



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2021

## The News & Observer

### Here's who's left on the Hurricanes' roster after a round of waivers and assignments

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes have made a number of personnel decisions, putting five players on NHL waivers and assigning three players to the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League.

Still on the Canes roster: forwards Seth Jarvis, Jack Drury and Jamieson Rees.

The Canes also said center Vincent Trocheck was placed on NHL Injured Reserve. Trocheck was injured during the team's Oct. 3 Red-White scrimmage at PNC Arena. While not medically cleared for game action, he did participate in practice late in the week at Wake Competition Center.

The Canes on Sunday placed forwards Josh Leivo, Stefan Noesen and C.J. Smith, and defensemen Eric Gelinas and Maxime Lajoie on NHL waivers. If they clear waivers Monday, they will be assigned to the Wolves.

The Canes assigned forward Ryan Suzuki, defenseman Joey Keane and goalie Alex Lyon to the Wolves. That reduced the roster to 30 players, including those on waivers.

NHL rosters, limited to a maximum of 23 players, must be submitted to the league Monday by 5 p.m.

Jarvis, the Canes' first-round pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, continues to impress and continues to stick on the roster. Jarvis played Saturday in the Canes' final preseason game, a 4-3 road loss to the Nashville Predators, and scored in the

postgame shootout with a filthy move against goalie David Rittich that quickly went viral.

Drury, a second-round pick by Carolina in 2018, and Rees also have performed well in preseason training camp. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour likes Rees' grittiness and Drury's toughness and 200-foot play, not to mention his hockey pedigree — Drury's father, Ted, played in the NHL as did his uncle, Chris, general manager of the New York Rangers.

"He's what we want in a Hurricane, that's for sure," Brind'Amour said of Drury after Saturday's game.

Drury, who left Harvard to play in Sweden last season, and Rees can be assigned to the Wolves, if the Canes choose to make that move, but Jarvis can not. At 19, Jarvis must either make the Canes roster or be returned to his junior team, the Portland Winterhawks of the Western Hockey League.

Brind'Amour has praised the maturity of Jarvis' game and his poise on the ice during preseason, saying Jarvis has an elite skill set while also noting Jarvis needs to continue to learn to play better away from the puck.

Veteran center Derek Stepan said after Saturday's game that Jarvis "seems to be in the right spot all the time" and called his shootout shot a "crafty move for a kid."

"A lot of really good things to say about him," Stepan said on a media call.



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## The Athletic

### NHL Goalie Tiers 2021-22: Anonymous panel of GMs and coaches rates all 32 starters

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner was traded for cap space. The goalie that finished third in the voting left Colorado to sign with a brand new franchise in Seattle. And yet the goalie the Avalanche signed to replace their departing No. 1 is considered by many to actually be an upgrade.

That essentially sums up how volatile the goalie carousel was this offseason.

More than a dozen goalies with significant NHL experience changed teams, and five goalies that started playoff games this past postseason are now playing elsewhere.

It creates a fascinating backdrop for The Athletic's annual NHL goalie tiers.

Here is how it works: Corey Pronman, Michael Russo and Sean Shapiro surveyed more than three dozen experts across the NHL — a list that included general managers, head coaches, goalie coaches, goalie gurus and former goalies — and asked them to give each goalie a score between 1 and 5. We used that to tier the perceived starting goalies for all 32 teams.

And while the market was volatile, those closest to the game were unanimous in ranking Tampa Bay Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy as the undisputed No. 1 in the world.

During the Dominik Hasek, Patrick Roy, Ed Belfour and Martin Brodeur era, Ken Holland, who was then a Red Wings executive, noted that there are four real top-end goaltenders in the NHL in any given year and that those top-four remain constant every year — a pattern we see today with Vasilevskiy, Connor Hellebuyck, Marc-Andre Fleury and Carey Price.

Holland, now with the Oilers, told The Athletic's Daniel Nugent-Bowman recently that his belief hasn't changed.

"I think goaltending in the National Hockey League is probably the hardest position to be really good at on an every year basis," Holland said.

"The elite goalies are elite because they're able to do it on an every year basis. Their resume tells you they're in the voting annually for the Vezina, they're a No. 1 guy, they play 60 games, they're workhorses, they're at the top of their field.

"But at the end of the day, the league can't have 32 elite goalies. But there's 32 teams."

#### TIER 1

1. Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 1.41

Highest Tier rating: 1.00 (2021)

Lowest Tier rating: 2.55 (2017)

It's Vasilevskiy's world and the rest of the goalies just live in it.

The two-time champion who has led the NHL in victories for four consecutive seasons received unanimous praise. Other than Carey Price in 2016, he's the only goalie to get a perfect 1 across the board.

Perhaps the most telling thing was how many respondents went out of their way to state they thought the Lightning goalie was in fact underrated and hasn't earned his due praise for the team's success.

"He's the MVP of that team. They can lose (Steven) Stamkos, they can lose (Nikita) Kucherov, I bet they could even lose (Victor) Hedman, and they'd still be a top contender. If they lost him, they'd be fucked," one goalie coach said.

"It's in Tampa, so we could make the Tom Brady comparison, that's how good this guy is," one coach said.

"I think he's got every single element of a top-notch goaltender," a former league executive said. "Like, he's got the brain. He reads the plays especially well. He's got the athletic ability that's off the charts. He's got the technical ability. The other thing, too, that I think that really separates Vasilevskiy, he understands, 'OK, this is a night where we might not score that much' and he dials it up. He dials it up for the situation. ... I think he's one of the top-five players in the league. Not goalies, players."

Some pointed out that the entire tier system should be changed just to emphasize how good he is.

"That'd be a 0.5," a former goalie said. "There's Vasy, and then there's everyone else."

"He should be a zero," added a goalie coach. "He's above and beyond everyone."

As one former NHL goalie put it: "Vasilevskiy is the mold. He's the best goalie on the planet."

#### 2. Connor Hellebuyck, Jets

Average Tier rating last four seasons (unranked in 2017): 1.69

Highest Tier rating: 1.22 (2021)

Lowest Tier rating: 2.41 (2019)

Hellebuyck had a down year by his standards, but the Jets' workhorse continues to hold high regard across the league and was the only goalie consistently put in the same tier as Vasilevskiy.

"I wonder how good his numbers would be if he was on a team that was pretty good," one former NHL GM said of the 2020 Vezina winner.

"He's not Vasilevskiy, but to me, he's the closest thing to it," an NHL assistant coach said.



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Hellebuyck at his best is far from flashy, his structure and command of the mechanics of the position were particularly important to others in his field.

"He's never going to be (Igor) Shesterkin or Vasilevskiy, but he's probably the most structured goaltender — using his size, being in the right position, not wasting any energy — in the NHL," said a former goalie. "I don't think people see flash with Connor Hellebuyck, but I see efficiency and results."

Hellebuyck's dip, again by his standards, will be something to track.

"He struggled a bit last year. But what happens to guys is they get to the top of the mountain and you've got to fall off a little bit and then you go back up," one voter noted. "It's hard to stay at the top of the mountain, especially for goalies."

## TIER 2

### 3. Marc-Andre Fleury, Blackhawks

Average Tier rating in four of last five seasons (unranked in 2020): 2.03

Highest Tier rating: 1.55 (2021)

Lowest Tier rating: 2.90 (2017)

Since GMs vote on the Vezina Trophy, we know they collectively hold the 2020-21 version of Fleury as the top of the class.

"Hall of Famer, and still playing like one," an Eastern Conference executive said.

But Fleury will be under a lot more pressure now that he's not in Vegas, which had a much better defense than Chicago.

"He's in for a rude awakening in Chicago," one NHL GM projected. "They give up lots and lots of chances."

"He's going to be asked in Vegas to make eight, 10 saves a game, and maybe four or five of them are going to be really difficult. In Chicago, that number's gonna increase," a former league executive said.

Questions about whether the move to Chicago will accelerate the aging curve for the 37-year-old did not worry everyone.

"He's the full package," a former goalie said. "I know at 37 there's miles and all of that, some playoff disappointments and all of the things that have come with Marc, but he's a star, for me. He checks all my boxes, put it that way."

Added another former goalie. "Listen, the guy looks like he's still 25 years old, not just in his face, but his body, his work ethic, how he's done it. So I think he can still do it for a couple of years."

Even though Fleury committed to Chicago after the trade, there's some belief that his final stop will be a reunion with his first team where he was part of three championships.

"I'm still not convinced he won't end up back in Pittsburgh," one panelist said, referring to Pittsburgh's suspect goaltending. "I'm not too sure he's not just in a rest stop."

### 4. Carey Price, Canadiens

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 1.43

Highest Tier rating: 1.00 (2016)

Lowest Tier rating: 1.90 (2018)

Price's performance during the 2021 playoffs, helping Montreal to the Cup Final, added some more juice to an already strong base that put the goalie among the best in the world and as the favorite to start for Canada at the Olympics.

"I still think he's one of the very best in the league. When prospects and young goalies are coming up he's still the guy they all get compared to by our scouts. He's slowed down a bit but his hockey brain and efficiency are both so excellent," an executive said.

The question about the 34-year-old Price, which has come with age, is which version of Price are you going to get?

"There's regular-season, kinda ho-hum Carey Price, but by the end of the year, he's righted the ship in the big games where we're reminded why he's been anointed as one of the best goalies on the planet. ... Dialed in Carey is as good as anybody. He's a 1 in big games and 3 when he's not very engaged and there's nothing on the line," said a former goalie.

Another former goalie said a change in Montreal's goalie coach could have been a key to helping Price find that consistency.

"I saw a change last year when Sean Burke came in. I'm not saying Sean Burke is the goalie whisperer, but I've seen some of the work that Sean Burke has done over the last 15 years and I do think there were some really good changes that Carey Price made to his game. ... When you look at the second half of the season and the playoffs last year, Carey Price was a stud," he said.

Price entered the NHL/NHLPA player assistance program and will miss the start of the season.

### 5. John Gibson, Ducks

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 2.09

Highest Tier rating: 1.69 (2019)

Lowest Tier rating: 2.75 (2017)

The Ducks are bad. John Gibson is not.

That's essentially the analysis our pollsters provided when asked about the goalie who is seemingly under siege every night.

"I think he's on a terrible team. He could be a 1, but because of his team, you don't know," a former goalie said.

"He's a bona fide No. 1," said a former league executive. "John Gibson, to me, is money in the bank."

But some need to see more from Gibson.

"I know the numbers have always looked good for him ... but I've never been a fan of John Gibson. ... I've got him as an average starter. That's how I see John Gibson," a former goalie said. "It's always been something where I have not felt comfortable with John Gibson."



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"I don't think he's a star yet," added another former goalie. "Unfortunately, I think he would be that star, that upper-echelon, but unfortunately he's a victim of his surroundings. We'll have a different conversation about him two or three years from now when those young kids grow up in Anaheim. If he's still there, I think he has an opportunity to be star material."

## 6. Igor Shesterkin, Rangers

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 2.11  
Highest Tier rating: 1.98 (2021)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.23 (2020)

The Rangers will retire Henrik Lundqvist's number this season, but his 25-year-old successor has quickly grabbed rave reviews heading into his second season as the No. 1 in New York.

"He's the next guy," said a former goalie. "He's the next Vasilevskiy. He's the next Carey Price. He's the next guy. He was dominating the AHL before he came to the Rangers, and I thought dominating the AHL is one thing, but the NHL is very different. And then I saw him live a few times and his ability to move, his quickness, his athleticism, it's just unreal. When you see it live, you really come out absolutely impressed by him."

"He's gonna be a star, that kid," an Eastern Conference assistant coach said.

Like Vasilevskiy, one NHL coach referred to Shesterkin as having some "freakish" ability to make difficult saves that other NHL goalies, frankly, can't make.

"I bet he'll be a 1 in a year-and-a-half," said a former goalie. "He's got a lot of skill. Big lights and big shoes to fill in New York, but I think he's up to the task."

One thing that came up with Shesterkin, and was common among the younger goalies, was the sample size. That should be tested this season in his first 82-game campaign as the No. 1.

## 7. Darcy Kuemper, Avalanche

Unranked prior to this season

Kuemper's move from Arizona to Colorado is one of the underrated moves of the offseason. Multiple pollsters told us the Avalanche actually got better in goal when Philipp Grubauer left for the Pacific Northwest.

"He's got all the qualities of a true No. 1," a former league executive said of Kuemper. "He's been hampered by some injuries. But when he hasn't been injured, he's been a top goaltender. I think he's an upgrade on Grubauer."

Colorado is a Cup favorite, deservedly so, which some think will elevate Kuemper to a level that is deserving of his play in Arizona.

"Could be a top-six goalie with that team," a longtime coach said. "He'll be the real deal there. He's been playing on a shit team for three years. He moves up bigtime."

One question surrounding Kuemper is his consistency and the higher pressure that comes with playing with actual expectations.

"I like him better than Grubauer, and he may be good there the way Colorado always has the puck and spends time in the O-zone, but Kuemper seems very fragile. One goal often turns to three quickly," a Western Conference pro scout said.

## 8. Juuse Saros, Predators

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 2.62  
Highest Tier rating: 2.14 (2021)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.10 (2020)

Whether it's a legit concern or not, Saros' height is always a point of conversation in his assessment. At 5-foot-11, Saros is one of two starting goalies (maybe the only, depending on how you assess the Dallas situation) that checks in under six-foot.

"I love watching this little guy play. He always finds a way to make a save. He's so quick," one scout said.

"I like that kid," an NHL assistant coach said. "Small, but very competitive, great hockey sense. He's going to be a stud."

Despite his size, Saros' quickness and technical ability have drawn positive reviews. It may be the only reason he made it in the NHL and took over as the No. 1 in Nashville, filling the grand skates of Pekka Rinne.

"If he was 6-4, he'd be a 1. People can't get by his size. But he manages his crease so well," a former goalie said. "He's got a great glove and he's got great feet, unbelievable demeanor, great mentor in Pekka Rinne. He's the whole package, except the package is just a little small. It rattles people. But he's really good. Like really good."

The big question, aside from the size, is durability.

"Last year, he did it. Now, the only difference between what he did last year and what he'll have to do this year is there's a lot more games," said a former goalie. "Playing a 56-game season is different than 82, but I think his numbers and what he did last year, he can make an impact."

Added a former league executive: "I think he needs to have a tandem to be at his best."

## 9. Thatcher Demko, Canucks

Unranked prior to this season

Demko makes his debut as a starter in this exercise and early reviews are positive for the new No. 1 in Vancouver.

"This guy is going to surprise people," a goalie coach said. "He has everything you look for in a top-tier goaltender, he has size, quickness, sense, technical skill. I think he's going to become one of the stars of the league in a short period of time."

One thing that multiple former goalies noted, they love the swagger Demko has in the net. He exudes confidence and, for those in the field, that goes a long way.

"He's going to be a 2. He's that good, and most people wouldn't know that," a former goalie said. "He's big, and he's got a great ability to outwait the shooter. You don't get him guessing very often, you don't open him up very often. He's pretty, pretty solid."



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"There's a lot to like about him," another former goalie added. "Big, swagger, moves well in the net, great glove hand, has some durability. He checks a lot of the boxes for me."

10. Semyon Varlamov, Islanders

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 2.61  
Highest Tier rating: 2.28 (2021)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.05 (2017)

It's not often you want to start with a quote, but why bury the main point?

"This one is tricky because I put Varlamov and (Ilya) Sorokin as a tandem," a former goalie explained. "Varlamov by himself, I think, is a 3. I think he's good. But I don't think he's in the upper echelon of the goalies. ... But Varlamov and Sorokin together, I think they're almost combined for a 2. But I think Sorokin by himself is a 3. ... Combined together, I think they're top echelon when they can go back and forth. So the math doesn't add up. Like three plus three doesn't equal two, but it does for me."

Fuzzy math aside, we get it. The Islanders can thrive with a tandem, but not so much with Varlamov alone.

The reality? As nice as it is to be a goalie in a Barry Trotz-coached system, Varlamov has performed at a high level for a long time.

"A lot of people are so down on that guy," a goalie coach said of Varlamov. "But he just consistently puts up good numbers every year. Part of it is a product of the defensive game he plays behind, but he's done it in other places as well."

"He's still legit. He proved it in the Boston-Islanders series. He's legit," an NHL executive said.

11. Jacob Markstrom, Flames

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 2.87  
Highest Tier rating: 1.97 (2020)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.50 (2017)

Few goalies in our tiers have fluctuated as much as Markstrom the past five years.

After a strong season with Vancouver in 2019-20, the 6-foot-6 goalie was rewarded with a six-year, \$36 million contract in Calgary. He then went through an up and down season in which he got hurt and had trouble acclimating to his new team.

"He had a real struggle last year," said a source who knows him well. "Part of it was personal, (being) by himself, then COVID (protocols). He really struggled with (the) COVID (situation). I do think he's a top, top NHL goaltender."

"I think he's a good goaltender and he's got size and he moves well," a former goalie said. "Very much consistency issues with him. We kind of saw it a lot last year. ... I'm going to give him more of a positive look in Year 2 (with a new team) than he probably showed last year."

That seemed to be the common belief with the experts. Throw the first year in the trash and expect to see the real Markstrom this season.

"Just scratching the surface to stardom," a league executive said.

"He was the MVP in Vancouver two years in a row. Then he gets to Calgary ... (and) hits the ditch. But raw ability and talent, he's special," a former goalie said.

12. Philipp Grubauer, Kraken

Average Tier rating last three seasons (unranked prior): 2.69  
Highest Tier rating: 2.45 (2021)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.82 (2019)

Many of our experts thought Grubauer was the product of an Avs team that had the puck a lot last season and now will be exposed after getting a big payday with Seattle

"Overrated. Plain and simple," a former goalie said.

"I don't think he's got the exceptional ability, but he grinds and he works and he does what he needs to do to keep his team in the game," a former league executive said. "For the most part, he's going to get beat on good shots and good shooters. I don't think he's an intimidating presence in the net."

"I like Grubauer, but on the big stage, he's had injuries, even in Washington they took him out, put (Braden) Holtby in, they won the Cup. In Colorado, he got the injury to the point where they're having Michael Hutchinson play net," said a former goalie. "Last year, Grubauer, I thought, was good in the playoffs until he needed to be against Vegas. Then, I didn't like his game."

But Grubauer does have his supporters.

"Another guy that doesn't get enough credit for what he does," said a goalie coach. "He's put up good numbers everywhere he's gone, and being a smaller guy, he kinda gets overlooked."

13. Jordan Binnington, Blues

Average Tier rating last three seasons (unranked prior): 2.41  
Highest Tier rating: 2.33 (2020)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.48 (2021)

Life has gotten harder since Binnington burst onto the scene in 2019 and helped hoist the Blues from a last-place team to a Stanley Cup.

"Well, he's shown he can be a clear-cut No. 1. ... But ever since the Stanley Cup in 2019, he's shown glimpses of it, but his game has deteriorated," a former league executive said. "And the guy's temper gets the best of him too much."

"I think now what we're seeing is he's a really good goalie, but he's a notch behind the top guys in the league," a former goalie said.

But not everyone is using credit from past performance to lift up Binnington.

"I'm not as sold as everyone else. ... You win a Cup before you're really a legitimate starter in the league, and then you get paid, now you've got to go out and earn it every night," a former goalie said.



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## TIER 3

### 14. Elvis Merzlikins, Blue Jackets

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 2.46  
Highest Tier rating: 2.33 (2020)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.58 (2021)

Merzlikins is a character, whether he's going to be a marquee actor in the goalie space or a fascinating sidestory will likely be determined this season.

"He's a star in the making," a former goalie said. "I want to see more consistency out of him. When he gets so hot, there's nobody hotter than him. Like, he gets really, really hot. But I want to see consistency. ... It's gonna be a tougher year in Columbus this year, but I think he's gonna be a bright spot."

Others, even those high on the goalie, wonder how Merzlikins performs behind a more porous defense this season with the coaching change from John Tortorella to Brad Larsen.

"He's learning," a former goalie said. "He's still very erratic, I think he's immature sometimes in his approach. But just on raw skill, he's a really, really good goaltender. I've told two managers that have talked to me about goaltenders that they should trade for him."

The tragic death of Matiss Kivlenieks was also a point that multiple executives and scouts raised when discussing Merzlikins, more so about the emotional toll than the actual product on the ice.

"I can't imagine what that will be like for him," one GM said. "I have no idea, I'm rooting for him."

### 15. Cam Talbot, Wild

Average Tier rating four of last five seasons (unranked in 2019): 2.71  
Highest Tier rating: 2.05 (2017)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.23 (2020)

Plain and simple, Talbot stabilized the Wild goaltending last season. Almost every game Talbot started, he had a better performance of the two goalies battling on the ice.

Why did the Wild perform better with Talbot in net?

Simple, says a former goalie: "Makes the saves you need him to make."

Added an NHL assistant who thought the Wild were in position to beat the Golden Knights in Game 7 of the first round of the playoffs because of Talbot's play: "He's a starter you can win with."

Like most goalies, Talbot is best when he's poised and quiet in the crease.

"He kind of is what he is," a goalie coach said. "If Talbs was a better skater and was a bit more athletic, he'd be easily a 2. Like first shot on Talbs and stuff like that, he's awesome. But once you get him moving a little bit and scrambling, that's when you expose him."

Some also think he gets in his own way.

"I've never seen a guy that gets so rattled within a game," a former goalie said. "Like, he'll be the best player on the ice and allow a muffin, and he can't recover for like three or four minutes. And there might be two goals after that. ... I thought he was great for Minnesota last year, but there are these pockets where it's like, 'What the fuck's this guy doing?'"

### 16. Frederik Andersen, Hurricanes

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 2.29  
Highest Tier rating: 2.10 (2018)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.66 (2021)

Most predict getting out of the Toronto limelight for the more anonymous confines of Raleigh will only help Andersen.

Plus, he'll get to experience the Angus Barn.

"Gonna be a different goalie," a longtime coach said. "Less pressure in Carolina and much better D than in Toronto. Defense-first mentality."

"I'm a bigger fan than most people," an Eastern Conference executive said. "I don't think that's a bad move for Carolina. Playing in front of their defense, I think he might be pretty good. Everyone questions him in the playoffs, but I think he'll enjoy not being in Toronto."

However, the latter was a concern as many wondered how he'll respond in the playoffs for this Cup contender because it hasn't gone well in the past.

"In big games, he just does not perform," a former goalie said.

"He lets in those goals that can't go in at the most critical times," a former league executive added.

One former goalie thought it would be smart for Carolina to give Andersen a two-week break just before the playoffs, especially if he plays in the Olympics for Denmark.

### 17. Carter Hart, Flyers

Average Tier rating last three seasons (unranked prior): 2.49  
Highest Tier rating: 2.00 (2020)  
Lowest Tier rating: 2.81 (2019)

Hart's got a lot of work to do in order to regain the confidence of many of the experts we chatted with.

"I've known Carter a long time," a league source said. "Carter's his own worst enemy. You know how we say goaltenders have to have a short memory? Carter doesn't. He overthinks things way too much, and he has for far too long."

"Last year really, really set me back on him," a former goalie said. "I don't see the quickness that the Shesterkin and the Vasilevskiy and the (Alex) Nedeljkovic have to be able to be in the 1, 2, 3 echelon. I think he's got good qualities. He's calm and he's solid in his structure, but he's on the edge of that cliff where he either comes back and moves forward or it's going to be a fall."

The Flyers had the league's worst save percentage (.883) last season.

"I don't think he's as good as the hype may have been on him coming out of junior, but he's nowhere near as bad as he



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was last season, it's likely a middle ground," one executive said. "He may lack the natural toolkit to be a true star, but he'll be a good starter for a long time. He's so smart."

Some thought the Flyers rushed the 23-year-old three-time WHL goalie of the year to the NHL.

"I think he's got a lot of potential," a former goalie said. "I think he got into the NHL too young. ... You've got to play games in the minors in my opinion. Last year the pressure got to him and it snowballed."

18. Robin Lehner, Golden Knights

Average Tier rating four of last five seasons (unranked in 2019): 2.91

Highest Tier rating: 2.13 (2020)

Lowest Tier rating: 3.55 (2018)

When he's not grabbing the hockey world's attention on Twitter, Lehner's the guy Vegas thought highly enough of to trade that other goalie to Chicago.

Fleury got the boatload of work last season, winning the Vezina because of it, but was still kicked to the curb with Lehner now the man in the Golden Knights' crease.

Some of our panelists are curious to watch whether this works.

"He's sloppy in net. He can give big rebounds, he's unpredictable, gives up too many soft goals for me," one scout said of Lehner.

"Listen, he will get you some really solid games, but most people overrate him a little bit," a former goalie said. "He's not the style of goaltender that I watch and think, 'Oh my goodness, this is a great goalie.'"

Another panelist was more blunt regarding Lehner.

"I don't like him as a goalie. ... I worry about him there without Fleury because ... now he has no safety net," a former goalie said.

19. MacKenzie Blackwood, Devils

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 2.75

Highest Tier rating: 2.69 (2020)

Lowest Tier rating: 2.80 (2021)

Like a lot of young goaltenders, and Blackwood's still only 24, consistency is the one thing the former OHL goalie of the year must overcome if the Devils are going to compete in the Metropolitan Division.

"He's big and poised in net. He's tough to score on and technically solid. He needs better defense, but I think once he gets that he can be one of the best in the league," one scout said.

But not everyone was so sure of Blackwood.

"It's funny, with Tommy in New Jersey, he keeps giving me indications that they're not as sold on him as I am," a former league executive said, referring to GM Tom Fitzgerald. "Last year, they traded for Corey Crawford. This year, they go and they make another addition. Like, I get trying to support him, but you're (24) years of age, at some point in time, you got to hang in there."

As of now, Blackwood remains unvaccinated and won't be able to play games in Canada under the current protocol.

20. Alex Nedeljkovic, Red Wings

Unranked prior to this season

Despite being a Calder Trophy finalist, despite being a star at virtually every level he's played at, the Hurricanes chose to move on rather than pay the restricted free agent.

Nedeljkovic was dealt to the Red Wings and should quickly learn he's not behind the Hurricanes' defense anymore.

Just call Jimmy Howard.

"I really like Nedeljkovic. I like the way he plays," a former goalie said. "He seems to read the play really well, he's always a step ahead. In Detroit, it's going to be a lot tougher than Carolina. He's a solid starter, though."

"He's the best puck-handling goaltender in the game, and he gets less shots because of it," an Eastern Conference executive said. "He ran big numbers last year and he wins everywhere he goes. He's just not a huge man."

Most panelists thought GM Steve Yzerman made a great bet acquiring Nedeljkovic.

"I like him, I liked him in the AHL and obviously he couldn't have been asked to do more last season. He needs to prove it over a longer time span to get a higher grade, but I think it's possible he becomes a good starter," one scout said.

21. Cal Petersen, Kings

Unranked prior to this season

Coming off a terrific world championship and in his sixth year as a pro, Petersen is the anticipated heir apparent to Jonathan Quick.

"I think he is on the verge of really, really showing what he can do," a former goalie said of Petersen, 26. "I like his game. I like how he battles. He's got a bit of a cockiness to him that is not on display all the time. But I can see it in the way he plays."

"I was never sure about him, to be honest with you, but he's developed nicely and it doesn't surprise me because Bill Ranford's so good in L.A. I don't think there's a better goaltending coach in the league than Billy Ranford," a former league executive said.

And, naturally, others disagree.

"Not a big fan. I'm not a big fan," a former goalie said. "There's soooooo much work to be done there. I think he's just a stopgap, personally. I don't see him as the guy."

22. Ilya Samsonov, Capitals

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 2.8

Highest Tier rating: 2.57 (2020)

Lowest Tier rating: 3.03 (2021)

It's not a surprise that we're in the midst of a run of young, unproven goaltenders in this range. Simply put, there needs to be a larger sample size to elevate the perception of their games.



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Samsonov, 24, who has played 45 games, is proof of that.

"He's like Carter Hart. They have these capabilities and potential, but to me, you've got to show more than what you've shown," a former league executive said.

"He has all the physical abilities to play the game. He's big, covers the net, moves really well," a former goalie said. "What we're dealing with with Samsonov is a young, immature kid that's got to figure out the mental side of the game right now. And I don't think that he has that figured out yet. ... I have not seen the maturity out of Ilya Samsonov right now, and that's why they trusted Vitek Vanecek so much last year."

"Not a Vasilevskiy in the making. More like a Varlamov in the making," added another former goalie.

23. Linus Ullmark, Bruins

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 3.08  
Highest Tier rating: 3.06 (2021)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.10 (2020)

At 28, Ullmark has to feel like he was thrown a life preserver after sinking with the Sabres.

"Love him. Gonna be big for Boston," a longtime coach said.

"Can he do it under pressure is the question I have with him, but the talent is there, his skating and edge work is excellent," one source said.

"What he lacks is that experience," a former league executive said.

A former goalie pointed out that it might actually be harder to look good playing for a winning team.

"Here's the thing: He has to prove it on a good team. I don't want to say it's easy, but it's easier to look good on a bad team and make all these great saves, right? But can you preserve a 1-1 or 2-1 lead late in a game?" said a former goalie who has watched Ullmark a lot.

24. Sergei Bobrovsky, Panthers

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 1.91  
Highest Tier rating: 1.44 (2019)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.11 (2021)

No goalie has taken a bigger turn for the worse in the goalie tiers than Bobrovsky, who lost his job last season to Chris Dreidger and most expect will eventually lose it to Spencer Knight.

Bobrovsky might be Exhibit A as to why signing goaltenders to long-term, lucrative contracts (seven years, \$70 million) is risky.

"Is he actually the starter in Florida? He may be the one paid all the money, but if Spencer Knight isn't the day one starter I expect he becomes the guy within a short period of time," one scout said.

Some think the two-time Vezina Trophy winner still can match his past success, but there is an equally good chance of him being an overpaid backup.

"Bob is a 4. But he could be a 1. ... He really at times last year looked lost," a former goalie said. "Now, I have complete faith in that goalie department in Florida because I know Roberto (Luongo), I know Francois Allaire, I know that group. But I think Bob is getting to the age now where he's almost too old to be changed. Like, he is what he is. I think they're much better suited spending time developing Spencer Knight because he'll be the one taking over."

Added another former goalie, "I'll say 3 that has the ability to be a 1 but also has the ability to be a 5. It's insane how this guy works. He's got two Vezinas, and then he has these statistically just god-awful seasons where I'm watching him and I'm like, 'Who the hell is that in net?' Wildly inconsistent."

25. Jack Campbell, Maple Leafs

Unranked prior to this season

Eleven years after he was a first-round pick, Campbell is finally entering a season as a No. 1, albeit for his third franchise.

Campbell is a beloved figure in the Leafs' locker room and picked up some early fans with his performance last season, but with a small sample size there are some worries about his ability to be the No. 1 in the most-scrutinized on-ice job in the league.

"He's the type of goalie who can look good in stretches, but I don't see him as being able to handle a typical No. 1 workload. He needs to be used in a tandem," one executive said.

"Jack's talent is really good. And that capability is really good," a former league executive said. "The problem is he doesn't have a big body of work. I hear this lots, 'Look what he did in the season.' Yeah, I know what he did in the season ... in 30 games. That doesn't establish you as a person."

Another voter pointed out that they wouldn't be surprised if Petr Mrazek was starting Game 1 of the postseason, assuming the Leafs get in.

"I know he's the affable guy and all of that and had the streak in Toronto, but you don't get in this league and all of a sudden wake up at 30 years old and you're a superstar," a former goalie said of Campbell.

26. Mike Smith, Oilers

Average Tier rating two of last five seasons (ranked in 2018): 2.99  
Highest Tier rating: 2.75 (2018)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.23 (2021)

Smith's play last season surpassed expectations for many, but no matter what the stat line says, it's hard to avoid the fact Smith will turn 40 in March.

"He's at the end of the line," one scout said. "He's done a great job pushing the end further and further, but at some point it's going to happen."

Even those in Smith's corner couldn't avoid the age.

"He handles the puck so well, he helps speed up their D," a former goalie said. "So, their team plays really well in front of



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him because he gets out, moves the puck. ... But his skills are diminishing. I think at 39, eventually Father Time will catch up to him."

## TIER 4

### 27. Tristan Jarry, Penguins

Average Tier rating last two seasons (unranked prior): 3.16  
Highest Tier rating: 2.77 (2020)  
Lowest Tier rating: 3.23 (2021)

Jarry's playoff struggles this past spring moved him into the lower echelons of the league in the opinions of our panelists.

"Really shows all those signs of being really good, real solid, capable, but last year's playoffs, he capsized," a former league executive said. "Everybody talks about Pittsburgh. The reason they lost was because of Tristan Jarry. He's barely hanging on now."

One theory on Jarry's success and then struggles? The fact it's easier to be No. 2 and try to push someone than to carry the No. 1 workload and responsibility.

"(Matt) Murray was great because Fleury was there. Jarry was great because Murray was pushing him. I mean, he had (Casey) DeSmith last year and did I read Louis Domingue is kicking around? Not good. I don't see him as an everyday starter."

"I thought Tristan Jarry was really good, and maybe it's a pressure thing," a former goalie said. "He just disappeared. I still think he can be a good goaltender, but at this point, if he's your starter, there's a very, very short leash."

### 28. Anton Khudobin, Stars

Unranked prior to this season

Picking the starting goalie in Dallas for this exercise is reflective of how weird the situation is in Dallas. Khudobin got the nod based purely on games played and the fact the other potential starter is slated for AHL duty.

Ben Bishop hasn't played in more than a year, but was skating in training camp. Jake Oettinger was the Stars' No. 1 goalie performance-wise last season, but is likely headed to the AHL. And Dallas signed Braden Holtby because of concerns over the combination of Bishop's health, Oettinger's youth and Khudobin's track record.

If the Stars get the best version of any of their four goalies, there's something there. But if Khudobin is asked to be a No. 1, there are concerns across the league.

"Listen, great story, works hard, does a lot of good things, but I think he's still better suited as a backup where you can play him 35 games if you want as a starter. But is he a true No. 1? No, he's not a regular starter in the NHL. He's a step below that," one source said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he's the third guy this year," said an NHL assistant coach.

### 29. Matt Murray, Senators

Average Tier rating last five seasons: 2.60  
Highest Tier rating: 1.65 (2017)  
Lowest Tier rating: 4.02 (2021)

After the Bob-plosion, Murray's fall from No. 1 in Pittsburgh to struggling in Ottawa is the biggest downtrend for goalies in recent years.

Murray has two Stanley Cups, but the confidence and what one coach called "youthful ignorance" from those Cup runs are gone.

"There's some really, really, really big, gaping holes in his game, and unless that gets fixed, he'll be a 5 for me next year," a former goalie said.

"It's almost like some nights he just doesn't want to play," a former goalie said. "Four-year deal at \$6.25 (million), I said the first 18 months of it was going to be hazard pay because Ottawa was going to give up chances and it was going to be a bit of a disaster, and sure enough it was. It's crazy to say, this guy's got two Cups and he still hasn't proven to me he can be a starter."

Some are holding out hope that Murray will improve with a young Senators team.

"If you look back at the last 20 games of last season, he was actually pretty darn good," an NHL assistant coach said.

### 30. Adin Hill, Sharks

Unranked prior to this season

Hill has never played more than 19 games in an NHL season, so while many goalies in this tier were ranked low based on performance, many voters just didn't know what to make of Hill.

"He hasn't gotten a real opportunity yet in his career, but I think he could surprise people. He doesn't deserve a high rating yet, but with his size and quickness for his frame, I could see him establishing himself as a legit starter," one executive said.

"He definitely has size, and he showed a really strong will and battle in Arizona, but he's not a regular starter for me," a former goalie said. "I wouldn't kick him out of the league either."

One former goalie put it a bit more bluntly.

"Not a fan at all," a former goalie said. "San Jose's goaltending is a trainwreck. They were worried about getting rid of Martin Jones. They brought in two guys that are worse than Martin Jones. When you look at (James) Reimer, whenever he's asked to play a series of games, he falters. He's more of a tandem guy, and if your tandem is Adin Hill, that's not good."

## TIER 5

### 31. Carter Hutton, Coyotes

Average Tier rating in three of past five seasons (unranked in 2020 and 2017): 3.76  
Highest Tier rating: 3.00 (2018)  
Lowest Tier rating: 4.59 (2021)

To say it bluntly, our panelists aren't fans.

"I know this is harsh, but Carter Hutton is your investment in trying to get the first overall pick," a former league executive said.



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"I just don't see a guy that's gonna be in the league much longer," added a former goalie.

"I forgot he was back in the league," said a goalie coach. "And he's coming off ankle surgery and vision issues. He'll be over his head."

32. Aaron Dell, Sabres

Unranked prior to this season

The Sabres goaltending is in such a precarious spot that any of the potential goalies would be thrashed by panelists, and

admittedly, we picked the wrong goaltender when we started this exercise as Aaron Dell cleared waivers last week.

Fortunately or unfortunately, Dell became the name attached to all Buffalo-based scorn.

"Do you have him playing in the NHL this year?" a former goalie correctly predicted of Dell. "I think there's a better chance we see Craig Anderson and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen in Buffalo ahead of Aaron Dell."

As of now, Craig Anderson and Dustin Tokarski appear to be the tandem the Sabres are starting the season with.



## Chinn Pays Homage To Brind'Amour

Panthers safety wears jersey of Canes Head Coach ahead of matchup with Philadelphia

By Walt Ruff

CHARLOTTE, NC - Two Carolina pro sports franchises came together Sunday morning, as Panthers safety Jeremy Chinn pulled up to Bank of America Stadium donning a red Rod Brind'Amour sweater.

A very fitting display just a few days ahead of the Canes regular season opener, Chinn has arrived to his team's games draped in the jersey of a regional sports legend each week this season. Brind'Amour follows Sterling Sharpe, Stephen Curry, Julius Peppers and Muggsy Bogues to date.

The best part?

It's all for a good cause.

Chinn is autographing and auctioning off each jersey worn to benefit charities. Proceeds from previous auctions have gone toward an organization tied to the namesake of the memorabilia, for example, Steph Curry's Eat. Play. Learn. Foundation and Hurricane Ida relief efforts.

Information on the benefitting foundation for the Brind'Amour sweater will be announced soon and more information can be found on [TheJeremyChinn.com](http://TheJeremyChinn.com).



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## Panthers DB Chinn rocks Brind'Amour Hurricanes throwback jersey to game

Second-year standout dons red home sweater of current coach on Sunday

By Dan O'Leary

Carolina Panthers defensive back Jeremy Chinn sent a very clear message heading into a game against the Philadelphia Eagles: Take Warning.

Chinn, a second-year player from Southern Illinois rocked a red Carolina Hurricanes jersey to his game on Sunday, with a little surprise on the back.

Chinn was rocking not a current player's jersey, but rather a throwback. The choice? Current Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour.

Bonus points for having the jersey with the "C" on the front. Brind'Amour served as Hurricanes captain for five of his 10 seasons in Raleigh, including the 2005-06 Stanley Cup championship season.



## NHL 2021-22 Metropolitan Division preview: Doubt the Isles at your peril

By Sonny Sachdeva

Perhaps it's fitting that the Metropolitan Division's 2021-22 campaign will begin with its most prominent stars out of the spotlight.

Discussion of the Metro has been dominated for years by the Capitals and the Penguins, whether it was Sid vs. Ovi, that three-year stretch that saw the two icons claim banners and rings, or the unending questions of whether they're able to do it again. But the landscape looks different this time around.

The veterans' squads have been ousted in the first round in two of the past three seasons — three for three in the Pens' case — and it seems Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin will both be sidelined through the early goings this year, along with their fellow star pivots, Evgeni Malkin and Nicklas Backstrom.

Meanwhile, in the shadows, the Islanders have reeled off two straight runs to the third round, and came dangerously close to pushing their way to that fourth and final one last post-season. Maybe the veterans manage to finish on top yet again, maybe it's someone else's time, but either way, it's time to give the Islanders the respect they're due.

Here's your Metropolitan Division preview.

(Note: Teams are listed in the order we believe they could finish)

### NEW YORK ISLANDERS

2021 season outcome: 32-17-7 record, Fourth in the East Division. Eliminated in the third round by the eventual champion Tampa Bay Lightning.

Notable off-season roster additions: Zach Parise (F), Zdeno Chara (D), Erik Gustafsson (D)

Notable off-season subtractions: Nick Leddy (D), Jordan Eberle (F)

The good news: Perennially overlooked amid the flashier teams that surround them in the Metro, the Islanders have been a force since Barry Trotz took over three seasons ago, the evidence no clearer than the fact that they're months removed from falling one game short of a shot at the Cup Final. At this point, after a second straight trip to the third round, there's no sleeping on the Isles. Expect more of the same, especially with the club returning a roster fairly similar to the one that lasted seven games against the juggernaut Bolts.

The bad news: The knock on this iteration of the Islanders has long been that they don't have the star power to hang with the top teams around them, or the top contenders league-wide. They've proven they can roll through most clubs they'll come up against in the post-season, that they should be expected to go on a run — the question is what happens if they once again find themselves up against a



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stacked contender like the Lightning. Have they done enough to enable them to get over that last hurdle, or are they built only to get that far? Eventually, we'll need an answer.

## CAROLINA HURRICANES

2021 season outcome: 36-12-8 record, First in the Central Division. Eliminated in the second round by the Lightning.

Notable off-season roster additions: Frederik Andersen (G), Antti Raanta (G), Jesperi Kotkaniemi (F), Ethan Bear (D)

Notable off-season subtractions: Dougie Hamilton (D), Alex Nedeljkovic (G), Petr Mrazek (G), James Reimer (G)

The good news: After a few years of steady climbing, the Hurricanes ascended to bona fide contender status last season, winning their division and firmly establishing themselves as one of the best squads in the game. A forward corps that's led by some quality young talent, namely dynamic pivot Sebastian Aho, should allow the 'Canes to make noise again offensively, and if their off-season haul works out as intended, they may be able to pick up where they left off last season.

The bad news: The problem is it's a big 'if.' There's little doubt the Hurricanes can be as high-flying as they were last year — the questions will come in the other half of the rink, where they're simply a different team this year. Blue-line leader Dougie Hamilton has moved on — a significant blow to Carolina's top power-play unit, specifically, which was among the league's best last year — as are the trio of netminders that together allowed the fifth fewest goals-against per game last season. Whether the new-look defensive corps and goaltending tandem — Frederik Andersen and Antti Raanta — can match their predecessors' level will be the key question in Raleigh this season, but it's a gamble.

## PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

2021 season outcome: 37-16-3 record, First in the East Division. Eliminated in the first round by the New York Islanders.

Notable off-season roster additions: Brock McGinn (F)

Notable off-season subtractions: Jared McCann (F), Brandon Tanev (F)

The good news: The Penguins have been here before. The club's veteran core has been counted out more times than they've won — and they've won a fair amount in their time. For all the doubts and the visions of their championship window slamming shut, the Pens are coming off a season that saw them emerge as division champions, and will bring back a squad that looks fairly similar to the one that accomplished that feat. If they can recapture what they found last season and build on it, we've seen what their stars can do.

The bad news: The key issue in Pittsburgh is fairly obvious. While the Penguins proved last year they can still do some damage in the East, their two most dangerous players — Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin — will be sidelined to start the year. But a bigger question mark remains even after the two-headed monster returns. The Pens are fresh off a

post-season that saw one of their best rosters in recent memory undone by shaky goaltending. With Tristan Jarry back as the starter, questions will remain until he's tested in the playoffs again.

## NEW YORK RANGERS

2021 season outcome: 27-23-6 record, Fifth in the East Division. Missed the playoffs.

Notable off-season roster additions: Gerard Gallant (Coach), Ryan Reaves (F), Barclay Goodrow (F), Sammy Blais (F)

Notable off-season subtractions: Pavel Buchnevich (D), Jack Johnson (D), Brendan Smith (D)

The good news: It might not yet be the Rangers' time, but there's plenty of reason for optimism throughout the roster. The club has promising youth in Alexis Lafreniere and Kaapo Kakko. It has dynamic veterans in Artemi Panarin and Mika Zibanejad, and a newly minted Norris Trophy winner on the back end in Adam Fox, with some quality pieces behind him. Not to mention an interesting addition in head coach Gerard Gallant. The Rangers have been steadily pulling in this direction since "The Letter," and there's plenty of reason to assume another step forward comes in 2021-22.

The bad news: As is usually the case in rebuild mode, the issues could come in the depth that supports that top-tier talent. A glance at the Rangers' off-season business makes clear their desire to play a more physical brand of hockey this season. Will that create an environment where Panarin and Co. are enabled to better do their thing, as intended, or will it detract from their efforts and pull the club a few steps back? Will it add a new element to a team already on a steady ascent, or will defensive liabilities undo the offensive success that comes from the top of the lineup? How that balance plays out could determine whether the Rangers find themselves on the outside looking in once again.

## WASHINGTON CAPITALS

2021 season outcome: 36-15-3 record, Second in the East Division. Lost in the first round to the Boston Bruins.

Notable off-season roster additions: None.

Notable off-season subtractions: Brenden Dillon (D)

The good news: This iteration of the Capitals has been at or near the top of the division for years, so running it back and seeing what they have left is worth a shot. A hair away from winning their division last season too, the Caps still have some supremely talented veterans and will now get to see a full year of Anthony Mantha, who looked ready to do some damage after coming over via trade late last season. If he can become a key contributor and make good on his potential, the club has enough talent spread throughout their roster to make some noise.

The bad news: Missing Nicklas Backstrom, and potentially Ovechkin, to start the year will throw a wrench into the club's offensive plans, but even so, much like the club they were battling for the division title last year, the questions are in the cage. The jury's still out on whether young guns Ilya Samsonov and Vitek Vanecsek are a strong enough duo to carry the Capitals to the post-season, let alone through it. Neither was particularly inspiring last season, and continuing



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on that track might just undo whatever winding back the clock the team's vets have in store this year.

## NEW JERSEY DEVILS

2021 season outcome: 19-30-7 record, Seventh in the East Division. Missed playoffs.

Notable off-season roster additions: Dougie Hamilton (D), Tomas Tatar (F), Jonathan Bernier (G), Ryan Graves (D)

Notable off-season subtractions: Will Butcher (D)

The good news: It's all optimism in Jersey right now. The club landed a marquee talent in free agency by bringing in Dougie Hamilton. Veteran Tomas Tatar is a quality boost for the young squad too, and Ryan Graves and Jonathan Bernier figure to have a positive impact as well. That's on top of what should hopefully be another step forward from star centremen Nico Hischier and Jack Hughes — and other quality young pieces like Ty Smith, Yegor Sharangovich, Janne Kuokkanen and Alexander Holtz. It's all moving in the right direction.

The bad news: How much will things actually move in that direction in 2021-22? The Devils have been mediocre for so long, they've accrued an impressive roster of young, promising talent. Now they've supplemented it with quality off-season additions. But is that enough to put them over the top and back into contention for a playoff position? It won't come easy in a division that has plenty of quality scattered throughout its top few clubs, meaning a moral victory of progress without playoffs could wind up being in the cards once again.

## PHILADELPHIA FLYERS

2021 season outcome: 25-23-8, Sixth in East Division. Missed playoffs.

Notable off-season roster additions: Ryan Ellis (D), Cam Atkinson (F), Rasmus Ristolainen (D), Keith Yandle (D), Derrick Brassard (F), Martin Jones (G)

Notable off-season subtractions: Jakub Voracek (F), Shayne Gostisbehere (D), Nolan Patrick (F), Brian Elliott (G)

The good news: The Flyers have more talent throughout their roster than would be expected of a club that finished as low as they did in 2021. Maybe that just gets chalked up to a

rare, unrepeatable disaster in Philly, particularly on the part of young netminder Carter Hart. But they have what they need to be better than they've been, and if Hart can return to the form he showed through his first two seasons, and if the club can get the type of performances from their veterans that should be expected, perhaps a fight for a post-season spot is within reach.

The bad news: Of course, we need only look at what happened last season to know that those performances aren't guaranteed. The pressure will be on Hart to bounce back this season, but there could be questions in front of him, too. The Flyers were busy in the off-season, remaking their blue-line corps by shipping out Shayne Gostisbehere and bringing in Ryan Ellis, Rasmus Ristolainen and Keith Yandle. It's a lot of change for a team that already looked shaky, and the last thing Hart needs in 2021-22 is to play behind a defensive corps that winds up taking too long to get on the same page.

## COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS

2021 season outcome: 18-26-12 record, Eighth in Central Division. Missed playoffs.

Notable off-season roster additions: Jakub Voracek (F), Jake Bean (D), Adam Boqvist (D)

Notable off-season subtractions: Seth Jones (D), Cam Atkinson (F), John Tortorella (Coach)

The good news: Jakub Voracek is back home? There are no two ways around it — this season likely won't be kind to Columbus, which lost a few key pieces and finds itself in need of a lottery pick to breathe some life back into the team. But there will be intrigue around what exactly the Blue Jackets look like on the ice with the club moving on from the John Tortorella era. There's even a chance that shift allows Patrik Laine to awaken and reclaim the potential he showed in Winnipeg. That's the best-case scenario.

The bad news: That best-case scenario still isn't great. Even with a new coach, some new faces in the room, and the potential of a Laine reawakening, it's tough to envision these Blue Jackets challenging for much in the Metro. They're staring down a season in the basement and hopefully a top-three pick a year from now, but it's going to be a long 82 games until then.



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## PHT's 2021-22 NHL Metropolitan Division predictions

By Sean Leahy

We are back to the old divisional alignment in the Metropolitan Division. Gone are the Bruins and Sabres and returning are the Blue Jackets and Hurricanes.

There are plenty of questions that will be answered this season. Do the Penguins and Capitals have enough gas for another attempt at a Stanley Cup? Can the Islanders make another deep playoff run, one that would see them advance out of the third round? Will the changes in Carolina affect their upward progression? Did the Devils improve enough to challenge for a playoff spot? What should we expect out of both the Flyers and Rangers? Are we in store for another surprise season out of the Blue Jackets?

How will things shake out as we get back to a normal 82-game schedule? Here's how the PHT staff see the Metropolitan Division finishing up.

Sean Leahy, NHL writer: The old guard — Pittsburgh, Washington — are getting older, and the Hurricanes and Islanders have proven they're here to stay and ready to take control of the division. This season certainly feels like a "last dance" for the Capitals and Penguins, with big changes possibly coming next summer. In the meantime, Rod Brind'Amour and Barry Trotz will keep doing what they do best: win.

James O'Brien, NHL writer: The Penguins and Capitals defy Father Time (and with Pittsburgh, often injuries) year after year, but my bet is that the Houdini act fails for at least one

of those proud teams. The Flyers likely would've been a playoff team last year if Carter Hart was merely passable, and while I didn't love every move, they made enough improvements to get back in the mix. Frankly, the Metro could go any number of ways — I could even see the Blue Jackets surprising a bit without Torts barking everyone into oblivion.

Adam Gretz, NHL writer: Carolina is the class of this division and the Islanders will find a way to get into the playoffs where they will cause chaos again. The Capitals and Penguins find a way to get in the playoffs again despite aging cores and some questions on the roster. The Rangers barely miss out, while the Flyers disappoint. The Devils need another year and the Blue Jackets start rebuilding.

Jake Abrahams, Managing Editor, NHL content: The Hurricanes wheeled and dealt once again this offseason, and I think this year's version of the team is good enough to win the division. The toughest call here was leaving the Rangers on the outside of the playoff picture, but whose spot are they taking?

Michael Finewax, Rotoworld Senior Hockey Writer/Editor: I'm expecting a big season from the Rangers and that will knock the Flyers out of a spot. The Islanders have gone to the Conference Final in each of the last two seasons and I think they are the best in the division. Carolina will be strong if their goaltending doesn't fall apart and Washington will make the playoffs yet again with Ovechkin having a comeback season.

### TODAY'S LINKS

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 11, 2021

## SportScan

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

1222297 Carolina Hurricanes

Here's who's left on the Hurricanes' roster after a round of waivers and assignments

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

OCTOBER 10, 2021 4:32 PM

The Carolina Hurricanes have made a number of personnel decisions, putting five players on NHL waivers and assigning three players to the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League.

Still on the Canes roster: forwards Seth Jarvis, Jack Drury and Jamieson Rees.

The Canes also said center Vincent Trocheck was placed on NHL Injured Reserve. Trocheck was injured during the team's Oct. 3 Red-White scrimmage at PNC Arena. While not medically cleared for game action, he did participate in practice late in the week at Wake Competition Center.

The Canes on Sunday placed forwards Josh Leivo, Stefan Noesen and C.J. Smith, and defensemen Eric Gelinas and Maxime Lajoie on NHL waivers. If they clear waivers Monday, they will be assigned to the Wolves.

The Canes assigned forward Ryan Suzuki, defenseman Joey Keane and goalie Alex Lyon to the Wolves. That reduced the roster to 30 players, including those on waivers.

NHL rosters, limited to a maximum of 23 players, must be submitted to the league Monday by 5 p.m.

Jarvis, the Canes' first-round pick in the 2020 NHL Draft, continues to impress and continues to stick on the roster. Jarvis played Saturday in the Canes' final preseason game, a 4-3 road loss to the Nashville Predators, and scored in the postgame shootout with a filthy move against goalie David Rittich that quickly went viral.

Drury, a second-round pick by Carolina in 2018, and Rees also have performed well in preseason training camp. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour likes Rees' grittiness and Drury's toughness and 200-foot play, not to mention his hockey pedigree — Drury's father, Ted, played in the NHL as did his uncle, Chris, general manager of the New York Rangers.

"He's what we want in a Hurricane, that's for sure," Brind'Amour said of Drury after Saturday's game.

Drury, who left Harvard to play in Sweden last season, and Rees can be assigned to the Wolves, if the Canes choose to make that move, but Jarvis can not. At 19, Jarvis must either make the Canes roster or be returned to his junior team, the Portland Winterhawks of the Western Hockey League.

Brind'Amour has praised the maturity of Jarvis' game and his poise on the ice during preseason, saying Jarvis has an elite skill set while also noting Jarvis needs to continue to learn to play better away from the puck.

Veteran center Derek Stepan said after Saturday's game that Jarvis "seems to be in the right spot all the time" and called his shootout shot a "crafty move for a kid."

"A lot of really good things to say about him," Stepan said on a media call.

News Observer LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222298 Carolina Hurricanes

A generation of Carolina Hurricanes fans who've only known hockey is coming of age

BY LUKE DECOCK

OCTOBER 10, 2021 5:00 AM

Akul Gupta used to play basketball and football and soccer with the other kids on his Raleigh cul de sac, but when he'd look out the window and see them playing hockey he didn't know what to think. This was new to him.

He ended up playing for the Junior Hurricanes for 13 years. His younger sister played hockey. His parents, immigrants from India, became huge Carolina Hurricanes fans. Hockey became part of his life.

Gupta, who graduated from UNC in 2018, is now 25 and a manager on the data analytics team at Lowe's. During the pandemic, he started working remotely from Raleigh, which allowed him to attend games last spring. He grew up going to games with his parents, trying out the moves he saw the next day on the ice at practice. Now he's a fully fledged hockey consumer in his own right.

"Now, after college, living independently, being employed, I can buy tickets on my own and go to games when I want," Gupta said. "Having that ability, to have that freedom, that's a big factor to feel more engaged with the Hurricanes compared to when I was a kid."

This is not about kids in the Triangle playing hockey. There were 2,500 boys and girls registered with USA Hockey in 2019, before the pandemic, a number that continues to grow as new rinks are built. The number of college players from here continues to increase. There have been NHL draft picks who grew up here — and not all the children of NHL players — and there will be more.

There will, someday, be an NHL star who took his first strides on ice in this area code.

All of that is increasingly old news.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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This is about what happens to those kids when they're done playing hockey, when they become gainfully employed, when they have families of their own, when youth hockey players become adult hockey consumers.

"It's the same building I grew up with, the third iteration of its name but still the same place I would go with my family," said Ford Hatchett, who grew up playing hockey in Raleigh and is now a television reporter in Winston-Salem. "I have so many memories there, even as the generations have changed. The players, coaching staff, broadcasters — everything has changed. But it's still the same team, the same home. It feels like home. It makes me feel a little old."

Hatchett is 24.

This generation of young Hurricanes fans never grew up without a hockey team here. They played the sport as kids, or had friends who did. Their formative sports experience as children was not an NCAA basketball title but the Hurricanes' unexpected playoff run in 2002, or the Stanley Cup in 2006.

And they're the future of the Hurricanes.

There have always been three basic groups of Hurricanes fans. The most devout, but smallest, were the people who were already hockey fans when the team moved here, the ones whose kids had to fight for opportunities to play the sport, who remember the Raleigh IceCaps, who commuted to Greensboro.

Then there were the transplants, people from elsewhere who grew up with the game and welcomed the Hurricanes' arrival. That group continues to swell every day, with every new subdivision in Wake and Johnston and Durham counties, with every moving truck from Ohio and New York.

And there were the native converts, North Carolinians who knew nothing about hockey but found themselves captivated by the sport when the Hurricanes arrived — a group that most prominently includes Gov. Roy Cooper, but many, many others. The team has been here long enough now that anyone who might have been in that group long ago chose a side.

Twenty-five years in, there's a new, fourth group: The children of 2006, the generation of Triangle kids who have never known anything else. It's organic growth, limitless in its potential. And as that group comes of age, with jobs and disposable incomes and, someday, families of their own, their fandom will be the primary engine driving the Hurricanes far into the future.

One of them might even end up playing for the Hurricanes someday.

"I grew up skating during intermissions, buying \$10 tickets up in the nosebleeds," said Tyler Weiss, a 21-year-old Raleigh native and fourth-round draft pick of the Colorado Avalanche in 2018. "I've always been a Canes fan."

Other than his talent, Weiss' experience was typical of his peers. For previous generations of Triangle kids, their formative sports experience was often an NCAA basketball title. The Hurricanes' Stanley Cup in 2006 came amid a relative drought in that department; North Carolina's championship in 2005 was the only one between 2001 and 2009. The Hurricanes, with their unexpected romp through the playoffs in 2002 and their Stanley Cup championship in 2006, emerged to fill the void.

For kids of a certain age growing up here, that became the primary sports imprint on their developing minds. Especially for someone like Weiss, who grew up in a family of N.C. State fans. He was 6 when the Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup.

"My dad went to N.C. State, which hasn't really won anything in basketball for a long time. Same with football," Weiss said. "I've always been an N.C. State fan, but I remember the Canes winning in '06 and the town going nuts. That always stuck in my mind, the fans and stuff. I remember we drove by the arena one time, just to drive by the arena, with all the people out there."

Gupta was visiting family in India and watched the playoff games on television early in the morning. Even as an 8-year-old, Hatchett could see the perception of hockey in the Triangle start to change. It has been a slow process — even in high school, there weren't a lot of other kids disappearing on the weekends to play in hockey tournaments, although there certainly are now — but he could see it happen.

"The turning point was after that Cup run, when kids even just a few years younger than we were then started getting into hockey," Hatchett said. "Really getting into hockey. That (born in 1999) generation was when it really started to explode."

The Hurricanes' involvement in youth hockey was slow in coming, but the Junior Hurricanes branding is now ubiquitous. It didn't hurt that many of the stars from those breakthrough Hurricanes teams embedded deeply in the hockey community, as well.

Rod Brind'Amour coached a youth team while he was a Hurricanes assistant coach. Ron Francis, a Hockey Hall of Famer, coached a house league — recreational — team. Erik Cole and Aaron Ward are still coaching, and their teams played for national championships last season. Many other former Hurricanes (and IceCaps) continue to coach. Jesse Boulerice is on the Raleigh Youth Hockey Association board of directors.

The Triangle's youth hockey scene now generates college players on a regular basis. One of them, Josh Wilkens, played for the Nashville Predators in a preseason game at PNC. Weiss, a senior at Nebraska-Omaha, remains the highest-drafted Raleigh player, but that won't last forever.

"The hockey market, we're still obviously trying to build and build and build, but it's impressive where we've come," said Hurricanes head coach Brind'Amour, whose son Skyler was drafted by the Edmonton Oilers and plays college hockey at Quinnipiac. "Now, obviously we've got to keep going. It's way bigger than it was when we started, and it's growing rapidly."

It has also become self-perpetuating. Pat Bush has officiated youth hockey games in the Triangle for more than 30 years, long before the Hurricanes were a figment of anyone's imagination, back when there were two sheets of ice (there are now nine) and you had to really want to play hockey. He's starting to see a second generation of hockey players emerge.

"I had two of them this weekend," Bush said. "One of (the parents) says, 'When I was playing, you were reffing then. How long have you been doing this?' Too damn long! I've had three or four like that. Their kids are 14 or 15 now and I had them when they were 14 or 15."

With that, there's a new generation of hockey fans emerging. Those parents are taking their kids to games. The kids who used to go to games with their parents are going on their own. The generation that was introduced to hockey here has been succeeded by a generation that has never known otherwise.

"My whole friend group growing up, they're going to Canes games every weekend, especially with the Canes doing so well and going to the playoffs," Weiss said. "Growing up, they didn't really talk about the Hurricanes as much, but now that they're older and they can go by themselves and with each other, it seems like they have a bond with the Canes now."

Weiss is trying to make a career out of hockey, but the rest of the kids who grew up playing on the same ice are going pro in something other than sports. Gupta went into data science and started climbing the corporate ladder at Lowe's. Hatchett studied journalism at Syracuse and got a job at WXII. They and their peers are flexing their consumer muscles for the first time.

"I got to go to a game with my dad, and when I walk in and I smell the bratwurst and the pork and the nachos and I smell the beer, now I can go buy a beer," Hatchett said. "That's different."



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They are not unscarred. Their fandom, like many others, waxed and waned during the 10-year playoff drought. Even the most bogus relocation rumors all sounded real to them and they wondered if the team would still be here when they came of age. But they have. And it is.

"I prep myself two hours prior to every playoff game, have dinner ready at home, just like when I was playing," Gupta said. "I love basketball. I'm a Tar Heel. I went there. But at the end of the day, this is the No. 1 sport in my heart."

News Observer LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222299 Carolina Hurricanes

How the Hurricanes evolved from 'novelty' to an indelible part of the NC sports landscape

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

OCTOBER 10, 2021 5:00 AM

Jordan Staal first moved to North Carolina in the summer of 2012, like many in the Triangle a transplant to the area and one with a vested interest in hockey.

Staal was traded to the Carolina Hurricanes by the Pittsburgh Penguins. The big center from Thunder Bay, Ontario, joined an older brother, Eric, with the Canes and soon signed a 10-year contract extension. If hockey was going to continue to grow and flourish in the Triangle, in the state, he was committed to being a big part of it.

The Hurricanes were seen as something of a novelty act in 1997 when the NHL franchise moved to North Carolina from Hartford, Connecticut. Hockey in ACC country, NASCAR country? But as they approach their 25th season in North Carolina, the Canes have become an indelible part of the state's sports landscape. They've given the state its only major-league championship, and become an economic driver in the Triangle and put hockey sticks into the hands of many of the state's kids, boys and girls, in youth programs.

Staal was recently asked about the impact of the team on the area. Standing in the Wake Competition Center in Morrisville, with youth players streaming into the building lugging heavy bags of hockey gear, the Canes captain smiled and said, "Look at where we're standing right now, look at this place."

"This is a stepping stone for a lot of kids in this building alone, never mind how much it's grown in and around this city and community," Staal told the N&O. "Hockey has grown a ton here. That starts with the kids and the kids programs and the Canes have done a great job in helping grow that part of the game."

"Obviously selling tickets and having fans in the building has grown, too. It's been fun to watch and be a part of it, and I'm very proud of that. I'm very excited about the future, about the future of hockey in Raleigh and what it can still become. It's only going to get better."

One constant for the Canes has been Rod Brind'Amour. Traded to the Canes in January 2000, the center helped the Canes reach the Stanley Cup Final in 2002, and then was the captain of the 2006 Stanley Cup champions, raising the Cup high at PNC Arena. As the Canes' head coach, Brind'Amour has taken his teams to the playoffs each of the past three seasons.

Brind'Amour's youngest son, Brooks, is a 9-year-old hockey player determined to be able to duplicate the lacrosse-move goals scored by Canes forward Andrei Svechnikov. Others do the same. They want to be

a part of the sport now and many will remain hockey fans, Carolina Hurricanes fans, as they get older and have their own families.

"It's changed drastically," Brind'Amour said. "The excitement is everywhere ... which is great to see."

### BECOMING A CANES FAN

Dave Pulver moved to North Carolina in 1997, just as the Hurricanes were giving the state its first taste of major league hockey.

Pulver is a native Michigander, from Lansing. He was a loyal Detroit Red Wings fan — forward Steve Yzerman was his guy, his favorite. He said he once went to a Michigan State hockey game to see a young player for the Spartans many were saying was headed to NHL stardom: Rod Brind'Amour.

Pulver, 54, adopted the Hurricanes as his team, proudly wearing a vest adorned with 70 or so Hurricanes pins for games at PNC Arena. He and his wife, Bonnie, drive in from the Greenville area for games, supporting the team coached by Brind'Amour.

"It's really strange that we would end up in the same place," Pulver said. "He's running it and we're rooting for it."

"I've really enjoyed watching the Canes' popularity grow through the years. The marketing folks have done tremendous outreach into the community over the years and I see it paying dividends. It's fun to watch and more people are getting interested in hockey."

Pulver likes the changes new owner Tom Dundon has made and Dundon's commitment to being competitive in the NHL, spending to the salary cap to bring in talent. He likes the way Brind'Amour has coached, setting a high standard for his players.

Pulver said his son was "highly ticked" when the Canes traded away forward Jeff Skinner in 2018. Pulver understood, saying Skinner didn't meet Brind'Amour's work-ethic standard defensively. He had to go.

"I think that has caused a lot more people to notice the Canes and pay attention," Pulver said. "I see the buzz in the community, even here in Greenville. It's just fun to see new people discover hockey and what a fast and fantastic sport it is and fun to watch. It's a tough market with the college sports and the Canes have to fight for every bit of attention they get."

Jim Rutherford was there at the beginning. Then president and general manager of the Hartford Whalers, he relocated to Raleigh in '97 with the task of making the Carolina Hurricanes and NHL hockey work and succeed for then-owner Peter Karmanos Jr.

The first two seasons were spent playing home games in the Greensboro Coliseum, at times before a handful of fans. The arena in Raleigh, then called the Entertainment and Sports Arena, was completed and opened in the fall of 1999, and the laborious task of filling the new place and growing hockey interest began — one Canes marketing pitch was, "You'll Know When You Go."

But it all fell into place for the Canes: the 2002 Stanley Cup Final, hosting the 2004 NHL Draft, winning the 2006 Cup, more playoff success in 2009 and then being picked to host the 2011 NHL All-Star Game. Each was a step toward added credibility, for the franchise, for the market, for the team's place in the community.

"It was hard at the start," Rutherford said this week in an N&O interview. "We moved in such short order, we didn't have long to plan, and we played outside our own home for two years. So there were some growing pains."

"But Pete Karmanos and I always believed in the market, that if we would stick with it, it would work. As we get to the 25-year mark, you can see how good the market is. And when you win a championship, you really establish the franchise in the market."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Rutherford traded for Brind'Amour in 2000, sending former captain Keith Primeau, a contract holdout, to the Philadelphia Flyers. He later coaxed Brind'Amour into coaching, first as a Canes assistant.

"He had what I consider a Hall of Fame career as a player," said Rutherford, a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame. "He stayed with the organization and now is in position to have a huge impact again."

The Hurricanes share PNC Arena with N.C. State men's basketball and oversee the arena's operations. Before the pandemic canceled all events in the arena, it was generating more than \$250 million a year in estimated economic impact for Wake County, according to an economic study prepared for the Centennial Authority, an appointed body and the arena landlord.

The Hurricanes now have a new lease extension for PNC Arena. Dundon's goal, like that of Karmanos and Rutherford before him, is to win a Stanley Cup championship while continuing to build the Hurricanes' brand in the state and within the NHL.

The Canes have plans to host an NHL Stadium Series outdoor game at Carter-Finley Stadium in the 2021-22 season after the pandemic forced a postponement. That's projected to have an economic impact of \$15 million to \$20 million.

"The Hurricanes are a part of our area fabric," said Steve Stroud, a long-time authority member and Raleigh developer.

Rutherford, who won two Cups as GM of the Penguins after resigning from the Hurricanes in 2014, has moved back to Raleigh with his family — once a transplant to the area, Rutherford has returned. His son, James, is 13 and a hockey goalie on a youth team.

"The number of people who have moved to (the Triangle) from hockey markets was pretty high when we first got here and we knew it was going to grow and it has really grown now," Rutherford said. "This Hurricanes team is a contender and should be a contender for a number of years. And there's no making fun of the market or the team anymore."

### GROWING WITH THE CANES

Jeff Ammons is a Raleigh native who grew up following ACC basketball and college sports. He's an N.C. State graduate. His wife went to UNC. He has a brother who went to Wake Forest.

"We do have one team we can all cheer for," Ammons, laughing, said in a recent N&O interview. "When the Hurricanes first came here I bought one ticket and my brother bought one ticket and we sat side by side. That has grown into 12 tickets now."

"We've come to appreciate what a great game it is and how hard the players work, and now our kids have grown up in it. I've got a figure skater. I've got a hockey player."

Ammons also has another hockey rink: He's the developer of Wake Competition Center, a complex near RDU Airport that includes gymnastics and volleyball facilities, soccer fields, and the 115,000-square-foot hockey building that became the Hurricanes' official practice facility in 2020.

That was once Raleigh Center Ice, which Ammons also owns. Ammons and the Hurricanes upgraded in a joint financial venture that provided the team with 12,000 square feet of space — locker room, weight room, players lounge, all the amenities — while giving youth players a venue with two additional sheets of ice.

"I have nieces and nephews who buy season tickets to the Canes games, which is kind of crazy to me," Ammons said. "To me it still kind of feels new but to them it's their whole life. Their whole lives they've been cheering for the Hurricanes."

"When the Canes first moved here I was a little skeptical. Raleigh is so spread out and college driven. I couldn't see professional basketball or baseball coming in and didn't think that of hockey, immediately. At first I was worried would they find a base?"

The Hurricanes found a base. They built on it, laid a solid foundation.

"To me it seems like it has been an amazing fit," Ammons said. "I think in terms of hockey and hockey interest growing, it's going to be exponential the next 20 to 25 years."

News Observer LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222322 New York Islanders

Lamoriello waiting until last minute to set Isles' roster

Andrew Gross

10/10/2021

Before training camp opened, Lou Lamoriello was asked about his famously secretive ways. Essentially, the Islanders president and general manager, who has been at the helm of an NHL franchise since 1987, said he likes keeping all options available as long as possible.

That certainly seems to be the case in advance of Monday's 5 p.m. deadline for submitting the team's initial 23-player maximum roster to the NHL. Somewhat surprisingly, no Islanders were among the 43 players placed on waivers league-wide on Sunday, a necessary step for many who are about to be reassigned to the AHL. But that could just signal an imminent flurry of other transactions.

The Islanders will open the regular season on Thursday night at Carolina after concluding their five-game preseason schedule with a 5-4 overtime loss to the Rangers on Saturday night in Bridgeport, Connecticut. They did not practice on Sunday.

Defenseman Thomas Hickey and forward Richard Panik cleared waivers on Sunday but were not immediately reassigned to the Islanders' AHL affiliate in Bridgeport.

"I can understand the question by everyone," Lamoriello said on Sept. 21 regarding his ultra-hush-hush methods. "But there's a reason for everything you do. It's a combination of things. It has to do with salary cap. It has to do with negotiations. And it has to do with potential acquisitions and confidentiality and the unknown to your opponent."

Lamoriello certainly is pushing the boundaries of that philosophy.

For instance, the team had acknowledged one-year agreements with Zdeno Chara and Zach Parise, but those deals weren't submitted to the NHL until Sunday. Both were inked to \$750,000 deals with another potential \$750,000 in performance bonuses, but neither was on the official roster before Sunday despite having been with the team since the start of training camp and participating in the preseason. The same was true of goalie Cory Schneider and forwards Kieffer Bellows, Michael Dal Colle and Anatolii Golyshev.

The roster also didn't include journeyman defenseman Erik Gustafsson, who attended training camp on a professional tryout offer, which he was released from on Sunday.

Coach Barry Trotz indicated that Saturday night's lineup very likely featured the players he will dress for Thursday's opener against the Hurricanes.

Bellows, Dal Colle, Golyshev, Hickey, Panik, Leo Komarov and defenseman Sebastian Aho and Robin Salo were the healthy players who did not dress.

Johnny Boychuk will be placed back on long-term injured reserve so the Islanders can exceed the \$81.5 million salary cap ceiling by \$6 million.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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But the secretive Lamoriello also has lots of other work to do before Monday at 5.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222323 New York Islanders

Report: Erik Gustafsson Released from PTO by Islanders

October 10, 2021

By Christian Arnold

The New York Islanders made a surprising move on Sunday releasing Erik Gustafsson from his PTO, according to Pierre LeBrun.

Gustafsson had been at camp on a tryout deal and appeared to have a strong showing with the Islanders. Still, it apparently wasn't enough for the Islanders to keep him in the fold and offer him a contract for this season.

It was thought that Erik Gustafsson could have been a candidate to fill the hole left by Nick Leddy after he was traded to Detroit. Gustafsson was a left-handed defenseman that can skate and had an offensive upside.

He was only two seasons removed from a 60 point season with the Chicago Blackhawks, where is reportedly going to sign a one-year deal for this season. And during the preseason, Gustafsson had four points, with three of those coming on the power play.

Erik Gustafsson back with the #Hawks expected to be a 1-year deal worth \$800k.

— Frank Seravalli (@frank\_seravalli) October 10, 2021

What was a concern at the start of training camp had been his defense. Gustafsson had struggled in his own end and could be a liability at times for his own team. However, that didn't appear to be an issue in his limited time during the preseason with the Islanders.

Gustafsson's time on the power play made it appear as though the Islanders liked what they had seen out of the 29-year-old. Keeping Erik Gustafsson would have made sense too for the Islanders from a standpoint that would allow them to swap him in and out easily for Andy Greene or Zdeno Chara.

The battle to be the Islanders' extra defenseman had begun to wind down as the team began making cuts over the past week. Gustafsson had been viewed as the favorite, but a strong camp out of Sebastian Aho and Robin Salo made the decision harder for the Islanders front office.

The Islanders also had to consider the fact that a number of players that needed to be sent down had to pass through waivers. Aho would have been an attractive option for any team had he been put on the waiver wire.

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NYI Hockey Now LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222324 New York Islanders

NYHN Daily: Islanders Waive Panik and Hickey, Raty Concerns, & More

October 10, 2021

By Stefan Rosner

The New York Islanders finished up their preseason play on Saturday night, as they fell to the New York Rangers 5-4 in overtime. Prior to the game, the Islanders waived two veterans, forward Richard Panik and defenseman 2021 draft pick Aatu Raty has been a healthy scratch for the last two games for Karpas of Liiga, but head coach Barry Trotz is not worried. Islanders forward Jean-Gabriel Pageau should have similar linemates each game, with the third line looking to be a consistent threat.

These stories and more in today's daily links!

The New York Islanders slimmed down their lineup even further on Saturday, hours before the Isles hosted the New York Rangers in their final preseason game of the year. Thomas Hickey and Richard Panik were both placed on waivers with the two destined for AHL Bridgeport if they clear. Panik was vying for one of the final roster spots, but to no avail. (NYI Hockey Now)

On Friday and Saturday, 18-year old Aatu Raty did not play for Karpas. He was a healthy scratch, which drew many questions from the Islanders faithful about the latest Islanders draftee. Head coach Barry Trotz stated that he was not overly worried seeing this as Karpas has a very good team, shutting down concerns about Raty's ability to develop overseas. (NYI Hockey Now)

New York Islanders head coach Barry Trotz did not consistently dress the same linemates alongside Jean-Gabriel Pageau last season. With the injury to Anders Lee, Pageau saw a revolving door to his left and his right as Trotz trusted Pageau to play consistently through the chaotic situation. But this season, Pageau will get a heavy dose of Zach Parise and Oliver Wahlstrom by his side, which will only positively impact Pageau and the Islanders. (NYI Hockey Now)

Former Islander Chris Wagner, a grinder, was waived by the Boston Bruins on Saturday, along with defenseman John Moore. Wagner did not do much to stand out at preseason, so being waived did not come as much of a surprise. The surprise was seeing Moore go with him. (Boston Hockey Now)

Defenseman Mark Friedman was looking to make the opening night roster for the Pittsburgh Penguins. He was in a two-way battle for a final spot, but bad luck and bad decision saw that battle come to a close. On Tuesday, Friedman blocked a shot in the Penguins preseason game, and while he returned to that game, missed practice on Wednesday. He was unable to play in the preseason game on Thursday. In the first period of Saturday's preseason game, Friedman received a game misconduct. (Pittsburgh Hockey Now)

In a surprising move Saturday, the Washington Capitals waived defenseman Michal Kempny. The 31-year-old blueliner is still working toward getting back into NHL shape following two major surgeries and three injuries in his left leg. (Washington Hockey Now)

There is no question on how important Sasha Barkov is to the Florida Panthers franchise. Panthers general manager Bill Zito knew that as well, as he locked up his superstar center and captain to an eight-year extension. He has grown up in Florida, starting his career with Jaromir Jagr and eight years later has helped the Panthers become a dominant team, on the rise. (Florida Hockey Now)

It was 29 years ago that Manon Rheume made NHL history, becoming the first woman to play in an NHL game when she suited up for the Tampa Bay Lightning in a preseason game against the St. Louis Blues. The female goaltending pioneer will be back in the NHL as the Lightning visit the Detroit Red Wings to open the 2021-22 on Wednesday as she joins the broadcasting booth. (Detroit Hockey Now)



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • October 4, 2021

The Golden Knights fell 4-0 to the San Jose Sharks on Saturday. With the roster still not solidified, can Peyton Krebs make the starting lineup? After killing off penalties at only a 70.3% mark in the preseason, is this a sign for concern? These takeaways and more from the loss. (Vegas Hockey Now)

Veteran defenseman Jack Johnson has made the Colorado Avalanche roster. After getting a PTO, both sides have come to an agreement on a contract, a one-year deal likely to be in the \$1 million range. That deal will not become official until Monday. (Colorado Hockey Now)

The San Jose Sharks played quite well in their preseason finale against the Vegas Golden Knights. William Ekland and Jonathan Dahlen shined bright in the win. Here are the game notes from the win. (San Jose Hockey Now)

Although Vancouver Canucks Head Coach Travis Green coached him with the Portland Winterhawks in the Western Hockey League, he says his history with Nic Petan has very little to do with the 26-year-old forward's presence on the current Vancouver Canucks roster. He had to earn a final roster spot, and he has. (Vancouver Hockey Now)

After missing the entire 2020-21 campaign due to an illness, Jonathan Toews was back when training camp began. The captain and two-time Stanley Cup winner is expected to play in the Blackhawks season-opener against the Colorado Avalanche on Wednesday. (NHL)

The Florida Panthers held a moment of silence in honor of U.S. Army Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, who was their chairman and alternate governor since 2017, before a preseason game against the Tampa Bay Lightning at FLA Live Arena in Sunrise, Florida, on Saturday. Odierno died Friday following a battle with cancer. He was 67. (NHL)

On Friday, Washington Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin left the preseason game after sustaining a lower-body injury. After hitting Philadelphia Flyer Travis Konecny, he left the rink limping and did not return. He will be re-evaluated in the coming days, but losing Ovechkin is not how the Caps wanted to kick off their campaign. (NHL)

On Sept. 8, Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby had wrist surgery. He had been skating on his own, with coaches. He was on the ice for morning skate prior to the Penguins preseason game on Saturday and management is encouraged by his progress thus far. (NHL)

On Saturday, the St. Louis Blues and James Neal came to terms on a one-year deal worth \$900,000. Neal was on a professional tryout and performed quite well in preseason to earn a starting gig. (NHL)

Toronto Maple Leafs head coach shared some negative news in an update on Ilya Mikheyev. The forward left Saturday's preseason game with an upper-body injury, a hand injury, and did not return. After being evaluated, it is expected that he will be out long-term. (TSN)

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NYI Hockey Now LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222321 Nashville Predators

Who will be on Nashville Predators' opening-night roster? Our projection

Paul Skrbina

10/10/2021

Lines, lines, everywhere. There were lines and defensive pairs and Juuse Saros in goal.

The Nashville Predators' final preseason game Saturday afternoon, a 4-3 victory against the Carolina Hurricanes, was a preview of what lineups to expect when the season begins anew Thursday against the Seattle Kraken at Bridgestone Arena.

Rosters are due to the league by late Monday afternoon, and the Predators' will look much different than in recent years.

Gone are the days of JoFA, with the "A" in the equation, Viktor Arvidsson, now wearing Los Angeles Kings garb. Say hello to the combination of Ryan Johansen, Matt Duchene and Filip Forsberg, which looks to be John Hynes' top line going into the 2021-22 season, one general manager David Poile termed a "competitive rebuild."

Eeli Tolvanen, Mikael Granlund and Luke Kunin made up the second line Saturday. Nick Cousins, Cody Glass and rookie Philip Tomasino the third, with the "herd" line of Yakov Trenin, Colton Sissons and Tanner Jeannot rounding out the forwards.

With Ryan Ellis gone to Philadelphia, captain Roman Josi paired with Alexandre Carrier. Mattias Ekholm, who like Forsberg has yet to sign an extension, played mostly with Philippe Myers. Ben Harpur and Dante Fabbro were the third line.

Most of Hynes' roster decisions were made before Saturday. And changes will be inevitable.

"You have a pretty good idea coming in what the team is going to look like to start," Hynes said. "That doesn't mean the 20 guys that play on opening night are going to be the same 20 that (stay on the roster)."

SCHEDULE: Here's the complete Nashville Predators 2021-22 regular season schedule

ROSTER: Eeli Tolvanen rooting for Philip Tomasino to make Nashville Predators roster

OPENER: Nashville Predators coach says Todd Richards could be back by opener after heart attack

"Sometimes it gets hyped. Everyone's that's here has had a good camp, we feel like. A lot of times the group you start with never stays the same."

Saturday was a chance for Tomasino to show one more time what he's capable of.

Hynes' first full camp in his third season as the team's coach has provided him with valuable time to evaluate players and install systems.

Here's a look at what the Predators' opening-night roster could look like when the season begins:

Forwards (14): Nick Cousins, Matt Duchene, Filip Forsberg, Ryan Johansen, Cody Glass, Mikeal Granlund, Rocco Grimaldi, Tanner Jeannot, Luke Kunin, Mathieu Olivier, Colton Sissons, Eeli Tolvanen, Philip Tomasino, Yakov Trenin,

Defensemen (7): Mark Borowiecki, Alexandre Carrier, Mattias Ekholm, Dante Fabbro, Ben Harpur, Roman Josi, Philippe Myers,

Goalies (2): David Rittich, Juuse Saros.

Tennessean LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222319 Montreal Canadiens

Jack Todd: Changes and concerns abound as Habs approach new season



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Jack Todd

Oct 10, 2021

"I think we have a good group," Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin said about his team's leadership. "With (Shea Weber) being here for five years, I think he left a legacy among his teammates, how to be a good pro, how to put his team ahead of anything else."

For the past 19 months, the title of English poet W.H. Auden's long wartime poem "The Age of Anxiety" has been in the back of my mind, like a bell tolling in the distance

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Like those who endured the war, we live in our own Age of Anxiety, compounded of the all too genuine threats of fire, flood, plague and nuclear war and by the ersatz threats whipped up by algorithms and misinformation on social media.

This world is enough to break even the strongest — or perhaps it is the strongest who break first, because they are least likely to bend in the face of the tempest.

The massive wave of support that has come from all over the world in the wake of the news that Canadiens goaltender Carey Price had entered the NHL's player assistance program represents more than empathy for Price and his family — it's a symptom of our growing understanding of the mind and the many ways it reacts to the anxiety most of us feel.

Would such a reaction to the news about Price or Jonathan Drouin have been the same 10 years ago or even two years ago, pre-pandemic? I think not.

Times change. We change. As we admired Price for his brilliance during the run to the Stanley Cup final last summer, as we admired his courage in speaking out on aboriginal issues, we now admire his courage in seeking help.

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What matters now is for Price to get the help he needs, whether it takes a month or a year. Human first, player second.

The pressure on Price has been there since he was a 15-year-old goaltender, playing a single period for the Tri-City Americans in 2003. His life since has been a blur of high-pressure situations, from the Olympic Games to the Stanley Cup final.

Through it all, the laconic westerner has been a tower of strength, standing tall in the crease and in his corner of the room, where he faced the baying mob of reporters like a man enduring root-canal work without novocaine. Now he is facing something else entirely, although what exactly it is we don't know.

Price will get all the time he needs. The club will start the season without him and there can be no pressure for his return.

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What will happen when the puck drops on a new season? The absence of Shea Weber, Phil Danault and Price means it's as hard to predict as the direction of the wind. Having scraped the stars with a giddy playoff run last summer that brought them achingly close to a parade, the Canadiens now face the very real possibility that they could miss the playoffs entirely.

New faces and missing faces aside, when the Canadiens take the ice against the Maple Leafs in Toronto Wednesday, it will be 98 days since Tampa goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy outduelled Price and the Lightning hoisted their second consecutive Stanley Cup.

If you're a nurse, a 98-day vacation seem like a ticket to paradise. For professional athletes, a break of fewer than 100 days (minus another month for the long, tedious training camp) is barely time enough to hit the reset button.

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The Canadiens and the Lightning, therefore, are going to be an extended lab experiment for the effects of a short off-season on the minds and bodies of elite athletes, especially those in contact sports.

The Canadiens have also endured an offseason that has been an extended pratfall, from the departure of Joel Bouchard, Danault signing in Los Angeles, word that Weber would not play this season and that his career might be over and mutterings from GM Marc Bergevin to the effect that he would honour the balance of his contract through this season without committing to more.

Then there was the most significant blunder of Bergevin's career, the decision to draft convicted sex offender Logan Mailloux, followed by Geoff Molson's ham-fisted efforts at crisis management. As repugnant as that episode was, however, it's unlikely to affect the club on the ice in the least. The absence of two key players and their all-world goaltender is another matter.

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Initially, at least, the Canadiens are likely to have more difficulty keeping the puck out of their own net. That's where the absence of the superb checking centreman, the stud defenceman and the superstar goaltender are going to have the most effect.

They should be able to mount a real offensive threat with Christian Dvorak an upgrade over Jesperi Kotkaniemi, at least in the short term, Drouin returning in great shape and Mike Hoffman, once he's healthy, to inject some life in the power play.

Will it be enough? Put it this way: we were all betting against the Canadiens making the playoffs last spring, then certain they could not overcome the mighty Maple Leafs, doubtful against the Winnipeg Jets and certain their run would end against the big, strong, tough Las Vegas Knights.

In each case, the experts were wrong, so I'm going to go out on a limb and saying that the 2021-2022 Canadiens will scrape into the playoffs.

After that? We'll burn that bridge when we get to it.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222320 Montreal Canadiens

Opinion: Carey Price and the perils of the professional hockey player

Sheldon H. Jacobson

Oct 10, 2021

Carey Price in action at the Bell Centre during the 2020 Stanley Cup playoffs. "He deserves our support and respect, and at this time, his privacy," writes Sheldon H. Jacobson.

Growing up in the 1960s and '70s, I watched Les Canadiens win eight Stanley Cups between 1968 to 1979. It seemed surreal and normal at the same time. No one could have predicted their current Cup drought.

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As a data scientist, I analyze data to identify trends, glean insights and offer explanations. Risk-based decision-making under uncertainty is my



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particular expertise. It has allowed me to make contributions that have led to improved airport security systems, election forecasting and sports analytics.

Yet no amount of data analysis and risk assessment can break the code for risk of mental health injuries.

There are obvious physical risks in being a professional hockey player, typically described as upper or lower body injuries. And concussions. Star athletes are placed on a pedestal for their ability to play games that many partake in as children. With increased competition, a natural weeding out process occurs with only the very best performers reaching professional status. As cream rises to the top, so does the talent required to earn a living playing a child's game.

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Whether it be a star athlete or some other highly visible person, a flawless veneer of stability must permeate their public persona. This creates a schism between their inner life and their outer image. With multi-million dollar salaries and overwhelming performance expectations, these people must execute at superhuman levels independent of what is going on in their psyche. This pressure creates an ever-expanding divide that can only strain their mental health and well-being.

The news last week that Carey Price, the Canadiens' star goalie, was taking a leave of absence came as a shock to many. Teammate Jonathan Drouin took a similar leave back in April. But what is most surprising is that more athletes do not succumb to such mental pressures.

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In reality, they do, though it manifests in different ways. Some turn to illicit or prescription drugs. Others take up addictions like gambling. Many embrace a more constructive approach and focus their attention on public service, or faith and religion, finding solace from the pressures in a spiritual domain.

Whether we are star hockey players or ordinary people, the stresses of life are often self-imposed, based on the divide between what we expect of ourselves and what we can deliver.

Let's not be fooled by social media discussions and dialogues. What counts most is our inner lives, not the outward image projected. This is how our fears can be confronted and overcome, inspiring others to do the same.

It's complicated. For star athletes like Price, both blessed and cursed with visibility, they must step away from the spotlight, seeking refuge and relief.

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The lesson learned is that star athletes, no matter how they perform and what they earn, are still human, with the same human emotions we all share. For them, their public life and private life are distinct and separate; we just see their public life. Yet their private life is the reality for them and their family.

In a world where winning, power, wealth and reputation are valued, let us remember that the most valued asset we all have is time. Each of us leaves a legacy based on what we do with our time, and the lives that we touch.

Price may never play another game for the Canadiens. Or he might return sooner than we think. Either way, he is still Carey Price, a father, husband and human being.

He is fortunate to earn a living playing professional hockey, but must bear the burden that comes with it. He accepted the risk, physical and emotional. He deserves our support and respect, and at this time, his privacy.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.11.2021

1222371 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Six bold predictions for the 2021-22 NHL season

Rory Boylen October 10, 2021, 11:09 AM

Ah yes, bold predictions. The easiest way to make yourself look like a fool in a few months.

The whole idea of coming up with bold predictions is knowing full well that most of them probably won't pan out. But the trick is to balance that with some level of possibility. It's not a bold prediction to say Nikita Kucherov will win the Art Ross this season, because he's done it before. That's just a prediction. And it's also not a bold prediction to say, I dunno, Pius Suter wins the scoring race because there's no reality where that happens (sorry, Pius).

So we're trying to have a little fun, challenge ourselves, but have some basis in reality, while recognizing that most of these may whiff.

Then again, I tasked myself with bold predictions for the Canadian Division last season, took a similar approach and, I must say, the results were...

A 66 per cent hit rate was entirely surprising and not bad at all.

Vancouver Canucks finish first in Pacific Division after the regular season

Rory have you lost it?

Well, yes, but that has nothing to do with this. Remember people -- bold predictions. This certainly qualifies.

Vegas will be the heavy favourite, and Edmonton comes in behind them. Seattle's the wild card, as are the Calgary Flames in some ways. Los Angeles is the team on the rise that could shock us all.

When framing the Canucks, it might be helpful to look into a neuralyzer first to forget last season. It was incredibly challenging for the team and, sometimes, for reasons out of their control. Jim Benning made significant changes to the lineup over the off-season as well, which should put them in better position to compete in 2021-22.

Consider that the Pacific Division may be the worst of any of them, so playoff spots are up for grabs. It's also worth pointing out that the favourites aren't entirely perfect either. Vegas no longer has the luxury of two elite goalies should one have to miss time, and their power play got more and more atrocious as the year went along -- one important factor to regular season success. And the Oilers do have questions about their goalies and, you might say, their defence too.

So why Vancouver? Look at this top nine forward unit. They're deep. They've got speed. They've got strength. They could be a matchup problem and have options to shake things up if need be. Want more centre depth? Put J.T Miller down the middle (and it looks like he'll start the season there). Want to load up the top-six? Move him to the wing and have the capable Jason Dickinson in the 3C hole. Elias Pettersson is back healthy and could have a huge year, while Vasily Podkolzin and Nils Hoglander have lots of untapped potential -- a step from either would shift this unit into high gear.

Garland - Pettersson - Boeser

Pearson - Horvat - Hoglander

Dickinson - Miller - Podkolzin

Every team has a weakness, though, and Vancouver's might be its blue line. That's the area that needs to improve the most, since they were one



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of the worst teams at defending against the highest-quality shots last season. It wasn't an area of strength two years ago either.

This is where Thatcher Demko comes in. Heck, he might be the subject of someone else's bold prediction. Demko got better as last season went along, and that followed an outstanding 2020 playoff performance in which he took on an otherworldly form now referred to simply as 'Bubble Demko.' If you want to get really bold and say he could be in the Vezina conversation then that would be reason enough to elevate the Canucks. He doesn't quite have to hit those heights, though. Demko carried a .923 save percentage in the last 22 of his 35 games played, and if he can sustain that in 2021-22 he'll be among the better players at his position and would keep the Canucks in plenty of games when the defence isn't up to snuff.

Toronto's starting goalie for Game 1 of the playoffs is neither Jack Campbell nor Petr Mrazek

Nothing is guaranteed in Toronto's net this season, which is maybe not the best thing heading into such a critical one for the team. Jack Campbell was fantastic for them in 2021, but he's no stranger to injury and had a groin issue last season. Campbell has also never been leaned upon as a No. 1 over an 82-game calendar and the 22 appearances he made last season were the second-most of his career -- the most he's played in one season was 31 games in 2018-19 for the Kings.

Of course, Campbell doesn't need to be a 50-game starter necessarily, because Petr Mrazek was brought in to team up with Campbell in a tandem. But Mrazek was the primary starter for two Carolina teams that had Stanley Cup hopes in 2018-19 and 2019-20 and we wouldn't exactly call it a smashing success.

In 2018-19 the Canes were among the better defensive teams and Mrazek was up and down with some putrid months along the way, then he finished the regular season strong. He led them past the Capitals in Round 1 with an .899 save percentage, and got banged up a bit after that. The Canes reached the Eastern Conference final, Mrazek allowed 10 goals in the first two games (against Boston, eek Toronto fans) and didn't play the last two games. In 2019-20 Mrazek wasn't nearly as good in the regular season, split playoff time with James Reimer, and again was unravelled by the Bruins, allowing eight goals in three games en route to three losses. (Eek again.)

Mrazek was good when he played last season, but injuries limited him to just 12 games. Both Campbell and Mrazek have the potential to catch fire at the right time, but the risk here is obvious.

All situations. Stats via Hockey-Reference

The Leafs just committed three years to Mrazek and are cap tight, so this bold prediction won't be easy to come to fruition -- hence why it's bold -- but if there's any sign of this situation being unstable by the trade deadline, how do you not address it? If the Leafs don't win at least one playoff round this season, and probably more than that, jobs are on the line in the front office.

Who would they target? That's the million dollar question. In the trade market, the Leafs might have to be competing with a team like Edmonton, who have net questions of their own, or Colorado because Darcy Kuemper is another injury risk (and backup Pavel Francouz is already out 3-4 weeks).

But would they have to go the trade route to address the position? This bold prediction is not mine, but rather Sportsnet.ca managing editor Gary Melo's (a mad Leafs fan): What if UFA Tuukka Rask, currently injured and not likely back until at least the new year some time, is open to signing back with the team that drafted him?

Direct all feedback to @Im\_So\_Legendary.

Neither Pennsylvania team makes the playoffs

The Metropolitan Division could be one of the more fascinating this season because of the potential for immense turnover -- or maybe none at all.

Here you have your established contenders from years gone by: Washington and Pittsburgh. You have a team in the Islanders that doesn't look special, but clearly is after back-to-back Round 3 appearances. Carolina had more points than any of these teams last season, while the Flyers are a popular bounce back pick and certainly look better on paper than the inconsistency they've played with in recent years.

But then you have a team like the New York Rangers, who seem poised to take a big step out of a rebuild. Even the New Jersey Devils have designs on doing the same after signing Dougie Hamilton in free agency. Columbus may finish last here, but even they have some weapons that could make them a surprise team.

So we're predicting some turmoil. Chaos, baby.

The Penguins are already starting the season without both Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and there's no sugar coating that sting. Tristan Jarry returns in net, but he was a problem for the team in the playoffs and doesn't seem likely to lead a charge. Jeff Carter was absolutely fantastic for the Pens after coming over in a deadline trade last season, but what really are the odds of him being able to sustain that nearly point-per-game average tear he was on, over a full 82-game season? He'll turn 37 in January and hasn't scored 20 goals since 2016-17. There's a bit of a last dance feel here with Malkin and Kris Letang in the final year of their contracts, so if things are going poorly perhaps they double down at the deadline and add. But Pittsburgh hasn't won a playoff round since 2018, so how aggressive can you really get?

Brian Burke's off-season review with the Pittsburgh Penguins

October 08 2021

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And the Flyers are just a tough team to get a handle on. Carter Hart seems to be a great bet to bounce back -- after all, the 23-year-old has been outstanding at every level he's played, including the NHL. But last season was so bad with an .877 save percentage and 3.67 GAA that there is certainly more concern now. The Flyers know they didn't have the right mix and GM Chuck Fletcher made the changes he could -- Ryan Ellis, Rasmus Ristolainen, Keith Yandle, Martin Jones and Cam Atkinson are all new faces. But are we sure they're better than the teams in this division that are clearly on an upwards trajectory?

Neither the Flyers or Penguins reach the playoffs. We don't even need to boldly predict any of the rebuilding Metro teams taking their place -- Washington, Carolina and the Islanders could be the three representatives from this group, with the Atlantic sending five teams.

Jack Hughes at least doubles his career-best point production

Some people may be down on the middle Hughes brother because he hasn't had the same obvious impact of some other recent forwards chosen No. 1 overall. Auston Matthews and Connor McDavid spoiled us in that regard. But even Hughes' teammate, Nico Hischier, has gained a lot more respect for his two-way impact.

Jack is about to hit big.

Hughes has point totals of 21 (in 61 games) and 31 (56 games) in his first two seasons, so it's not bold enough to simply say he'll have his best offensive season yet. He'll smash it. Hughes gets to at least 62 points, if not more.

In his 19-year-old sophomore season, Hughes was one of the top Devils forwards, with a positive on-ice shot and goal differential for a team that was minus in both categories. He's elusive, great on controlled entries, and at elevating his linemates. Hughes' playmaking ability is well-established, but he also took a step up as a shooter last season, taking more shots on net overall and seeing his conversion rate rise by two percentage points. It still wasn't great though (7.7 per cent), and has room to grow again.



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And now we have the potential for better power play results. Just seven of Hughes' 31 points last season came on the man advantage, and New Jersey's PP unit ranked 28th in the NHL. The addition of Hamilton gives them a proven quarterback and that alone should improve the Devils' situation.

In his rookie season, Hughes averaged .34 points per game. In Year 2, he averaged .55. If he has the same year-over-year improvement in Year 3 and averages .75 points per game in 2021-22, that's a 62-point season. And the conditions could be setting him up for that sort of leap.

The cap finally caught up to the Lightning this off-season, and they lost their entire third line of Yanni Gourde, Barclay Goodrow and Blake Coleman. That would lead to a depth issue on most teams. Not the Lightning, though.

Ross Colton, 25, and Mathieu Joseph, turning 25 in February, had the two best goals per 60 minutes rate (at 5-on-5) for the Lightning last season. Neither played all that much, averaging just under 11 minutes per game, and both had extremely high shooting percentages that won't be sustained (19.6 for Colton, 20.3 for Joseph). But those declining shot percentages will be offset by rising minutes and opportunity.

And while Colton showed well as a rookie last season, Joseph's numbers have been screaming "underrated asset" for a few years now. Over the past three seasons combined, Joseph has averaged 1.01 goals every 60 minutes of 5-on-5 action, which ranks 33rd among all NHL players with at least 1,000 minutes played. That's just ahead of Alex DeBrincat, Artemi Panarin, Josh Anderson and Elias Pettersson, and just behind Brayden Point, Mark Stone and Steven Stamkos. This is the same stat that indicated Carter Verhaeghe could be a breakout candidate before he did it with greater opportunity in Florida last season, or why Jakub Vrana was on track to break big when the Capitals weren't giving him minutes (and maybe why we should be buying into 2021-22 breakouts for Jordan Kyrou, Michael Bunting, or another step up for Joel Farabee).

Joseph doesn't need to be an elite performer, but if he and Colton can replace the 20-ish goals Coleman and Gourde would have been good for, the Lightning will keep rolling without much in the way of a weakness.

Florida Panthers win the Stanley Cup

Now we're off the rails, picking a team to win it all that hasn't won a single playoff round since 1996.

Or are we?

The Panthers were one of the NHL's top regular season teams last season, and challenged the Lightning to an exciting six-game series that, perhaps, would have played out a bit differently without a Sam Bennett suspension in Game 1, or if Aaron Ekblad had of been healthy enough to play in the series.

This year, the Panthers come back reloaded, improved and with the full buy-in from their captain.

That Aleksander Barkov signed an eight-year extension before the season even started is no small thing. It wouldn't have been strange for one of the game's top centres to walk in free agency and try his hand at playoff hockey elsewhere, but Barkov chose to commit to the changes in Florida.

Ekblad, who was having a great year before breaking his leg, is back. Sam Bennett was fire after Florida traded for him at the deadline, and whether or not he regresses back to the usual "regular season Sam" we got used to seeing in Calgary doesn't matter much, because you can count on him upping his game come playoff time. And besides, the Panthers acquired Sam Reinhart, Buffalo's only consistently good player last season, and they now have three of the top four picks from the 2014 draft on the same team.

The Panthers had the fourth-best offence in the league last season and only added to it. Their top-nine forwards are deadly and even the fourth line could be a lot to handle.

I can hear the naysayers now: "But Rory, what about Sergei Bobrovsky and his anchor of a contract? He stinks!"

It's true that Bobrovsky hasn't been great in two years with Florida (he was slightly better last season though!) but Spencer Knight could carve out more of a workload for himself. The 13th overall pick from 2019, Knight has been elite at every level he's played, and then posted a .943 save percentage in four regular season games at the end of last season, when he joined the Panthers after his NCAA career ended. Knight even got some playoff action, too, going 1-1 and stopping 56 of 60 shots the Lightning threw at him.

Bobrovsky will get his starts, but there's a path to Knight taking over the lead role of this tandem and it could put him on track for a Calder Trophy season if he does.

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