33 assists also had him on pace to have his second-highest assist total at 48.

Aho dominates every phase of the game. Over the past two seasons, he had seven shorthanded goals, the most of any player in the league. His 15 power-play goals rank 22nd in the league and his 40 even-strength goals also rank 10th

over the last two seasons. There isn't another player in the league that can affect the game as he can in any situation.

Heading into the 2020-2021 season the only knock that there was on Aho was in the faceoff circle. His best season saw him win just 48.59%, of his draws which made Brind'Amour think twice about when to deploy him. This also forced some issues where units were built around Jordan Staal to win the initial faceoff, which now we only see in overtime.

Last season saw Aho's faceoff percentage jump 6.74% to his new career-high of 52.75%. This shifted his offensive zone start percentage down from 61.6% in 2019-2020 to 55.7% in the 2020-2021 season. While this might seem like a bad thing, it means that Rod Brind'Amour had more faith in Aho in all situations and is not sheltering him with easy shifts.

If Aho continues his evolution as a full two-way center, he should be the one getting Selke talk over Jordan Staal. Aho shows no signs of slowing down and it will be great to see the numbers he will be able to put up in the first 82-game season in three years.

Vincent Trocheck

Last Season Stats: 17 Goals, 26 Assists, 43 Points in 47 Games

The 2020-2021 season was Trocheck's first full season with the Carolina Hurricanes. He quickly drew a big following from fans with his playstyle that made him close to a point-per-game scorer. He missed some time in the playoffs with an MCL sprain that hampered his play a bit even when he returned. He was the second-highest goal scorer and point producer in a per-game rate behind only Aho.

Trocheck's offense is one of the biggest reasons that the Canes were able to win the Central Division last season. He gives the Canes two legitimate scoring lines and his speed



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

allows him to create high-speed dynamic plays with Martin Necas and really punish flat-footed defenders and teams that make a bad change. Unlike many other Canes players of old, he can actually finish once he creates space and high danger chances.

His offense hasn't come with the sacrifice of defense as he ranked sixth in goals for (60.98%) and seventh in possession with a 54.38% Corsi. This is also surprising given the fact he had the lowest offensive zone start rate of just 42%. Brind'Amour had the faith in him to put him in for defensive zone face-offs and Trocheck proved him right.

Trocheck also completely changes the look of the power play. With him on the ice, the Canes become almost impossible to stop with playmakers and scorers all across the ice. It forces penalty-kill units to pick their poison on who to cover. He tied for the most power-play goals on the team last year with seven and the most power-play points with 18 despite playing fewer games than anyone else who was regularly on the powerplay.

Another offseason with the team and with the same line mates should allow Trocheck to continue to grow both on and off the ice. Taking into account this is also a contract season for him to earn the biggest contract he will get in his career, he will be doing everything that he can to impact each and every game. There would be no reason to be surprised if he was able to score at a point-per-game pace for the upcoming season if he is able to stay healthy for all 82 games.

Jordan Staal

Last Season Stats: 16 Goals, 22 Assists, 38 Points in 38 Games

Much like there must always be a Stark in Winterfell there must always be a Staal as captain in Carolina. The skipper has long been a fan favorite as a dark horse candidate for the Selke but has yet to break through nationally.

Last year would be considered a down year for Staal defensively. He struggled in many possession categories.

He was the 14th ranked forward in Corsi with a 52.6%. He was a shocking -1.5 relative Corsi, which does consider his low 43.2% offensive zone starts. Staal also ranked just 15th on the team with 51.19% goals for and 18th in expected goals for with 51.88%. He also ranked second to last on the team with 10.69 high danger chances against per 60 on the team. Where he has not missed a step is in the faceoff circle as he leads the team with a 57.99% win rate which also ranks the sixth highest in the entire league.

Staal is more than capable of bouncing back defensively and that style of game translates better over an aging curve than goal scoring. He will continue to be an impact player on the third line who can eat penalty kill minutes and take important defensive zone faceoffs for years to come.

While his defense wasn't up to his usual standards he did excel offensively. His 15.5% shooting was his third-best in his career. That translated on the score sheet as his 16 goals were the most he has had since the 2017-2018 season when he had 19. He was able to also get 16 goals in 26 fewer games than he had in that 2017-2018 season. Last season

was great to see the joy he had while scoring, and it will be great to see if he can keep it going.

Staal is still the heart and soul of the team and it looks much better when he is part of the lineup than when he is out of the lineup. The main concern is that he has only played one full season in the last five and it was the 2019-2020 season that was shortened due to COVID-19. Zooming further out he has only played three full seasons since he got to Carolina. The team has prepared better this season with offseason additions of centers that have a better chance to fill in a bigger role if he was out.

Derek Stepan

Last Season Stats: One Goal, Five Assists, 6 Points in 20 Games (Ottawa)

Stepan is an 11-season NHL veteran who has played over 100 playoff games in his career. Stepan has never been a huge goal scorer with only two 20-goal seasons in his career. He has been an effective playmaker with six 30-plus assist seasons, but his last was in the 2017-2018 season. This offseason he signed a one-year, \$1.36-million contract with the Canes to be the fourth center.

Last season was his statistical worst but he also played less than half of the season due to a shoulder injury just 20 games into the 2021 campaign. However, Stepan was effective in possession, ranking second in Ottawa Senators centers and fifth among forwards with a 48.8% Corsi despite a 44.4% offensive zone start rate.

Stepan is due to bounce back this season as he had the lowest PDO on the team at 940 which includes his career-low 2.3% shooting percentage. His career average is 9.3% and even with an aging curve, two seasons ago he had a 6.3% and should be bouncing back.

He can also play on the penalty kill on the second unit. He played 1:11 short-handed time per game last season and has short-handed goals in six of the last seven seasons. He can fit in with the aggressive style that the Canes play with but could actually bring more finishing ability than Brock McGinn brought last year on the second unit.

Overall he is an extremely capable fourth-line center and can also play with the third line if there were any injuries to come into play next season. He offers a more robust option in these situations than a very green and young Geekie, but without the future upside.

The Insurance Policy/Future

The Canes have multiple players who are both play on the wing but are natural centers. While they may not play consistent time at center but can fill in if the team is in a pinch.

Jordan Martinook is a perfect example of this kind of player. He plays a majority of his time on the wing but played some time at center last season when Vincent Trocheck and Jordan Staal were injured. Martinook has never been an ideal fourth-line center, but with him, it's a low-floor, low-ceiling at center without the chance to have a ton of impact on the fourth line.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

The two other players who are natural centers but will be playing the wing are Martin Necas and Jesperi Kotkaniemi. These players are both in the Carolina Hurricanes' center prospect protocol aka learning to play in the NHL by learning on the wing. This is the same process the Canes used with Sebastian Aho and that turned out to be a success.

The best-case scenario for the Canes is that neither will see significant time at the center position because that would mean that something happened to one of the top three guys. The biggest benefit of having this many centers is that the

Canes will almost always have two guys on the ice that can take a faceoff at any time. They can be aggressive on faceoffs without worrying about the consequences of someone getting thrown out of the circle.

This will be a big season for the growth of both of these young players in the NHL. If either show promise or growth, it will give the Canes leverage against Trocheck after this season when his contract expires. Staal also only has two seasons left on his current contract so these two are set up to be the second and third-line centers for the future.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article254232933.html>

<https://theathletic.com/2826002/2021/09/14/sebastian-aho-qa-on-offer-sheets-sleeping-through-the-drama-and-how-the-hurricanes-can-take-the-next-step/>

<https://www.tsn.ca/carolina-hurricanes-announce-team-is-100-per-cent-vaccinated-1.1693485>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2021/9/14/22672988/carolina-hurricanes-state-of-the-position-centers-aho-trocheck-staal-stepan>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

SportScan

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

1191695 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho gives his take on offer sheet to Jesperi Kotkaniemi

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MORRISVILLE—Remember how disappointed Sebastian Aho was after the Carolina Hurricanes' last loss in the 2021 Stanley Cup playoffs? How mad he was after being ousted by the Tampa Bay Lightning?

The pain and anger didn't go away quickly.

"I tried to use that fire in this offseason," Aho said Tuesday. "You've got to learn from those things. It's been three years now that we've had good years but not quite good enough and I truly believe those experiences will help us in the future. We just have to remember how it feels to lose."

Aho said that in an interview session at Wake Competition Center. No Zoom. No phone hookup. The Canes center came off the ice after an informal on-ice preseason workout with a group of his teammates, sat down on a bench and answered questions from a pair of reporters.

For the first time since September 2019, there was a sense of normalcy. NHL training camps will start later this month and the regular season in October. The Canes will return to the Metropolitan Division with a regular-season schedule comprised of 82 games.

So much changed during the coronavirus pandemic. Life has been anything but normal. The NHL's 2019-20 regular season was brought to a halt by the pandemic in March 2020, and the 2020-21 regular season did not begin until January 2021 and lasted 56 games.

In September 2019, Aho returned to Raleigh from Finland and answered questions about the offer sheet made to him by the Montreal Canadiens that summer. This September, he was asked about another offer sheet — the one made by Carolina to forward Jesperi Kotkaniemi of the Canadiens on Aug. 28.

The Canes matched the 2019 offer to Aho. The Canadiens, after taking their allotted seven days to make a decision, with zero media leaks, then passed on Kotkaniemi, not matching the offer, taking two draft picks in return and adding another young Finnish player to the Canes' mix.

Aho, 24, said he has never played in international competition with Kotkaniemi, 21, and does not know him well. He did say they "talked a little" after the offer sheet was made.

"I'm going to help him as much as I can," Aho said. "At the end of the day you have to just forget all that talk and keep doing what you do and play hockey. I'm sure he is going to help us a lot as a team. ... We got a great player out of it. That's my take on it."

Kotkaniemi, who was a restricted free agent, signed for a one-year, \$6.1 million contract that includes a \$20 bonus — 20 being Aho's jersey number and a bonus, Aho quipped Tuesday, he was willing to pay "if it comes to that."

In Aho's case, his 2019 offer sheet was for a five-year contract with an \$8.454 million annual cap hit, with millions of dollars in front-loaded bonus money.

In both cases, the players had to sign the offer sheets. With that comes the risk that should the offer sheet not be matched, the player could change teams.

"Everyone knows when you signed that contract what can possibly happen," Aho said. "To me, I always wanted to stay."

Aho stayed with the Canes. Kotkaniemi, who has yet to get to Raleigh, will be with a new team and wearing a new number, No. 82.

Aho said with the seven-hour time difference in Finland, he was asleep soon after his offer sheet was announced, unaware of the drama being played out in Raleigh while Canes fans were fretting they might lose a star center and questioning why Aho had signed an offer sheet from Montreal. The next morning, Canes owner Tom Dundon said the Canes would match. Drama over.

Not so for Kotkaniemi.

"I guess it's a long week not knowing exactly what's going to happen," Aho said. "I was pretty confident with Carolina. Tom (Dundon) told me and the whole world that he's going to match right away, so I guess it wasn't too bad for me."

While Kotkaniemi is a newcomer to the Canes, there are others. Aho was on the ice Tuesday with defensemen Ethan Bear and Tony DeAngelo, Josh Leivo and Brendan Smith.

"A lot of the new faces but there's still a lot of the same, more familiar faces," Aho said.

No longer will there be defenseman Dougie Hamilton on the back end, looking to push the pace, get off shots and be a big part of the offense. Hamilton signed as a free agent with New Jersey, leaving Carolina for a big contract.

"It is all part of the business and I think we all knew there was a chance that he might not be here this year," Aho said.

Aho will be entering his sixth NHL season and has been a vital part of the franchise resurgence, with playoff appearances the past three years. One preseason ranking has him No. 21 among NHL players, as if he pays much attention to such things, to the outside noise.

He just doesn't want to be mad, again, when the season ends.

News Observer LOADED: 09.15.2021

1191696 Carolina Hurricanes

Sebastian Aho Q&A: On offer sheets, sleeping through the drama and how the Hurricanes can take the next step

By Sara Civian Sep 14, 2021



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

As the Hurricanes trickle back into Raleigh ahead of training camp, many new faces are gracing Wake Competition Center (all of whom are vaccinated, including coaches, according to the team).

So much has changed between a brand new goalie tandem and a revamped, Dougie Hamilton-less blue line. But much has stayed the same as well, like Jordan Martinook's voice booming through the practice facility and budding star Sebastian Aho giving the media a little wave while shooting around.

After the team's informal practice Tuesday, Aho caught up with a few members of the media, answering questions on where the Canes have been, where they need to go and a certain \$20 bill.

(Note: Some questions and answers are edited for length or clarity.)

What did you get up to during the offseason?

I was just spending some quality time with my family and friends as much as I possibly could. And obviously I worked hard. I did some things to take my mind of the hockey but still every day worked to get better. Body feels good. Just excited to be back.

How can the team be better this season?

We need to start on time, first of all. We can't expect that it's going to come easy because we had a good regular season last year. We have to do all the work again, and over and over again. Just try to build every day, piece by piece, small steps. I'm confident that we can be better than last year — that's my goal. ...

I see it as a process. I've been doing this pretty much the past 10 years, trying to get just a little bit better each day. I know it's cliché, but that's exactly how I feel, and that's how I get my confidence on the ice. I know that I've been doing my stuff off-the-ice in the offseason, and doing everything as well as I can. ...

I've tried to use the fire (from last year's disappointment) for my workouts this offseason. You've gotta learn from those. It's been three years now that we have had good years, but not quite good enough. I truly believe that those experiences are going to help us in the future. We just have to remember how it feels to lose a tight playoff series and use that in the future.

What's it like coming back to so many new faces?

I guess it's somewhat normal. It's just part of business when teams try to get better. There are a lot of new faces, but there are still a lot of the more familiar faces. Every new guy I've met so far has been great, and I'm sure they'll help us as a team.

What were you thinking when you heard the Canes tendered Jesperi Kotkaniemi an offer sheet?

We got a great player out of it. That's my take on it. I guess that's part of the business as well, I guess it doesn't happen too often. (Laughs.) I really don't know what to say, but I'm excited to see what Kotkaniemi can bring to us. I talked to him a little after it happened. I know him a little bit from before so I'm excited.

What's it like for a player to go through the offer sheet process?

Everyone knows when you sign that contract what could possibly happen.

To me, I always wanted to stay here and Carolina matched. ... I was pretty confident Carolina was going to match. Tom (Dundon) told me and the whole world he was going to match right away. I guess it wasn't too bad for me. I slept through (the Canes matching) because of the time change. Everyone's talking, and I was just sleeping at home and it was great. ... In the morning, social media was (blowing up).

It's a lot of media asking questions about it, but it's only a little bit more than a normal extension (to the players). I'm going to help him as much as I can — if there's anything on his mind. But at the end of the day you

just have to forget all of that talk, keep doing what you do and play hockey. I'm sure he's going to help us a lot as a team.

I can't say I was too surprised (to hear about the Kotkaniemi offer sheet). I had heard they were trying to trade for him. I actually got a text from (VP of Communications and Team Services Mike) Sundheim.

Did he tell you about the \$20 signing bonus?

(Laughing) He told me about that.

What are you most excited about coming into this season?

Just getting back at it again. We have an exciting team. ... We have a lot of new faces but some of the same core. I'm happy to be back and excited to get going.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2021

1191753 Websites

The Athletic / Most interesting NHL prospect to watch in training camp for every team

By Corey Pronman

Sep 14, 2021

As NHL training camps prepare to open for the 2021-22 season, it is time to highlight the most interesting prospect for each NHL team.

This is not meant to be every team's top prospect, although at times it will be. This will identify the player whose progress will be the most fascinating to follow this fall.

For a complete ranking of every team's best prospects and young players, check out my NHL Pipeline Rankings and my ranking of the best players under 23.

Anaheim: Benoit-Olivier Groulx, C, San Diego-AHL

Groulx was a solid all-around player in the AHL as a leading player for San Diego. He's not a true high-skill type, but he can make and finish plays to go with his strong compete level. Anaheim was 31st in the NHL in goals per game, so any type of forward help would be appreciated. I could see Groulx, whether at center or the wing, make a strong push in the preseason to get a roster spot.

Arizona: Barrett Hayton, C, Tucson-AHL

There's no getting around the fact that Hayton had a very disappointing 2021 season. The fifth pick in 2018 has a ton of skill and is still a highly thought of prospect, but the clock is ticking for him to show some returns for the Coyotes. Preseason isn't the time to do that, but you still want to see him come in and show without doubt that he's ready to help the team. If his pace leaves doubt, at age 21 that will really start to raise some flags.

Boston: Jakub Lauko, LW, Providence-AHL

Lauko was very impressive in the AHL last season. He plays with a ton of speed and compete, which will translate to the NHL and will certainly appeal to coaches. There might not be a clear roster spot for him, but I could see him have a strong camp and make some veterans nervous if he looks close to ready.

Buffalo: Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, G, Rochester-AHL

There are prospects who are more highly touted than Luukkonen at Buffalo's camp, but given how chaotic their goaltending situation was last season, and how up and down his play has been through his first two pro seasons, it would be a huge boost to the franchise if the former OHL most outstanding player looks like an NHLer in camp and is ready to take some starts this season.

Calgary: Connor Zary, C, Kamloops-WHL



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

Zary was excellent again in the WHL last season and in his brief time in the AHL as a teenager he was also quite good. That time versus men is what makes him intriguing going into NHL camp. He's a very skilled and competitive player, although his skating is just OK. For that last reason, I would guess he still needs extended AHL time. But it would be intriguing to see if he looks close and provides some depth for the Flames forward group.

Carolina: Jack Drury, C, Vaxjo-SHL

Drury had an excellent season in Sweden, as an important part of a team that won the SHL title. He's not the flashiest player in terms of speed or skill, but he's a very smart player who brings a ton of effort to his shifts. He also offers a different quality than the rest of the Hurricanes system, which is heavy on skill and playmaking. Drury looks close to being NHL ready; if his skating looks good enough in camp he could be a bottom-six grinder.

Chicago: Lukas Reichel, LW, Berlin-DEL

Reichel was Chicago's first-round pick in 2020. Since then the Blackhawks moved a lot of futures in the Seth Jones trade. That puts even more pressure for the high picks they did keep to work out. Reichel is still a teenager, so I'm not expecting him to make the team, never mind do so in a notable role. But from Chicago's perspective, you are looking at him to be a top-six forward in the future because the options in the system are going to be limited going forward. You'd like to see him have a big camp and look not far away from being a big leaguer.

Colorado: Sampo Ranta, LW, Minnesota-Big Ten

A lot is expected of top picks Bowen Byram and Alex Newhook, but the way great teams are built is getting value beyond the first round. Because of how good Ranta looked last season, he is quite intriguing, and there is room on Colorado's roster for a big, fast forward with some offense. He may need AHL time, but if he steps into camp and starts turning the corner on NHL defensemen to create offense, he could force the team to play him.

Columbus: Yegor Chinakhov, RW, Omsk-KHL

This is a rather straightforward case for why Chinakhov is the guy to watch. The surprise pick of the 2020 NHL Draft at No. 21 as a second-year eligible who then went on to a great KHL season and a championship, Chinakhov will be a guy Blue Jackets fans have a lot of eyes on. His skill, vision and shot are all great. What I'll be looking for is how his skating and pace hold up at the NHL level.

Dallas: Thomas Harley, LHD, Texas-AHL

Harley is an easy and obvious choice for the player to watch in Dallas' camp. He's excelled in recent years, including in the AHL as a teenager. He has all the tools you want in an NHL defenseman as a big, mobile, skilled, intelligent puck-mover who can defend. You don't want to hand spots to a 20-year-old, but with his trajectory, he should be a guy right in the mix to play NHL games soon and push some veterans for ice time.

Detroit: Lucas Raymond, LW, Frolunda-SHL

Why is this not Moritz Seider? Because realistically he's going to be playing and playing a lot next season for Detroit. Where Raymond fits is more of a debate. He was good in Sweden last season but wasn't amazing. The skill level for the 2020 fourth pick is off the charts, but how a summer of development changed his strength level will be interesting to see at his first NHL camp. I don't expect him to make Detroit — although I'm not ruling it out — but with his size and lack of elite speed, I'll be curious how he looks initially and how far away he seems if at all.

Edmonton: Evan Bouchard, RHD, Edmonton-NHL

After being in and out of the lineup last season, Bouchard is expected to do more this coming season and to become a bigger part of the Oilers lineup. He's an excellent puck mover with a big point shot, but the questions for the NHL have always been on his pace and whether he can skate with top forwards. With the changes to the Oilers' blue line, there is an opportunity now for him to seize out of training camp.

Florida: Serron Noel, RW, Syracuse-AHL

Florida has better prospects you expect will be in the roster mix, like Anton Lundell and Spencer Knight, but it's important that Noel, the 34th pick in 2018, looks like a player. He's barely played hockey the past two years with mixed results. When you have his huge frame, can skate well enough and have offensive skill by age 21, you are hoping he looks at least close to providing help to the big club. If it's a quick cut without much preseason noise, it will start to be concerning.

Los Angeles: Arthur Kaliyev, RW, Ontario-AHL

It's expected 2020 No. 2 pick Quinton Byfield will be with the Kings, so the most interesting prospect going into camp is Kaliyev. Kaliyev was good in the AHL for a teenager and was a great junior. He has tremendous playmaking and finishing ability, but scouts have reservations on his skating and compete. I think people will be skeptical on the 33rd pick in 2019 until he shows he can do it in the NHL. There are roster spots to be had in L.A., and now would be the time for Kaliyev to prove himself.

Minnesota: Marco Rossi, C, Ottawa-OHL

This one is a rather obvious choice. After missing an entire season due to a COVID-19 complication, all eyes will be on the ninth pick in 2020 to see how he looks at Wild camp. How close does he look in terms of his conditioning and skating? Is he a plug-and-play prospect or will he need a full year in the AHL? Those are the questions being asked heading into camp after a very scary medical situation.

Montreal: Ryan Poehling, C, Laval-AHL

With Philip Danault in Los Angeles, Jesperi Kotkaniemi in Carolina and Christian Dvorak in Montreal, the Habs center position will look a lot different next season. To stop the bleeding, they will need Poehling to build off his second pro season and look like a real NHLer in camp. He may not be the most dynamic offensive type, but he works hard and is a smart player who you could see help a team.

Nashville: David Farrance, LHD, Boston University-Hockey East

Farrance was a terrific college hockey player, as a true driver of offense in his last two seasons particularly. He's a dynamic skater who can move the puck well but is an undersized defenseman who has always had issues defending. He will be 22 years old at camp, so Nashville should get a pretty good idea of how real a prospect he is and how much his game will translate to the pro level. If he shows he can play and help their team, it would help to an extent replace some of the offense the Predators lost in Ryan Ellis.

New Jersey: Alexander Holtz, RW, Djurgarden-SHL

The Devils have a lot of prospects and thus candidates you can pick from for most interesting player going into camp. Holtz, who was the seventh pick in 2020, didn't have the season he likely hoped he would in Sweden last season — particularly on the goal-scoring front, which is typically what he is best at. I don't think he'll be ready for the NHL and he will need time in the AHL, but you'd like to see him come into camp and look like an offensive difference-maker at times with his skill and his finishing, even though he will likely need time to adjust to the NHL pace.

New York Islanders: Samuel Bolduc, LHD, Bridgeport-AHL

Bolduc had a strong first pro season in the AHL. He's intriguing as a big, mobile defenseman whom you could easily see being a solid defender in the NHL. The question has always been his puck game and whether he can move it at the NHL pace. I don't see him on the Isles to start the season, but if he has a good camp and answers some concerns it would inspire confidence that he's a player who could step in soon.

New York Rangers: Nils Lundkvist, RHD, Lulea-SHL

Lundkvist has been excellent in the SHL and Rangers fans have been awaiting his landing in North America. The Rangers have two excellent right-shot defense prospects in Lundkvist and Braden Schneider, to go with Adam Fox and Jacob Trouba already with the big club. In the short term, there might be a spot for Lundkvist, but he and Schneider will need to be so good that they force the coach to play them on the off side. That picture should become a bit clearer once camp wraps up.

Ottawa: Egor Sokolov, RW, Belleville-AHL



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

Sokolov isn't the highest-rated prospect or the one with the most prestige in the Ottawa system, by any means. But the past two years he's performed as well as you could have asked him to, showing a consistent high level of skill and finishing ability in a big frame. The test on Sokolov has always been whether the skating will hold up as he advances levels. He checked the AHL box; the NHL is the next and largest step. If he goes into an NHL camp and looks the part, you can start thinking Ottawa may have something with their 2020 61st pick.

Philadelphia: Morgan Frost, C, Lehigh Valley-AHL

Frost didn't get much playing time due to injury last season, but coming out of junior he looked like a great prospect and had a strong first pro season. When healthy, he's an extremely skilled and intelligent forward who can make a lot of plays, even if his overall pace and physicality has really never been great. As a third-year pro, you are looking to Frost to step up and start producing for the Flyers soon.

Pittsburgh: Filip Hallander, LW, Lulea-SHL

It's pretty rare for a team to draft, trade and then reacquire a prospect all before their 22nd birthday. It shows the Penguins value Hallander's hockey sense and competitiveness. They have a shallow system, and while he's not their top prospect, given how well he's shown versus men he could be their most ready forward prospect to help extend the roster and provide some returns from their farm system.

St. Louis: Scott Perunovich, LHD, Minnesota-Duluth-NCHC

Perunovich was an excellent college player, winning the Hobey Baker award in 2020. He then missed the 2021 season due to injury. He looks like he will be healthy for camp. As a 23-year-old who is a fantastic puck mover with good enough skating despite being undersized, if he hits the ground running and looks like he could help, that could really help the Blues' blue line.

San Jose: William Eklund, LW, Djurgarden-SHL

Eklund, who was the seventh pick in the 2021 draft, was excellent versus men last season will have a lot of eyes on him at Sharks camp. It is likelier than not that he will spend the season outside the NHL. But with his tremendous skating, compete and skill, I wouldn't rule out the possibility he makes the Sharks. At a minimum, I think he will make things interesting at camp.

Seattle: Ryker Evans, LHD, Regina-WHL

Evans was one of the more interesting picks in the 2021 NHL Draft. He was a high second-round pick as a re-entry prospect who some teams did not see going that high. He was very good in the WHL last season, and as a 2001 birth date who would typically turn pro around now, Seattle should get a decent idea at camp what they really have on their hands. He's still expected to need a good amount of AHL time, but whether he shows the type of pace and puck-movement to play with NHLers at camp will be a good indicator of what type of prospect he is.

Tampa Bay: Boris Katchouk, LW, Syracuse-AHL

Katchouk had a very successful third pro season at well over a point per game in the AHL. He's a player with very good offensive skills who competes hard. The skating has never been a selling point in his game and he's not a dynamic offensive type, but he could certainly be a player who plugs into an NHL bottom six and continues Tampa's tradition of extending its depth with young players. He may not make the team, but I could see him have a strong camp and make it a hard decision.

Toronto: Nick Robertson, LW, Toronto-AHL

I don't expect Robertson to make the Leafs out of camp but I highlight him because his stock was very high in the 2020 season after his great OHL year, his world juniors and his play with the Leafs late. During the 2021 season, I heard more mixed reviews of his play from scouts; not poor, but not the raving from Peterborough as he adjusted to pro hockey. He has tremendous skill, compete and scoring ability, but there are still legit concerns on his skating, especially for his size. If Robertson has a big NHL camp and looks like he's on the verge of stealing some jobs, that would be an indicator that he can overcome his skating issues.

Vancouver: Jonah Gadjovich, LW, Utica-AHL

Vasily Podkolzin is Vancouver's top prospect and all reasonable expectations are he'll start with the Canucks in an important role. I highlight Gadjovich because he's approaching the stage of his career where it's time to break through or he'll look like an AHLer. He'll be 23 by the time the season starts, coming off a brief AHL season where he scored 15 goals in 19 games. He's a very competitive player who is great around the net, but isn't the quickest or most skilled. I see a place in an NHL lineup for his style, but he will need to win over decision-makers soon.

Vegas: Peyton Krebs, C, Winnipeg-WHL

Vegas has a very deep roster, so it's perfectly conceivable that no young prospect makes its roster to start the season. But if someone is going to do it, it would be Krebs. Krebs was a great junior, showing a ton of offense to go with a great motor. If he makes Vegas initially it likely won't be in a prime scoring role, so he'll need to show the coaches he can provide value as a secondary scorer who wins battles even though he's not the biggest forward.

Washington: Alexander Alexeyev, LHD, Hershey-AHL

Washington has an older group of defensemen, so it's certainly possible Alexeyev or Martin Fehervary could see playing time soon. Alexeyev would provide more offense, whereas Fehervary's skating would make him more of a two-way type in the NHL. I could see arguments for both, but I thought Alexeyev was quite impressive between the KHL and AHL last season and he's a player I could see making a big impression at camp.

Winnipeg: Ville Heinola, LHD, Manitoba-AHL

Winnipeg acquired some good defensemen in the offseason, so it's not clear if there's a path for Heinola or Dylan Samberg to break camp with the Jets, but if either would I could see Heinola do it. He's been good versus men the last few years and could provide an elite puck-moving presence to the blue line; whereas Samberg would be more of your standard two-way player. At the minimum, I could see Heinola make it a hard decision to cut him.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2021

1191754 Websites

The Athletic / How safe will minor hockey be this winter? Across Canada, leagues and parents grapple with the question

By Sean Fitz-Gerald

Sep 14, 2021

In the months after COVID-19 forced Toronto minor hockey to shut its doors, Dr. Sara Pickersgill saw her youngest child grow moody, more irritable and less able to focus on school. Bicycle rides and walks could not fill the void of what was lost, she said: "A lot of that had to do with the lack of sport."

Children who were registered in the Greater Toronto Hockey League would lose an entire season, with the organization shutting down all sanctioned activity last fall. That meant no tryouts, no team practices, no games and no tournaments.

A year later, there is more hope — and more hockey.

Experts warn there is also plenty of risk, with an uneven patchwork of rules and regulations governing children and families as they return to arenas across Canada. Vaccines will be mandatory for those who are eligible in some regions, but not in others. Masking will remain a fixture in some rinks, but not all.

On top of that, the more contagious Delta variant is fueling a surge in cases while the youngest players in the minor hockey system — children under the age of 12 — are awaiting an approved vaccine.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

"It's about your individual risk tolerance," said Pickersgill, who is an emergency room physician. "You have to look at the risks and benefits for your family, and for your particular child."

Last week, Peel Public Health, in suburban Toronto, announced that more than 100 people attending a hockey tournament had potentially been exposed to COVID-19. The two arenas were in Brampton and Mississauga, and teams had traveled from more than a half-dozen municipalities in Southern Ontario.

Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious diseases specialist at Toronto General Hospital, pointed to an outbreak last year in Ottawa, where 89 positive cases — and more than 440 high-risk contacts — were traced back to a single hockey practice. And that was before the Delta variant arrived in full force.

"What could possibly go wrong, putting a bunch of kids in an indoor setting, with physical exercise, with mask use some of the time, with the Delta variant circulating?" said Bogoch. "There's going to be outbreaks. We know that. There are going to be outbreaks with that."

He said the prospect of the variant in minor hockey rinks made him "very nervous" for the winter.

"It kills me to say it, because I love hockey so much, and I want this to be a successful and safe season: But there have to be significant steps to curb transmission in the rink," he said. "You can't think your kid's going to go to hockey, and there's going to be a zero per cent risk of infection in that setting."

Hockey Canada has not issued a vaccine mandate, though a spokesperson for the national governing body said "we are encouraging anyone who is eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine to do so."

What has been created, then, is a series of rules that can vary not only from province to province but also from city to city.

In a document circulated to members this week, Hockey Canada outlined the differences from coast to coast to coast. In Ontario, for instance, the provincial government requires face masks for anyone who is visiting an indoor public space. (For minor hockey, players have to wear their mask in the arena, but not once they are on the ice.)

There is no such provincial requirement in Saskatchewan. And at the time the document was circulated, mask use was only recommended, and not required, in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as in Prince Edward Island.

In Ontario, several governing bodies — including the GTHL and the Ontario Women's Hockey Association — have mandated vaccines for all eligible participants. There were no similar mandates in place for Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, New Brunswick, PEI, or Newfoundland and Labrador.

"Any time you bring a bunch of people together in close proximity for a long period of time — who are going to be breathing heavily — you certainly are likely to increase the risk of transmission," said Ryan Demmer, an associate professor in the school of public health at the University of Minnesota. "The thing that has changed in the last year is, now we're dealing with Delta variant, which seems to be much more contagious, and seems to be impacting kids more readily."

Overall, he said children seem to do "reasonably well" with the virus, and the "absolute risk of having a really bad outcome if a child was infected seems to be fairly low."

That is not the same as saying there is no risk to children.

"Generally speaking, if kids are unvaccinated and participating in sports like this," said Demmer, "the risk that they're going to get infected over the course of the next year I would say is pretty high."

In Toronto, the GTHL will require proof of vaccination from age-eligible players. Scott Oakman, the organization's executive director, said the rule extends to anyone whose role requires a presence around a rink this winter, from executives to timekeepers.

Parents, he said, are excluded.

Children too young to receive the vaccine will also be in the arenas.

"That's where we actually started with the development of our vaccine policy — with that group," said Oakman. "Because we knew there were limited options in terms of those kids."

Steve Hogle, general manager of Hockey Edmonton, said the local association has strict policies tied to mask-wearing, but has not implemented a vaccine mandate.

"We've strongly encouraged — recommended, urged — everybody to get double-vaccinated," he said. "The science proves that's the most effective way to deal with this virus."

In the meantime, there are no COVID-related capacity limits on local minor hockey arenas. Hogle said children are allowed access to dressing rooms, though they are required to mask until the moment they buckle their helmet to go onto the ice.

From that point, he said, minor hockey almost feels normal, or at least "in this new normal where we're living."

"You can't ignore the numbers of cases that Alberta is experiencing daily," he said. "So you're sort of casting an eye toward those numbers while trying to manage the minor hockey in front of you — and hoping people do what needs to be done to get those numbers going back down."

In terms of registration, Hogle said the association was only down about five per cent from last season, with between 8,000 and 9,000 registered players.

"We still recognize that some parents are sitting on the fence and don't have the comfort level to get back to the rink yet," he said. "We totally respect that. People have varying levels of tolerance for risk, and that comes with the turf."

Cases of COVID-19 have been soaring in Alberta, as well as in neighbouring Saskatchewan, which reported 449 new cases on Monday. It was the province's highest daily total since the pandemic was declared.

Kelly McClintock, general manager of Hockey Saskatchewan, said there are no provincial restrictions for any of the rinks. He said the organization encourages participants to wear a mask inside local arenas (except when on the ice), and that it recommends eligible players and officials take the vaccine.

They are recommendations, though, and not requirements.

"It's such a polarizing topic," said McClintock. "I know lots of families have been divided by it. It just depends on where you are and what you believe in."

Dr. Andrew Morris is an infectious diseases specialist with Sinai Health System and University Health Network in Toronto. He said youth sports organizations should examine the structure of their system to minimize the risk of spread among children too young to get the vaccine.

That could mean holding off on fielding competitive travel teams until a vaccine is approved, he said, and keeping the focus on practice and skills development. Children would still be able to play, he said, but the reduction in travel would reduce the risk within different communities.

"Hockey tournaments are money-makers," said Morris. "But outbreaks cost a lot of money. More than the money that is made. And there should be broad discussions about this."

Pickersgill, the emergency room physician, has one vaccinated child, and another waiting until a shot is approved. She praised the GTHL for moving ahead with its vaccine mandate and hopes coaches make it clear to players and parents this season that, even if they only have a cold, they should stay home.

Her 10-year-old has returned to the ice for practice and even an exhibition game. She saw a change in his mood, and this time it was for the better.

"He's really, really happy about it," she said. "And frankly, so are we."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

1191755 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Holland believes 'time is now' for Oilers to evolve into contenders

Mark Spector@sportsnetsec

September 14, 2021, 8:25 AM

EDMONTON — “The time is now.”

When Ken Holland says something like this, it's never going to be a Mark Messier-like guarantee. Or a Peter Pocklington prediction that the 1979 Oilers would win a Stanley Cup within five years.

To Holland, a man of process, “the time is now” means it is time to move from being a good team to being an elite team. To evolve from a team that is feared in December and January, to one capable of being feared in May and June.

To grow from a team that could feasibly win its division, to a team that could feasibly win the Stanley Cup.

“The time is now,” Holland told us over the phone, on his way home from Team Canada Olympic meetings in Banff. “In my mind, the time to try and take a step. We've been 12th in the league, 11th in the league. But the aspirations are far greater than that.”

You can lament an organization that wasted the first few years of Connor McDavid's career. Holland wasn't here for that, and he doesn't care what happened back then.

You can say that Holland's Oilers have only won one playoff game in two post-seasons under the GM, and he'll agree. It's part of the process, losing. And honestly, you don't take over a mess from Peter Chiarelli and have it ticking like a Swiss watch in 24 months.

The survival phase was in Year 1. Holland signed a whack of players to a bunch of one-year deals, and slapped together a lineup that was in second place in the Pacific when the pandemic struck. Four months later, the play-in series was a disaster, and with a frozen cap he put together another second-place team last season.

Again, the playoffs were a disaster. That has to end.

When?

“The time is now.”

“I wanted to bring in some people who have won before,” Holland opined. “(Zach) Hyman is 29, Foegele is 25 — they're in the prime of their careers. Duncan Keith is going to have a lesser role (than in Chicago), but he's bringing in his resume. He's played in lot of situations at the international and National Hockey League level. He's been brought in for what he can do on and off the ice.”

When McDavid and Leon Draisaitl sit down at the second intermission trailing 3-2, and the people they see across the room have names like Gaetan Haas, Dominik Kahun, Joakim Nygard and Caleb Jones, they know that the comeback is on their backs. It's been that way in Edmonton: If No. 29 and 97 don't win the game for you, it doesn't get won.

Slowly, the faces of fringe NHLers are being replaced with legit NHLers.

“The hope is that some of the guys who have been around here for a while look around the locker room, and they think that we're a deeper team. That's the plan,” Holland said.

Ask him about his goalies, however, and Holland simply can't tell you what he really thinks.

He's been in the market for a younger partner for Mike Smith for two summers, and been unable to succeed — largely because any deal had to include the weighty contract of Mikko Koskinen, who has one year remaining at \$4.5 million. And Holland is still working the phones, with a

handful of NHL GMs having to make some tough decisions on the goaltending front when they set their rosters after camp.

If he's shopping, he simply cannot be happy with what he has. But you can't expect an NHL manager to verbalize his displeasure with such an important position, when it looks very much like the Smith-Koskinen tandem may have to get Edmonton on the trade deadline at least.

“Since I've been here our goaltending has been a positive,” Holland reasoned. “It's been part of the reason why we've made the playoffs. The big question mark is, one guy's 39 (Smith), one guy's 33.”

Smith can give you a great 40 games. Koskinen, not so much.

Smith can play for a couple of weeks in a row if he has to. Koskinen's game runs out sometime during his third consecutive start, a distressing trait when the starter is 39 and bound to miss time to injury.

“Kosky, I think he knows that one of the areas he needs to improve upon is his consistency,” Holland allowed. “Obviously the question with Mike Smith is, he's 39 years old. Can he do it again?”

You could say that, in a cap system, even the best teams have an area they'd like to be able to shore up. You could also say, “Yeah, but goaltending is the most important position.”

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

That why Holland's proclamation isn't a Stanley Cup guarantee, but an admission that he's had two years here to affect change, and 12th or 11th place in the NHL has to now become a single digit conversation.

“The time is now to try and take a step,” he said. “The Stanley Cup doesn't just happen. You evolve, you grow. You have multiple chances. You have disappointments. ...

“In '93, '94, '95 we couldn't get it done in Detroit. By '98 we had the blueprint and the recipe.”

You can critique the changes he made this offseason, or the veterans — Darnell Nurse, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — that he signed to long-term deals.

But in Keith, Hyman, Foegele, Derek Ryan and Cody Ceci, he has added genuine, veteran NHL players who belong in the league. They aren't some Euro on a one-year deal, or a rookie whose “potential” comes with zero NHL experience.

“I guess I could have just said we'll give jobs to the best of our young kids,” Holland said, “but my thinking process was to bring in established NHL players. And hopefully over the next 40 games some of these young guys become part of the solution. But while we're waiting for them to grow, we have some veteran, established players on our roster.”

And the room does look better.

From outside and within.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.15.2021

1191756 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames not making excuses for challenges in luring top players to Calgary

Eric Francis@EricFrancis

September 14, 2021, 2:28 PM

One week away from training camp, it appears the Calgary Flames will return to action without the shakeup they craved.

The shakeup they need.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

Setting his sights as high as Jack Eichel, GM Brad Treliving scoured the trade landscape all summer long with an eye on altering a core that has repeatedly struggled to live up to expectations.

Alas, what he settled for was a handful of depth players brought in to fit the Darryl Sutter mold.

Outside of snagging top-six winger Blake Coleman via free agency, there weren't many other options for the Flames' seventh-year architect.

"I know everybody screams for change, and we talked about that, but we can only do things that are available to you," said Treliving, whose challenging off-season included losing captain and top defenceman, Mark Giordano, via the expansion draft.

"I can't click my heels and make things happen. You have to have a trade partner. Nobody is ever done in this business — you're always looking for ways to improve. But it has got to make sense.

"It doesn't make any sense for us to give a player away for 50 cents on the dollar. It's great to say, 'go get this guy.' Problem is, this isn't fantasy hockey. The idea that you can go pick 'this player' off the player tree ... it doesn't happen that way."

After missing the playoffs last season, the stocks of many top-end players in the organization have diminished, complicating chances of swapping one star for another.

Johnny Gaudreau's appeal as a one-year rental was diminished by a second-consecutive season below a point-per-game average. Sean Monahan's worst professional season can be attributed to a hip injury that required off-season surgery, scaring potential suitors. Matthew Tkachuk was a shadow of his former self, as were several others.

And so, with an eye on giving this group yet another shot at redemption, the focus turned to getting players Sutter can rely on, or who he's relied on in the past.

Veteran forwards Trevor Lewis and Brad Richardson, who both won Cups with Sutter in L.A., will start the season with fourth-line roles. Brett Ritchie and Michael Stone, whose careers were resurrected following Sutter's arrival last year, were both re-signed as depth charges.

"We brought in some players that will fit an identity we want to have with this team," said Treliving, who added plenty of size and brawn to the mix, including rugged defenceman Erik Gudbranson.

"You want to be a team that is limiting chances against and is hard to play against. We want to be structured defensively and focus on details.

"All the guys we brought in are all guys who bring an edge to their game and I think they'll fit into the way the coach coaches. Lewis, Richardson and Coleman have all won Cups, so experience was added."

Hulking Nikita Zadorov was acquired from Chicago (for a third rounder) to play top-four minutes on the back end and Tyler Pitlick was acquired from Seattle (for a fourth rounder).

Outside of Coleman and Zadorov, all the newbies are depth players aimed largely at shoring up the right side of the blue line and forward ranks.

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

So why couldn't the Flames land any bigger fish via trade or free agency?

Well, as explained, few Flames players drew significant interest from around the league.

Calgary is proving to be a tough sell to many players, given the dated arena, winter weather, high taxes, the team's lack of playoff success, the scrutiny in a Canadian market and a coach who scares some players off.

Zach Hyman, for example, was pursued by the Flames before the former Leafs favourite chose to play alongside the world's best player in Edmonton's fancy arena.

Given how attractive so many teams are in places like Florida, Vegas, Dallas and even Seattle, it's getting harder and harder to lure players here.

"That's not an excuse for us," said Treliving, who paid \$29.4 million for six years of Coleman's services.

"I think it's a really attractive market, but players look at different markets for different reasons. They want to get paid, they want a lifestyle. Not every market is for every player.

"I think it's an unbelievable experience to play in a Canadian market and in this market, but it may not be for everybody to play in Canada. We get that. But that's not a barrier to try to go out to make the team better and do the things you've got to do. We're certainly not making any excuses that we have challenges in our market. We're not playing that card."

What they will be playing is Sutter hockey, which may be the biggest reason for optimism that they can bounce back in the league's weakest division.

"We're 100 per cent vaccinated," said Treliving. "We don't anticipate any issues with our group."

Treliving said Monahan's recovery from surgery has been excellent.

"We'll get the official word when he gets through all the medicals, but our guys have been working with him all summer," Treliving said of his 26-year-old centre who had 10 goals in 50 outings last year.

"He's ahead of schedule, he's doing really well, and had no setbacks. He's been fully skating and full-go training the majority of the summer. I anticipate him being full-go for camp. The focus is making sure he's ready for Game 1."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.15.2021

1191757 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs may have a gem in Wickenheiser 'guinea pig' Alex Steeves

Luke Fox@lukefoxjukebox

September 14, 2021, 4:19 PM

TORONTO — We're not sure who's doing a better job winning over the other: the Toronto Maple Leafs or Alex Steeves.

Because after one summer of all-encompassing development and a message-sending rookie camp, the team appears just as impressed with Steeves as the undrafted NCAA stud is with the organization that won the bid for his services.

It wasn't enough for Steeves to score four times in the development camp's final Blue-versus-White scrimmage Monday, the inspired prospect was still gabbing with the refs, hoping to talk them into a chance for five.

"They didn't want to give me any penalty shots today, so obviously it didn't work," Steeves smiled.

Carrying himself on the ice and in front of the Zoom lens with a maturity that belies his 21 years of age, the Notre Dame product was passed over on the draft floor but is giving off some early diamond-in-the-rough vibes.

"To me, he looks like a pro player on the ice," senior director of player development Hayley Wickenheiser said. "He's a man, the way he's built.

"And he continues to put in the work. So, there's no concerns for his work ethic or his ability to show up every day and be a professional on the ice. He's very diligent and a very serious guy. I like his approach, and I also thought he had a solid camp."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

Steeves, a coveted free agent, inked a three-year, entry-level contract with the Leafs in March after fielding multiple pitches.

Careful not to give away too many state secrets, Steeves says he was blown away by the Leafs' resources and capabilities with video in particular. He was shown a video breakdown of Auston Matthews' shot, for example, and was wowed by how the staff was working to improve an already lethal asset.

"I was just really impressed with the attention to detail that the entire organization has taken towards development," Steeves said. "It's a holistic approach, whether it be with the Leafs or the Marlies. They're just so invested in their players.

"So, for me, someone who loves to learn and loves to grow, it was just really a dream fit. I'm a big believer in utilizing resources."

That he has.

Steeves, a dual citizen born in New Hampshire, moved north shortly after signing his deal and happily became Wickenheiser's project. Toronto's staff opened his eyes to a new strength and conditioning regimen, and Barb Underhill tackled his skating stride.

But the forward's close work with Wickenheiser has been instrumental.

"I think I was one of the first players she's really worked with since she got promoted to her new role," Steeves says.

"We learned a lot from each other. I think in some ways I was probably a bit of a guinea pig for her. I think her and I are pretty similar in terms of our mental approach. Obviously, she's had a much better career than I could probably dream of. I consider her someone I look forward to working with every day, and it's definitely lucky for the organization to have someone like her."

Steeves vows to one day earn his outstanding credits and graduate from Notre Dame's prestigious Mendoza College of Business, but in the meantime, his sights are fixed on pro hockey.

"For training camp, what my goal has been and what it will continue to be is: be the best version of myself, compete really hard, and make it really hard on the Leafs to turn me down," Steeves says.

"I feel strong. I feel explosive. ... It's fun."

The Leafs are a long shot for the fall, but if Steeves can thrive with the Marlies, who knows how far his drive can take him?

"He's got a good shot. He's very strong. He's powerful," Wickenheiser said. "Can he make plays under pressure at the next level?"

Robertson is on another level

The gap between Nick Robertson, who celebrated his 20th birthday mid-camp, and the rest of the prospect pack is significant.

Robertson is treating his third development camp less as a chance to learn and more as an opportunity to ramp up his own confidence and conditioning heading into Toronto's NHL camp.

"One thing that gets overshadowed when it comes to evaluation is my leadership," Robertson said.

The left winger led off practically every drill, lit the lamp regularly in scrimmages, and could be seen engaging and encouraging the younger skaters. He has gone out of his way to joke around with the newcomers and make sure they show up on time.

On the (rare) occasion that Robertson fumbled a puck, he might curse himself loud enough for the bleachers to hear.

"Off the ice, I really appreciate his killer instinct, his mentality. You can tell just looking at him that he's a super-driven person. I just appreciate that because I'm the same way, and I've been told at times that I'm too intense all the time," says Steeves, fast finding chemistry on Robertson's line Monday.

"On the ice, pick your poison. He's a very talented skater. He's low to the ice. He's got really good goal-scoring ability, and he's flying out there."

Whether it's spending his evenings stretching and foam-rolling or firing 100 pucks a day on a Michigan shooting pad prior to arriving in town, the kid has set a high standard for himself.

Don't take my word for it. Take Wickenheiser's: "I thought Nick had a really dominant camp."

Sign up for NHL newsletters

Get the best of our NHL coverage and exclusives delivered directly to your inbox!

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

Robertson's former Peterborough Petes linemate, the affable Semyon Der-Arguchintsev, got a taste of the pro life last winter. The 2018 second-rounder jetted back to his native Russia and put up six points in 17 games for the Nizhny Novgorod Torpedo.

Der-Arguchintsev — an intelligent playmaker and easygoing personality — says he found it easier to play in the KHL than the OHL because he enjoys surrounding himself with talent.

SDA is listed as five-foot-10 and 163 pounds and is trying to eat more to bulk up, but Wickenheiser smiles when the question of the prospect's size comes up.

"He does tell me he's put on some weight over the summer — although I haven't seen that yet," Wickenheiser says. "I'm looking for him to be a bit more of a physical presence and be a more impactful player outside of just playmaking."

Questions about SDA's skating and his effectiveness outside of a top-six, offensive role (issues that once roadblocked hyped prospect Jeremy Bracco) linger.

"Being overseas, playing with the good Russian talent, it's similar. There are very high-skilled, good players. But the ability to come into the NHL game, where there's a lot closer checking, a tighter game, is still a whole other level for him that he's going to have to understand to elevate his game," Wickenheiser says.

"We've tried to encourage him to think a shot-first mentality a bit more. And off the ice, quite frankly, he's got to get stronger, more powerful, more physical."

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

Only if you wish to feel lazy should you call up Dr. Hayley Wickenheiser's resume.

With development staffers Scott Pellerin and Stefane Robidas moving on, Wickenheiser has stepped up — alongside respected skills guru Darryl Belfry and Danielle Goyette, "my right and winger, so to speak" — to oversee the next wave of Maple Leafs.

When she's not poring over game film or working with players at Ford Performance Centre, the four-time Olympic gold medalist is continuing her residence in medicine. Slacker.

"I've been able to balance both. I currently am doing an emerge rotation at a downtown Toronto hospital. So, I worked last night and the night before," Wickenheiser said at the outset of camp.

"The Leafs have been phenomenal in understanding that I have these two things simultaneously going on. But they both complement each other right now. And our staff functions quite well without me around. There's a lot of work I can do from afar as well."

Competition > Teaching

Due to the truncated time to prepare for the Traverse City rookie tournament, the Leafs opted to place an emphasis on high-tempo battle drills, game scenarios, and scrimmages to get the prospects into shape for the season.

"We've opted to create a competitive environment versus a teaching environment, if you will," Wickenheiser explained. "We want to see how players can think the game, how their compete level is, what type of



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 15, 2021

character they can demonstrate under difficult circumstances, and then ultimately their top-end skill.”

We love to see (a) the staff approached the camp with a clear vision and (b) that a culture of competitive urgency is being instilled in these athletes early.

The one hiccup this camp — typically held in late June — suffered (because there’s always a hiccup in our pandemic world) is that many of the Leafs’ NCAA players were unable to attend. They are already in the U.S. training with their college teams.

As a result, fewer Leafs prospects attended and more free agents showed up, which changed the tone of camp.

Kral sidelined

Filip Kral is a fifth-round (2018) defence hopeful who looked great in his native Czech league and scored twice in 10 outings with the Marlies last season. Unfortunately, he’s been left off the Traverse City roster due to a rib injury he suffered in Monday’s scrimmage.

The next steps, Wickenheiser believes, are for Kral to embrace the physical nature of defending and to improve his skating, particularly with the puck on his blade. He needs to want to become “an impactful, purposeful player with the puck, to drive the play, to possess the puck on the powerplay, to be able to make effective reads and create things.”

“We’ve talked a lot with Filip,” she said. “He went back to the Czech Republic this summer. The off-ice conditioning would be a big piece for him to come in and be able to dominate physically and make an impact every time he’s on the ice to solidify himself in the top [Marlies] four.”

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.15.2021