Anaheim Ducks
1152729 Ducks GM Bob Murray rips Ondrej Kase trade rumors
1152730 As the Ducks’ Ondrej Kase deals with trade rumors, he keeps the focus on where he is now

Arizona Coyotes
1152731 Open competition: Coyotes have 2 goalies with a ‘starter’s mentality’

Boston Bruins
1152732 As preseason opener looms, Bruins lineup is an open book
1152733 Here’s why the Bruins are primed for another run at the Stanley Cup
1152734 Joakim Nordstrom on the mend for Bruins
1152735 Matt Grzelcyk healthy, looking to make impact for Bruins
1152736 Joakim Nordstrom (foot) makes his on-ice camp debut for the Bruins
1152737 David Backes plans on going ‘balls to the wall’ to hold on to NHL spot with Bruins
1152738 After years of offensive brilliance, David Pastrnak is honing the defensive side of his game

Buffalo Sabres
1152739 Kyle Olson trying to stick with Sabres after Ducks chose to not sign him
1152740 As season looms, Sabres player rep Jake McCabe keeps close watch on opt-out decision
1152741 5,000-calorie diet helps Tage Thompson add weight, strength in attempt to make Sabres
1152742 Sabres stock report: As training camp commences, Ralph Krueger is looking to ‘nail the lineup’
1152743 Linus Ullmark is back and boisterous, challenged but unbroken by his first NHL season

Calgary Flames
1152744 Flames forward Jankowski looked to MacKinnon to improve skating in off-season
1152745 Kylington out to prove people wrong in competition on Flames blue line
1152746 While found money for the Flames, being a sixth-rounder is costing Andrew Mangiapane

Carolina Hurricanes
1152747 In Hurricanes’ entire time in NC, there’s never been a training camp like this
1152748 Hurricanes’ Andrei Svechnikov finding his confidence without ducking expectations
1152749 Haydn Fleury is trying to find his inner ‘Jerk’ and his coach is all in favour

Chicago Blackhawks
1152750 Newcomer Olli Maatta is picking up the pace in his transition to the Blackhawks: ‘You’ve got to build every day’
1152751 Crawford vs. Lehner is Blackhawks’ biggest competition, but it won’t be settled in camp
1152752 The 40-year-old versions
1152753 Can Patrick Kane play to age 40? History doesn’t like his chances
1152754 Behind the numbers: Patrick Kane excels as a goal-scorer by doing what defenses don’t expect
1152755 Blackhawks’ Toews motivated by missing cut in NHL’s Top 20 list
1152756 Blackhawks’ Kane a fan of latest bobblehead
1152757 Far from Czech home, Kubalik adjusts to life with Blackhawks
1152758 Blackhawks using first training camp under Jeremy Colliton to nail down defensive zone coverage
1152759 Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman: Adam Boqvist is ‘ready to be a pro’

Colorado Avalanche
1152760 “I’m happy to be here for the next eight years”: Sam Girard’s time on Colorado’s top pairing is just beginning
1152761 Avalanche Training Camp Observations: Defense might be taking shape
1152762 Avalanche Training Camp Observations: Optimism unchecked

Columbus Blue Jackets
1152763 Markus Hannikainen arrives at last at Blue Jackets camp
1152764 Columbus Blue Jackets players still follow Artem Panarin’s example
1152765 Sonny Milano focused on making Columbus Blue Jackets’ roster
1152766 After getting snared again in U.S. visa process, Markus Hannikainen arrives at Blue Jackets camp

Dallas Stars
1152767 Ben Bishop may not duplicate 2018-19 numbers, but the Stars hope his goalie won’t have to

Detroit Red Wings
1152768 Detroit Red Wings are eager to see Moritz Seider in exhibitions: Here’s why
1152769 Children’s Foundation chief making his mark to boost youth health
1152770 Moritz Seider warming to life in Michigan, adjusting to pro hockey
1152771 Top pick Moritz Seider makes strong first impression on Red Wings
1152772 Oliver Kaski hopes to upgrade Red Wings’ skill level on defense

Edmonton Oilers
1152773 Connor McDavid is fine after going down in practice
1152774 Oilers Notes: Leon Draisaitl salary is barrier next to Marner’s
1152775 Sam Gagner returned to Edmonton Oilers a well-travelled player
1152776 JONES: Joel Persson hopes to go from classroom to Edmonton Oilers roster
1152777 Handicapping Oilers prospect progress: The development of Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones and William Lagesson

Florida Panthers
1152778 Camp Quenneville, Day 2: Panthers goalie Sam Montembeault battles for backup role to Sergei Bobrovsky
1152779 2019-20 NHL Season Preview: Florida Panthers

Los Angeles Kings
1152780 ‘We shouldn’t be surprised if we make trades’: Drew Doughty prepares for transitional year with Kings
1152781 MARTINEZ KEEN ON KINGS’ ABILITY TO KEEP LEARNING, ‘UP-TEMPO’ ADJUSTMENTS
1152782 DAY TWO: MCLELLAN TALKS DOUGHTY, MORNING SKATES, INSTILLING UP-TEMPO PLAY

Minnesota Wild
1152783 Spurgeon, Wild continue successful partnership
1152784 Wild sign defenseman Spurgeon to 7-year, $53M extension
1152785 Wild signs Jared Spurgeon to seven-year contract extension
1152786 Jared Spurgeon signs seven-year, $53 million contract extension with Wild
1152787 “This kid is a damn stud”: From ‘nobody’ to payday, Jared Spurgeon’s Wild ride is complete
1152788 Not going anywhere: Jared Spurgeon, Wild agree to 7-year contract extension
Montreal Canadiens
1152789 Canadians’ Max Domi has a new look and old linemate at training camp
1152790 Stu Cowan: Canadians’ Victor Mete bonds with Shea Weber on and off ice
1152791 Canadiens Notebook: Noah Juulsen and Karl Alzner sidelined at camp

Nashville Predators
1152792 NHLPA decision on CBA pushed back to Monday
1152793 Pekka Rinne optimistic Predators career won't end over NHL labor issues as deadline approaches

New Jersey Devils
1152794 WATCH: Jack Hughes, P.K Subban, Nikita Gusev skate in 1st Devils practice
1152795 Notable player combinations from Devils’ 1st practices of training camp
1152796 What if nothing the Devils do can convince Taylor Hall to stay put? | Politi
1152797 Why Taylor Hall and John Hynes believe Devils’ Nico Hischier will make big leap in 3rd NHL season
1152798 How Devils’ Ty Smith, Jesper Boqvist are approaching chance to make NHL roster
1152803 How the Devils plan to split time between Cory Schneider and Mackenzie Blackwood
1152804 NJ Devils scrimmage quick-hitters: Jesper Boqvist is everything advertised

New York Islanders
1152805 Islanders’ Johnny Boychuk elated to be healthy at start of training camp
1152806 Former Devi Slava Fetisov takes on global warming with help from Lou Lamoriello

New York Rangers
1152807 Why Chris Kreider is worry-free going into final year of contract
1152808 Pavel Buchnevich is X-factor on Rangers’ revamped top line
1152809 Chris Kreider says he isn't concerned about his contract status

Ottawa Senators
1152810 SNAPSHOTSHOTS: Sens player rep DeMelo says players will be unified — whatever NHLPA decides
1152811 Changes are about to be made at Ottawa Senators’ training camp
1152812 GARRIOCH: Craig Anderson determined to bounce back after difficult season

Philadelphia Flyers
1152813 Bruising Chris Stewart, once filled with promise, trying to resurrect career with Flyers
1152814 Young Flyers fan writes recruitment pitch to Mitch Marner ... and sends it to Matt Marner
1152815 Claude Giroux, Sean Couturier wow the prospects, roster talk and more from Flyers training camp
1152816 From Jakub Voracek to Alain Vigneault, Joel Farabee turning heads (and ankles) at Flyers training camp
1152817 Kevin Hayes is new to Flyers but already having an impact on teammates
1152818 Wayne Simmonds’ departure may mean a job for his best friend, Chris Stewart

Pittsburgh Penguins
1152819 Brandon Tanev already seeing prominent role for Penguins alongside Evgeni Malkin
1152820 It’s now or never for Tristan Jarry with the Penguins
1152821 David Warsofsky eager for his third chance with the Penguins
1152822 Penguins pair up Justin Schultz, Marcus Pettersson on second day of camp
1152823 From undrafted to Sidney Crosby’s line, Dominik Kahun continues his precipitous climb
1152824 Penguins wanted more depth in goal behind Matt Murray, and they got it
1152825 Mike Sullivan isn’t concerned about the shortage of righties up front
1152826 Patric Hornqvist says he’s ready to go after longer-than-normal layoff
1152827 On Jack Johnson, Juuso Riikola and the Penguins’ crowded defense

San Jose Sharks
1152828 Forward thinking: Why Sharks’ Meier, Labanc signed new contracts so early
1152829 Sharks’ Aaron Dell reveals extra motivation ahead of 2019 NHL season

St Louis Blues
1152830 Blues turn back the clock for third jersey
1152831 Tarasenko good to go on first day of camp
1152832 Unfinished business for Pietrangelo, Schenn
1152833 Blues hit the ice for first day of training camp at new facility

Tampa Bay Lightning
1152834 Why Lightning aren’t swayed by market with bridge offer for Brayden Point

Toronto Maple Leafs
1152835 Forward Mitch Marner joins Toronto Maple Leafs in Newfoundland for training camp
1152836 Kapanen gets first shot at Tavares-Marner line in Leafs camp
1152837 Mitch Marner blinked first in contract staredown with Maple Leafs
1152838 What do fans think of the Leafs’ Mitch Marner signing?
1152839 Leafs finally add Mitch Marner’s name to their prepaid plan. They better get dialed into a longer Cup run
1152840 SIMMONS: Life-changing money won’t change Marner’s hockey life
1152841 Dubas laments ‘mistakes’ but glad Marner deal done
1152842 Maple Leafs and the Maritimes have historical bond
1152843 Kapanen, Tavares get look as Leafs linemates
1152844 Newly signed Leaf Marner returns fire from critics
1152845 SIMMONS SAYS: Marner the winner as Leafs pay him more than NHL’s MVP
1152846 TRAIKOS: Leafs’ salary imbalance a problem if cap remains stagnant
1152847 Siegel: The Leafs won’t regret giving Mitch Marner $10.8 million a season
1152848 Can the Leafs win with their current cap structure after signing Mitch Marner?
Vancouver Canucks
1152868 Ben Kuzma: MacEwen trained with bobsleigh gold medallist to improve explosiveness
1152869 Canucks' camp notes: Bachman's back, Juolevi's jiggy, Bo doesn't know
1152870 Ben Kuzma: Canucks' shot-blocking Benn, Tanev get creative for better protection
1152871 Patrick Johnston: New dad Baertschi finds new lease on life and purpose with Canucks
1152872 Recap: Day two at Canucks training camp
1152873 Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien granted leave of absence
1152874 Canucks training camp: The faceoff thing, the Elias Pettersson takeover and inside the goalie development plan
1152875 Deep Dive: What Jett Woo's breakout season means for his NHL ceiling
1152876 Canucks training camp: The Jake Virtanen thing, Elias Pettersson is on 'a mission' and the new-look blueline

Vegas Golden Knights
1152849 Cody Eakin isn't dwelling on ending to Golden Knights' season
1152850 Golden Knights’ Gerard Gallant to stick with trusted top 6
1152851 Last year's new guys ready for second act with Golden Knights
1152852 Golden Knights’ Shea Theodore ready for camp after cancer scare
1152853 Kids Back In School; VGK Boys Back On Ice In Las Vegas

Washington Capitals
1152854 Evgeny Kuznetsov doesn't need our scorn. He needs our support.
1152855 Evgeny Kuznetsov, suspended after positive cocaine test, says, 'I'm going to learn from this'
1152856 Evgeny Kuznetsov suspended three games by NHL over cocaine test
1152857 How Kuznetsov's suspension helps the Caps' salary cap situation
1152858 NHL to suspend Caps center Kuznetsov for start of regular season
1152859 With Evgeny Kuznetsov suspended, Caps GM Brian MacLellan details how team will move forward

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1152880 Sportsnet.ca / With Marner signed, Maple Leafs' Cup window open until further notice
1152881 Sportsnet.ca / How daily meditation let Baertschi find peace in uncertain Canucks future
1152882 Sportsnet.ca / Broek emerging as potential third-pair upgrade on Canadiens' blue-line
1152883 TSN.CA / Leafs GM Dubas learning on the fly with high-stakes negotiations
1152884 TSN.CA / Marner relieved to be back with Maple Leafs
1152885 TSN.CA / Canucks training camp notebook
1152886 USA TODAY / NHL suspends Capitals' Evgeny Kuznetsov for first three games following positive cocaine test

Winnipeg Jets
1152860 Appleton, Bourque next men up
1152861 Ehlers takes coach dad's advice, goes over all his games
1152862 New lines, defence pairs debut as Jets training camp underway
1152863 BILLECK: Jets’ Stanley defying the doubts he's faced for years
1152864 RFA Laine set to train with Swiss club as Jets’ impasse drags on
1152865 Wheeler says pressure, media reports took toll on him last season
1152866 FRIESEN: Jets need Laine, Connor back 'right now'
1152867 Dustin Byfuglien news sets tone on first day of Jets training camp

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Ducks GM Bob Murray rips Ondrej Kase trade rumors

By ELLIOTT TEAFORD | PUBLISHED: September 14, 2019 at 4:12 pm | UPDATED: September 14, 2019 at 4:12 PM

IRVINE — When Ondrej Kase and the Ducks returned to Great Park Ice for the second day of training camp Saturday, he ditched the yellow non-contact jersey he wore Friday. He donned a white jersey with his familiar No. 25 on the back and formed a line with Adam Henrique and Max Comtois.

Another day passed and the Ducks didn’t trade Kase to the Carolina Hurricanes for defenseman Justin Faulk. The Ducks and Hurricanes were said to have agreed on a trade last week, but Faulk didn’t agree to waive his no-trade clause and accept a contract extension to seal the deal.

Or more to the point, Faulk didn’t get the offer from the Ducks that would have prompted him to waive his no-trade clause. It’s believed he wanted a seven-year contract and a significant raise from the $4.83 million he will make this season, the last before he can become an unrestricted free agent July 1.

Ducks general manager Bob Murray declined to provide an update Friday on negotiations, but he expressed his displeasure with Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, whom he blamed without mentioning his name for leaking the name of Kase as the player Carolina was interested in acquiring.

“When things are out there and haven’t happened and some owner decides he’s going to garner some friendship with the media, and he’s going to get close to the media, and he puts things out there, some of these people, I wish they were players at some point in their lives,” Murray said.

“Obviously, they weren’t.”

Murray acknowledged his desire to acquire a right handed-shooting defenseman to his left handed-dominated blue line corps before the season opens Oct. 3. But he wouldn’t say who he might be targeting or who he was willing to part with in order to make the deal happen.

“I’m very old school,” Murray said. “I hate the trade deadline when things get reported before you get a chance to tell your player. I think that’s all wrong that something gets out there before you get to talk to your player. It’s just how I am, and I think there’s some GMs out there that agree with me.”

Kase, 23, seemed unfazed by the rumors of a trade. He was far more concerned about returning to form after season-ending surgery to repair a torn labrum. The right wing said he might play in at least one exhibition game and he expected to be 100 percent by the start of the regular season.

“This year I hope for 82 games,” said Kase, who had 11 goals and nine assists in 30 games in 2018-19. “Last season, it was last year. I look forward to this year. I can’t wait for the season. Nobody wants to be injured. Everybody wants to play 82 games. I do my jobs there. I try to do the best.”

Asked about the trade chatter, he said, “It’s just a rumor. I’m here and it’s good to be here.”

GETZLAF SIDELINED

Ryan Getzlaf was absent from practice, sitting out because of an undisclosed injury.

“If this were the season I’m guessing you would have seen him out there,” Ducks coach Dallas Eakins said of the 34-year-old Getzlaf, the oldest skater on the roster. “But a player of that level and importance to us, we’re going to err on the side of caution.”

Backup goaltender Ryan Miller, 39, is the Ducks’ elder statesman.

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As the Ducks’ Ondrej Kase deals with trade rumors, he keeps the focus on where he is now.

By Eric Stephens Sep 13, 2019

IRVINE, Calif. — Very little is needed for Ondrej Kase to break into a smile. A well-placed shot that beats a goalie. A friendly jab from a teammate, whether verbal or physical. Even bracing himself to answer questions from reporters with the knowledge that a touchy subject will be broached.

There was business to do on the ice. There has been business to deal with off it.

It is the business side of hockey that Kase has witnessed over the past few days. Signing a three-year contract extension last year with the Ducks, the team that invested in a seventh-round draft pick and helped groom him into a blossoming goal scorer? That was no problem. Learning that your team recently made you a central piece in trade talks for a certain Carolina Hurricanes defenseman? That can be a bit unnerving.

A lot of that business, as Kase simply calls it, gets revealed on social media. The specifics in his case were the possibility of being sent to Carolina for Justin Faulk. They still might be. The Ducks have (or had) been poised to do the deal if they and Faulk’s camp could agree on a long-term extension.

Which hasn’t happened. As more days pass, the likelihood seems to diminish. Faulk was in Raleigh on Friday for the start of Hurricanes’ training camp. Kase was at Great Park Ice as the Ducks fired up their season with sessions broken up into three groups.

Nothing has changed.

“It’s just a rumor,” Kase said. “I’m right here. And it’s good to be here.”

The 23-year-old right wing will seemingly keep a place with the Ducks as long as an extension with Faulk can’t be worked out. Faulk, entering the final year of his contract with the Hurricanes, reportedly agreed to waive his no-trade clause for a move to Anaheim only if he gets a fat new contract.

Kase has been left in the somewhat awkward position of grappling with his name being bandied about in the hockey universe. Few at Great Park wanted to get into the specifics of the winger handling the very real prospect that his team intended to trade him, even if it was for a potentially significant upgrade in a defensive corps whose depth has been whittled away.

Ducks general manager Bob Murray didn’t deny there have been talks to bring in Faulk, whose future with the Hurricanes was thrown into further doubt by their addition of free agent Jake Gardiner to an already deep blue line. Though Murray didn’t mention Faulk by name, he did reaffirm his openness to obtaining a right-shot defender even as he noted how some of his left-handed shooters can play the right side.

Players must deal with trade speculation. The way it was handled in this case bothers Murray. Raleigh News & Observer columnist Luke DeCock was the first to report that Kase was the return piece in the Faulk talks. Murray, who has long been effective at keeping his dealings close to the vest, didn’t like his player beingouted.

“It happens to all of us,” Murray said. “It happened in my career. As a player, this is the life we live. If you’re going to be a professional athlete, things are going to happen. Your name’s going to go out there. That is part one of that. That’s something we live with and have to — you just got to move on. Whether it’s out there or not.

“The second part of that, which is the disturbing part for me, is when things are out there — when things haven’t happened and some owner or whatever decides he’s going to garner some friendship with media and he’s going to get close to the media. He puts things out there … some of these people, I wish they were players at one point in their life. Obviously, they weren’t.”

Clearly, Murray had Tom Dundon in mind with his pointed comments. It isn’t known if the Carolina owner was the source, but Dundon does tend to follow his own impulses. So, is one of the NHL’s longest-serving GMs right to be upset? Perhaps it is simply the case of an executive’s feathers being ruffled when someone else airs dealings that were meant to be kept under wraps.

But in a league he’s been involved with for over four decades, Murray makes no bones about the cloth he’s been cut from.

“Because I am very old-school,” Murray continued, responding to a question about his players reacting to trade speculation. “I hate the trade deadline when things get reported before you get a chance to tell your player. Sorry, I’m old-school. I think that’s all wrong that something gets out before you get to talk to your player.

“That’s just how I am, and I think there’s a few other GMs that agree with me.”

On Friday, Dallas Eakins was formally opening his first training camp with the Ducks. Hired as the 10th coach in franchise history, Eakins spent a good part of his summer building relationships with players he wasn’t as familiar with as those he led in San Diego with the AHL’s Gulls.

Easing concerns over a talented young winger and his immediate future wasn’t part of the plan.

“Sometimes it’s total bullshit,” Eakins said. “I’ve seen it so many times. Guys’ names get floated and they’re not in play at all. In free agency, you see that a lot. But for me as the coach, all of that is white noise. It should be white noise to the players. It’s part of our business. We’ve grown up in it. Hey, your name is going to be out there特朗普mely sometimes, and other times it’s going to be total bullshit.”

“My job is I try to keep an eye on the player. And if I see that I think it’s visibly affecting him, then I’m going to grab him and remind him — we sit, and we have a little chat about it. It’s always a reminder that this is the business we’re in. And those things happen.”

Cam Fowler can relate. In a Ducks career moving into its 10th season, Fowler has routinely seen his name pop up in trade rumors. Some of those had legitimacy. Others were fanciful musings with zero substance.

Ignoring them has become more challenging. Information spreads instantly.

“I think it’s a lot more difficult now than it was even five, six years ago,” Fowler said. “Just because there’s so many outlets now. Once a story hits, you see it on Twitter. You see it on TSN. … You can type in anything. You can click a couple buttons and you see these things. So that makes it difficult.”

Much of the trade talk that surrounded Fowler has ceased since he signed his eight-year contract with Anaheim. But the defenseman acknowledged he didn’t handle the rumors all that well. His way of dealing with them was to lean on his family and friends for support.

Now 27, Fowler has come to understand that “it’s part of the territory” of playing in the NHL, especially in the era of a hard salary cap. Trade chatter is part of the normal discourse over the long grind of a season.

“For the most part, most guys go through it at least one point in their career,” he said. “Maybe multiple times.”

He has spoken with Kase and will do so again if he feels it is needed. But he also wants to tread lightly.

“It’s a delicate situation, right?” Fowler said. “Ondrej’s a great kid. He’s a quiet kid. If he doesn’t want to think about it, I don’t want to be someone to go and talk to him and bring it up. I hope he knows any of us would do anything for him if he’s struggling with it.

“At the end of the day, he’s going to go to work here. He’s a Duck, and that’s all that matters. That’s all you can control. At the end of the day, if something happens, as players it’s totally out of our control. Just part of the business.”

On Friday, Kase was the only one wearing a yellow jersey while the rest of the forwards were dressed in red, white, blue and gray. He also wore a different color than his teammates in other earlier informal, highly populated skates before camp opened.

Though it might have had the look of protecting an asset who could be changing locales, Murray said it was about being careful with Kase as he comes back from surgery to repair a torn labrum that ended his 2018-19
season in January. He said the winger is ahead of schedule and on track to start the regular season.

"The doctors are happy," Murray said. "The doctors are not worried. They just don’t feel he needs contact quite yet. I am sure he’s going to be playing in exhibition games and we’ll go from there. He’s done very well."

Kase is hopeful of participating in the preseason. Injuries in each of his three NHL seasons have kept him from realizing all of his potential. He had 20 goals in 66 games two seasons ago, and his 11 in just 30 games a year ago put him on a 30-goal pace over a full slate. He wants to prove that he can play in all 82 games. And he said a full range of movement came back "a while ago."

"But the (shooting) and stuff, I think a month ago," Kase said. "It's how I make the little steps."

Before the shoulder problem, it was concussions. As for the frustration of missing stretches of every season, he said, “It’s a tough question. Nobody wants to be injured. Everybody wants to play 82 games. Sometimes shit happens.”

Indeed. But Kase simply went about his business Friday, often handling it with a smile. There is no need to dig into what’s real or false about playing in Anaheim or elsewhere, and he has no wish to discuss that with his general manager, who wants to keep the trust factor intact.

“All I can promise my players is that nothing will ever get out from this organization,” Murray said. “And if anything ever does get out, I will found out how it got out and that person will no longer be with us. That’s all I can promise my players.”

Notes

It did not come as a surprise, but Murray indicated that Ryan Kesler and Patrick Eaves will not play this season. Kesler had his right hip resurfaced on May 9 — the second major procedure on the troublesome joint in two years — to relieve chronic pain. Eaves has had a recurrence of the muscle-weakening disorder that has limited him to just nine games with the Ducks over the past two seasons.

Murray was careful to not say whether the playing days of both players are over. Kesler has returned to Michigan with his family, and the GM suggested that the center and 2011 Selke Trophy winner is in good spirits. “He’s doing really well,” Murray said. “The resurfacing has worked. I’m not going to comment on the rest of his career, but that’s very doubtful at this point.”

As for Eaves, Murray said, “I won’t say he’s retiring, but he’s out for the year. Whatever you want to call what he had keeps resurfacing. He’s tried a couple of times. And him and his wife have just decided that’s enough for right now. I totally agree with that at this point in time.”

The Ducks will still have to pay the salaries of both, but they can gain significant flexibility under the salary cap by freeing up an additional $10 million for 2019-20 by putting them on long-term injured reserve. Cap Friendly has the Ducks with $8.5 million available without putting Kesler and Eaves on the long-term list.

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Arizona Coyotes

Open competition: Coyotes have 2 goalies with a ‘starter’s mentality’

BY MATT LAYMAN
SEPTEMBER 13, 2019 AT 5:48 PM

GLENDALE, Ariz. — If you’re waiting for the Arizona Coyotes to name a starting goaltender and choose decisively between Antti Raanta and Darcy Kuemper, you may not get the satisfaction you’re looking for. Of course, there’s not as much fun in that.

But there is evidence to back up the idea of blurring the lines between a starter and a backup goaltender. And Raanta, who has played strong when healthy, and Kuemper, who helped carry the Coyotes down the stretch last season, give Arizona two options in net heading into this year that the team feels good about.

“You know Antti’s deal. When he’s in there and he’s healthy, he’s a hell of a goalie,” head coach Rick Tocchet said. “Kuemps, was it 23 games straight last year? In tough buildings, tough games. Not too many goalies can do that. … So we have two guys that have a starter’s mentality.

“We’re lucky we have two capable guys that can go in there and do what they’ve done. So we’re excited about having the competition, and they’re excited about competing, too. In-house competition breeds success.”

From the sound of it two days into training camp, there will be a competition between Raanta and Kuemper. It just might not end before the season starts.

OPEN COMPETITION

“It’s an open competition, for sure,” general manager John Chayka said. “I think it’s going to be every single night. I think both goalies are at a stage of their careers where we know they’re going to be good goaltenders, so it’s not necessarily about that. It’s about finding that right balance in terms of workload, but also making sure that every single night for 82 games, we’ve got a goalie in net that gives us a chance to win.”

From the 2000-01 to the 2017-18 seasons, the number of NHL goalies in any given season who started at least 30 games never surpassed 40. In 2018-19, it spiked to 44. Conversely, the number of goalies who started at least 50 games was last year was just 17, the second-lowest number this century (2005-06: 16 goalies).

That could be an indicator that more teams are having goalies share the load. The New York Islanders’ Robin Lehner, for example, started 43 games last year. Thomas Greiss, their other goalie, started 39.

“Looking at different teams over the last couple years, there have been goalies who have been successful or teams who have been successful with two guys playing,” Coyotes goaltending coach Corey Schwab said. “Not exactly equal, [but] the Islanders were pretty close to equal. But you look at Dallas, you look at Boston, teams that have had success with both of their guys being a big part of their team.”

Schwab said the team doesn’t have a set formula for how it plans to use its two goalies. Instead, someone could play three games in a row and then they may take turns game-to-game. The benefit, he said, would be lightening the load for each goalie. Of course, health and performance both will be a factor in these decisions as the season goes on.

“I think it’s just you go day by day, and you see how things are going,” Raanta said. “We want to make the coach’s decision hard. We want to show that we both can play and we both can win the games. So I think it just more brings the fun part there. And also for the media, they always have to guess who’s starting, so it makes their job a little bit harder.

“But I think it’s going to be a fun battle.”

KUEMPER BACK FROM A BIG SEASON

With Raanta out due to injury last year, Kuemper set career-bests in save percentage (.925) and goals against average (2.33). He finished fifth in the Vezina Trophy voting and 22nd in Hart Trophy (MVP) voting.

Kuemper started 55 games, finishing tied for the best save percentage in the NHL among players who started at least 50 games.

“I always believed that I could do it, but it’s another thing to actually do it, that I could handle the workload and kind of carry the weight of all those games,” Kuemper said. “Now that I know I can do it and I can be that guy, it’s just about going out there and playing with confidence.

“We got two really good goalies and that’s going to be good for our team. I’m just going to focus on when I’m in there, doing my best job and when Antti’s in there, I’m going to be cheering him and the team on as well.”

It was a breakout season for Kuemper, and a huge boost to the Coyotes, who saw their starter go down with an injury. Often times, that’s a crushing blow for a team. It didn’t seem to be that big of an issue for Arizona last year, and Kuemper was the reason why.

“Every single year I’ve been here, we’ve had key goalie injuries,” Chayka said. “Until last year, we didn’t have that depth to really sustain when a goalie went down and it hurt our seasons, quite frankly. Going into this season, I know that we have some depth there if there are injuries, our team can continue to grow and win games, and it’s an important thing for a team.”

Kuemper said if it does come to a situation where he and Raanta share the workload, he’ll just “control what he can control.” But he did acknowledge that teams having a goalie tandem is becoming more of a trend.

“Lots of teams are going to that and I can see the benefits from a team standpoint, have both guys going,” he said. “I want to play as much as I can. But that’s not my decision, so all I can do is focus on doing my job when I get called upon.”

RAANTA RETURNS

Recency bias and the nebulous “injury prone” label may affect the narrative around Raanta, who has missed time with injuries in each of his first two seasons with Arizona.

But Schwab pointed out the unpredictable nature of injuries and that Raanta has followed the team’s instructions when it’s come to training and health.

“Number one, he’s done everything we’ve asked of him, as far as adjusting his workouts and everything he’s done,” Schwab said. “He’s come in, each year he’s in better shape than he was the year before, each year he’s put on muscle and he’s stronger, adjusted his training and his eating habits, everything about that. He’s done what we’ve asked.

“I think looking at last year, freak accident. How do you know? How do you know you’re going to end up in a certain position? And knees are tricky things. It’s not anything he could’ve done to prevent that. Time will tell as far as where he’s at.”

In the 2017-18 season, Raanta played 27 games after Jan. 1 and 16-6-4 with a stellar .942 save percentage.

“He put up Vezina-type numbers,” Schwab said. “So he played and he gave us a chance.”

Last year was a different story. Raanta played in only 12 games all season and didn’t play a game after Nov. 27. He had a .906 save percentage up to that point.

“It’s tough when you’re not playing,” Raanta said. “But it was great to see that Darcy just helped the team, and we was doing a really great job, so obviously you’re super happy for him and you want to see our team win, so it doesn’t really matter who’s in net. When the team is winning, everything’s good.”

A lot can change between the start of training camp and the start of the regular season; let alone the end of the regular season. But as it stood on day one of practices, the Coyotes had two options to look to for help in net. And they don’t seem to be overthinking it too much beyond that.

“[W]e’re confident in either guy,” Schwab said. “And however that plays out by the end of the year, who plays a certain amount of games. But I think both guys have shown when they’re healthy that they can play long stretches. It’s so hard to predict how the season’s going to play out, how each guy’s feeling, how are we doing as far as travel-wise.

“I think it’s a luxury that we have that we have two guys that the team’s confident in, either guy can step in.”

Arizona Sports LOADED: 09.15.2019
As preseason opener looms, Bruins lineup is an open book

By Matt Porter Globe Staff, September 14, 2019, 6:29 p.m.

Bruins players do sprints around the goal during training camp at Warrior Ice Arena on Friday, some 72 hours before the opening of their preseason schedule in New Jersey.

Bruins players do sprints around the goal during training camp at Warrior Ice Arena on Friday, some 72 hours before the opening of their preseason schedule in New Jersey. (WINSTON TOWNSON FOR THE GLOBE)

Soon comes opportunity.

The Bruins’ exhibition slate, which begins Monday night in Newark, N.J., against the Devils, is a prime chance for a half-dozen or more hopefuls to secure the few open spots on the wings.

Or, reshape the lineup from the middle out.

With the departures of third-liner Marcus Johansson (Buffalo) and fourth-liner Noel Acciari (Florida), the Bruins have at least two open wing spots in the bottom six. But coach Bruce Cassidy is open to the possibility of position changes, as newcomers make their cases.

Karson Kuhlman, who pushed David Backes out of the lineup in the Stanley Cup Final, opened camp as the No. 2 right wing, and has remained with David Krejci and Jake DeBrusk through two days of on-ice work. Assuming he maintains his grip — not guaranteed in the course of a six-game preseason, but so far he looks the part — the Bruins’ top six could carry over from the end of last postseason: Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron, and David Pastrnak, followed by DeBrusk, Krejci, and Kuhlman.

The rest will be revealed in games, that being what the Bruins have in free agent signees Brett Ritchie, the big (6-4, 220) right winger from Dallas, and former Winnipeg/Toronto center Par Lindholm (6-0, 183), who plays left wing. Lindholm has started off centering a bottom trio of left wing Jakub Lauko and right wing Chris Wagner, while Ritchie has opened camp on the right side of third-line center Charlie Coyle, with Anders Bjork on the left.

“I actually like that line. They’ve been good,” Cassidy said Saturday of the latter three, praising Ritchie’s size and strength on the puck, and the mental improvements made by the speedy Bjork, who has had a run of shoulder injuries the last two years. “He seems to have better awareness with the puck,” Cassidy said, “how he can hold onto it, where to go, give and go, that kind of thing.”

He may be better served developing in Providence. Danton Heinen, who played nearly every possible wing spot last year, has a leg up on Bjork because of his experience (162 NHL games to 50) and versatility.

In his lineup machinations, the left-shot Heinen is a “moving part because he can be a moving part,” Cassidy said. “We want to see how it shakes out with Krejci and DeBrusk. We want to see how does Lindholm play, does that allow us to move [fourth-line center Sean] Kuraly to a wing, or Coyle? How does Ritchie fit in, how does [David] Backes? Where do all the pieces go? Danton will end up in there somewhere.”

Speedy rookie Zach Senyshyn, whom Cassidy said is “taking the puck to the net well,” veteran Paul Carey, and 35-year-old Backes are less secure. Backes, a healthy scratch the last two games of the Cup Final, carries a $6 million cap hit and would give the Bruins $1.075 million in cap relief if stashed in the AHL.

Grzelcyk eager to go on

He was a hometown kid who scored in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final, wearing his favorite team’s jersey on the biggest stage in hockey, in a rink a mile away from his childhood home.

He barely celebrated. He didn’t smile.

Bruins defenseman Matt Grzelcyk shrugged Saturday when recalling his tumbling wrister from inside the left circle, which eluded St. Louis goalie Jordan Binnington and made it 4-1 with 2:10 left on that fateful night.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Grzelcyk said. “It’s your dream to play in that game. It’s the exact scenario you dream of.

More than three months later, his friends and family still don’t talk about it.

“They don’t want to bring it up, the game, because they don’t know how I’m going to react to it,” he said. “I just try to be up-front. It’s in the past at this point. There’s a lot to look forward to. It’s still early in my career.”

Grzelcyk, who has been dealing with an undisclosed injury, hurt himself in the gym early this summer. He is being monitored, and is unlikely to play in the first exhibition game as the Bruins are certain to need his services come opening night, Oct. 3 in Dallas.

Like the rest of the returning Bruins, he’s eager to get there.

“First couple weeks I didn’t think about anything at all,” he reflected on the post-Final nadir. “Anytime it was on . . . it’s inevitable to see things on social media, but I scrolled right past it. I feel I’m at the point now where I can relive it a little bit, look at it. It’s always going to be a sore subject, no matter what, but there’s a lot to be proud of.

“I think now the focus is challenging ourselves, because I’m sure a lot of people have their doubts, thinking we’re going to burn out or not be ready for the season. I think that’s what motivates everyone, especially the older guys who have gone through this process before.”

Nordstrom joins group

Joakim Nordstrom, rehabbing from a foot injury, joined the main group for the first time. He wore a red no-contact jersey and did not participate in an extended session of battle drills. “Step one for me today, just being back with the group a little bit,” he said. “Hopefully I wake up tomorrow still feeling good.” . . . Trent Frederic (undisclosed lower-body injury) also practiced with the main group . . . Bergeron (groin) continues to skate with skills coach Kim Brandvold . . . Zdeno Chara (jaw, elbow) went through a full, hard practice . . . Unsigned restricted free agent defensemen Charlie McAvoy and Brandon Carlo missed their third day of camp.

Boston Globe LOADED: 09.15.2019
Here’s why the Bruins are primed for another run at the Stanley Cup

By Matt Porter Globe Staff, September 14, 2019, 2:25 p.m.

The Bruins’ locker room, mostly the same since TD Garden opened in 1995, is being overhauled. By the time the first puck drops in that building Oct. 12, everything in their quarters will be sparkling: new stalls, fresh carpeting, and revamped lighting. Even the Spoked-B logo, previously woven into the rug (and don’t you dare step on it), will now hang from the ceiling.

As for the inhabitants themselves, they largely remain in their places. Unless the captancy group decides on a new arrangement, the stalls of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand, David Krejci, and David Pastrnak will line the far end. Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug will park near the main entrance. Tuukka Rask and Jaroslav Halak will sit opposite Jake DeBrusk, Danton Heinen, Charlie Coyle, and others in the supporting cast.

No bold reimagination was needed for a team that last saw that room under more somber circumstances, its season stopped 60 minutes shy of the Stanley Cup. It’s essentially the same group: Don Sweeney enters his fifth camp as general manager having parted ways with short-time contributor Marcus Johansson, hard-hitting plunger Noel Acciari, and no one else of import. He had to reserve his buckets for restricted free agents Charlie McAvoy and Brandon Carlo, who entered the weekend sans contracts, but few other big-picture issues worried him.

The structure of his team is rock-solid. Bergeron, Krejci, Coyle, and Sean Kuraly are as good a set of centers as any in the league. Speed, skill, and grit abound on the wings, though a few jobs are up for grabs. Rask and Halak are happy to share net duties for another year. The defense may have its early bumps, since Chara, 42, is on borrowed time. John Moore (shoulder) and Kevan Miller (knee) are recovering, and McAvoy and Carlo are contractual question marks. But there are no malcontents. Once everyone’s back in the room, there is more than enough depth and talent to make another run.

Related: What will the next generation of Bruins bring?

Aidied greatly by bargain deals for his three elite forwards (combined price tag of Bergeron, Pastrnak, and Marchand: $19.7 million), Sweeney has drafted and developed this franchise to the elite the last three years, after two years out of the playoffs. It has been the right method because a few kids a year have arrived to supplement the core. It has allowed Sweeney to make intelligent trades (Coyle for Ryan Donato; Johansson for picks) and free agent signings.

Though the McAvoy and Carlo deals are likely to eat up all the remaining $7.4 million in cap space and then some, and eventual extensions for Krug (who could command some $8 million on the open market) and DeBrusk, the Bruins this summer committed more money to their coach — Bruce Cassidy, believed to be earning in the $3 million range on a three-year extension this past week — than incoming talent. The July 1 prudence sits in stark contrast to some of Sweeney’s less-inspired signings, such as giving five years each to Matt Beleskey (2015) and David Backes (2016).

Winger Brett Ritchie, signed for one year and $1 million, is a big (6 feet 4 inches, 225 pounds) body who moves well, and struggled to score the last two seasons in Dallas (13 goals) after a breakout year in the Swedish top division. Maybe Ritchie wins a job as a No. 3 right wing, meshing with Coyle and left winger Heinen. Maybe Ritchie joins that rotating cast of buzzsaws on the fourth line, kills penalties, and chips in a few goals. Or Coyle and left winger Heinen are as good a set of centers as any.

The Pembroke-raised Bruins, a star at Silver Lake High and Boston College, lost his playing career, a job as a scout with the Penguins, and became estranged from his family in a haze of opioids and cocaine. His story became a 22-minute documentary, “Shattered,” produced and originally shown on Sportsnet in Canada.

The film, released in February 2018, came last Tuesday to the Regent Theatre in Arlington, as part of a speaking tour that has taken Stevens nationwide. Flanked by his sister, Kelli Wilson, and a panel that included Dr. Michael Hamrock of St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center and state Senator Cindy Friedman (D-Arlington), Stevens expanded on his story after the documentary.

“I’m not a natural speaker, but he is a dedicated one. In addition to his foundation, Power Forward (powerforward25.com), Stevens co-hosts an addiction-themed podcast called Crosscheck Radio.

“It’s the first thing I have to control,” said Stevens, who claims a sobriety date of May 17, 2016. “If I don’t control that, I have nothing. No family, no friends, no job . . . I’m pretty happy doing that, because I’m pretty happy with my life.”

A drinker but non-drug user as a young pro, he said trying cocaine in a New York City nightclub in the 1992-93 season “flipped a switch in my brain.” Some three months later, during a May 14, 1993, game against the Islanders, Stevens knocked heads in a collision with defenseman Rich Pilon, and thudded face first to the ice. Reconstructive surgeries left him with plates in his face and pills in his hand.

Related: Kevin Stevens and the fight against opioid use

Addicted and using during his subsequent stops in Los Angeles, Boston, Manhattan, and Philadelphia, Stevens was arrested a number of times and did “six or seven” rehab stints, he said. He was jailed in 2000, when as a member of the Rangers he was arrested in Collinsville, Ill., and charged with soliciting a prostitute and possessing drug paraphernalia. He bottomed out again in 2016, when he was found by police in Braintree with 175 oxycodone pills and charged with conspiracy to sell. Stevens was fined $10,000 and ordered to give motivational speeches.

“When I refused to do 36 talks in three years,” Wilson said. “He did it in six months, and hasn’t stopped.”

Massachusetts has one of the highest rates of opioid-related deaths in the nation. In 2016, there were 2,032 opioid-related deaths in the Commonwealth, and more than 70,000 nationally.

Admitting it sounds backward, Stevens said he felt he was in more pain when he was taking pills, the cycle of abuse spinning him more harshly. Weighing more than 300 pounds after his most recent arrest, he has steadily trimmed himself thanks to a combination of exercise, therapy, and diet.

He has more clarity today. Hopefully so, tomorrow. “When you’re running around chasing drugs, you really don’t have a purpose,” he said. “About anything. It’s a tough way to live. It’s important, a day at a time for me. Life’s pretty good.”
Forgotten Bruin made his mark

Bruins fans are forgiven if they don't remember Kevin Dallman.

Signed as an undrafted free agent in 2002 after playing juniors in OHL Guelph, the stocky, offensive-minded defenseman had a brief NHL career. Put it this way: Boston rookie Urho Vaakanainen has played in two NHL games, and he's already 20 away from passing Dallman for most wearing Bruins sweater No. 58. Dallman, who recorded one assist for the Bruins in 2006, suited up for 154 games over three NHL seasons between Boston, St. Louis, and Los Angeles.

Rather than toil in the AHL, where he spent three full years in Providence, Dallman opted to spend his prime years in the KHL. It was a heck of a run. Dallman, who hung up his skates last week, retired as the KHL's all-time leader among defensemen in scoring (135 goals, 395 points in 564 games) and made seven all-star teams.

He also has his Kazakhstani-Canadian dual citizenship, and took a pair of unsuccessful runs at Olympic qualification in 2013 and 2017, the latter along with fellow Canadians Nigel Dawes and briefly-a-Bruin Brandon Bochenski.

Catching up with new rules

The NHL's freshly printed rulebook states that regulation wins, rather than regulation and overtime wins, are now the first tiebreaker for a standings deadlock. Wake me when they ditch the loser point. Catching up on a few of the other changes for 2019-20, at least two of which address situations that affected the Bruins in last year's postseason:

- The Krug rule: A player whose helmet comes off must either get his helmet or leave the ice "within a reasonable period of time," i.e. after making a play on the puck. Had the rule been in place last season (and properly enforced), Krug would have been penalized for steamrolling St. Louis forward Robert Thomas in Game 1 of the Cup Final. However, Blues agitator David Perron would have drawn a minor of his own, for intentionally ripping off Krug's bucket. That, per the new language, would be a roughing minor.

- Video review: The NHL's focus is goals, rather than centralized review of every potential infraction. All goals will be reviewed by the NHL's situation room in Toronto, and play cannot resume until they have deemed it valid (ideally, this wouldn't take long). If Toronto observes an incident involving a potential goal that was undetected by on-ice officials, it can signal for a review at the next stoppage of play.

- Coach's challenge: The Bruins could have used this in Columbus, after Artemi Panarin's "puck off the netting" goal in Game 4 of the second round. Coaches, already able to challenge goalie interference and offside, can now do so for missed stoppages of play in the offensive zone that lead to goals. Additionally, challenges are not tied to timeouts remaining; all failed challenges now earn a delay of game minor, and subsequent misses earn double minors. A challenge for missed penalty calls is not in the works.

- Other video review: All non-fighting majors, match penalties, and double minors for high-sticking will now be reviewed by on-ice officials. The referee can only confirm his call, or change it to a lesser penalty. If a four-minute high stick was called on a player who didn't make contact, the referee can rescind that penalty. Toronto is not involved in these decisions.

- Faceoff locations: Following an icing, the attacking team will have its choice of offensive-zone faceoff dot. After a penalty, the power-play team will have its choice of end-zone dot. The Bruins, with right-shooting Patrice Bergeron and David Krejci centering their PP1 and PP2, respectively, are likely to take all their man-up draws on the right (strong) side.

Loose pucks

After San Jose named Logan Couture captain this past week, succeeding Joe Pavelski, seven teams entered camp without a player wearing the "C": Carolina, Detroit, the Rangers, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Vegas. The Leafs have been without one since trading Dion Phaneuf in 2016, and while it makes sense that Auston Matthews gets it one day, no one’s giving it to him with John Tavares on the roster.

So many who battle drug addiction never leave rock bottom, much less have a platform to help others get out. Stevens, though his road remains rough, understands his privilege.

ETC.

Boston, which in 2006 pinned letters to Zdeno Chara and Bergeron, employs the league's longest-serving captain and alternate . . . Those in Bruins management point to Brad Marchand as a reason why no player, no matter his pedigree, should be forever pegged as a renderer. When Marchand submitted a 36-64—100 line last season, he was 10 years into his career. Only one player in history has produced his first two 100-point seasons a decade in: Peter Mahovlich, who did it with the stacked Canadiens of the mid-70s . . . Not buying the Rangers as a playoff team, even after adding Panarin, Jacob Trouba, and prospect Kaapo Kakko. The Devils, with Taylor Hall in a contract year and a deeper lineup, should be dancing, and not just because Hall stated this past week it's "playoffs or bust." . . . Happy 40th birthday Sunday to Patrick Marleau, who remains without a contract. The active leader in games (1,657), Marleau would need nearly a full season to pass Ron Francis (1,731) for fourth all time. Marleau, who had blazing speed until his late 30s, needs six goals to jump Johnny Bucyk (556) for 27th . . . Alex Ovechkin, who turns 34 Tuesday, needs about six more years of 40-plus goals to pass Wayne Gretzky (894) for No. 1 . . . All the best to Vegas defenseman Shea Theodore, 24, who revealed he underwent June surgery for testicular cancer, and has made a full recovery. Early detection, as it is for so many, was the key . . . Among the attendees at the Kevin Stevens reception: Don Sweeney, Olympic hero Mike Eruzione, and always-sharp former Boston University coach Jack Parker, avidly sailing and playing tennis in retirement. Terriers and Eagles, getting along.

These days, Bruce Cassidy can afford some fine bespoke suits. In previous seasons, he didn't always have the finest stitching. He recently recalled a story from his third game as Bruins coach, against Montreal at TD Garden. His pants split before the game, leaving him walking around the locker room in dress shirt and underwear, drawing quizzical looks from players. Stitched up and ready for puck drop, he didn't think twice until a puck came into the bench, forcing him to bend over. He was once again feeling the breeze. "The camera wasn't on me, so thank God," he said. "The people directly behind the bench in the front row probably got more than they bargained for."

Boston Globe LOADED: 09.15.2019
Joakim Nordstrom on the mend for Bruins

By MARISA INGEMI | PUBLISHED: September 14, 2019 at 6:16 pm | UPDATED: September 14, 2019 at 6:17 PM

The Bruins got a step closer to full health on the third day of training camp.

Joakim Nordstrom skated with the full group for the first time Saturday, wearing a red non-contact jersey. Nordstrom fractured his foot at the end of the Stanley Cup Final and was rehabbing all summer.

"I felt good. It was fun to be back out there," said Nordstrom. "Step one for me today, just being back with the group for a little bit and it felt good. Hopefully wake up (on Sunday) and still feeling good.

"It was difficult not being able to work out and prepare as you want, but it is what it is. I had good help back home in Sweden. I came back here fairly early for camp, too, to make sure I could do whatever I can to be ready. I guess I skated full level today and it felt really good."

In his first season with the Bruins, Nordstrom played nearly every role and ended up with 12 points in 70 games. His versatility allowed him to slot up in the lineup in short spurts, along with centering lines while players were injured. But he primarily worked with the fourth line with Sean Kuraly and Chris Wagner.

"I don't think we changed too much throughout the playoffs or at the end of the regular season," he said. "I thought we tried to just keep building on what we were doing well."

Heading into his second year with the Bruins, there's a bit more competition among the bottom six forwards for depth. But Nordstrom's role, by the end of the season, was well established.

His playoff production was valuable, too, with three goals and five assists while playing in all but one of the postseason contests.

While the B's try to complete their forward puzzle, Nordstrom might be one of the forwards who, if healthy, should have a well-defined role.

"I thought I felt pretty good throughout the season," said Nordstrom. "Obviously towards the end I had a little bit better production than early on, but stayed with the same line for a longer period of time. Just confidence, too, that plays a role."

Bruins notes

Trent Frederic was with the main group for the first time after he missed the start of camp with a lower body injury. The center also missed part of the Prospects Challenge in Buffalo, but he's been skating prior to the Bruins getting on the ice before he was back as a full participant on Saturday. ...

Patrice Bergeron didn't skate with the group once again. He's still recovering from a groin injury that hampered him at the end of last season.

Boston Herald LOADED: 09.15.2019
Matt Grzelcyk healthy, looking to make impact for Bruins

By MARISA INGEMI | PUBLISHED: September 14, 2019 at 6:04 pm | UPDATED: September 14, 2019 at 6:05 PM

After missing part of the Stanley Cup Final with concussion symptoms, Matt Grzelcyk returned for the ultimate Game 7 loss where he contributed the Bruins lone tally.

The B’s missed him sorely while he was out; the Blues forecheck was tough as it was, and the Bruins couldn’t penetrate it without one of their best puck movers.

Especially with the status uncertain for Charlie McAvoy and Brandon Carlo, and the injuries to John Moore and Kevan Miller, Grzelcyk’s role is even more important this season. Even without the extra variables, Grzelcyk would be projected to take a natural leap and have more of a presence in the lineup.

It’s hard to believe that a year ago, Grzelcyk was slated to be the seventh defenseman and was forced into the opening night lineup only due to an injury to Torey Krug. This time around, it seems Grzelcyk has a role as a regular from the start.

He has skated with the full group during training camp after skating on his own earlier on in the week with an undisclosed injury, which he’s still keeping an eye on to make sure he doesn’t fall behind ahead of what could be an important, role-defining season.

“It’s going to be especially important early so that we don’t kind of burn out by the end of the year,” said Grzelcyk. “The coaching staff and medical staff are obviously very aware of it, and we as players too, but at the same time you want to make sure you’re in good condition, ready to go when the puck drops in October.”

The 25-year-old defenseman wouldn’t specify just what the injury he sustained was, but said he is basically back to 100 percent and can participate in everything.

“I’m feeling really good now,” said Grzelcyk. “Just talking to the trainers making sure there’s no hiccups along the way. Right now, I feel good. Just want to make sure after skates I go to check in with them right away, don’t want to keep anything a secret.”

Given that the blue line is lacking it’s usual faces, it’s more important than ever the Bruins defensive depth does stay in tact. They brought in Alex Petrovic on a professional tryout agreement, and they have young guys who did step in last season like Jeremy Lauzon, Urho Vaakanainen and Jakub Zboril.

But, at least while they’re without some of the defensemen they’d like to have in their full lineup, health is at its most important, and they might have dodged a bullet with Grzelcyk.

“Just getting ready to go to camp a few weeks before and did it in the gym,” he said. “Something I’ve never really gone through before, but luckily we had the medical staff here and I wasn’t too far away in order to communicate better.”

One stroke of luck for the Bruins is that despite the uncertainty on the back end, the left side has stayed together. Zdeno Chara, Torey Krug and Grzelcyk are all there; it’s all on the right side where the pieces have to fall into place.

Bruins head coach Bruce Cassidy mentioned Grzelcyk can slide to the right if they need him to, as he did at points last season.

But, in a perfect world, he can continue to grow his game on a healthy, fully intact defense as the Bruins embark on their Eastern Conference championship defense.

“It’s fun to be back and get back in the groove with the guys,” he said. “We’re looking ahead and looking for a new challenge.”

Boston Herald LOADED: 09.15.2019
Joakim Nordstrom (foot) makes his on-ice camp debut for the Bruins

By Joe Haggerty September 14, 2019 4:02 PM

BRIGHTON, Mass – The Bruins added some healthy bodies to their training camp group on Saturday as both Joakim Nordstrom and Trent Frederic (lower body) were added to the mix in Group A that practiced in the morning at Warrior Ice Arena.

Nordstrom fractured his foot at the end of the Stanley Cup Final and spent the entire summer rehabbing and healing from the injury, and sat out Friday’s on-ice opener before jumping on a day later. The return of Nordstrom and Frederic means that Patrice Bergeron (groin), Kevan Miller (fractured kneecap), John Moore (shoulder surgery) and Cameron Hughes (facial injury) remain off the ice with No. 37 closing in on a return as he skates on his own ahead of the main training camp groups.

The 27-year-old Nordstrom is coming off a strong season for the Black and Gold where he finished with seven goals and 12 points in 70 games, and used his versatility and gritty two-way game to help out in many spots along with a regular role on the penalty kill. He’s looking at another season with plenty of bottom-6 opportunities and Nordstrom is hoping to take advantage just as he did in a very effective first season in Boston.

Backes looks to hang on to a spot with Bruins

“I felt good. It was fun to be back out there,” said Nordstrom. “It was step one for me today being back with the group. Hopefully I wake up tomorrow and I’m still feeling good. It was difficult not being able to work out and prepare as you want, but it is what it is. I came back [to Boston] fairly early to do whatever I needed to do to be ready.

“I felt pretty good throughout the season. Toward the end I had better production than earlier on, I played with the same players for a time there and I think confidence plays a role.”

Here are the line combos and D-pairings from the second day of Bruins training camp:

Group A
Bjork-Coyle-Ritchie
Marchand-Studnicka-Senyshyn
Carey-Shen-Pastrmak
Cehlarik-Steen-Koppanen/Lantosi

D-PAIRINGS
Krug-Kampfer
Zboril-Breen
Vaakanainen-Petrovic/Zech

GOALIES
Rask Keyser Vladar

Group B
DeBrusk-Krejci-Kuhlman
Blidh-Kuraly-Backes
Fitzgerald-Gaunce-Heinen
Lauko-Lindholm-Wagner
Nordstrom-Frederic-Asselin

D-PAIRINGS
Chara-Andersson
Grzelcyk-Didier
Lauzon-Clifton
Sherman
David Backes plans on going 'balls to the wall' to hold on to NHL spot with Bruins

By Joe Haggerty September 14, 2019 2:05 PM

BRIGHTON, Mass – David Backes enters into Bruins training camp this season with the highest level of uncertainty since he signed on with the Black and Gold more than three years ago.

The 35-year-old produced career lows with his seven goals and 20 points in 70 games and then was a healthy scratch for the final three games of the Stanley Cup Final against his old St. Louis Blues team after some good moments in Boston’s post-season run. There was speculation he could be bought out of the final two years of his contract this summer and certainly, the Bruins would have traded Backes and his contract if they could have made it work.

Torey Krug seeking clarity on his contract as camp begins

There were also questions about Backes’ health after the Bruins made mention of a nagging issue this summer that was never fully explained, and led to questions as to whether he’d even be healthy for camp.

Still, Backes was never asked to waive his limited no-trade protection and No. 42 is here at camp and on the ice banging bodies and working his way through drills. It’s exactly what the B’s power forward intends to do while facing some stiff competition at right wing with Brett Ritchie brought in to basically fill the same NHL job description.

“[The offseason workout program] was as intense as it’s ever been. I’m looking forward to going out there and playing hockey this year,” said Backes, who has skated on the right wing with Sean Kuraly and Anton Blidh in the first two days of camp. “I channeled some of [last season’s frustration], I festered some of it away and let it motivate me and I can focus some on what I can do as an athlete having a great summer so I can do what I do best, which is to play the game.

“I don’t worry about other decisions that I don’t get to make and that are out of my control. What’s in my control is each shift, each play and each moment. That’s what I’m going to focus on all year. That moment and that drill will be my focus, and decisions out of my control will be made. It’s balls to the wall starting with the first drill of practice and I’m going to give it everything I’ve got until they tell that I’m done playing. That’s the way I’ve always been.”

So, what might happen to Backes?

Who are the under-the-radar players at camp?

He certainly could wind up in the AHL with Providence if he’s caught in a numbers game in Boston and shows that he simply can’t keep up with the pace of the NHL game anymore. There were moments where that seemed to be the case last season, but Backes will get a chance to show he can still play and further fill his role late last season when he dropped the gloves a little more often to protect his teammates.

That’s essentially what Bruce Cassidy wants to see out of Backes in camp, and it may be enough to keep him up with Boston given his leadership, toughness and the wide respect he garners in the dressing room.

“We had a conversation over the summer, a little bit [about] how the year ended. I don’t think we wanted to do it two days after Game 7. I think we were all a little bit raw for obvious reasons. We talked a little bit about my decision,” said Cassidy. “I thought [Karson Kuhlman] added a little more pep to our game and a different element than David, right or wrong. We revisited a little bit of what he could do to stay in the lineup this year and what’s ahead.

“It’s hard to predict what’s ahead. [Par] Lindholm and Brett Ritchie, they’re going to compete. Ritchie happens to play the same position as Backes. We’ll see what kind of advances Kuhlman has made. So, the message to David was ‘there’s competition on that side of the ice, but if he gets back to the level we feel he can get to, then he’ll have a spot.’ How much ice he gets from there? That’s going to depend on the growth of some players and the chemistry involved.”
After years of offensive brilliance, David Pastrnak is honing the defensive side of his game.

By Joe McDonald Sep 14, 2019

David Pastrnak’s defensive game has been a work in progress since he made his NHL debut with the Bruins in 2014-15.

The 23-year-old forward has steadily improved his two-way game, however, and continues to hone that aspect of his dynamic talent. On Day 2 of training camp on Saturday at Warrior Ice Arena, Pastrnak earned a loud ovation from his teammates after forcing a turnover and then retrieving the puck in the neutral zone during a drill against Charlie Coyle’s line. Pastrnak celebrated his play as if he just scored his 30th goal of the season.

“You watch clips from training camp and he’s in half of them, coming back into the zone in the right spots and stopping (plays) with his stick, so that shows you right there that he’s grown (that part of his game),” coach Bruce Cassidy said.

There’s no denying his offensive abilities, and Pastrnak has the numbers to prove it. No. 88 has registered three consecutive 30-goal seasons, including 38 during the 2018-19 season. Sure, it helps that he’s playing with Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand, but Pastrnak has developed into a prolific goal scorer.

“He’s getting better every year,” Marchand said when asked about his linemate’s defensive game. “It really helps when you play with a guy like Bergy and you realize how defensively responsible you have to be to be an elite player and take the next step. He’s doing that and I’m sure you’ve seen how incredible his stick has been so far in camp. He’s a Selke candidate early here (laughs).”

Pastrnak also understands once he becomes more of a complete player it will only add to his success on the ice, and Cassidy believes the forward has done a good job of balancing his offensive and defensive game.

“He puts more value on that part of the game,” Cassidy said.

Nordstrom healed, rounded into form

Forward Joakim Nordstrom, who suffered a broken foot during the Stanley Cup final last June, participated in his first on-ice session during training camp on Saturday at Warrior Ice Arena. Wearing a red no-contact sweater, he skated for half of the first session and said afterward he felt good.

“It was fun to be back out there,” Nordstrom said. “It was Step 1 for me today just to be back with the group a little bit. I felt good and hopefully wake up tomorrow still feeling good.”

After signing as a free agent with Boston prior to the 2018-19 season, his transition to the Bruins’ style of play took some time. His game finally clicked late in the season, and his production was key during the team’s playoff run.

“I felt pretty good throughout the season, but towards the end, I had a little bit better production than early on,” he explained. It also helped that he found some chemistry playing on the fourth line with a combination of Sean Kuraly, Chris Wagner and Noel Acciari.

“Staying with the same line for a longer period of time (gave me) confidence to play a role,” Nordstrom said. “We all play similar, and we made it clear early on what kind of game plan we wanted and how we needed to play to be successful. We didn’t change too much throughout the playoffs or the end of the regulation season.”

Because of his late-season surge in performance at both ends of the ice, many compared Nordstrom to former Bruins forward — and fellow Swede — P.J. Axelsson. Axelsson was the type of player that did all the little things well and was a stud on the penalty kill. Nordstrom is thrilled with the comparison.

“That means a ton,” he said. “Growing up and watching him play he was obviously a player that I looked up to. Watching him in the Olympics for Team Sweden and here with the Bruins, so to be compared to him is an honor to me.”

After a successful 11-year NHL career, all with the Bruins, Axelsson moved back to Sweden and finished his professional career with his hometown team in Gothenburg. Walk into any sports bar in Sweden, especially the popular Boston-themed O’Leary’s, and a No. 11 Axelsson sweater is framed and hanging on the walls.

Axelsson remains one of Sweden’s most famous athletes, behind tennis legend Bjorn Borg.

“He’s a big deal (in Sweden),” Nordstrom said.

The mask

During the summer, the NHL on NBC Twitter account asked fans to vote for their all-time favorite goalie mask. It was a bracket of 16 goalies, including Tuukka Rask, Gerry Cheevers, Curtis Joseph, Rick DiPietro, Ryan Miller, Ed Belfour, Ken Dryden, Marty Turco, Gary Bromley, Roman Turek, Gary Simmons, Michel Dion, Martin Gerber, Jean-Sebastien Giguere, Gilles Gratton and Vesa Toskala.

Rask won.

Learning that result was a bit of a surprise since many believe Cheevers’ stitches mask is the best all time. Either way, Rask was pumped at the voting results. His design has never changed and he’s only added his kids’ initials. He’s worn Winter Classic-themed masks but has stayed consistent with his regular bear mask.

“I’m not changing it now,” he said with a smile.

Cheevers’ famous mask (Joe McDonald / The Athletic)

Group A lines:
Marchand-Studnicka-Senyshyn
Carey-Shen-Pastrnak
Bjork-Coyle-Ritchie
Cehlarik-Steen-Koppanen/Lantosi
Krug-Kampfer
Zboril-Breen
Vaakanainen/Zech-Petrovic
Rask
Keyser
Vlada

Group B lines:
DeBrusk-Krejci-Kuhlman
Lauko-Lindholm-Wagner
Blidh-Kuraly-Backes
Fitzgerald-Gaunce-Heinen
Nordstrom-Frederic-Asselin
Chara-Andersson
Grzelcyk-Clifton
Sherman-Lauzon/Didier
Halak
Lagace

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Kyle Olson trying to stick with Sabres after Ducks chose to not sign him

By Lance Lysowski

Published Sat, Sep 14, 2019|Updated Sat, Sep 14, 2019

Kyle Olson met with Buffalo Sabres assistant general managers Randy Sexton and Steve Greely, as well as Rochester Americans coach Chris Taylor, at the conclusion of the Prospects Challenge on Monday.

The three explained to Olson why they were impressed with the 20-year-old center's play during the team's three games at the event and delivered the news he had been hoping for. Olson, a fourth-round draft pick of the Anaheim Ducks in 2017, was invited to join the Sabres for one of Ralph Krueger's first camps as coach.

Olson was the only non-roster player to receive an invitation, which provided him with an opportunity to prove he is ready for professional hockey. The Ducks chose not to sign Olson this summer after he scored 21 goals among 70 points in 62 games for the Western Hockey League's Tri-City Americans, his fourth season of junior hockey.

Olson called the Ducks' decision "disappointing," but he used the experience as motivation upon joining the Sabres for their prospect development camp in June.

"My goal was to be signed and have an NHL contract at the end of last year. I thought I had a pretty good year to do that, but at the end of the day it's their decision," Olson told The Buffalo News following Saturday's practice. "I can only focus on what I can control."

Neither Sexton nor Taylor spoke to Olson about a possible invite to Rochester's camp later this month. Olson plans to return to junior hockey for his overage season if the Sabres choose not to sign him, and he has already been chosen as captain for Tri-City, which lost in the first round of the WHL playoffs in 2018-19.

Olson, though, is making the Sabres' decision difficult. In addition to his outstanding performance in the Prospects Challenge, he has performed well during the first two days of training camp. Olson has played on a line with Arttu Ruotsalainen and Jean-Sebastien Dea, both of whom are competing for a spot on the Sabres' NHL roster, and they will likely skate together during their Sabres preseason debut.

Olson earned a spot on the Sabres' power play during the prospects challenge and scored the team's first goal of the tournament. He wasn't given a reason why the Ducks chose not to sign him. However, Olson's injury-shortened 2017-18 season likely didn't help his cause.

Olson scored 20 goals among 57 points for Tri-City in 2016-17, which led to the Ducks' decision to draft him. However, a knee injury limited him to four goals among 18 points in 36 games the following season. Olson recalled playing through pain after returning to the lineup too soon, but he managed to score six points in 10 playoff games.

His breakout season in 2018-19 included 19 multi-point games, including 11 with two or more assists. The Sabres are always in the market for young talented centermen who can skate well and score. If Olson earns a contract, he would join an organizational depth chart that includes Jack Eichel, Casey Mittelstadt, Dylan Cozens, Matij Pekar and Ruotsalainen, among others.

"It's extra motivation with the way things didn't work out with Anaheim," Olson said. "Extra motivation to prove myself to a new organization and show them what I can do."

Miller reacts to Theodore news

Defenceman Colin Miller said he's talked to fellow blueliner Shea Theodore, his teammate the last two years in Vegas, after Theodore revealed this week he had treatment over the summer for testicular cancer.

Theodore, 24, wrote about the stunning diagnosis in a first-person account published Thursday in the Players Tribune. He had failed a drug test while playing for Team Canada at the World Championships in Slovakia but doctors told him that the hormone level of hCG that triggered the positive result could, in fact, be a sign of cancer.
Candidate for one of the busiest summers among the Buffalo Sabres? Jake McCabe is high on the list.

"Got married, had a lot of other weddings to go to and signed a contract, so it was a pretty good summer," the defenseman cracked Saturday afternoon after practice in KeyBank Center.

McCabe and his wife, Gaby, were married in Madison, Wisc., where they both went to college, and honeymooned in Hawaii. Then McCabe avoided arbitration and got a two-year, $5.7 million contract as a nice wedding present.

"Nobody wants to go through arb, both player and team," McCabe said. "It was good to get it done before we went there and I'm extremely happy to be back here for two more years."

McCabe has certainly been one of the Sabres' more dependable defensemen the last four years but injuries, including a broken thumb and shoulder surgery, have ended his last two seasons prematurely. He played 77 and 76 games, respectively, in his first two years but only 53 and 59 in the last two.

How important is it for him to get back to that 75+ games level?

"Hey, why are you cutting me short seven games?" said a smiling McCabe. "I have 82 as my goal. That's very important to me. I've worked really hard over the summer to stay healthy and get healthier and I feel really good going into this camp."

As the summer wore on, McCabe got down to serious business. He's worked with his personal trainer to be ready for the season — and he's also kept his eyes and ears on a potential seismic shift in the relationship between the NHL and the NHL Players' Association.

McCabe is the Sabres' representative on the NHLPA Executive Board and was last week's gathering in Chicago where the board met with Executive Director Donald Fehr to discuss its options regarding an opt-out clause in the collective bargaining agreement signed to end the 2013 lockout.

Sunday — Sept. 15, 2019 — is the deadline for the PA to opt-out of the current deal, which is supposed to expire in 2022 (The choice can actually be made Monday so it comes on a business day). If that's the decision, the contract would expire next year and it could squarely put the 2020-21 season in lockout jeopardy. The NHL announced on Aug. 30 it was not opting out, would prefer to keep the current deal and perhaps even work out an extension.

"We have 700 players in the league and it's important for all of us to be on the same page and inform each other of our options," McCabe said. "That's how it's been the last week or so, getting everyone informed before we do make a decision."

Escrow is the No. 1 sore spot for players today. Essentially, players have a portion of their contracts taken out of their paychecks and then refunded to them at the end of the season based on the growth of hockey-related revenues and the salary cap after the contractually mandated 50/50 split of revenues with the owners is achieved.

But that refund has been disappearing and some players are complaining of upwards of 13 percent of their salaries being taken out now that bigger deals, especially front-loaded ones, are being handed out by some teams. And those are being negotiated even though revenues are not growing at the same rate.

The escrow issue really came to the forefront when Chicago captain Jonathan Toews flatly told the Arlington (Ill.) Daily Herald at the end of last season in an article published Aug. 31, "I'm no financial expert. All I see is that I've signed a contract and to me it's not exactly being honored. So I don't care what business you're in — to me that's kind of ridiculous."
The plan to try to transform Tage Thompson from a raw, lanky winger into an imposing power forward began at a Whole Foods in Milford, Conn.

Thompson, 21, was not eating unhealthy prior to this offseason, but he had trouble adding weight to his 6-foot-6 frame. So, he elicited the help of his trainer, Pete Pulaski, who joined Thompson for weekly trips to the grocery store. After purchasing a haul that often included grass-fed beef, chicken, fish and rice, Thompson would return to his home to cook and package a six-meal-a-day diet for the week ahead.

"It was a chore," Thompson told The Buffalo News following practice Friday. "It wasn't really fun because you have to force yourself to eat, even when you're not hungry. It was tough, but it was obviously worth it." Pulaski instructed Thompson to consume anywhere from 3,000-5,000 calories per day, depending on the intensity of workouts. Though eating became an arduous task, Thompson is elated with the results early in Buffalo Sabres training camp. He weighs 216 pounds, an increase of 13 from one year ago, and lost one percent of body fat.

Thompson feels stronger, particularly in his lower body, and better prepared for the grind of an NHL season. But will it be enough for him to earn a roster spot under new coach Ralph Krueger?

"It's going to be a challenge," Thompson acknowledged. "There are a lot of talented players here. My goal is to make the team and do whatever I can to help them be successful."

The disappointment of last season still doesn't sit well with Thompson. He failed to score in the Sabres' first 15 games and in his final 23 games before being demoted to Rochester on March 28. After beating out Alexander Nylander for a roster spot in training camp, Thompson finished with only seven goals among 12 points with a minus-22 rating in 65 games for Buffalo.

Though Thompson struggled with the nuances required to succeed in the NHL, Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill chose to keep the former first-round draft pick on the roster for much of the season because Thompson routinely flashed his potential in practices and games.

The breakout did not come until Thompson was given a prominent role with the Amerks. He scored six goals among nine points in eight regular-season games and added two goals in three games during their first-round playoff loss to Toronto. Thompson did not imagine he'd eventually be sent back to the American Hockey League after making the Sabres out of camp.

However, his time in Rochester reminded him what he can accomplish on the ice.

"I did have chances every game," Thompson said, reflecting on his time with the Sabres last season. "When they're not going in you get down on yourself and frustrated. When that happens you can start to put unneeded pressure on yourself. I let that get to me and it affected my game. Maybe if I put one or two in and got into a little bit of a groove things would have worked out differently. When you're not putting pucks into the net you have to be able to help your team in other ways, playing well defensively and in the neutral zone. I think that stint in Rochester gave me confidence back, and I'm excited for this year."

Pulaski built an offseason workout regimen for Thompson by watching each of his client's games with the Sabres last season. Pulaski, who owns Pulaski Strength Academy in Bridgeport, noticed Thompson struggled when battling with opponents for a loose puck or trying to out-muscle someone in front of the net.

Thompson's size is one of the many attributes that led the Sabres to acquire him in the Ryan O'Reilly trade, however, he had trouble using that to his advantage since he lacked the necessary lower-body strength.
The Sabres will see if Rodrigues connects with Skinner, too.
“I’m coming in here to be a go-to centerman, a second-line center if you want to say,” Rodrigues said. “The depth on our wings has really increased from last year to this year. It’s obviously going to give a player like me more opportunity to make plays, have guys that can finish.”

“I’m looking to take advantage of the opportunity that’s there and hopefully take it early and run with it.”

Lazar has to be feeling good, too. He signed with Buffalo after playing just one game with Calgary last season and immediately found himself with the Sabres’ top scorer.

4. Victor Olofsson-Rasmus Asplund-Marcus Johansson

How many Swedes does it take to light a goal lamp? Buffalo hopes the answer is three.

Fresh off their dominating performances in the Sabres’ prospect tournament, Olofsson and Asplund join one of the marquee offseason additions. Botterill and Krueger promised a true, open competition for roster spots, and Johansson’s presence proves Olofsson and Asplund will get every chance to make the NHL club.

5. Matej Pekar-Vladimir Sobotka-Kyle Okposo

Okposo and Sobotka are coming off one of the worst seasons of their careers. Okposo is eager to show he’s back and deserves a promotion.

“My job is to go play and be the best player that I can be, and that’s what I’m looking forward to doing this season is getting back to the player that I can be,” he said.

Pekar, a 19-year-old who is expected to head back to Barrie of the Ontario Hockey League, had an impressive Prospects Challenge with goals and fights. Skating with two NHLers (even two who struggled) is a great reward.

6a. Tage Thompson-Dylan Cozens-Remi Elie

6b. Zemgus Girgensons-Johan Larsson-Andrew Oglevie

It’s hard to give either line an edge, but it’s easy to say three of the players should be worried.

Girgensons and Larsson have been with the Sabres for six seasons. They have quite a few players to pass if they want to make it seven. Thompson was on the opening-night roster last year, but the rise of Olofsson and the arrival of Vesey and Johansson will make it a chore to repeat the feat.

“Tage has really improved and worked hard through the summer, and he’s in the competition,” Krueger said.

Cozens, this year’s first-round draft pick, will likely get a preseason game or two before returning to juniors (unless he dominates). Elie and Oglevie will probably start in Rochester.

8. Scott Wilson-Artoo Ruotsalainen—Jean-Sebastien Dea

This is a tough spot for Wilson and Ruotsalainen. Wilson is competing for the job as 13th forward. Ruotsalainen has the option of returning to Finland if he doesn’t make the Sabres — and he’s got quite the climb for that to happen. Dea is expected to be a leader for the Amerks and among the first recalls.

Extras: Kevin Porter, Kyle Olson, Sean Malone, Eric Cornel

Porter, Malone and Cornel have AHL contracts with the Amerks, while Olson is hoping to get one after an invite to camp and the prospects tourney.

Defensive pairs

Before getting to the rankings, let’s just say defense is harder to handicap than the forward spots. One practice group had an uneven number of players, so the pairs fluctuated. And with so many viable candidates with NHL experience, it’s not easy to say who was ahead on Day 1.

But we’ll give it a shot.

1. Rasmus Dahlin-Henri Jokiharju

Dahlin is Buffalo’s top blueliner, so he goes in the No. 1 slot. But the odds of this pairing staying intact are slim. The Sabres have high hopes
for Jokiharju after acquiring the 20-year-old from Chicago, but it’s not clear whether he’s ready for a full-time NHL gig.

Putting him next to Dahlin allows the Sabres to find out.

2. John Gilmour-Rasmus Ristolainen

Until Ristolainen gets beat out or traded, we’ll designate the longtime top-pair player as a No. 2. Krueger said he liked what he saw in the opening practice.

Gilmour, who signed after scoring 20 times for the Rangers’ AHL team, gets an opportunity to make a solid first impression.

3a. Casey Nelson-Brandon Montour

3b. Marco Scandella-Colin Miller

3c. Jake McCabe-Will Borgen

The first five are established NHLers, and Borgen is on the cusp of being ready. So they’re in a dead heat.

The good news for Buffalo is Montour has fully recovered from a knee sprain suffered at the World Championships.

“I have to wear a brace, but other than that it’s 100 percent,” said Montour, who wants to build on his 20 games with the Sabres last year.

“I’m still a younger guy and still kind of coming into my role and knowing what my strengths are and how I can play and how I can be a key part of this team.”

6. Brandon Hickey-Casey Fitzgerald

They played together in the Sabres’ prospect tourney and could remain together as one of the Amerks’ top pairings.

7. Devante Stephens-Zach Redmond

Redmond has an AHL contract, and Stephens is hoping to play in Rochester after spending most of last season in the ECHL.

Extra: Jacob Bryson

Injured: Zach Bogosian (hip surgery), Matt Hunwick (neck), Lawrence Pilut (shoulder surgery)

Pilut is expected back in about a month, while Hunwick’s career is likely over. The Sabres don’t have a timetable for Bogosian.

“He’s just training off the ice,” Krueger said. “We’re not expecting him in the near future.”

What Krueger and the Sabres are expecting is fierce competition for playing time. The players know where they’re starting. They have about two weeks to show where they should finish.

“You’re going to have other conversations with me,” Krueger said. “We need to nail the lineup.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
BUFFALO, N.Y. — Life is about experiences for Linus Ullmark. One of the most happy-go-lucky players in the Sabres locker room, Ullmark is coming off his first full NHL season, one that provided a lot of new experiences on its own.

After three seasons in Rochester, Ullmark was tapped by general manager Jason Botterill as one of his goalies to play in Buffalo at the end of the 2017-18 season. After Carter Hutton was signed that summer, the Sabres tandem was set, and the time for Ullmark to grow in the NHL and potentially become the No. 1 goalie began.

It didn’t quite go according to the plan. After the hot start in the first half of the season for the Sabres and the goalies, things went south in December and got worse from there.

From the end of the 10-game win streak in November through the rest of the season, Hutton and Ullmark had matching .900 save percentages. Later in the season, things got a bit worse for Ullmark. In his final 17 games, he went 5-9-2 with an .890 save percentage. In Hutton’s final 18 games, he went 3-11-2 but had a .902 save percentage. The sum: It was a missed opportunity for Ullmark to become the No. 1 guy.

“When you get a chance to win a game, you saw every game is an opportunity,” said Ullmark, 26. “So every game you go out there and you lose is a missed opportunity.”

Ullmark’s rise to Buffalo came after he posted a .912 save percentage in 127 games with the Americans of the AHL. In his final season with Rochester, he went 21-12-10-2 with a .922 save percentage and a 2.44 goals-against average. Going from a wildly successful season to one that was a wild roller coaster ride with the Sabres didn’t cause Ullmark to second-guess his abilities.

“It definitely was tougher the longer we got into it,” Ullmark said. “I thought I can handle it better, being in the minors for a few years playing a lot of games, but it’s a totally different thing, a whole different beast to tame when you get up here in the show. I’m looking forward to (this season), I know I got a lot of things in the back of the trunk that I can pull out for the season.”

An up-and-down season for a player in his first full season could have been difficult to digest. For Ullmark, it was all a demonstration that there’s more to being in the NHL than just playing the games.

“(The season) is hard, and that’s one of the reasons I thought this all was one of the things that got me to slow down and (made it) seem worse than they actually were just because it’s such a long season. You think you prepare for it, but just mentally it was tougher,” Ullmark said.

Ullmark and Hutton will again be the tandem in Buffalo, and even though the numbers weren’t ideal, a new season brings new hope. While coach Ralph Krueger wants competition from all his players throughout camp, for the goalies, it’s done a little differently.

“There’s so many things that are out of your control, whether you’re the No. 1 guy or the No. 2 guy,” Hutton said. “When you’re playing, you’re playing, right? This isn’t like football, where there’s one guy playing all the time. There’s both of us, and for us to have success, we need to have both goalies be successful. I think there’s this environment that’s created that we’re competing against each other. I’m more believing that you’re competing against yourself. You’re just trying to improve and get better every day. And for the general success of the team, the better Linus does, the better I do, the better we do as a whole and you see as teams do better and win, everybody prospers.”

For Ullmark, getting away for the summer after a tough season meant heading home to Sweden. There, he got back to the gym for workouts and showed the progress he made on Instagram.

“I’ve always tried to improve the strength and the conditioning and all that stuff, but more of a putting it out there to see that, too,” Ullmark said.

“You have a lot of guys in the show, they kind of push out those workout videos or posts or whatever, to just kind of show the fans that you’re actually working. Like some guys, they get to see that you’re working hard and that you want to improve and you’re doing what it takes to be a better self every day. And you know, this is something new for me, but I haven’t made any big changes in the actual workouts that I’ve done before.”

Social media can be a difficult route for pro athletes to show how they’re trying to reach their goals. It’s a platform where everyone has an opinion, and sometimes those opinions are unkind.

“There’s a lot of pressure, there’s a lot of outside pressure, especially with the younger generation that live on social media, and things can get in your head,” Hutton said. “Ralph talks about a cocoon, just kind of blocking out the outside noise. Truthfully, if there’s a problem with your game, management’s going to address it and, you know, everybody has an opinion and it’s easy to get caught up in that. When things are good and things are going great, it’s easy to get a little too high or get a little too low. So I think for him just managing the season, he’s a heck of a goalie and you know we have each other’s back, and that’s the main thing. The main thing I think that we both try to demonstrate as we support each other and, you know, we’re playing for the Sabres, not for an individual.”

Ullmark’s attitude is so positive that he was even able to crack a smile about the salary arbitration process. He was a restricted free agent over the offseason and filed for arbitration, which led to a one-year, $1.325 million contract. Going through arbitration is sometimes an anxious affair for the player and the team, but Ullmark considers it another experience, another chance to learn.

“I’m not saying that going into arbitration was fun, I’m just saying that I’ve found it interesting,” Ullmark said. “Just the whole process of doing it — leading up to it being there — the whole experience was more of a positive side than it wasn’t a negative side, because in the end, I was going to come out of it with a contract, not if I’m going to have a contract or not. So that took kind of the biggest stress level out of it so I could go in there and just be, like, enjoy the process and everything.”

Experience helps people grow, and experience for NHL players can help them adapt better to changing circumstances. With prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen looming on the horizon for the Sabres, stress could be a factor for Ullmark as he tries to make his own way. But he says the future and the opportunity to be the No. 1 goalie for the Sabres are still his to seize.

“There’s always going to be great goalies coming up from underneath, so I don’t feel any more pressure,” Ullmark said. “If I go out there and win my games, I don’t think they’re going to pull me and put me on the bench or kick me off the team. So if I’m playing, I’m doing what’s needed to be done, coming in with a smile on my face, and be a great teammate. That’s everything that I can possibly ask out of myself every day.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Flames forward Jankowski looked to MacKinnon to improve skating in off-season.

There is plenty of footage to work with.

Over 150 big league game’s worth.

But the most recent stuff, the Calgary Flames’ springtime exit from the post-season dance, was the perfect material Calgary Flames skating coach Dawn Braid needed to show Mark Jankowski ways he can improve.

“She pulled a lot of clips from playoffs, because obviously, (Nathan) MacKinnon is a really good skater,” explained the 6-foot-4, 205-lb. centre, taking time on Saturday to chat during the team’s fall training camp. “She pulled some of his clips and how he is powerful right off his first few steps, so she did a lot of video on the playoffs.”

Their main summer-time mission?

Working on Jankowski’s ever-important opening strides.

“Everyone has things they’re better at or things they need to improve on, and I know that’s something I wanted to improve on,” Jankowski said. “It was a lot of technique stuff. You almost try to jump out of the gates and move your feet quickly and gain as much ice as you can for your first few steps.

“It’s definitely a little harder as a big guy. One of my strengths is that I can use my long stride at my top speed. The focus on trying to get to your top speed as quick as possible.”

They worked on driving his lead knee up and forward. They worked on lengthening his already lengthy stride, instead of taking quick steps. They worked on his mind-body connection.

They worked.

Skated.

And skated some more.

Renting a house in Oakville, Ont., for the first time in his professional career, Jankowski took his off-season training seriously. Skating, of course, is always a priority, but even more so as the pace of the National Hockey League increases season after season.

“This game is getting faster and faster every year,” Jankowski said. “If you’re not improving on your skating, then you’re falling behind. I think that’s something I put a big focus on was my skating and my first few steps and just trying to gain that speed.”

Jankowski turned 25-years-old on Friday, his birthday coinciding with the start of Flames training camp, at least the on-ice portion. It is his fourth fall camp with the Flames, another year older and another year of development at the NHL level.

In the blink of an eye, the 2012 first-round pick (21st overall) has all of a sudden amassed 152 NHL contests, scoring 31 goals and 26 assists in that span. Last year, he deposited 14 markers and 18 helpers in 79 games, largely centring the team’s third and fourth lines.

But his stock and his reputation as being a steady centre is improving. There is a sense that he has arrived in the NHL as a regular. (No better evidence of that than his name being in the mix in the summer-time Nazem Kadri deal which, eventually, fell through as the pepper-pot forward decided to take his talents to the Colorado Avalanche.)

And Jankowski, who is in the final campaign of a two-year contract he inked last summer, is focused on taking another step in his development in 2019-20 — and that started with his skating in the off-season.

“I definitely think I’ve built off my rookie year last year and had a good season,” Jankowski said. “I’m still trying to improve off that and build on,
When the topic of the Calgary Flames blueline arose this off-season, where did the conversation go?

The (Young and fresh) reigning Norris Trophy winner?
The solid second pairing of Noah Hanifin and Travis Hamonic?
The emergence of Rasmus Andersson?
The up-and-coming Juuso Valimaki and his unfortunate summertime knee injury?

If you didn’t, however, mention the oft-forgotten Oliver Kylington and the progression of the 22-year-old whip-smart defenceman, that is OK.

“Sometimes I don’t read that much about what you guys (the media) are talking about anyway,” Kylington said with a grin, taking time on Saturday to chat at the Flames’ fall training camp.

No offence taken … Kylington prefers to stay under the radar.

The 2018-19 campaign was his first real taste at the National Hockey League level, receiving the call from the American Hockey League’s Stockton Heat in late November when the aforementioned Valimaki went down with a high-ankle sprain on Nov. 23 in Las Vegas.

Kylington played on the Calgary club’s third pairing with Rasmus Andersson for a large portion of the season beyond that, missing some time when he blocked a shot in February and when he was replaced in the lineup for the final months of the season by Oscar Fantenberg and Dalton Prout.

In total, the Stockholm native logged 38 games last season, scoring three goals and adding five assists. It was progression, for sure, considering he’d been in the AHL for the entire 2017-18 campaign.

This fall, his goal is to earn a spot as an everyday NHLer, off the bat.

“I was disappointed to get sent down (at the start of the 2018-19 campaign), right after training camp,” Kylington said. “I just wanted to prove to everyone else that they were wrong (for the demotion to the AHL). Deep down, I thought to myself that I wasn’t going to go back and feel sorry for myself. I wanted to prove myself — and I think I showed that when I came up here — that I could help the team win games and be part of something.

“It was a learning experience, but I think I took that and made something good out of it.”

And when one door closes, another opens as Valimaki’s injury seems to free up a spot on the back end. With the first four spots locked up by Mark Giordano, TJ Brodie (likely), Hamonic, and Hanifin, that leaves at least three spots open — the third pairing and, at least, one spare defenceman.

Kylington is hoping to be considered, but he’ll be up against Andersson, the newly (re)signed Michael Stone, off-season addition Brandon Davidson and a handful of PTOs, including Eric Gryba and Andrew MacDonald.

“Last year, I felt ready — I felt like I could play here,” said Kylington, who has been with the organization since 2015 when he was selected in the second round and 60th overall. “This year, I think maybe the coaching staff knows me more and knows what I can do at the NHL level, so I think I am just going to be myself and play like I did when I came up here and when I played when I was up here for the rest of the season. I want to show them I’ve developed into a better player than I was last year.”

The opportunity motivated Kylington this entire off-season.
While found money for the Flames, being a sixth-rounder is costing Andrew Mangiapane

By Darren Haynes Sep 14, 2019

Is Andrew Mangiapane being punished for where he was drafted? Because from afar, that’s sure how it appears.

When the Calgary Flames’ training camp got underway in earnest Friday with players hitting the ice for the first time, there were two notable players missing — restricted free agents Matthew Tkachuk and Mangiapane. While Tkachuk’s absence isn’t a shock given the number of high-profile RFAs across the league, the big-dollar figures involved in that negotiation and the Flames’ precarious cap situation, the same cannot be said for Mangiapane.

For a player with less than two-thirds of an NHL season on his résumé, what could possibly be the issue? How far apart could these two sides be? Making the situation even more perplexing was learning through a source Friday that Mangiapane’s representation has come down from their original ask and has put in front of general manager Brad Treliving both a one- and a two-way contract in and around the $590,000 range.

The two-way offer is for slightly more, as is standard with these types of situations. A player will typically accept fewer dollars for the security of a one-way deal, even though in this instance, it’s essentially a moot point. Any grappling over a two-way contract or not, from either side, would be a head-scratching hill to die on considering there’s virtually no way the now waiver-eligible Mangiapane will be sent to the minors anyway because he would first have to be placed on waivers, where he would be claimed faster than you can say the words “Paul Byron.”

Given the NHL’s minimum salary increases from $650,000 to $700,000 for 2019-20, that puts the two sides at less than $200,000 apart.

While that might seem like small change in a league in which each team’s salary cap is $81.5 million, that extra $150,000, give or take, is a bigger deal for Mangiapane. In math that the rest of us can relate to, if the team’s salary cap is $81.5 million, that extra $150,000, give or take, is a bigger deal for Mangiapane. In math that the rest of us can relate to, if the team’s salary cap is $81.5 million, that extra $150,000, give or take, is a bigger deal for Mangiapane. In math that the rest of us can relate to, if the team’s salary cap is $81.5 million, that extra $150,000, give or take, is a bigger deal for Mangiapane.

This is the case with Mangiapane, too.

Look at other NHL players, also age 23, also wingers, out of the same draft class (or should have been), all of whom sport similar career numbers, and it could be argued the only thing Mangiapane has done for the Flames, given their captain and Norris-winning defenceman was never selected.

As a refresher, Mangiapane, undrafted into the OHL also, was a rookie in Barrie in 2013-14 when he went 24-27-51 in 68 games. He then erupted the next season, more than doubling his production to 43-61-104 in 68 games. Even with those massive numbers, it took until pick 166 in the sixth round of the 2015 draft before Calgary took a chance on the then 19-year-old. That’s essentially Round 13 for him, if you’re keeping track.

Shouldn’t there be a statute of limitations around how long you were picked in the draft can be held against you? Because as I’ll explain later, it is negatively affecting Mangiapane’s earning power at this precise moment. You’d think if there’s one team that should be sympathetic to the who-cares-where-you-were-drafted movement, it should be the Flames, given their captain and Norris-winning defenceman was never selected.

For further examination, since listing comparable players is how contracts are often negotiated in this business, here is the aforementioned shortlist of similar wingers production-wise, each with their career NHL point totals. All were draft-eligible in 2014 and all went that June, except for Mangiapane. Josh Ho-Sang, Brendan Lemieux and Hawryluk went 28th, 31st and 32nd overall, respectively. Blais went in the sixth round, 176th overall. All five finished their three-year entry-level contract last season, and other than Mangiapane, each has signed a new one-year deal this offseason.

Andrew Mangiapane, CGY | 54 gm, 8-5-13
Brendan Lemieux, NYR | 72 gm, 13-5-18
Josh Ho-Sang, NYI | 53 gm, 7-17-24
Jayce Hawryluk, FLA | 42 gm, 7-5-12
Sammy Blais, STL | 43 gm, 3-4-7

Production-wise, Lemieux — a teammate of Mangiapane’s for three seasons in Barrie — is on the higher end, albeit slightly. That was reflected in his signing the biggest contract of the bunch Thursday night, inking a $925,000 one-way deal with the New York Rangers.

In Ho-Sang and Hawryluk, you have two players who over the summer signed their qualifying offers, which were two-way deals at $874,125 in the NHL, or $70,000 in the minors.

Blais, after being in and out of the lineup during the regular season, made his playoff debut in Game 6 of the second round. He scored that night in helping the Blues to a big win against Dallas, setting up Game 7, and he never came out of the lineup again. Rewarded for his steady postseason contributions, Blais inked a one-way deal for $850,000.

If you’re Mangiapane, why not just sign your qualifying offer, like Ho-Sang and Hawryluk? Well, that’s the catch. I’m certain he would have by now, had his qualifying offer been the same, but that’s where being a late draft pick can negatively affect you. Mangiapane’s qualifying offer from the club was considerably lower at just $715,000, a byproduct of what he earned for a base salary in the final year of his entry-level contract, which was the league minimum of $850,000. Ho-Sang and Hawryluk, on the other hand, as high draft picks, earned an NHL base salary of $832,500 in their final season of their ELC — thus their significantly higher qualifying offers.

Accepting the NHL minimum on your ELC like Mangiapane did is normal for later-round draft picks. Recent Flames signings Martin Pospisil (fourth round), Adam Ruzicka (fourth round), Eetu Tuulola (sixth round), Matthew Phillips (sixth round) and Dmitry Zavgorodnyi (seventh round) were all handed identical ELCs in that regard — NHL minimum through those three years for any time spent with Calgary. Guys who earn more — like Ho-Sang and Hawryluk — are the shiny first-rounders Matthew Tkachuk and Juuso Valimaki. Even second-rounders Dillon Dube ($800,000), Rasmus Andersson ($775,000) and Oliver Kylington ($750,000) are also on deals that by Year 3, as illustrated, have base salaries above the NHL minimum.

But once three years have passed, surely the playing field should be level for all players.

AHL production

If you look at the minor-league careers of the aforementioned comparables (two of which my source indicates are comparable players offered up by the Flames), there’s still no evidence Mangiapane should be in the income bracket below. In fact, his minor-league production — often a precursor to NHL success — is the best of the bunch.

Mangiapane
AHL, age 20 | 66 gm, 20-21-41, 0.62 PPG
AHL, age 21 | 31 gm, 21-25-46, 1.48 PPG
AHL, age 22 | 15 gm, 9-8-17, 1.13 PPG
Lemieux
AHL, age 20 | 61 gm, 12-7-19, 0.31 PPG
AHL, age 21 | 51 gm, 19-24-43, 0.84 PPG
Ho-Sang
AHL, age 21 | 50 gm, 10-26-36, 0.72 PPG
AHL, age 22 | 50 gm, 8-23-31, 0.62 PPG
Hawryluk
AHL, age 21 | 47 gm, 9-17-26, 0.55 PPG
AHL, age 23 | 28 gm, 7-21-28, 1.00 PPG
For those who subscribe to the what-have-you-done-for-me-lately way of thinking, again Mangiapane has been the best of the bunch. After the NHL All-Star break last season, Mangiapane was one of the Flames’ most productive forwards, despite limited ice time and no power-play opportunity.

Mangiapane | 31 gm, 8-4-12, 10:49 TOI
Lemieux | 31 gm, 6-4-10, 11:25 TOI
Ho-Sang | In the minors
Hawryluk | 26 gm, 4-3-7, 10:04 TOI
Blais | 8 gm, 0-1-1, 10:00 TOI

Any way you slice the last 2 1/2 months of the regular season, it was an impressive body of work for Mangiapane, accomplished while skating on the Flames’ fourth line with Derek Ryan and Garnet Hathaway.

— DARREN HAYNES (@DARRENWHAYNES) SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

While second to Blais in terms of impact, especially considering the latter ended up hoisting the cup, Mangiapane nonetheless was still able to author a beautiful unassisted goal, which was the game-winner in the Flames’ only win.

Mangiapane | 5 gm, 1-0-1, 10:57 TOI
Lemieux | DNP
Ho-Sang | DNP
Hawryluk | DNP
Blais | 15 gm, 1-2-3, 11:58 TOI

Finding a hidden gem like Mangiapane in the sixth round of a draft is found money. The more common outcome with picks that late is they don’t even sign with the organization, never mind go on to have the impact Mangiapane has had early in his career, which has him tracking to be a fixture in the lineup for many years to come.

It’s time for Treliving to get off his wallet and spend some of that found money on a kid who has earned it.

He hasn’t had the type of impact that got Sam Bennett (two years, $3.9 million) and Mark Janowski (two years, $3.35 million) more lucrative multiyear deals out of their entry-level contracts, but he’s not asking for that, either.

He just wants the same money he would have gotten on a qualifying offer had he been a second-round pick originally. Considering he’s been performing like a second-rounder — only seven players from the second round of 2014 have played more games, and only five have scored more goals — that only seems fair.

The player has moved from his original ask. Now it’s time for the team to show good faith and move from their original offer so instead of practicing with the Barrie Colts, Mangiapane can get back on the ice where he should be — at the Saddledome with the Calgary Flames. When he finally does arrive, he could likely be in the top nine, too, a role that would return great value for the club already, never mind any top-six usage he potentially gets this season.

Time to end this silliness.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Carolina Hurricanes

In Hurricanes’ entire time in NC, there’s never been a training camp like this

BY LUKE DECOCK
SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 04:30 PM

Even after training camp started, the Carolina Hurricanes managed to step up the competition. Already crowded with players fighting for a sparse few roster spots at every position, late arrival Fredrik Claesson took the ice Saturday, the kind of veteran depth defenseman the Hurricanes could have used when they started running out of bodies deep into their playoff run last spring.

Claesson is technically on a tryout, but the Hurricanes have every intention of signing him, and with Justin Faulk still here after a trade last week with the Anaheim Ducks fell through, Claesson is one of a handful defensemen competing for a maximum of three spots at the bottom of the defensive depth chart. That doesn’t even include Trevor van Riemsdyk, who is continuing to recover from shoulder surgery.

Things are just as crowded in goal, where it looks like Petr Mrazek and James Reimer will start the season 1-2, but Anton Forsberg and rookie Alex Nedeljkovic will be given every opportunity to force the issue, with the Hurricanes potentially losing one of the three veterans on waivers.

And while the forward group appears to be set, holdovers from last season like Warren Foegele and Brock McGinn will have to fight to keep their spots on the depth chart.

In the 20-plus years the Hurricanes have been here, there’s never been a training camp like this, with this much legitimate competition for important jobs. There may have been an open spot on forward or defense here or there, but in most seasons you could write down the 23 for opening night in ink at this point in camp, and only something truly rare and extraordinary could change that.

A year ago, there was maybe one forward spot open, and even that was quickly settled. This is a completely different scenario.

Even without the semi-retired Justin Williams and unsigned Sakari Mannala, who will apparently remain in Finland, the Hurricanes have questions to answer at forward, where Brian Gibbons, Jordan Martinook, Martin Necas, Foegele and McGinn are competing for two open third-line winger spots. In Necas’ case, that’s probably the difference between starting the season in Raleigh and Charlotte; there’s no point in keeping him up here to play on the fourth line.

Watching the four goalies sort out their pecking order could potentially be fascinating, but it’s on the blue line where things really get interesting — and were, even before Claesson’s arrival. Barring a trade, which certainly remains possible, there are five locks, the core of what with Faulk is probably the NHL’s deepest defensive group: Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce, Dougie Hamilton, Jake Gardiner and Faulk. (Van Riemsdyk will be the sixth when healthy.) That leaves two or three openings for five players, all of whom came into camp expecting to fill one.

Chase Priskie would be the exception, even before the college free agent suffered a mysterious injury Friday that will keep him out for at least the first two preseason games, but he certainly still has every chance to make the team with a good camp. Out of Gustav Forsling, Haydn Fleury, Jake Bean and Claesson — two first-round picks, a trade acquisition and an imminent free-agent signing — someone’s not making the roster.

Maybe two someones.

Across the board, that all presumes there isn’t an unexpected challenge from someone who started training camp off the radar but could play their way onto it, a player like Eetu Luostarinen or Jesper Sellgren or Clark Bishop or Morgan Geekie. And with the Hurricanes hard up against the salary cap, they could end up carrying 22 or 21 or even 20 players, which only makes the competition more intense.

It’s too early to see that on the ice now. The first few days of camp are remedial schoolwork, systems installation, Xs and Os. Veterans and prospects alike are skating, not hitting; listening, not competing.

But it won’t be long before the competition gets intense, and while there’s no guarantee that spills over into preseason team performance, the first two preseason games — Tuesday at the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Raleigh return game on Wednesday — will begin an evaluation process that will determine not only which 23 (or fewer) players make the roster, but even the trajectory of entire careers.

There’s that much on the line. For a change.
Hurricanes’ Andrei Svechnikov finding his confidence without ducking expectations

BY CHIP ALEXANDER
SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 01:16 PM

Andrei Svechnikov says he took boxing lessons this summer while home in Russia.

Then again, the Carolina Hurricanes forward took the same lessons last summer and where did it get him?

Svechnikov can laugh about it now, and has. But when he and Alex Ovechkin of the Washington Capitals squared off last season in the Stanley Cup playoffs, dropping the gloves, Svechnikov wound up down on the ice with a concussion as Ovechkin, a fellow countryman showing no mercy, won the brief fight by a knockout.

Did he learn his lesson? Svechnikov smiled.

"We’ll see, we’ll see," he said.

Svechnikov’s rookie season was all about lessons, about piecing together different experiences, good, bad, indifferent at least once injurious. The No. 2 pick of the 2018 NHL Draft, the Russian had impressive flashes of skill and power but also more than enough rookie mistakes, enough to add to Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour’s worry list.

"Obviously the first couple or three months it was pretty hard and then I think I started to understand this game and score some goals," Svechnikov said at the team’s recent media day. "Hopefully this season will be better. I want it to be better."

Some will look at the 20 goals he scored last season and say Svechnikov may be good for 30 in his second year in the league. He has the shot. He has the willingness to go to the net, a power forward in every sense at 6-2 and 195 pounds.

But Brind'Amour won’t go there, say such things. Why? Personal experience.

"What I don’t want to do is heap a bunch of expectations on him," Brind’Amour said at media day. "I went through that in my second year. My rookie year was good and then they threw me to the wolves …"

OVERWHELMING EXPECTATIONS FOR BRIND’AMOUR

A first-round pick by the St. Louis Blues in 1988, Brind’Amour scored 26 goals and had 61 points in 1989-90, his rookie season, and 13 points in 12 playoff games. Blues coach Brian Sutter then put Brind’Amour on the top line with Brett Hull in his second season.

"I couldn't handle it," Brind’Amour said.

Hull scored a career-high 86 goals, a franchise record. Brind’Amour, then 20, had 17 goals as his point total dipped to 49, and he was traded to the Philadelphia Flyers after the 1990-91 season.

"I didn’t want to let anybody down," Brind’Amour told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in 1991. "There was pressure to do well and I couldn’t relax."

Brind’Amour won’t do that with Svechnikov, who turned 19 in March. He probably won’t, say, throw him on the top line with center Sebastian Aho.

In the first two days of training camp, Svechnikov has been on a line with Jordan Staal and forward Teuvo Teravainen while Aho centered Nino Niederreiter and Ryan Dzingel.

"We all see where he can go," Brind’Amour said of Svechnikov’s potential. "The important thing is not heap a bunch of expectations on him. Give him a little more. He’s going to get more opportunity -- that’s a fact. He’ll obviously have to earn that but I think he’s ready to take it."

SVECHNIKOV’S CONFIDENCE

There’s room for improvement. Svechnikov did not have a power-play goal last season. His 62 penalty minutes were a team high as he was constantly reminded by Brind’Amour to get his stick down and avoid stick infractions.

But many of Svechnikov’s analytics — scoring chances, high-danger chances, Corsi, goals for and against — were favorable. His 20 goals ranked third among NHL rookies, trailing Vancouver’s Elias Pettersson (28) and Brady Tkachuk (22) of Ottawa and tying Andreas Johnsson of Toronto.

"But I don’t really feel any pressure this season," Svechnikov said. “I just want to be a better player."

Forward Warren Foegele, another rookie forward last year, became a good friend of Svechnikov’s -- "We FaceTimed over the summer," Foegele said -- and senses a difference in the guy the players call “Svech.”

"His confidence," Foegele said. "You could see the confidence he had in stretches in the second half of the year and in the playoffs. I think now after going through his first year you’re going to see how confident he can be. He’s a player. I think everyone here is excited to see him. I know I am, too."

Svechnikov came to training camp saying he has put in the work this summer -- on his shot, his stickhandling, skating.

"I wanted to get stronger, get faster," he said. "Of course I want to be more aggressive."

And land the big blows, not take them.
Haydn Fleury looked on from the press box in Washington as the Hurricanes and the Capitals faced off for Round 1, Game 5 last April.

In some parallel universe it would’ve been him out there, but in this one he was a healthy scratch victim of the Canes’ infamous defense logjam. In this particular universe one of his best friends, Trevor van Riemsdyk, got the call.

Van Riemsdyk cleared the puck so well on a penalty kill that Fleury stood up and screamed like he was a fan in the stands.

Haydn Fleury looked on from the press box in Washington as the Hurricanes and the Capitals faced off for Round 1, Game 5 last April.

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Van Riemsdyk cleared the puck so well on a penalty kill that Fleury stood up and screamed like he was a fan in the stands.

If you subscribe to the “hockey players are nice” thing, Fleury is the poster boy. He smiled through a ridiculous number of call-ups and call downs all last season — “I just get on a plane and go where I’m needed,” he’d told me at the time. He takes jokes about his elusive first NHL goal on the chin. The man gave a standing ovation when his friend was out there living what was supposed to be his dream.

This season feels like now-or-never for Fleury; the logjam is only getting worse, he is no longer waiver eligible, and at 23 he’s getting old in prospect dog years.

“Oh, and no more Mr. Nice Guy. For about an hour a day, at least.

“I’m a pretty happy-go-lucky kid, I like to have a smile on my face,” he told The Athletic. “But I was talking to my parents and it’s like, when I’m on the ice not as much smiling, maybe. Be a little more intense. If you can be intense for an hour of your day and be a happy-go-lucky kid the rest of it, it’s all good. If I can just be a little more intense, a little more focused, a little more consistent.”

That, he can manage.

Brind’Amour smiled when he found out about this conversation.

“He said that? He said that?”

Yep.

“Well, he’s learning.

“You don’t want to be easy to play against,” Brind’Amour continued. “And that’s something he needs to bring to his game. The sooner he figures that out, the better we’re all going to be.”

There’s not much else to say in this department. All there’s left to do is smile a little less and prove it.

The Hurricanes made their first cuts of training camp a few hours after on-ice sessions Saturday. They assigned Luke Henman (Blainville-Boisbriand, QMJHL), Blake Murray (Sudbury, OHL) and Jamieson Rees (Sarnia, OHL) back to their junior teams. The roster’s down to 48 players.

Chase Priskie is week-to-week. “I just got told it’s almost a week-to-week thing,” Brind’Amour said. “It’s not as bad as we feared, but obviously he’s going to be out for a little while.”

I just absolutely love it when Finnish reporters travel to Raleigh for the specific purpose of interviewing Sebastian Aho. Today one asked me if I think he can be the next great Hurricane. I said maybe, let’s see a Cup. I think he’d say that, too.

Petr Mrazek left the ice bleeding a bit from a puck caught above the eye. He returned minutes later. Safe to say he’s fine.

I don’t use the word “epic” often because it’s corny, but Erik Haula’s origin story is epic. Can’t wait to share it.
Newcomer Olli Maatta is picking up the pace in his transition to the Blackhawks: ‘You’ve got to build every day’

By JIMMY GREENFIELD
SEP 14, 2019 | 4:14 PM

Coming to a new organization after a trade brings all sorts of challenges. Some of them, such as trying to figure out where you fit in and coming to terms with the fact your former team could live without you, are fairly obvious. Others are, well, not so obvious. Pronouns, for example.

Olli Maatta has been in the Blackhawks organization for about four months, and the 25-year-old Finnish defenseman still catches himself using “they” rather than “we” when talking about the players with whom he’ll go to battle this season.

“They want to ...” Maatta started before stopping and smiling at his mistake while assessing the Hawks.

He tried again.

“We want to hold onto the puck a lot,” he said Saturday on Day 2 of training camp. “We’ve got a lot of skilled players. For my game, the defenseman’s job is really just breaking out clean and getting the puck to our forwards quick because we’ve got so much skill up there.”

When the Hawks acquired Maatta from the Penguins this summer for Dominik Kahun, a forward coming off a promising 37-point rookie season, it was sold as a rearrangement of assets meant to shore up a sagging defense.

Maatta was by far the more accomplished player in the deal, with 362 regular-season games, 69 playoffs games and two Stanley Cup titles on his resume. But he missed 22 games to a shoulder injury last season and was a healthy scratch during the Penguins’ final three playoff games.

The knock on the smart, dependable blue-liner was his lack of speed.

Maatta knows he isn’t going to beat Connor McDavid in a race but said success on the ice comes from far more than just speed.

“It comes from decisions with the puck and reading the game,” Maatta said. “That’s a big part of the game. You just have to put work into the skating, which is what I’ve been doing this summer. I don’t think I’m the faster skater but I think my skating’s got way better. It’s more about positioning, really, than it is about my skating.

“It’s about reading the game better and not getting caught in a bad position. That’s what hockey is.”

Coach Jeremy Colliton doesn’t seem concerned about Maatta’s speed.

“The skating thing is a little bit overblown,” Colliton said. “When I watched him I thought he moved well enough, gets back for retrievals, makes a lot of plays. Just like all of our (defensemen), we want to work on the gap. If you have a good gap your skating looks pretty good and you put yourself in a good position to both defend against the rush but hopefully get some clean retrievals and make a lot of plays.

“And he’s really got that in his game. When he gets the puck on his blade clean, often your team breaks out under control. Looking forward to seeing him in a real game.”

The Hawks play three preseason games in three days next week, and Maatta is likely to play in at least one. That’s when he’ll really start to build chemistry with his new teammates, a process that began at the Blackhawks Convention in July.

“You talk a lot on and off the ice,” Maatta said. “The big thing is just being on the same page in the system. ... Coming to a new team, coming into a new system, that’s a huge key. That’s why in training camp you want to bear down on that.

“Obviously it’s not going to be perfect tomorrow or the day after, but you’ve got to build every day and get used to it so it’s second nature.”

Training Camp Festival: The Hawks will scrimmage at 11 a.m. Sunday at the United Center as part of their annual Training Camp Festival. Tickets are $5, and the first 10,000 fans will receive a Patrick Kane bobblehead commemorating his celebration after scoring the Stanley Cup-winning goal in 2010.

A free street festival, including live music and appearances from Hawks alumni, will take place outside. The lot opens at 8 a.m., and parking is free.
Crawford vs. Lehner is Blackhawks' biggest competition, but it won't be settled in camp

By Ben Pope  Sep 14, 2019, 12:18pm CDT

In his first public comments since the Blackhawks’ shocking and splashy signing of Vezina Trophy finalist Robin Lehner on July 1, goalie Corey Crawford said almost all the expected things Friday.

Almost.

The 34-year-old Crawford, a Hawks mainstay since 2010 — even though recurring concussions and other injuries have limited him to a combined 66 starts the last two seasons — called Lehner a “really good goaltender” who “just helps our team.”

Crawford gets a check there, both for cliché use and accuracy.

Lehner is coming off a spectacular season with the Islanders in which he recorded a 2.13 goals-against average and carried a team with the 21st-ranked offense in the NHL to the playoffs.

And his addition, stunning as it was, now appears to be the most convincing reason the Hawks might return to the postseason in 2020.

But then Crawford became a little less rosy and a bit more honest in his comments.

He admitted that his body “wears down a little bit easier as you get older” and that he wasn’t able to lift as much weight this summer as he used to.

And fed a softball question about whether the involuntary workload management will help his longevity, Crawford responded bluntly: “Personally, I feel better when I play more.”

Lehner’s .930 save percentage last season bested Crawford’s .908, but the latter actually graded better in save percentage on high-danger scoring chances (Crawford ranked seventh in the league, Lehner 13th). That suggests Lehner’s apparent superiority might have been more a product of the Islanders’ and Hawks’ contrasting defensive acumen.

Still, deep down, Crawford probably does feel threatened to some extent by Lehner’s arrival, especially with both facing unrestricted free agency next summer. At that point, Lehner will be 29 and Crawford an unnerving 35.

That’s how most ultra-competitive athletes would feel, much less someone as driven and accomplished as Crawford. But that extra edge likely will help the Hawks this season.

“He’s back to himself, as far as his personality and excitement to be back playing and ready for the season to begin,” general manager Stan Bowman said. “He’s in a good frame of mind, trained well, and he’s ready for a big season.”

Crawford seemingly has a chip on his shoulder. Lehner, just months removed from being shunned by the team he helped resurrect, does, too.

And Collin Delia, who likely will be sent back to Rockford for the start of the season but still is very much in the long-term picture, might be the most motivated of all.

Whose edge proves edgier than the others’ won’t be determined in the next two weeks of training camp, although the duel for the starting role in the season opener Oct. 4 will be interesting nonetheless. For what it’s worth, through the first two days of practice Friday and Saturday, neither Crawford nor Lehner did anything spectacularly good or bad.

That’s been the idea for months now: Keep Crawford and Lehner competing all season in a way that seeing-the-end Cam Ward couldn’t last season.

“I’m sure there’s going to be points where both guys are going to have hot streaks, so that’s in the hands of our coach,” Crawford said. “Jeremy [Colliton] is going to have to decide who to go with. . . . Our job is to try to be at our best and push each other.”

“It’s a team that wants to make the playoffs again,” Lehner said. “We want to win, so you have to earn your starts.”
By Steve Greenberg  Sep 14, 2019, 8:05am CDT

All sharing options

Patrick Kane dropped to his right knee and slid across the ice. With his stick held aloft in his left hand, he pumped his gloved right fist. It was time for the celebratory cry:

“Woof!”

We’ve all watched it unfold before. Seen — maybe even heard — it up close if we were lucky. Kane after one of his 356 Blackhawks goals, the fifth-highest total in franchise history. There have been an additional 50 postseason goals; only Bobby Hull, Denis Savard and Stan Mikita had more of those.

But this goal celebration, well, it was only pretend — made for a future promotional spot on some network or another. NBC? NHL Network? Canada’s Sportsnet? All were in Chicago earlier this month to film a who’s-who of NHL stars, including the Hawks’ Jonathan Toews and Alex DeBrincat, participating in the league’s annual Player Media Tour.

At Fifth Third Arena, the Hawks’ Near West Side training facility, Kane juggled pucks, deked cameramen on skates and went through the motions of stickhandling tricks. He repeated slogans and taglines until they echoed inside the heads of anyone within earshot. All of it undoubtedly will look and sound super-cool post-production, but was it fun?

Sure, kinda.

“You’d rather be out there playing and enjoying the game,” he said, “but you’ve got to promote it in some way. Some of the stuff is really weird.”

Kane, 30, would know better than anyone. He’s the only NHL player who has participated in all 12 of these events. Toews, 31, has taken part in 11, starting with the first one in 2008. It’s probably inevitable, isn’t it, that the league someday will look past the longtime duo when it chooses the few dozen players to represent it in promotional ads and interviews for a coming season?

“It’s going to happen eventually, right?” Kane said. “My job is to make sure that happens as late in my career as possible. Can I tell you I’m going to be 40 years old and still playing the way I am now? I don’t know, but I hope so — and I think I can.”

Whoa. Everybody take a breath and focus for a moment. Did Kane just crank up the intensity to game level and try to put our timer by our collective ear? Was this a taste of what he was like during a sneaky-great 2018-19 season when — though the Hawks failed to make the playoffs — he set career highs in assists (66) and points (110)?

Did Kane just drop a bomb on us?

Seated now in a dress shirt and compression shorts in a private players’ lounge behind the Hawks’ dressing room at Fifth Third, a brand new pair of skates molding to his feet, he elaborated.

“If I tell you I’m going to be 40 years old and still playing the way I am now? I don’t know, but I hope so — and I think I can.”

“The way I train my body, the way I take care of myself, I think I can play [to 40] with a really successful style of play — the way I play — and still produce,” he said. “But I guess time will tell. It’s my job to get to each new season enjoying that time, and obviously you’ve got to stay healthy.”

Both Kane and Toews are signed through the 2022-23 season, after which they’ll be 34 and 35, respectively. The Hawks’ captain has little trouble envisioning Kane playing in the NHL at 40, a milestone only two players — Penguins center Matt Cullen (who has since retired) and Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara — had reached by the start of the 2018-19 campaign. (In fact, both Cullen and Chara were 41.)

“Yeah, absolutely. I don’t see why not,” Toews said. “He doesn’t get hit. Doesn’t backcheck.”

Shots fired?

“I’m just kidding about that last part,” Toews said. “He’s a smart player. He just tends off checks, and he has stayed healthy for a long time. A big talk of this summer is his training and the way he’s taking care of his body. I think he’s really getting even more detailed with how he approaches the game. So, yeah, I don’t see why not.”

This is where the other skate dropped.

“I want to play until I’m 40, too,” Toews said. “For sure, I do. You take care of yourself. You come in in shape every year. I think the older I get, the more I realize how special it is to be able to do what we do. And I wouldn’t be very good at doing anything else, so might as well try to be the best I can be on the ice for as long as possible.”

The late Mikita made it to 39 before retiring from the Hawks. Hull played professionally into his 40s, though he was long gone from the Hawks by then. Chris Chelios played just about forever, but likewise rang in 40 with a different team.

It’s hardly unheard of — Kimmo Timonen was 40, in his last of 20 NHL seasons, when he raised the Stanley Cup with the Hawks in 2015 — but with all the ice time Kane logs? With the pounding Toews, his partner in three Cup titles, dishes out and takes?

“I can see it, yes,” Hawks general manager Stan Bowman said. “You look around the league, and there are a handful of guys able to play that long and at that well. The hardest part is physically, maintaining strength, trying to keep up with all these guys who are going to be 15 years younger than you. And the game is getting faster. Do you want to put the time and work into doing that?

“But Patrick and Jonathan are both very diligent about training and dedicated to their craft. Most people peak in their 20s, but these guys aren’t typical players. I wouldn’t put anything past them.”

So, then, the obvious question: If and when the times comes, would the Hawks let their forever-joined faces of the franchise ring in 40 in enemy sweaters?

Put another way: You gonna re-sign these guys again, pal?

“So much changes on a team year to year, you don’t know what’s going to happen down the road,” Bowman said. “But certainly, if they’re going to keep playing, we’re going to want them to keep playing for us. But that’s down the road a while:”

Bowman calls looking too far down the road a “fool’s errand.” This one just might have to sneak up on all of us.

One of the questions players were asked during their Media Tour sessions: What will you do on your day with the Cup if you win it?

Kane gave this some thought. For him, it would be a fourth such experience. In 2010, 2013 and 2015, he brought it home to Buffalo, to his family and friends in the city where he grew up and spent his summers in his late-20s. Kane’s parents and three sisters still live there, a family so tightly knit that Mom and Dad famously travel to Chicago for most every game and the sisters — 29, 28 and 25 — all work for the same property management, leasing and development company.

“If we won it again?” Kane said. “Maybe celebrate more in Chicago.”

2015 NHL Stanley Cup Final - Game Six

Kane has lived here year-round since the season that followed the Hawks’ last Cup win. His offseason of 2015 was tumultuous, to say the least. He was the subject of a three-months-long rape investigation in Buffalo, New York, in which charges ultimately were not filed, the Erie County district attorney concluding that the case was “rife with reasonable doubt.”

It’s a subject Kane — who calls the fallout a “media nightmare” — addresses carefully, but pointedly, now.

“It was a tough situation, no doubt, especially when you feel like you didn’t do anything wrong,” he said. “And then besides that, you never want to do something, whether it’s your fault of someone else’s fault, that could put in jeopardy your profession, right?

“But sometimes it’s kind of nice to leave that stone unturned and leave it where it is. To be honest with you, I don’t really care what people think or say or do your homework and do your due diligence, you can understand the situation. People can believe what they want to believe. No matter what I say about it, or what is even true about it, there’s going to be 50 percent of the people that hate me and 50 percent
of the people that love me or believe me, so that’s the way it is no matter what I say about it.”

Kane had drinking-fueled escapades earlier in his career that made him infamous, something of a caricature or a living meme. In 2012, Deadspin ran a story titled “Reconstructing Patrick Kane’s Drunken Weekend in Madison.” Later came Bleacher Report’s “From Party Boy to Poster Boy: How Patrick Kane Became Hockey’s All-American Hero” and the Sun-Times’ “Patrick Kane’s Troubled Past” — both before the Buffalo accusations. All this long after Kane, then new to the league, was put through the wringer for assaulting a cabbie in Buffalo.

Rumors spread in those early years that the Hawks were looking to shed the Kane problem by trading him away. Bowman, who became GM in 2009, says they were never true, and that he regrets not addressing them clearly and definitively at the time. He calls that a “learning experience.”

“I can dispel that now — 100 percent false,” he said. “I never contemplated it, never had conversations with anybody about that. I knew him as a person. When you know somebody, nobody’s perfect but you kind of realize what their makeup is. He’s a good person with a family makeup. I knew what kind of person he was and his character deep down. There were so many rumors over the years. I didn’t comment because it was impossible to refute them all.”

Another rumor: that the Hawks told Kane after the 2015 offseason that he had to move to Chicago. Bowman says it’s just plain false. Kane does, too.

“I’d just thought when I was younger about maybe spending the summers in Chicago,” Kane said. “I kind of wish I always had. It’s so great of a city, especially in the summer, and it was time for a change. Buffalo was good to me for a long time, my hometown — I’ve got a lot of buddies there, and family — but I think it was important to be here, train here. It’s a lot better city, I think, for a professional athlete.”

Kane’s summers of training in the Hawks’ offseason program from afar — without their actual trainers — were over. It launched him into an offseason regimen that he believes just might sustain him awhile. Maybe even into his 40s. It isn’t just about training, either. Kane likes to lie low, living the simple life with girlfriend Amanda in their downtown home.

“I think at this point in time in my career, you understand what you want to do in life, right?” he said. “Like, what I want to do on a daily basis and the things that I enjoy in life. I think when you’re younger, you might cater to people a little bit more. For me now, it’s like, this is what I want to do, this is how I want to enjoy my life.

“I enjoy training in the morning. I enjoy skating after that. I enjoy some days just doing nothing and sitting on the couch. I enjoy eating healthy and trying to take care of myself and gain any edge I can. That’s a full-time job even in the offseason. It’s important to do that on a daily basis just for me to get into that rhythm.”

Toews sees a teammate who has changed — improved — across the board.

“Kaner was full of confidence; that’s what made him such a great player,” he said. “He loved going out, loved enjoying himself, and socializing. He’s a social dude. But I think as he’s gotten older in his career, gotten more mature, he’s definitely thinking more about his preparation and picking his spots to have fun.

“Sometimes, when you’ve gone out there and you’ve enjoyed yourself when you’re young you don’t necessarily feel like doing as much. I think in his 30s, just his motivation level is on that level, too. He’s not wasting his time spinning his wheels in the mud. He knows what he wants to do and goes out and does it every day.”

Said Kane’s eldest sister, Erica: “He’s very focused on his health — very focused. His career is his No. 1 thing and his passion. Not a day goes by that he doesn’t try to be the best player he can be. And he wants to play the game for as long as he possibly can.”

... Another Media Tour session, another question: Who are your top three players in the NHL?

Kane didn’t hesitate, ticking off the names of, in order, Lightning winger Nikita Kucherov — the league’s reigning scoring champion and MVP — Oilers center Connor McDavid and Penguins center Sidney Crosby.

A couple of hours later, Kane admitted he’d toyed with putting his own name in the top three.

“I was thinking about it,” he said. “I think I’m maybe right around there. I think Kucherov had an unbelievable year last year. McDavid, you could argue he’s the best player in the league the past three or four years. Crosby had another great season, helped lead that team to the playoffs. Maybe I’m in the 4, 5, 6 range, you know? But I feel like I’m pretty close to those guys.”

2019 NHL Awards - Nominee Media Availability

Last month, Kane participated in the prestigious, invitation-only Tactics and Tune-Up camp run by renowned skills coach Darryl Belfry in Florida. At least a half-dozen NHL All-Stars from last season were in the mix, among them a trio of forwards — the Maple Leafs’ Auston Matthews, the Coyotes’ Clayton Keller and the Islanders’ Mathew Barzil — who are nearly a decade younger than Kane.

According to Belfry, 46, with whom Kane has trained since age 9, Kane’s greatest strengths — generating offense, playing creatively and making others better — once again set the bar at the annual offseason camp.

“At what he does,” Belfry said, “he might be the best in the league.”

Kane, whom the Hawks drafted with the No. 1 overall pick in 2007, is convinced he’s better than ever. Smarter than he was in 2009, when he scored a hat trick in Game 6 of the Western Conference semifinals to eliminate the Canucks, prompting ESPN to call him “one of the NHL’s brightest stars.” More intuitive than he was a year later, when he beat Flyers goalie Michael Leighton in overtime of Game 6 of the Cup finals to end a nearly half-century-long Hawks drought. Stronger than he was when he won the Conn Smythe in 2013, and more determined than he was when he took home the Hart and Art Ross trophies for the 2015-16 campaign.

“I’m just a better hockey player,” he said. “My body feels better, I’m more confident in myself, I know what I can do on the ice and what I can bring to a team. I feel like I’m better, no doubt.”

He’s a believer in where the Hawks are headed, too. A season ago, in the early weeks following coach Joel Quenneville’s firing in November, Kane was at a loss; he saw the team dropping, not rising. Ultimately, though, he was impressed by young coach Jeremy Colliton’s vision, and he has been encouraged by the offseason personnel moves orchestrated by Bowman.

“We’ve got another goaltender, picked up two defensive defensemen, got a good penalty-killing forward and got [Andrew Shaw] back,” he said. “I look at our team and think our team is going to be pretty good. I like the way we’re shaping up. I think everyone’s kind of counting us out as a team that might miss the playoffs again, but we could make a pretty good run.”

In the Hawks’ dressing room at Fifth Third, a pair of goaltenders Kane helped vanquish in those Cup years — the Bruins’ Tuukka Rask and the Stars’ Ben Bishop, formerly of the Lightning — walked about in full gear like giants. In the locker stall next to Kane’s, the jersey of an on-ice bitter rival hung in glaring fashion: Vladimir Tarasenko’s of the defending Cup champion Blues.

Just how big is the gap between the Blues and Hawks these days?

“I don’t think it’s big at all,” Kane said. “I think we’re a lot closer than people think.”

For the Hawks to experience a resurgence, not-so-old guys Toews and Kane will have to lead the way. Which reminds us of the top three players in the NHL as listed by the Captain.

“I said McDavid, Crosby and Kaner,” Toews said. “I swallowed my pride to say that a ‘learning experience.’

Maybe I’m in the 4, 5, 6 range, you know? But I feel like I’m pretty close to those guys.”
Can Patrick Kane play to age 40? History doesn’t like his chances

By Ben Pope  Sep 14, 2019, 7:55am CDT

Patrick Kane’s incredible combination of durability and productivity this far into his NHL career places him in a rare crowd.

A lonely crowd, actually.

Kane has missed just one game over the past four seasons, his ninth through 12th in the league. In the same time period, he’s topped the 100-point plateau twice. In fact, no player in hockey history has ever before played at least 327 games and scored at least 381 points in the four-year span from age 27 to age 30 — until now.

But we already knew Kane was a special player, and those aforementioned criteria are pretty specific. It may not be entirely shocking that he’s blazing new ground in that trivial regard.

What would certainly be an even more incredible accomplishment would be if Kane can keep this up for another decade. He wouldn’t be the only one to play until age 40 — but he would join a legendary, and perhaps surprisingly exclusive, group.

The recent-day existence of ironmen Jaromir Jagr, Joe Thornton and Teemu Selanne has somewhat distorted hockey fans’ perception of the rarified 40-year-old plateau. In fact, only 32 forwards in NHL history have ever reached it.

And of those, only 24 played 40 or more games in their 40-year-old season, and only 12 scored 40 or more points.

So when Kane unleashes eye-opening quotes like he recently did to Steve Greenberg — “I think I can play [to 40] with a really successful style of play, the way I play, and still produce” — he best realize it will bring upon him some scrutiny.

History doesn’t favor his odds of making it there, although Kane surely understands that.

We can loosen the tight parameters from this article’s lede to create a bit more of a sample size (as in, more than just Kane, whose data points wouldn’t exactly shed any light in this study). Seventeen forwards in NHL history have played at least 300 games and scored at least 350 points between ages 27 and 30.

Their average age of eventual retirement, however, was 37.2. Only four made it to age 40: Thornton, Selanne, Dave Andreychuk and Adam Oates.

Kane’s chances are buoyed slightly by modern science’s ever-improving understanding of fitness and nutrition. As the youngest by a significant margin in that entourage, his odds of making it to 40 may indeed be higher than the 4-in-17 chance the sample indicates.

On the other hand, he also has more miles on his 30-year-old skates than many 30-year-old players of the past. Kane has made 903 regular-season appearances to date, making him one of only 19 forwards in league history — not even placing a minimum on point production — to hit the 900-game milestone by age 30.

That sample lends strikingly similar conclusions as the previous one. The average age of retirement was 37.3, and again, just four made it to age 40: Thornton, Patrick Marleau (assuming he signs with a team for this coming season), Ron Francis and Steve Yzerman.

The fact that Thornton and Marleau have done so, though, is probably a feather in Kane’s visor. The Sharks’ longtime forward duo is a close comparable to Kane and Toews in Chicago today — and both of them have now made it to the big four-oh.

Regardless, at least one thing is clear:

We’ll have an answer by 2029.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 09.15.2019
Behind the numbers: Patrick Kane excels as a goal-scorer by doing what defenses don’t expect

By Ben Pope
Sep 14, 2019, 6:55am CDT

In terms of expected goals, Patrick Kane and Patric Hornqvist differ only in their surnames.

Over the past three seasons, Kane is expected to have scored 44.9 goals in 5-on-5 play, and Hornqvist 45.4. The expected goals statistic, for reference, assigns a likelihood of scoring to every shot attempt based on its location, then sums all the likelihoods.

There’s just one problem: expected goals is a situational calculation, not a talent-based calculation. And in the comparison between the Blackhawks’ legendary attacker and Hornqvist, a solid complementary player on the Penguins, it falls embarrassingly short.

Over the past three seasons, Kane has actually scored 66 goals at 5-on-5.

Hornqvist, meanwhile, has potted only 34.

That anecdote is one of many that can be found in the recent portion of Kane’s 12-years-and-counting NHL career, because according to hockey’s advanced statistics, Kane’s decline has already begun. His Corsi rating — the most well-known analytic — has steadily declined from nearly 60 percent in his early years to under 50 percent last season, a first for the Buffalo native.

And yet Kane, at the same time, set a career high with 110 points and finished fifth in the league with 44 goals. Sure, his defense suffered (and it was never great to begin with), but after a legitimate down year in 2017-18, Kane re-cemented his status in the NHL’s superstar tier in 2018-19.

So why does his expected goals estimate not accurately reflect that? The answer comes from the same root cause as his tremendous success — in other words, Kane fools opposing defenses and statistical models simultaneously.

He does so by keeping relatively to the outside of the offensive zone, defying the modern obsession with the slot.

Defenses focus most heavily on preventing shot attempts in the slot, so by staying away, Kane is defended less, so to speak. Doing so means more room to maneuver his stick, more sight lines to the goal, more time to make a decision and less checking endured by his small 177-pound frame.

That extra space and time means more opportunities to use his elite wrist shot. 63 percent of Kane’s shots on goal over the past three seasons have been wristers, one of the highest usage rates in the league.

He essentially bets on his shooting and playmaking ability to exceed league average by a larger margin than his shot and pass location falls short of league average.

And he typically wins the pot.

This strategy is nonetheless quite atypical for other top-tier NHL forwards, even those with similar statures and skill sets to Kane.

Five-foot-8 Blue Jackets sniper Cam Atkinson’s shot location heat map looks like a bull’s eye, with higher shot frequency than league average in the middle of the offensive zone and lesser frequency around the perimeter. This is, generally, considered ideal. Hornqvist’s heat map is even more impressive, with that red dot centered right in front of the goal.

The expected goals statistic is similarly impressed by both Atkinson and Hornqvist: it projects that the two forwards should have ranked eighth and third in the NHL, respectively, in goals per minute over the past three years.

Kane’s heat map, meanwhile, looks like it has two eyeballs, with his highest shot frequency located on either side of the goal, but not so much directly in front of it. Thus, he’s a lowly 152nd in expected goals per minute.

But that’s all just part of the scheme. What wouldn’t work for most does work — to a sky-high degree — for No. 88.
Jonathan Toews set career highs in goals (35), assists (46) and points last season (81).

He also averaged a career-high 21 minutes of ice time, won 56.3% of his faceoffs and centered the Blackhawks' top line each and every night.

Yet, when NHL Network unveiled what it believes to be the league's top 20 centers, Toews failed to make the cut.

Asked if he will use the omission as motivation, the Hawks' captain said: "Honestly, kind of. Yeah. If I saw my name at the top of the list, I wouldn't really key on it too much. But the fact that it's been a few years since our team's had playoff success, you kind of start losing a little bit of focus and attention (nationally).

"There's no doubt in the back of your mind you want to prove yourself as one of the best players in the league and on the team. So when you see that, it definitely sinks in a little bit for sure."

The list begins with some of the biggest names in the league in Edmonton's Connor McDavid, Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby, Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon, Florida's Aleksander Barkov, and Toronto's John Tavares and Auston Matthews.

But doesn't Toews belong somewhere in the top 20?

After all, the three-time Stanley Cup winner had 8 more goals that Buffalo's Jack Eichel (No. 15) and is more well-rounded than second-year player Elias Pettersson (No. 20). Toews also scored 14 more times than Washington's Evgeny Kuznetsov, who was at No. 16 and won just 38.7% of his draws.

Kris Versteeg, a veteran of 643 NHL games who has won two Stanley Cups with Toews, was smiling the entire time he talked about this snub.

"He (had) been ranked as a top-3 centerman (in the past), and now he gets 81 points and he's not ranked in the top 20. So people are looking at points," said Versteeg, who then rattled off the five key attributes to any good center: "A guy that can play penalty kill, power play, 6-on-5 situations (on) offense and defense, and go against top lines.

"Jonathan Toews can do all of that and half the centermen in that list can't. (They) can only play offensive zone. …

"It's a bit of a smack to him and I expect him to take it in stride and try to prove some people wrong."

Toews was the first player mentioned in NHL Network's "bubble players" who just missed the cut. Considering Toews averaged just 23 goals and 56 points the previous three seasons, perhaps those who put the list together thought his 2018-19 campaign was a fluke.

The 31-year-old is out to prove that's not the case.

"I know there's another level I can get to towards being that really effective top-of-the-league, two-way guy again," Toews said. "And I think if I'm playing that way and setting that example the right way, it's only going to make our team better.

"That's kind of my focus right now."

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 09.15.2019
Blackhawks’ Kane a fan of latest bobblehead

John Dietz
Updated 9/14/2019 7:15 PM

The first 10,000 fans to enter the United Center for the Blackhawks’ intrasquad scrimmage Sunday will receive a Patrick Kane bobblehead. It features the Hawks’ superstar raising his hands in celebration after he scored the game-winning goal in Game 6 of the 2010 Stanley Cup Final in Philadelphia.

"It’s a good one," Kane said. "I picked it up and the stick dropped. I was trying to put it back in his hand. Then I figured I guess my stick was on the ice when I threw my gloves and stick off like an idiot there after we won."

Kane scored from a tough angle after getting around Flyers defenseman Timmo Kimonen early in OT. Seconds after the puck went into the net, an overjoyed Kane dropped his stick and flung his gloves skyward as he made a beeline toward goalie Antti Niemi.

"It was a really fun time," Kane said. "Every kid dreams of scoring an overtime-winning goal to win the Stanley Cup. Got to do that at 21 years old, so it was a pretty amazing night and obviously being a part of a championship for the Blackhawks’ first in 49 years was even more special."

Slap shot:

Philipp Kurashev, who missed the opening day of training camp, practiced at Fifth Third Arena on Saturday. Kirby Dach (concussion protocol) remains out.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 09.15.2019
Far from Czech home, Kubalik adjusts to life with Blackhawks

By JAY COHEN
Associated Press
Updated
9/14/2019 3:25 PM

CHICAGO -- Dominik Kubalik is leaning on David Kampf while he transitions to life in the NHL with the Chicago Blackhawks. He peppers his Czech countryman with all sorts of questions.

"I think he's a little bit mad at me right now," a grinning Kubalik said, "because I'm still asking 'What's that?' and 'Where are we going?' and 'Where's the training room?' Stuff like that."

The Blackhawks have their own questions about Kubalik, one of the biggest variables in their pursuit of the franchise's first playoff appearance since 2017.

It sure looks as if Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane might play together on Chicago's top line, and close friends and former juniors teammates Dylan Strome and Alex DeBrincat are a good bet for the second line. Kubalik is in the mix to play alongside one of those potent duos.

"Everything is pretty new," he said. "I'm just trying to get used to it as quick as possible. But I feel great."

Kubalik skated with Strome for at least part of Saturday's session on the second day of training camp. Strome played against Kubalik at the world championships and saw him in the Ontario Hockey League a few years ago.

"He's got a real hard shot, fast skater, some good hands," Strome said. "So I think he's going to add a different element to our team. He's got a great one-timer. He knows where to go and knows how to find open ice. Big body, too, so it's a lot of good attributes to have in a player."

Coach Jeremy Colliton said Kubalik has been "as advertised" so far.

"It's going to be somewhat of an adjustment for him," Colliton said. "He has played over here in North America before, so that's good. But it's still going to take some practices and games."

Kubalik was drafted by Los Angeles in the seventh round in 2013. But the 6-foot-2 winger never played for the Kings, who shipped him to Chicago for a fifth-round pick in January.

He had spent most of his career in the Czech Republic before playing for HC Ambri-Piotta in Switzerland for part of the 2017-18 season and again last year. Kubalik had 25 goals and 32 assists in 50 games for the Swiss club last season, and then had a goal and five assists in five playoff games. He also had six goals and six assists in 10 games at the worlds.

The move to Ambri-Piotta was a key moment for Kubalik in his journey to the NHL.

"I was still thinking that I just need to make another step in my career," he said. "So I decided to. If there was a chance to go to Switzerland, felt pretty good about it. So I tried it and it actually worked pretty well."

Kubalik plans to stick to his strengths in his transition to the NHL.

"I think I'm playing pretty simple," he said. "I don't want to handle the puck for a while. I want to just put it as quick as possible to the net. If there is a chance to shoot, I'm just going to take it."

While Kubalik is learning his way around Chicago, there was at least one familiar face in the locker room when he joined the Blackhawks. He played with Kampf on a U-20 team in the Czech Republic a couple years ago.
Blackhawks using first training camp under Jeremy Colliton to nail down defensive zone coverage

By Charlie Roumeliotis September 14, 2019 2:25 PM

Jeremy Colliton has been the Blackhawks' head coach for more than 10 months now, but this is his first training camp with the team and he's able to instill some concepts that he wasn't able to do on the fly last season. The biggest thing, however, is that he was afforded a full summer to prep and can help get everyone on the same page during training camp and in the seven preseason games before the games actually matter.

"It's important," Duncan Keith said. "Systems nowadays, with the way teams are, it's important that everyone's on the same page. Having a training camp with the coaches and being able to implement the system and try to get on the same page early on, the quicker we can iron out everything the better off we're going to be."

The one area the Blackhawks have focused on heavily over the first two days is the defensive zone coverage. They gave up the most scoring chances and high-danger chances at 5-on-5 last season, and the team got better at it in the final month or so but it's still a work in progress.

"It's going to be huge," Patrick Kane said. "Even [Friday], first day we're running through some defensive coverage trying to get everything done tactically. I'm sure we'll do a little bit more of that each day and some different things as well. It'll be real beneficial for us just to all get on the same page, set the standard around here and feel confident about our team, the way we play going into the season."

The onus isn't just on the defensemen, either. It's a five-man unit and training camp is just as much about building trust with your teammates and being in the right spot as it is nailing down the scheme and letting it become muscle memory.

"We've all got to be on the same page," Brent Seabrook said. "If my D partner's doing it perfectly and I'm not, then we're not going to be any good at it. We've all got to be on the same page, we've all got to be doing our job and doing the right thing and the faster we get to that point, then I think it's just going to help us out in the long run. We're just going to keep getting better at it and we'll go from there."

The Blackhawks are going to continue working on their defensive zone coverage as camp goes along because that's priority No. 1. Scoring goals won't be an issue. And after Sunday's training camp festival at the United Center, the Blackhawks have three consecutive preseason contests to apply what they've learned in a game-type setting.

"I just think getting guys on the same page as quickly as we can, that's really important," Colliton said. "You saw there was a lot of D-zone work today [Friday]. That'll continue and we'll just sort of roll out how we're going to play day-by-day so that we're ready. We got that festival game, that will kind of be a dress rehearsal and then right into it."
Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman: Adam Boqvist is 'ready to be a pro'

By Charlie Roumeliotis September 14, 2019 8:45 AM

Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman hinted at the possibility of this earlier in the summer but he made it official on Friday: Adam Boqvist is turning pro.

Boqvist spent the 2018-19 season with the London Knights in the OHL, where he compiled 60 points (20 goals, 40 assists) in 54 games and led all defensemen with 10 goals in 11 postseason contests. He made significant strides in his development as he got accustomed to the North American style of hockey and the Blackhawks are ready to bring him over to the organization.

"I think Adam's made enough progress," Bowman said. "The biggest thing with him was always just the physicality and the strength and I thought he put in a lot of work. I got to give him credit, especially this summer, even last year during the season. But he still has to continue to mature and develop physically but he's ready to be a pro."

If Boqvist doesn't make the Blackhawks out of training camp, he will start the season with the Rockford IceHogs in the AHL. Not only will the team be able to have more of a hands-on role in his development, but they'll now be able to call him up at any moment.

"I think the drawback to going back to junior is you don't have the access to him then for the whole season," Bowman said. "So he's a player we're going to want to have access to whether he's in Chicago or nearby in Rockford."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.15.2019
"I'm happy to be here for the next eight years": Sam Girard’s time on Colorado’s top pairing is just beginning

BY EVAN RAWAL   SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

Most players are happy to answer when you ask how their summer went. The ever polite Sam Girard, still only 21-years-old, doesn’t want it to just be a one-way conversation.

“It was good, spent my summer in Quebec back home,” Girard said, before picking his head up and looking at me. “Yours?”

That’s the type of person Girard is. And that’s just one reason why the Avs were eager to lock him up for a very long time.

On July 31, the Avalanche announced they had signed Girard to a seven-year extension for a total of $35M (a $5M cap hit). The young defenseman is still on the final year of his entry-level contract, but the team showed no hesitation in locking him up for the better part of the next decade after the big steps he took last year.

So, how did the extension come together?

“My agent called me before he talked to Joe (Sakic),” the defenseman said on Saturday. “I told him I wanted long term. I’m very happy to be here for the next 8 years. You can’t ask for anything more than that.”

With the extension now out of the way, Girard only has hockey to focus on. After being the talk of camp last year after adding 18 pounds of muscle in the summer, the 5’10” defenseman looks even sturdier this camp. He says he’s around 180 right now but anticipates losing around 5 pounds during the season.

“That’s what I want. I feel good at 175 or 180.”

After starting last season with veteran Erik Johnson on the top pair, Girard finds himself in a familiar, yet different position as camp opened yesterday. Bednar has him paired with super prospect Cale Makar, much like they were in the postseason, and through two days they’re already showing the same electric chemistry they did after Makar joined the club midway through the playoffs.

Most 21-year-old defensemen don’t find themselves in the position of being the “old man” on their defensive pair, but the chemistry between the two young stars is undeniable.

“He’s so good on the ice,” Girard said told BSN Denver after the second day of camp. “It’s easy to play with him. He’s good with the puck, he’s good offensively and defensively. I think we just need to talk on the ice and everything will go well.”

While Colorado has several young players it is entertaining putting on the NHL roster, the continued development of Girard hasn’t gone overlooked as he enters his third NHL season. His head coach knows exactly where he can improve.

“I’d like to see him get a little bit more involved on the offensive side of things,” Jared Bednar said after practice. “He certainly has the ability to do that, with the way he skates and moves the puck. At times he does that, other nights he seems more comfortable playing a defensive role and making a first pass.”

Girard knows he’s not perfect, and while his coach only mentioned one area he can improve, Girard sees room for improvement all over.

“When you’re a player, you want to be better everywhere,” Girard said. “My goal this year is just to be better and to make sure that we go far.”

While Girard is set to anchor the Avs top defensive pair this coming season, we had to address the other big news coming out of his summer: His new dog, Tomade the Doodle, and his social media popularity. When asked about it, the quiet Girard couldn’t help but chuckle.

“It was just an idea I had, me and my girlfriend,” he said. “He’s a very nice dog, I like him a lot and I’m glad that everyone likes him too.”

Thanks to the events of the offseason, Avalanche fans will get to enjoy a version of La Tomade both on and off the ice for the next eight years.
Avalanche Training Camp Observations: Defense might be taking shape

BY AJ HAEFELE   SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

The second day of Avalanche training camp saw some players really begin to separate themselves in the battle for opening night third pairing. With Ian Cole still expected out until December and the expected top four to be some combination of Cale Makar, Sam Girard, Erik Johnson and Nikita Zadorov, there could be up to four jobs in play if Colorado chooses to go with eight defenders on opening night.

That battle got off to a good start yesterday but really ramped up today as there was actual defense being played.

Yesterday there were some very solid moments from the Ryan Graves – Mark Barberio pairing. It was a good reminder that had Colorado not gone after anybody over the summer, they could’ve had decent depth on defense already.

But the Avs did make some big moves over the summer on the blueline. The Bowen Byram–Calle Rosen pair was, simply put, awesome today. They are each great skaters and they played off each other perfectly. Each capable of moving the puck, that pairing not only looked the part when they had the puck but they were very good defensively, too.

Byram’s aggressive nature defensively was on display once again but today the work forced him to defend in his own zone and he handled the assignment well. It was an impressive display from him given he’s 18-years-old.

The real standout, however, was Rosen. I don’t remember much of him from the first day of camp but on day two, he lit it up. The skating was great, the decisions with the puck were crisp and on point, and that’s all well and good.

What I really liked was Rosen’s defense. His reads were excellent and the hockey IQ really jumped off the ice to me. I thought that pairing made a case to play a preseason game together and very much hope they stay together for the expected scrimmages tomorrow.

Forgotten man reminds the world he’s still here

It seems like the Avs have been waiting on A.J. Greer for a number of years now. For one reason and another, it simply hasn’t all come together for him yet.

After a tumultuous offseason that included an arrest in New York, Greer entered camp with an enormous chip on his shoulder and maybe the future of his career on the line. Day one came and went without much mention of him but that changed in a real big way today.

Greer was finding the back of the net in a variety of ways and his energy level was consistently through the roof. He played with intensity, pace, and skill.

More than us in the crowd noticing, head coach Jared Bednar said it might be the best he’s ever seen Greer play. It’s obviously asking a lot of Greer to reach “highest level ever” every single day but that might just be what it takes to break down the barriers in front of him to make the NHL roster and see regular ice time.

It’s obvious Greer has nothing left to prove in the AHL. The only question is whether he can translate the skill portions of his game to the NHL on a consistent basis. If he keeps up something close to his performance from today, it will be extremely difficult to send him back to the Eagles.

More like Burakowsky

Andre Burakovsky’s performance on day one didn’t inspire much confidence from his coach or onlookers as he displayed his elite shot but not much else.

That all changed in a hurry today as he was much sharper with the puck and crisp on his passes. His skating was really undersold by those in Washington because he is not struggling to keep up with the pace Mackinnon is setting out there.

The all-around ability of Burakovsky on offense really stood out to me today. We knew about the shot being special when he got here and we’ve seen it on display both days. What came as a bit of an added surprise for me today was how well he fit into the flow MacKinnon and Landeskog were producing.

We see guys get swallowed up all the time when trying to play next to both skilled and creative players but Burakovsky hummed right along with them.

Hit it right on the Naz

It’s only been two days but Nazem Kadri sure appears to be as advertised. He comes with a certain intensity even during training camp and that kind of attitude is infectious.

The newly remade second line with Kadri centering Tyson Jost and Joonas Donskoi has found instant chemistry and they look like a line worth giving a longer look even when Mikko Rantanen inevitably comes back.

The on-ice chemistry even carried over to the locker room today as the guys continued talking through certain situations. That kind of communication is always huge for successful teams and it is especially encouraging to see from newer players who are still trying to tackle the intricacies of a new system.

BSN DENVER LOADED: 09.15.2019
Avalanche Training Camp Observations: Optimism unchecked

BY AJ HAEFELE  SEPTEMBER 13, 2019

It was an early morning at the rink today as the Avalanche kicked off their training camp with an invigorating 30 minutes of goaltender drills.

The large crowd on hand was treated to extremely technical work with goalies Philipp Grubauer and Hunter Miska before any other skaters took the ice.

Once the sessions were actually off and running, however, the pace of camp mirrored the style the Avalanche expects to play this season: fast and faster.

Let’s get to some of the highlights of the day.

New guys dazzle

After a busy offseason, there were plenty of new guys I could have picked here but I thought both Nazem Kadri and Joonas Donskoi stood out playing together on a remade second line that included Tyson Jost.

The trio had instant chemistry and it will be interesting to see just where Donskoi fits in once Mikko Rantanen inevitably joins the team. For one day, however, they did a little show-stealing of their own.

But the guy I really found intriguing was Andre Burakovsky. Coming off back to back 25-point seasons, seeing him take Rantanen’s place alongside Gabe Landeskog and Nathan MacKinnon really drives home just what the Avalanche believe they have in Burakovsky.

Understanding his situation, Burakovsky was sure to note his presence as the third banana on what was the NHL’s best line last season.

“Obviously [MacKinnon and Landeskog] two of the best players in the league,” Burakovsky told BSN Denver, “For me, I don’t want to take up too much space from them, but at the same time, I want to have the puck a lot and do my thing. I think it would be fun playing with those guys. We can be a real threat.”

You can read more about Burakovsky’s day here.

Lack of goaltending drama

As someone in the business of writing about the big stories of the day, I find it amusing how I find the lack of a goaltending battle to be interesting but the organization is clearly set at the position this season.

Colorado has decided to go with the rarely, rarely seen three goalie approach. That’s not three goalies in the NHL but just three on NHL contracts. The hierarchy is clear, however, as Grubauer is the man for the Avalanche and Pavel Francouz is his undisputed backup.

From there, Adam Werner (on his ELC) will split time with Hunter Miska as well. It was exp -

Other Notes

Some injury notes here: Erik Johnson and Colin Wilson each are healthy from their offseason shoulder surgeries but both are experiencing other minor ailments that kept them from joining their groups today. They could each appear in non-contact jerseys during the rest of training camp.

Valeri Nichushkin was a no-show on day one as he was getting his passport issues worked out. With immigration no longer an obstacle, he was expected to arrive in Denver tonight and take his physicals tomorrow. He is expected to be on the ice on Sunday at the earliest.

Each session today concluded with an endurance test that the players were aware of beforehand. This has historically torn up players in the past and today was no different. Martin Kaut received the lion’s share of attention because he was so exhausted he just laid on the ice for a few minutes but he certainly wasn’t alone. A number of players, including Burakovsky and Alex Beaucage, also camped out on the ice as a means of rest when they were finished. Bednar said after it the point of the test was for the players to push themselves to their limits and beyond. As in, stop making a story out of a non-story. Message received.

The lack of Rantanen continues to be a story. There is good news on that front, however. Mitch Marner signed a six-year deal with Toronto and was considered the high-end of the market this year. The Avalanche and Rantanen were already making progress towards a deal. The Marner situation getting wrapped up should not upset that progress in any meaningful way. It would not be a surprise to see Rantanen get six years, as well.

Ryan Graves returns after an unexpected promotion last year went so well the Avalanche were afraid to lose him on waivers at the end of the season. The acquisition of Calle Rosen as part of the Barrie-Kadri deal gives them another smooth-skating rearguard to compete for time.

But the real spice of this group comes from the quarter of young talent that could realistically be the backbone of a Stanley Cup-winning defense in a few years. Sam Girard is the veteran of the group but Cale Makar will join him on Colorado’s likely top pairing this season.

Beyond the ‘Turn and Burn’ pairing, Bowen Byram was drafted fourth overall and Conor Timmins is back to being healthy. Byram and Timmins combined for a dominant showing in the Anaheim Rookie Faceoff and each is fighting for NHL time immediately.

It certainly won’t happen right away but Colorado’s defense is no longer a hope and a prayer of competence. Byram and Rosen skated together while Timmins paired with Zadorov. That goes to show how seriously the coaching staff is taking their chances of making the team.

They could legitimately be dominant.

And soon.

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And soon.
Markus Hannikainen arrives at last at Blue Jackets camp

Adam Jardy
Sep 14, 2019 at 2:58 PM

The smile Markus Hannikainen couldn’t stop flashing showed no hint at the frustrations that immediately preceded it.

For the second time in three years, the native of Finland had his arrival to Blue Jackets preseason camp delayed due to an immigration issue. This year, it set his arrival back by nearly two weeks.

On Saturday, he was on the ice as the Jackets scrimmaged in front of what began as a capacity crowd at the Ice Haus. It had been a whirlwind of a few days, but Hannikainen was in good spirits.

“Same team, pretty much,” he said. “Same guys. I love it here. It’s great to be back.”

After signing with the Jackets in June, Hannikainen said he started his immigration process the same way he always has. Nothing had changed about his situation, he said, but he received word that things were going to be delayed. As the calendar crept toward the start of camp, the consternation grew.

“It is really frustrating, especially when you know you haven’t done anything or it’s not up to you and they don’t give you a timeline when it’s going to be ready,” he said. “That’s the toughest part. I was sitting at home. I was supposed to be here 10 days ago and I had to cancel my flights and just wait at home for the visa to come. It was frustrating.”

Hannikainen arrived at 10 p.m. Friday and was picked up by fellow countryman Joonas Korpisalo, who had no immigration issues.

Hannikainen said he woke up at 4:30 a.m. Saturday but was feeling no ill effects from the lack of sleep.

“You can just imagine how it does feel,” he said. “Obviously, I want to be here day one, but I’m still glad I can come in here now because I can do all the testing. This morning I did the medicals, the physicals, I’m going to do the run, I’m going to do the skating test and I’m going to do them all. I’m happy that I was able to get here today.”

After going through the process for a second time, Hannikainen said there’s no guarantee that it will or won’t happen to him again.

“They don’t tell (you) what’s up,” he said. “They just tell, here’s the situation now. We’re going to need you to answer these and these questions and this process might take weeks or months. Then I keep asking them when it’s going to be ready and it’s going to be ready when it is ready. There’s nothing you can really do about it.

“I did everything right. I did the same process. I’ve been here four years. It’s the same team, same employer, same everything, but that’s what it is. I don’t know what they did, but it’s here. I’m happy, but it was frustrating.”

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 09.15.2019
Columbus Blue Jackets players still follow Artemi Panarin’s example

Brian Hedger

Sep 14, 2019 at 5:30 AM

Artemi Panarin’s first regular season with the Blue Jackets had just concluded.

After setting a Jackets record with 82 points during the 2017-18 season — a mark he topped last season with 87 — Panarin was asked about the center of his line, Pierre-Luc Dubois, after a practice at Nationwide Arena.

The Blue Jackets were awaiting the start of a first-round playoff series against the Washington Capitals, and Panarin glanced across the locker room, spotting his rookie linemate — a towering, massive kid who had just finished his rookie season with 20 goals and 28 assists.

“We understand each other very well on the ice,” Panarin said through an interpreter. “I like playing with him. He is a great prospect, who has a lot of potential. He just needs to keep working hard and working a lot. He has a great chance to become an NHL star, but he needs to keep working hard.”

Dubois didn’t have to look far to find a good example to follow.

After surprisingly ascending to the role of No. 1 center a month into that season, the talented young French Canadian got a front-row seat to watch one of the NHL’s most naturally gifted — and hardest-working — forwards ply his trade. Dubois and “the Breadman” also became friends along the way, with a sort of teacher-pupil connection between them.

They both enjoyed it, while the Blue Jackets benefited from it more than some might realize.

Panarin is gone now, having signed with the New York Rangers this summer as a free agent, but the lessons he taught Dubois and other Jackets players remain.

“He’s obviously a great player and you see him on the ice, how talented he is, but he was also a mentor for me on this team and I learned as much as I could from him these past two years,” said Dubois, who topped his rookie season with 27 goals and 34 assists last season. “I was always asking questions on the ice, practicing with him, but now I’m ready to take that next step and maybe even help out the younger guys coming up on this team.”

He began to do it last season, when Alexandre Texier joined the Blue Jackets with two games left in the regular season. Dubois quickly took the young French forward under his wing, forming a fast friendship that helped Texier make the biggest transition of his young life.

“I don’t know who, exactly, is going to be around the whole year, but even though I’m just 21 and going into my third season, I’ve played all 82 games plus playoffs, plus world championships,” Dubois said Thursday at the outset of training camp. “I’ve played big minutes, big roles, so I do think I have a lot of experience.”

He has also played with Panarin, soaking up everything he could, and he wasn’t the only one. Other young Jackets took some cues from their former teammate, too, whether it was asking him questions or just watching Panarin win pucks all over the ice.

“I learned a lot from him,” said Oliver Bjorkstrand, who scored a career-high 23 goals last season. “I watched him (to) see how he plays, and different things he does, so it was definitely a good learning experience for me to see him play a lot, and get to play with him a little bit.”

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 09.15.2019
Like the other young forwards starting camp with the Blue Jackets this week, Sonny Milano is hoping to earn a spot on the NHL roster.

Unlike his peers, there are extenuating circumstances that make him one of the more interesting players to follow.

Milano was the Jackets’ first-round pick in 2014 (16th overall), has played parts of four NHL seasons with the team — including 55 games in 2017-18 (14 goals, eight assists) — but spent most of last season with minor-league Cleveland after breaking camp with the Blue Jackets. Milano, 23, is also facing misdemeanor assault charges in New York, along with Colorado forward A.J. Greer, stemming from an incident over a disputed bar tab.

“Obviously, it’s unfortunate what happened,” said Milano, who entered a not guilty plea Sept. 4 in New York in a case that will continue Oct. 16. “I mean, you definitely don’t want that to happen, but we’re trying to look past it now, and that’s pretty much all I’m going to say about that. I’m just ready for camp now, and it should be good.”

Milano was released on his own recognizance and does not have travel restrictions while the case is ongoing. His focus is on earning a roster spot with the Blue Jackets, who have ice time available after losing free-agent forwards Artemi Panarin, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel.

“I just turned 23, but it’s definitely time to get going here and try to build off a good camp,” Milano said Friday. “I know I can play in this league. I produced when I was here (before), so I’ve just got to stick (in the NHL) and play well.”

All healed up

Emil Bemstrom has a one-inch scar under his left eye as a reminder of a scary situation this summer that kept him out of the NHL Prospect Tournament in Traverse City, Michigan.

The highly touted rookie forward was struck in his left cheek by a deflected puck during a training session in Sweden, which left him with two broken bones that have since healed.

“My eye was so (swollen), I couldn’t see for two or three days,” said Bemstrom, who led the Swedish Hockey League with 23 goals as a rookie last season. “I’m fine now, though, so that’s good.”

Reclaiming the crown

Alexander Wennberg finished the annual two-mile conditioning run Thursday with the fastest time, crossing the finish line in a blazing 11 minutes, 2 seconds — three seconds faster than last year’s fastest runner, minor-league defenseman Doyle Somerby.
The good news: The U.S. government told Hannikainen the process could take two weeks to six months, meaning it could have lingered well into the 2019-20 season.

"Now I’m here," Hannikainen said. "Now that’s done. I’m happy, but it was frustrating."

The bad news: Hannikainen arrived after the rest of the Blue Jackets endured coach John Tortorella’s on-ice testing and the dreaded 2-mile run, but he’ll have to make both of them up, he said.

The worse news: Hannikainen will likely sign another contract in 2020, meaning he’ll need to apply for a visa all over again next summer.

Notebook

• A pretty cool moment during the intrasquad scrimmages. Alexander Wennberg, whose struggles the last couple of seasons have been well chronicled, scored off a wrister from the right circle. The crowd cheered every goal during the scrimmage, of course, but they were quite a bit louder when Wennberg scored, and it didn’t sound like a Bronx cheer, either. It sounded like a deeply engaged fan base trying to help lift a struggling player.

• Each team had 11 forwards, so there was some mixing and matching through the games. But if you want some early “line candy,” here goes: Texier – Dubois – Atkinson; Nyquist – Wennberg – Bjorkstrand; Foligno – Jenner – Anderson.

• Here are the groups:
  


  G – Veini Vehvilainen, 80 Mattias Wiikniemi.

  • There are more scrimmages Sunday and Monday, all scheduled to be in the IceHaus and, thus, open to the public:

    Sunday, Sept. 15
    9 a.m.-12:10 p.m. Team 2 Practice/Game/Game (IH)
    10:10 a.m.-1:10 p.m. Team 3 Game/Workout/Practice (IH)
    11:20 a.m.-2:10 p.m. Team 1 Game/Workout/Practice (IH)

    Monday, Sept. 16
    9 a.m.-12:10 p.m. Team 3 Practice/Game/Game (IH)
    10:10 a.m.-1:10 p.m. Team 1 Game/Workout/Practice (IH)
    11:20 a.m.-2:10 p.m. Team 2 Game/Workout/Practice (IH)

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019

1152766  Columbus Blue Jackets

After getting snared again in U.S. visa process, Markus Hannikainen arrives at Blue Jackets camp

By Aaron Portzline Sep 14, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Markus Hannikainen might be a player of intrigue for the Blue Jackets, but he’s a suspicious character in the eyes of the U.S. government.

For the second time in three years, Hannikainen’s name was flagged this summer during the process of approving his work visa. A process that should take only a couple of weeks instead lingered all summer, delaying Hannikainen’s arrival at training camp.

He planned to arrive in early September. But through no fault of his own, Hannikainen missed the first two days of training camp and arrived at 10 p.m. Friday. He was feeling jet-lagged and weary after Saturday’s scrimmages and workouts.

“It’s really frustrating, especially when you know you haven’t done anything, or it’s not up to you,” Hannikainen said. “They don’t give you a timeline when it’s going to be ready.

“I was supposed to be here 10 days ago. I had to cancel my flights and just wait at home (in Helsinki), waiting for the visa to come.”

The most frustrating part: Neither the Blue Jackets nor Hannikainen knows exactly what the issue is, why his name keeps setting off alarms with one or more of the 17 U.S. security agencies.

Does somebody on the government’s watch list have a similar name or alias? Is Hannikainen’s name spelled differently — perhaps a misplaced umlaut? — on different documents? Has Hannikainen’s identity been stolen or compromised?

“Hanni has a dark side, maybe,” goaltender Joonas Korpisalo said, grinning. “He’s been blacklisted.”

Hannikainen, a 26-year-old winger, said he began the visa process shortly after he signed a one-year, $750,000 contract with the Blue Jackets on June 17. Typically, the application is followed soon thereafter by an interview at the U.S. embassy in Helsinki.

But he was quickly notified that there would be a delay.

“I did everything right,” Hannikainen said. “I’ve been here for four years. Same team. Same employer. Same everything.”

Athletes and entertainers fall into the same category for work visas: a P1 visa. For an athlete (P1A), it’s the length of his contract, with a maximum of five years. For a touring musician (P1B), the visa is granted for as long as the tour is scheduled to run.

The Blue Jackets apply for about 20 P1 visas per year, and they rarely have an issue. They pay for the expedited service ($1,400), too, not the standard service ($465).

Korpisalo said his process took only two weeks.

In situations like this, a major-league sports franchise — or the league, working on the club’s behalf — can use its considerable power and influence to expedite the process. But, since it wasn’t known which agency flagged Hannikainen’s name (FBI? CIA? Homeland Security?) the Blue Jackets and/or the NHL had no clue whom to contact.

All they could do was wait.

Hannikainen was asked to turn over his previous and current addresses, previous and current phone numbers, social media accounts, siblings’ names, etc., to help the U.S. in clearing his name.

“They don’t tell you what’s up,” Hannikainen said. “They just say, ‘Here’s the situation. We need you to answer these questions. It could take weeks or it could take months.’

“I keep asking when is it going to be ready? When? And they say, ‘Hey! It’s ready when it’s ready.’”
Ben Bishop may not duplicate 2018-19 numbers, but the Stars hope their goalie won't have to.

By Matthew DeFranks
9:03 PM on Sep 14, 2019

FRISCO -- The Stars understand just how good Ben Bishop was last season.

His .934 save percentage was the best in the NHL in nearly a decade. His 1.98 goals against average was second in the league. He broke the club record for longest shutout streak and nearly carried the Stars to the conference finals with 52 saves in Game 7 against the Blues.

The Stars also understand how difficult it will be for Bishop to replicate those numbers.

"It all kind of came together," Bishop said. "I don't think you can sit here 'I want to try to get another under-2 goals against.' That's kind of one of those things where all the chips fall in line. I felt good and I think that's the big thing."

Because of the high bar Bishop set a year ago, history says a dip is expected. In NHL history, no goaltender has posted multiple seasons of a .934 save percentage (minimum 40 games). It's been eight years since a goalie (Henrik Lundqvist) had at least seven shutouts in consecutive seasons.

"It's very good, obviously, but that season's gone," goaltending coach Jeff Reese said. "We're moving on to a new year. It's just one shot at a time, one period at a time, one game at a time. We can't think about what happened last year, and I'm sure Bish wouldn't, either."

The hope is that the Stars won't need Bishop to be historically great again, not with the addition of wingers Joe Pavelski and Corey Perry, a bounce back from Jamie Benn and improvement from Roope Hintz. And Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov, of course.

Maybe Bishop won't buck decades of goaltending performances, and it should still be enough for the Stars. Bishop was still a top-flight goalie without a Herculean effort last season, and his potential regression shouldn't drop back to the league average because he's not league average.

Among qualifying active goaltenders, Bishop's .9206 career save percentage is second behind Tuukka Rask. He's had four seasons of at least a .920 save percentage.

Bishop is also different from other athletes in that he accepts and acknowledges the role that luck can play in sports. During the shutout streak last season, he conceded that he was getting a little lucky. Some goals he allows he chalks up to bad fortune. So Bishop understands that numbers like save percentage and goals against average might not be completely indicative of performance.

"You don't really want to look at the numbers as you do the way you're playing and giving your team a chance to win night in and night out," Bishop said. "That's almost more important and hopefully the numbers follow."

Plus, with assistant coach Rick Bowness and nearly every defenseman back from a group that allowed the second-fewest goals in the league last season, Bishop should be facing shots of the same quality as he did in Bowness' first year a season ago.

At 5-on-5, Bishop had the second-highest expected save percentage in the league according to MoneyPuck, meaning the Stars were limiting the amount of high-danger shots Bishop faced. While shorthanded, Bishop had the fourth-highest expected save percentage in the league.

According to Natural Stat Trick, Bishop's 2.18 expected goals per 60 was the fifth-fewest in the league at 5-on-5.

After last season, Bishop mentioned Bowness' involvement with Tampa Bay's defense when the two found success there.

"He's a pleasure to work with and I think he's one of the best ever," Bishop said. "I don't know exactly what it is, but we seem to work pretty well together. I really think the fact that he gives everyone a voice and really wants to know what we're thinking and how we want to do it and likes to talk it out, makes a big difference."

Like many other Stars, Bishop hears the whispers surrounding the Stars this season and how the expectations are now focused on the Stanley Cup. And yet his target remains the same as it's been: win 30 games, and your team usually makes the playoffs.

"If you start talking about the playoffs and whatnot without even playing the first game, I think it's kind of ridiculous," Bishop said. "You listen to the radio, I think every team says they're going to make the playoffs. I don't think our expectations are any different than any other team's expectations."

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 09.15.2019
Detroit Red Wings are eager to see Moritz Seider in exhibitions: Here's why

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press
Published 6:26 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019
TRAVERSE CITY — Moritz Seider impresses with his maturity and his swagger, balancing aplomb with self-awareness. He looks confident making plays with the puck and showcasing his mobility and his hockey sense.

Seider is one of the reasons there's extra excitement at this year's Detroit Red Wings training camp. He's one of the team's top defense prospects, a 6-foot-4, 207-pound teenager touted for his two-way game. It's early — very early — but it's impossible not to notice him.

"He has a lot of confidence with the puck, he's one of those d-men who is an offensive-minded guy who you want to play with," forward Taro Hirose said Saturday. "He's not going to be dumping pucks, he's going to be making plays and looking for you and that's what you want in a d-man."

The two were part of the group of young Wings who won last week's prospects tournament. General manager Steve Yzerman selected Seider sixth overall in June's draft, seeing the big German defenseman who shoots right as a key addition to the rebuild.

"He's a very mature person for sure," Blashill said. "You can tell he's comfortable in his own skin. Those are the guys that have true self-confidence. He carries himself with a moxie. He's got a leadership pied-piper to him where guys the same age want to follow him around. He's got lots of real good qualities. I think he's a real good prospect."

The team is eager to see how Seider fares during exhibition season. When team personnel scouted him in May at the IIHF world championship, he played a conservative game. Is that what they'll see when he goes up against NHL veterans? Or will they also see his aggressive side?

German defender Moritz Seider attempts to score past Czech Republic's goalkeeper Patrik Bartosak during the IIHF Men's Ice Hockey World Championships quarterfinal match between Czech Republic and Germany on May 23, 2019 in Bratislava.

"He's got real good instincts," Blashill said. "Real good brain. Can move, he's big ... I've gotten to see him in different settings. At the men's worlds, he was super safe. At the prospects tournament, he was super aggressive offensively. It's a real positive that he's got that offensive touch, but let's get him into games.

"He's 18. That's a real young age for a defenseman. I think he's going to be a real good player, I just don't know when."

Seider can be sent to Grand Rapids or Germany if he does not make the Detroit roster, but there are advantages to assigning him to the Griffins. He'd be a two-hour drive away instead of a transatlantic flight, making it easier to keep tabs on every aspect of his development, from on-ice performance to training to nutrition. Playing in the AHL would also help Seider acclimate to the smaller North American ice sheet.

Asked about the argument for keeping Seider close, Blashill parried. "I wanted to go to law school when I got done with college. I think I can make a strong argument for any place for him to play, to be dead honest with you.

"Certainly there's arguments to play in North America; you could make arguments to play in Europe. Let's watch him play in exhibition and see where he best fits in."

In what little he has seen of Seider, veteran defenseman Patrik Nemeth said: "You can see he's got the tools, for sure. He wants to make plays and he sees the ice pretty well. It's going to be interesting to follow his development."

Seider sounded as if he'd prefer to stay in North America. "It all depends where I can play the most and that's probably in Grand Rapids if I'm not making the team," he said.

"I don't really care about it that much where I'm staying next season, to be honest. I just want to become a better hockey player, a better person, and I don't really care where that is."

Seider spoke of how thankful he is to be around a veteran defenseman such as Trevor Daley, who is entering his 17th NHL season. He likes absorbing the knowledge the veterans share.

This has been a fun month for Seider, an exciting one, from joining pre-camp skates at LCA to attending his first football game at Michigan Stadium ("It was unbelievable, a great atmosphere."). He's eager to get the most out of everything, and that starts with himself.

"I'm 18, I can improve a lot of things," he said. "That's why I'm here. I'm a prospect and I want to get better and I think I can do that in every situation on the ice, I can do a little bit better job."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 09.15.2019
Children's Foundation chief making his mark to boost youth health

Carol Cain, Free Press Business Columnist
Published 6:30 a.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019 | Updated 11:41 a.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019

If someone had told Larry Burns when he started his job he'd be spending this past Saturday in front of 700 people at the Motor City Casino Sound Board along with Detroit Red Wings announcers Ken Daniels and Mickey Redmond and other celebrities to raise money for awareness about drug addiction and mental illness, he wouldn't have believed it.

Burns, president and CEO of The Children's Foundation since 2017, has been on a crusade, crisscrossing the state signing up businesses, hospitals, colleges and other nonprofits, including the Jamie Daniels Foundation, as they become partners.

The Children's Foundation is an independent community-based nonprofit providing funding, advocacy and support for child, adolescent and young adult initiatives related to wellness and health.

When Burns joined the foundation, it had four partners. "Now we have over 70 partners. We are focusing on mental health issues facing early childhood groups, adolescence and young adults." "Our independence allows us to work with virtually any partner," added Burns, who stands out with his colorful signature bow ties. "We have been able to put politics aside and to consistently focus on improving the lives of children and families."

Burns will meet this Tuesday with over 80 legislators in Lansing and others to discuss their mission and also the need to do more to raise the conversion about mental health, suicide prevention, addiction and more.

"Our mission is to be a major source of funds, advocacy and support for the social determinants of health impacting children and their families in Michigan," he said. "We'll achieve this by fundraising, granting funds and advocating in Lansing and Washington. Our message to elected officials is that mental illness is a disease that needs funding in research as well as in insurance coverage."

Daniels, who has been involved with Burns for over a year, sees his success a bit differently.

"Larry's like a good coach," said Daniels. "You surround yourself with good people and let them do their jobs. You have to know how to lead and to make sure everyone is doing their job. Larry does that."

Daniels' son Jamie Daniels died of an overdose of an opioid that included heroin and fentanyl at the age of 23. The family started the Jamie Daniels Foundation in his honor to help educate others about drug addiction and raise awareness about mental health.

After teaming up with The Children's Foundation, they began working on the first Jamie Daniels Foundation Fundraiser — a celebrity roast of former Red Wings player and announcer Mickey Redmond. It took place a week ago. It went well and they are planning their next roast — featuring former Red Wings Coach Scotty Bowman — in August 2020.

Burns, a native of Detroit, has worked in top leadership positions at the University of Akron, the University of Toledo and Medical College of Ohio before coming back to Michigan two years ago.

"During my time in higher education, I saw the power of utilizing education as the main vehicle to break down decades of poverty and to create a runway for successful, healthy and fulfilling lives," Burns said.

"The position I have now allows me to combine all of the things I've done in my career to help children of all ages and their families," he added.

The Children's Foundation has 20 employees with an annual budget of $7 million. Burns said the organization will give out $6 million in new grants this year.

"We want to be a regional funding source and advocate for children and families," he said.

Suicide prevention

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. The statistics tell the sobering story as suicide is the 10th-leading cause of death among adults in the United States and second-leading cause of death among people ages 10-24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many attempting suicide have depression or other mental health disorders.

Too often stigma gets in the way of people admitting they have a problem or getting help. One in five young people between the ages of 14 and 24 will experience mental illness.

The toll of mental health issues on business is also staggering. American companies lose almost $200 billion each year in employee absenteeism and productivity due to mental health issues.

Numbers aside, Burns has seen the toll of mental illness on too many. It's what keeps him motivated as he keeps his foot on the pedal.

Among the many organizations Burns has forged relationships with is Kevin’s Song, a suicide prevention organization in metro Detroit, and Do it For Daniel in the Upper Peninsula, which is a suicide prevention organization targeting high school students and young adults.

"For generations, people have been hiding their behavioral health issues within themselves or from family members," he said. "The only way we were going to change this is to educate people on a consistent basis that mental illness is a disease not caused by a person's weakness but caused by many physical and environmental issues."

"Education is the key to breaking down decades of stigma," Burns said. For more:

Yourchildrensfoundation.org
jamiedanielsfoundation.org

GETTING HELP: If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 74174.
Traverse City — Moritz Seider, as it turns out, is a fan.
A fan of college football.
The Red Wings' first-round pick from Germany was able to attend his first college football game recently, as it turns out, at The Big House.
Seider, 18, was still gushing over the experience Saturday at the end of practice.
"Unbelievable," said Seider, of the experience. "It was a great atmosphere."
Seider carried that enthusiasm into the recent NHL Prospect Tournament.
The 6-foot-3 defenseman was one of the Red Wings' best players on the team that won the tournament, leading into this training camp, and now has fans excited about what the future may hold.
It's doubtful Seider would open the season in the NHL, the jump from German hockey to the NHL being so very big.
But it wouldn't be shocking to see Seider begin the season in Grand Rapids, in the American Hockey League, with returning to Mannheim, and playing with his German team, a distant third option.
General manager Steve Yzerman and coach Jeff Blashill both have preached patience during this star in camp, regarding Seider.
As for Seider, as many 18-year-olds basically are, he'll be happy wherever he is, playing hockey.
"I don't really care where I'm staying," Seider said. "To be honest, I just want to become a better player and person and I don't care where that is."
Yzerman was pleased with what he saw of Seider in the prospects tournament.
"He did very well," Yzerman said. "As an 18-year-old defenseman, he logged a lot of ice time, and he played in all situations. It's a big step coming into this tournament, and you watch the guys who do well in this tournament, and generally, they turn out to be pretty good players in the NHL."
"I'm not sure where he'll play (after the exhibition season). He's here this week, he's going to play in the preseason, and we're going to take one step at a time. Let's get through the preseason. We have options, Detroit, the American Hockey League (in Grand Rapids) or back to Europe. All three are potentially good options."
"We'll take it one step at a time."
Blashill, while coaching Team USA during May's world championships, had a chance to watch Seider, who played for Germany.
"He was impressive," Blashill said. "You don't get the same forecheck pressure, but man, for an 18-year-old, he did an unreal job when facing pressure. When he had it, he made real good, poised plays and managed his game great."
Some scouts have questioned Seider's offensive upside and ability to transport the puck, but Blashill feels that's not fair.
"He's played against men," Seider said. "If he was playing high school last year, nobody would have questioned it. There's a skill set there, he's a real prospect for sure, and let's see how he does in exhibition."
The largest adjustment for most young Europeans is adjusting to the smaller NHL ice surfaces and the speed of the game.
Seider got a taste of that during the prospects tournament.
"It's a lot faster, but in the end, it's hockey," Seider said. "Everybody can play and it doesn't matter if you come from Europe or North America, in the end, it's just hockey. You have to play your game and it's not like a lot of changes."
Blashill indicated Seider will play in Wednesday's exhibition game in Chicago.
"You train all summer to be on the ice for the first couple of games and I'm real excited and looking forward to put the jersey on for the first time," Seider said.
Glendening honored
It was a whirlwind summer for Luke Glendening.
The veteran forward got married, went on a honeymoon, then arrived at training camp and was named an alternate captain, replacing Niklas Kronwall.
"It was a great summer," Glendening said. "Finding out when I got here (about wearing an "A"), obviously it's very humbling, I'm very honored. To be part of the tradition of the Red Wings, it's great."
Glendening has always been one to lead by example rather than speaking up, and though that might change a bit, wearing a letter isn't going to change Glendening much.
"I don't think it changes who I am," Glendening said. "Maybe a bit, maybe more comfortable speaking up when I have something to say, but it's not going to change who I am. I'm going to try to lead by example and that's what I've done my entire career."
Almost done
The Wings will have the annual Red-White intrasquad scrimmage Sunday.
They'll conclude the Traverse City training camp portion of the preseason Monday with a practice, then head home to face Chicago Tuesday at Little Caesars Arena in the first of nine exhibition games.
Top pick Moritz Seider makes strong first impression on Red Wings

By Ansar Khan

TRAVERSE CITY – The Detroit Red Wings' selection of Moritz Seider with the sixth pick in this year's draft shocked many analysts, fans and even the German-born defenseman himself. Perhaps Steve Yzerman's first pick as the team's general manager will turn into a pleasant surprise.

The early returns are promising. While the 18-year-old hasn't played NHL competition yet, he excelled in the Prospects Tournament and has impressed during the first two days of training camp at Centre I.C.E.

"I like his makeup as a person," coach Jeff Blashill said. "I like his moxie, I like his brain, I like his skill-set. I think he's going to be a real good player. I just don't know when."

Maybe sooner than later. The 6-4, 207-pound Seider has been paired mostly with veteran Trevor Daley through two days of camp. The next test is Sunday's Red/White game (noon). The first big test will be his preseason debut Wednesday in Chicago, where Blashill wants to see how he will fare against stars Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews, who figure to play in that game instead of Tuesday's preseason opener at Little Caesars Arena.

Exhibition games will determine where Seider will start the season. Detroit is not out of the question, which is virtually unheard of for a defenseman his age. Seider has indicated a preference to play for the Grand Rapids Griffins rather than return to his German club, Adler Mannheim, if he doesn't earn an NHL job.

Yzerman said all three options are open. It makes sense to keep Seider in North America to accelerate his acclimation on and off the ice.

"I think it all depends where I can play the most," Seider said. "I'm thinking that's probably in Grand Rapids if I'm not making the team. First of all, you're here to make the team and you want to be part of the NHL team soon."

Yzerman liked what he saw of Seider at the Prospects Tournament, where he logged more ice time than any Red Wing and played in all situations in helping the team win the championship.

"The guys that do well in this tournament generally turn out to be pretty good players in the NHL," Yzerman said. "He shows good hockey sense most importantly, he showed good skills and what we really were impressed with is it's a different style of hockey on a smaller rink. He seemed very comfortable with the physical game and played with an edge and was very aggressive. He's smart, so he'll figure out what he can and can't do."

Seider played a safe, defensive style for Germany at the World Championship. He displayed his aggressive offensive tendencies in the Prospects Tournament.

"A different side of him than I saw in the World Championship, when he was playing real safe because of the role he was in as a young kid," Blashill said. "I thought he attacked the game here. He's got real good instincts, real good brain, can move, he's big. Let's see when it starts to get more real."

Seider was delighted to get a lot of ice time and power play minutes and show a physical side.

"You always want to play hard and make it tough to play against you," Seider said. "I think that's what I tried, and I think that worked pretty well."

Off the ice, Blashill has been impressed with Seider's maturity.

"He came into the (suite) with his family at the draft, and his parents don't speak much English, so he had to carry his parents a little bit and he did an unreal job of it," Blashill said. "You could tell he's comfortable in his own skin. Those are the guys that have true self-confidence. He's got a little leadership Pied Piper to him where guys of the same age want to follow him around."

Fellow prospect Taro Hirose has been hanging with Seider.

"He's an awesome guy, real good character guy," Hirose said. "I think you can tell he's going to be an unbelievable player in the league."

Hirose added: "He has a lot of confidence with the puck and he's one of those D-men that, as an offensive-minded guy, you want to play with because he's not just going to be dumping the puck in, he's going to be making plays and looking for you."

Seider got a little familiarized with the area while training in Detroit before the Prospects Tournament.

"First of all, great universities," Seider said. "We had the chance to go to a Michigan game in the Big House. It was unbelievable. It was a great atmosphere."

"You can go fishing, you can go out on the water a lot of times. I heard a couple guys have boats, so I think it's going to be a fun time."

The Red Wings have lacked an anchor on defense since Nicklas Lidstrom retired in 2012. Seider could soon be that player.

"I think he's going to be a good player in the NHL," Yzerman said. "Is that this year or next year or two years down the road, I'm not sure?"
Oliwer Kaski hopes to upgrade Red Wings' skill level on defense

Updated Sep 14, 11:42 AM; Posted Sep 14, 11:34 AM
By Ansar Khan

TRAVERSE CITY – The Detroit Red Wings' defense lacks skill and offensive punch, traits that Oliwer Kaski brings.

But Kaski first must earn a spot on the roster.

Kaski experienced his first formal practice with the Red Wings Friday during the first day of training camp at Centre I.C.E., displaying the skills that made him in the Finnish League MVP in 2018-19.

"I try to be good with the puck, make plays and shoot it," Kaski said. "I think I have a good shot, especially on the power play. I hope to be good there and produce."

"Work hard and battle and show that I really want it, and also play my game and make plays and shoot the puck. That's why they wanted me here, so I got to do that."

The right-shooting Kaski (6-0, 190) understands he's not assured of a roster spot after the undrafted free agent signed a one-year contract with the Red Wings in May. Right now, it appears the top six is comprised of Danny DeKeyser, Mike Green, Patrik Nemeth, Filip Hronek, Jonathan Ericsson and Trevor Daley. Kaski's main competition might come from Madison Bowey, Dennis Cholowski and Moritz Seider.

Kaski's age (23) and experience in SM-liiga, where he led Pelicans in goals (19) and points (51) in 59 games last season might give him the edge. Jiri Fischer, the Red Wings' associate director of player personnel, was instrumental in recruiting Kaski.

"Jiri Fischer had me watch on tape before we got him and he's got some real weapons, and I got to see him play at the World Championship and he can really shoot it and he has a real good offense mind," Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said. "The question is when a guy comes over from Europe is, 'How will they defend on the smaller sheet?' We'll find out and the same thing with Seids (2019 first pick Seider)."

Kaski isn't a newbie to the smaller North American ice, having played the entire 2015-16 season at Western Michigan before returning to Europe.

"I know what the game is a little bit," Kaski said. "I think I liked the small rink. It fits for me, my game style."

"Things happen faster, so you got to be ready to make the plays faster," Kaski said. "You've got to be aware all the time."

Kaski feels he improved his skating in the summer with extra drills. Fellow Finn Valtteri Filppula skated with Kaski in the summer.

"He can make plays. He can shoot," Filppula said. "I feel like I'm saying the same thing about a lot of players. I think now everybody skates well. They have a lot of skill and they can make plays. I'm really excited to see how camp goes for him."

Kaski was asked to compare his style to current NHL players.

"I just like to watch the more offensive guys like (John) Klingberg, (Erik) Karlsson, (Victor) Hedman, (Oliver) Ekman-Larsson," Kaski said. "(Miro) Heiskanen's pretty good, too. I like how they make plays but still are good defensively too, good two-way defensemen."

Several teams were pursuing Kaski, who said choosing Detroit was easy.

"They really understood my style of game," Kaski said. "I think every European player liked the Red Wings because they had a lot of Europeans and you liked the style of game they played. I always looked up to those guys, the Swedish guys they had here. Filppula was here, too. I always liked to watch them play. I really liked their style of playing."
Connor McDavid is fine after going down in practice

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal
Published: September 14, 2019
Updated: September 14, 2019 6:23 PM MDT

Connor McDavid took a tumble at the Saturday afternoon practice but while the fans at the open practice at Rogers Place held their breath, there was no harm.

He brushed himself off on a back-checking drill when Joe Gambardella got tangled up with Zack Kassian and the Edmonton Oilers’ captain collided with his linemate Kassian. He got back to his feet, but fell as he skated back to the bench, eventually shaking his left leg a bit.

But there are no worries here.

"Kass is doing everything he can to stay on that line (McDavid and Leon Draisaitl) and he hits his centreman. That's not going to keep Kass on that line," kidded Oilers' coach Dave Tippett. "Nah, he's (McDavid) fine. They (McDavid and Kassian) were laughing about it."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.15.2019
Edmonton Oilers

Oilers Notes: Leon Draisaitl salary is bargain next to Marner's

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal
Published:September 14, 2019
Updated:September 14, 2019 6:19 PM MDT

On the way out of town Peter Chiarelli was still taking major heat from fans for signing Milan Lucic to a seven-year, $42-million contract because Lucic couldn’t live up to it. But Chiarelli’s lasting legacy will be the eight-year $68 million deal for Leon Draisaitl, one of the NHL’s top 10 players. At the time, other GM’s were howling behind closed doors because Draisaitl suddenly became the comparable for other restricted free-agents off a 77-point regular-season. But now, in the wake of Mitch Marner’s six-year, $65.3 million contract in Toronto, Draisaitl’s a bargain. Marner’s average cap hit is $10.893. Draisaitl, who scored 50 goals last year, is $8.5 million. Plus, he’s signed for eight years, not six.

And Connor McDavid’s eight-year, $100 million, which has seven years left is $12.5-million a season. The Leafs top three forwards (Auston Matthews, Marner and John Tavares) make $33 million or 41 per cent of Toronto’s $81.5-million cap ceiling. The Oilers best three forwards (McDavid, Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins) make $27 million or 33 per cent of the max team cap.

The landscape shifts dramatically in hockey. “I feel great that the previous regime, Peter, got Leon and Connor signed to long-term deals,” said Edmonton Oilers new GM Ken Holland. “Connor and Leon have seven years left, those contracts are done. “It goes in cycles. As the cap goes up, things change,” said Holland on what top young players sign for. “There’s no blue-print, there’s not a book we (GM’s) follow. You determine what importance players have to your team and you find a way to get them signed to keep them.”

CHAISSON LOOKING FOR LINEMATES

At the first two Edmonton Oilers practices, Alex Chiasson was playing with Tomas Jurco and Cooper Marody, two players looking for NHL work. People noticed because Chiasson has a spot locked up after 22 goals last year. No slight on Jurco or Marody, at all, but Chiasson will probably be the third-line RW off his first 20-goal season. His coach Dave Tippett emphatically said there’s no message for Chiasson.

“Don’t read anything into it? There’s a lot of auditions going on. We’re looking for people to play with Chiasson,” said Tippett. “He’ll be on the first power play tomorrow for practice (Sunday morning).” Chiasson has always been under the gun at camps, of course. Last year’s breakout year was last year.

“I have to prove that I can play in a top six or top nine role. I’m OK with that. I’m up for the challenge. This is nothing new for me,” said Chiasson. “We’re building a team, we’re looking for team success, and you need internal competition between guys. That’s how I’m looking at it.”

LARSSON TRIMS DOWN

Defenceman Adam Larsson, who struggled last year with his game, says he dropped 10 pounds over the summer which is what his partner Darnell Nurse said too, down to 215 from 225. Same summer trainer?

“Maybe the same diet plan,” joked Larsson. “I lost almost 10 pounds. Got some fat off my belly. I did a lot more running this summer, not as much lifting (weights).” Tippett knows Larsson struggled last year but had a chat with the defender before camp.

“I watched him in the World Championship with (Oiler) Ekman-Larsson and he was free and easy. He had a smile on his face. I told Adam this summer I wanted the World Championship Larsson, not the Edmonton Oilers Larsson,” said Tippett. “Right now, he seems like he’s having fun, he’s trying to dangle guys with the puck.”

OPEN SCRIMMAGE

The Oilers will have a noon scrimmage Sunday at the Downtown Community Centre that will be open to the public, a free look at some of the new players. There could be three lines and four D on both squads and many of the veteran, returning Oiler players may take the scrimmage off.

This ‘n that: Oilers goalie Mike Smith missed his second on-ice day with the flu and might be away for a few more … Patrik Laine, still working on a new contract, obviously won’t be here with Winnipeg Jets for Monday’s game. He’s now skating with SC Bern in Switzerland … Draisaitl’s dad Peter, who was coaching Cologne when Oilers played an exhibition there last October, is now coaching in Kosice, in Slovakia … The Oilers have changed their Swedish amateur scout. Former NHLer Pelle Eklund won’t be back. Instead, they’ve hired Joakim Holm. “He was working with Frolunda’s (youth) academy,” said Oilers’ director of amateur scouting Tyler Wright … The Jets will start their top farmhand goalie Eric Comrie in net against Oilers Monday. Obviously the Comrie name still resonates here.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.15.2019
Sam Gagner returned to Edmonton Oilers a well-travelled player

Know this about Sam Gagner: as a hockey player he is a survivor. He was in the NHL's youngest player in 2007-2008, two months into his 18th year when he got his first NHL point in his first NHL game, assisting on a Tom Gilbert goal. Only three players in Oilers' history have ever had eight points in a game — Wayne Gretzky, Paul Coffey and Gagner. He was in on 11 straight Oiler goals over two games six and a half years ago. He beat 99's 10 for that.

He was in the NHL at 18, playing with Dustin Penner and Ales Hemsky here, and in the minors at 27 when the Flyers sent him down. He had his first 50-point season in Columbus three years ago and was waived through the league last season, winding up back in the AHL.

He just turned 30 and he's already played 802 games. He's been an NHL centre, played right-wing for current Oilers head coach Dave Tippett in Arizona, and was on the left side for Tippett with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and James Neal through the first two days of his 12th NHL camp. He's played here twice, in Arizona, Philadelphia, Columbus and Vancouver. He's made the NHL minimum at 27 and makes $3.25 million now.

He's seen it all, done it all.

He's most likely be on the Oilers roster to start the season, somewhere.

On the second line, the fourth line, maybe on the second power play, maybe 13th or 14th forward.

Gagner, whose dad Dave played 946 NHL games and is now a player agent for the Orr Hockey Group, has no idea how it'll turn out for him. He'll figure it out.

"I don't worry where I'll play. I'm focusing on putting my best foot forward every day. I've played a lot of different positions and bounced around. I'm ready for anything," said Gagner, who had 10 points in 25 games last year after Oilers got him from Vancouver in mid February for Ryan Spooner. He had played the first four and half months in the AHL with the Toronto Marlies.

Tippett knows exactly what he'll get from Gagner.

"He’s a really smart player and he can make plays," he said.

"The smarts have turned him into survivor because you can play him with good players and he can complement them or he’s been in situation where he’s been farther down the lineup and he’s helped the special teams, mostly the power play."

"I'm interested to see where Sam fits."

Playing for Tippett once before, albeit just one season for the Coyotes before he was traded to the Flyers, should give him a leg up. But not all the way up.

"Any familiarity can help," said Gagner. Having a full year under Tip before … knowing his mannerisms and how he does things, his day to day, hopefully is a good thing. He's calm and patient behind the bench which will help us. He lets guys play offence but he’s focused on structure and checking well. He’s a great communicator. I’m excited about it."

By putting Gagner with RNH and Neal the first two days, Tippett has communicated that he thinks Gagner has the offensive chops to play there, even on his off-wing.

"Tip has defined roles for his players, so when you come to the rink every day, you know what’s expected of you," said Gagner. “There will be a lot of moving parts and seeing where everybody fits.”

What’s Gagner’s defined role?
JONES: Joel Persson hopes to go from classroom to Edmonton Oilers roster

Terry Jones
Published:September 14, 2019
Updated:September 14, 2019 11:04 AM MDT

Joel Persson is the wild card at Edmonton Oilers training camp. He may also be the hole card. And if he pulls this off, he most certainly will be the best story.

When Keith Gretzky signed Persson to a $1 million, one-year, one-way deal, I'm not sure anybody figured the 25-year-old Swedish defenceman might show up for his first day of training camp with the prospects of playing beside Oscar Klefbom on the first pairing as the designated puck-moving defenceman with the duties of giving service to Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl up front.

Three years ago Persson was working as a school teaching assistant and playing in the lowest of levels of hockey in Sweden.

"I was in the fourth tier. I was almost in the fifth tier. We played in relegation and turned it around in the last game."

Already a storybook guy in Sweden, Persson figures he has a lot of people who will be following him.

"I played in almost every league back home. I had a lot of friends at a lot of different levels," he said.

"Back home when I came up to the Swedish Elite League from the third tier it was a big story there. People were surprised back home when I made that step. Hopefully, I can do this step, too."

Persson opened camp Friday at Rogers Place as the playing partner of Edmonton's No. 1 defenceman Klefbom. By itself that may or may not have meant much but at Thursday's interviews on medicals day, Klefbom spoke as if he believed he'd been assigned his partner for the season in Persson.

With head coach Dave Tippett saying he planned to put Adam Larsson and Darnell Nurse on the second pair in a play beside Oscar Klefbom on the first pairing as the designated puck-moving defenceman with the duties of giving service to Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl up front.

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With head coach Dave Tippett saying he planned to put Adam Larsson and Darnell Nurse on the second pair, Klefbom was asked about the idea of having a new partner this season and immediately started talking about Persson.

OIL SPILLS PODCAST: SMITH ADDS DIFFERENT ELEMENTS TO OILERS' GOALTENDING

Goalie Mike Smith will bring a puck-handling savvy, veteran presence and a strong second-half showing with the Calgary Flames last season to the Edmonton Oilers in 2019-20 to split duties with Mikko Koskinen, who was shaky down the stretch.

Hockey beat writer Derek Van Diest and host Craig Ellingson discuss how things could play out in Edmonton's net this year.

"It's going to be very interesting," said Klefbom.

"Obviously, he's another Swede but I haven't seen him play that much. It's going to be a lot of fun. Obviously, he's a bit of a late-bloomer back home.

"But he looks good on the ice. He has good mobility and a good shot. It's going to be fun to find out what kind of chemistry we might have. From what I've heard, he has some really good qualities that are going to help us this year."

Late bloomer?

The two were born eight months apart and Klefbom has played 316 NHL games and Persson zero.

"Finally I'm here. So I'm really happy to be here now. When I was 20, I was really low then," he said of Tier 4 in Sweden, which is three tiers south of being an actual professional hockey player.

"I was almost working a full-time job then. About 85 per cent. I was working at a school for five years. I was both a teacher and an assistant teacher. And I was special help for kids who couldn't handle school by themselves.

"A couple years from now it was looking like I'd be a teacher but I am far from being a teacher now."

The timing of all this was the call of Persson himself.

"I thought I needed one more year back home to work on everything," said the defenceman who wanted to play a second season in the Swedish Elite League, one more season to develop to the point where he thought he might be able to succeed in the NHL.

"I had a pretty good year to do that," added the player who had been feeding Vancouver Canucks Calder Trophy-winning Elias Pettersson the year before with the Vaxjo Lakers.

"I made the national team last season, which was my goal to do that. I am a much better player now for sure."

If Persson is playing beside Klefbom on opening night, it would allow GM Ken Holland, a big believer in developing players to be NHL-ready in the minors instead of trying to do it in the NHL, the opportunity to further ripe prospects like Evan Bouchard, Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones, William Lagesson and Dmitri Samorukov until they're unquestionably ready to begin their big league careers.

Klefbom is a 21-22 minute defenceman.

If Persson is savvy enough to know he needed another year last year, is he savvy enough to know if he can play those kind of minutes beside him?

"I don't know yet. If they want me there and think I can do it, I want to for sure. But it's really early in the camp. It was the first time today. It felt OK. We'll see. It was an OK practice today and I'm looking forward to tomorrow."

Asked for a scouting report on himself, he offered this:

"I try to play smart and quickly with the offensive end in mind but not to cheat on the defensive end either."

Persson sat there yesterday looking around the Oilers opulent dressing room in the NHL's state of the art building sitting about a half dozen stalls down from McDavid enjoying the interviewing.

"This is for sure the biggest arena I've ever played in. The biggest one in Sweden is the Globen and I haven't even been in that one," he said of the rink in Stockholm.

He said it's all something to take in.

"I don't want to think about that. I'm afraid it will all go away."
Handicapping Oilers prospect progress: The development of Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones and William Lagesson

By Allan Mitchell Sep 14, 2019

The first time I saw Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones and William Lagesson, none made an impression. It wasn’t their fault. The trio of blue made their debut as Oilers prospects the same week as first overall pick Connor McDavid, and every set of eyes at Rexall Place was on the future captain. In my game notes for the Billy Moores Cup later that week, I wrote the following:

Ethan Bear. I liked his skating and passing. He was a hair reckless with the puck a time or two and lost a physical battle down low (don’t remember opponent) but it was a nice showing.

Caleb Jones. Has a better shot than I’d read, needs to fix the sights though. Mobile player, I think his no fuss style probably fits better in a more traditional setting.

William Lagesson. Taller and bigger than I thought he’d be, wiry kid, unusual skater.

First impressions can sustain, but for hockey prospects, the road from the draft to the NHL is so long, there are many ups and downs for all but the truly gifted (McDavid being an example of the truly gifted). Each of the three defencemen spent time playing junior hockey (Bear and Jones in the WHL, Lagesson in the USHL), and now all three have had some time in the American Hockey League.

Do they have NHL futures?

One indication that all three might have a future in the NHL involves five-on-five goal differential from a year ago. As AHL teams don’t provide us with time on ice and other measures that aid in evaluation, we’re left with the basic (and meaningful) goal differential stat. All three defencemen had success in 2018-19:

Caleb Jones: 50 games, 44-28 GF-GA, +16 five-on-five goal differential

Ethan Bear: 52 games, 41-28 GF-GA, +13 five-on-five goal differential

William Lagesson: 67 games, 48-37 GF-GA, +11 five-on-five goal differential

From this we can tell the Condors were a good club (all regular blue were +10 or better) and that the three prospects were rock-solid with Bakersfield.

What does that tell us about this year’s training camp? All three men are bona fide, so luck, hard work, getting the attention of the coaching staff and more luck are needed for one to emerge from the pack.

It is especially heartening for Jones, who spiked in a big way during his second AHL season. The gap between Bear and Jones as rookies was significant (Bear’s AHL five-on-five goal differential was -8 (17-25), Jones as a rookie was -23 (27-50) in five-on-five goal differential).

Based on the numbers in Bakersfield, Oilers fans should be heartened by the three impressive defencemen who are arriving as NHL-ready players at the same time. It’s a pleasant inconvenience, one the organization hasn’t seen in some time.

Question: How does one keep score during training camp and pre-season? Who is winning a job? More in a minute.

Through the past, darkly

The goal differential numbers at five-on-five are valuable and do inform, as witnessed a decade ago when the Oilers graduated three college defencemen in quick order. Here they are, with their individual goal differentials as rookies:

Cody Wild, 2008-09: 59 games, 37-41 GF-GA, -4 five-on-five goal differential

Jeff Petry, 2010-11: 41 games, 24-29 GF-GA, -5 five-on-five goal differential

Taylor Chorney 2008-09: 68 games, 26-46 GF-GA, -20 five-on-five goal differential

That was Year 1; by Year 2, Petry was an NHL player, spending a total of 49 games in the AHL before arriving in Edmonton. Wild’s goal differential was -17 (22-39) and there was legit concern about Chorney (-19 goal differential, 10-19 GF-GA five-on-five). The separation a decade ago was quick and pronounced and further encourages the idea that the three current blue might represent a more substantial return (possibly two of three make it as NHL players).

What to watch for at camp

The early news from camp is inevitably about weight loss by veterans or young players looking more mature. You can go back to any training camp since 1979 and read an article trumpeting a physical step forward or recovery. These are interesting items, but the veteran observer will know none of that matters unless there’s some kind of on-ice result that moves the needle.

An example: Kyle Brodziak, September 18, 2007. He arrived in camp looking like a different player, and articles from that week screamed his name. Brodziak wasn’t a lock to make the team and was in competition with multiple first-round selections (Sam Gagner, Andrew Cogliano, Rob Schremp, Marc Pouliot) for a roster spot.

On that night, Brodziak delivered a pair of goals and an assist, went +2 in 16:33. He spent two minutes on the penalty kill and 2:31 on the power play. In the postgame scrum, coach Craig MacTavish raved about Brodziak and his improvement:

“That’s the closest you’ll get to a perfect game. He wasn’t in the wrong position all night. Made great plays with the puck, scored two goals, had a beautiful shorthanded assist, big block at the end. There’s nothing he didn’t do tonight. He looks faster and stronger and maybe the most important difference for him is mentally he’s ready to stay. And it looks like he’s made the decision that he’s staying. That was a hell of a game.”

Earlier in camp, Brodziak had impressed. He was quality at the Joey Moss Cup that fall, playing left wing, showing a physical element and scoring a goal that showed improved speed and skill. When Brodziak made the team, people talked about the Joey Moss Cup performance and that night in September, the quote from MacTavish. Each event was a vital link in the story of his making the team. In September 2007, Brodziak willed himself past Pouliot and Schremp, finding (as it turned out) the only NHL career available to the three men.

What does it all mean?

Bear has impressed several media (Jason Gregor, Bob Stauffer) in early days, and he might build on that ala Brodziak in 2007. The key is to prove it on the ice beginning Monday, to have that big game and then another. In all honesty, it’s unusual for any organization to have such a large number of hopefuls on defence (I count Joel Persson, Evan Bouchard, Jones, Lagesson, Bear) who are bona fide.

A cynic will tell you that Persson makes the team because of his contract (he gets paid $1 million in Edmonton or Bakersfield). Most Oilers fans have grown attachments to one or more of Bear (massive following), Jones (also substantial) and Lagesson (growing).

I like to count arrows, up and down. Bear’s improved conditioning and foot speed are excellent up arrows, and something we might be talking about all season long. If he can bring it to the games and have some impact, you’ll hear (like Brodziak) that Bear came to camp determined.

If he doesn’t make the team, it will be forgotten. It’s human nature. We like stories, anecdotes and conclusions with happy endings. There’s only one thing we can say for certain: Bear, Jones and Lagesson enter camp bona fide and have earned a full opportunity to make the team. Good drafting, coaching from Jay Woodcroft and a trio of determined men bring the organization to this point.

Now it’s about luck and getting noticed. Ethan Bear has gotten noticed. Now he needs to do it again.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Camp Quenneville, Day 2: Panthers goalie Sam Montembeault battles for backup role to Sergei Bobrovsky

By Erin Brown Sep 14, 2019

CORAL SPRINGS, Fla. — Sam Montembeault knows he is only penciled in as the Florida Panthers’ backup goaltender.

He gave the Cats’ braintrust a little more reason to start reaching for a pen Saturday morning.

Montembeault allowed one goal in 50 minutes of action and looked comfortable facing increased pressure down low during the course of Saturday’s scrimmage.

“I think it was good today,” Montembeault said. “My D-men played very well, too. I had a lot of forward shots to really help me to get comfortable. I was seeing the puck well, so it really helped.

“There’s an opportunity for me here. They told me, obviously, the spot is open but nothing is guaranteed. I really need to show them that I deserve to be here, and I think I’m going to have to work really hard to get that position.”

It’s a role Montembeault would love to have for his development. He made his NHL debut with Roberto Luongo as a teammate and can now seek advice from a two-time Vezina winner in Sergei Bobrovsky.

“I’m lucky to actually have to go from a future Hall of Famer to (one of) the top two best goalies in the league,” Montembeault said. “I’ve been really lucky. I’m going to take that and use that to my advantage.”

In the first of two Panthers scrimmages Saturday, Montembeault had the task of stopping a potential second line of Frank Vatrano, Vincent Trocheck and Brett Connolly. He also faced pressure from a revamped grind line of Colton Sceviour, Noel Acciari and Jayce Hawryluk.

Montembeault faced few high-risk shots in the first half, but both trios managed sustained pressure in the inner slot during the second. Vatrano finally broke a deadlock by stuffing a rebound past the 22-year-old.

“We always say, make the decisions for us by how you play and compete,” coach Joel Quenneville said. “And I think he was good today. I think he’s looked good every day here.”

Aside from finding a backup for Bobrovsky, the Panthers are also trying to determine who will tend net for the Springfield Thunderbirds, Florida’s American Hockey League affiliate.

One candidate pressuring Montembeault for the No. 2 role is Chris Driedger, who went 18-12-1 with a 2.45 goals-against average and .924 save percentage with Springfield last season. He faced Montembeault head-to-head on Saturday during an evenly played first half of a scoreless contest.

Also looking to climb the Cats’ depth chart are former Dallas Stars second-round pick Philippe Desrosiers and Ryan Bednar, a Florida 2015 draft selection making his pro debut this season.

“Organizationally, you’ve got sometimes two, three, four deep,” Quenneville said. “We’ll see how the season plays out, but (Montembeault) certainly put himself in position. He has a great opportunity ahead of him.”

Florida Panthers goaltenders Philippe Desrosiers and Ryan Bednar talk between periods of a scrimmage Saturday at Panthers Ice Den in Coral Springs, Fla.

Goaltenders Philippe Desrosiers and Ryan Bednar talk between periods of a scrimmage Saturday. (Erin Brown / The Athletic)

Top six shines

Florida’s top-six forwards had strong showings on Day 2, with Vatrano scoring twice and Jonathan Huberdeau contributing another across the two scrimmages.

“I thought Frankie V’s been pretty good right from the outset here,” Quenneville said. “Today, Huby had pretty good stretches in games where he looked like he had the puck there and he had it on a string.”

Vatrano broke a scoreless tie late in the second period of the first scrimmage, then added an empty-net goal in the final minute.

In Game 2, Huberdeau scored on a rebound, wristing a loose puck past Bednar from the edge of the crease after the initial give-and-go between Sasha Barkov and Evgeni Dadonov fell short.

“It gives us a lot of confidence that we can actually create chances and score goals,” Barkov said of the immediate chemistry with his line.

“Yesterday, Huby passed to me (for an) empty-netter, and today he did everything by himself so hopefully he’s gonna save something for the season.”

Tippys two sides

Owen Tippett caught the attention of Quenneville as a player who stood out on Saturday.

Tippett, Florida’s first-round pick in 2017, scored on a one-timer to put his team ahead 3-0 in the second scrimmage.

“The Tippett kid looks like he’s moving all right,” Quenneville said. “He’s got some speed. He’s got some pace to his game, and he’s got an NHL shot. We’ll see where that goes.”

Playing alongside Dryden Hunt and Cliff Pu — distinctly two-way forwards — Tippett has been showing off his game away from the puck. It’s an area the Panthers have wanted the power forward to develop in juniors the last two seasons.

Early in the contest, Tippett showed off his elite shot from the left circle. When the opposing team started to break out, Tippett relied on his quick acceleration to hustle back. He was the first forward to get past the blue line to support the defense.

Florida Panthers centers Sasha Barkov and Henrik Borgstrom face off during a scrimmage Saturday at Panthers Ice Den in Coral Springs, Fla. Panthers centers Sasha Barkov and Henrik Borgstrom face off during a scrimmage Saturday. (Erin Brown / The Athletic)

Catnips

— The Panthers signed defenseman Vladislav Kolyachonok to a three-year, entry-level contract Friday afternoon.

Florida’s second-round choice in 2019, Kolyachonok was named to the 2018-19 OHL All-Rookie Team after posting 30 points in 54 games with Flint and London.

“(I’m) really excited, first of all, and I have lots more motivation to do what I want to do and keep (working) on every part of my game,” Kolyachonok said.

Quenneville, who has paired the 18-year-old with Thomas Schemitsch during scrimmages, likes the improvement Kolyachonok has shown since development camp.

“He does some good things,” Quenneville said. “He really upgraded conditioning over the course of the summer. I think with the puck he’s handy, and I think defensively he’ll learn how to play and how to defend with his quickness. He’s got a lot of good attributes that could turn him into a good player.”

— Florida’s defensemen saw subtle changes to their pairings. Keith Yandle was paired with MacKenzie Weegar, Mark Pysyk skated with Kolyachonok and Josh Brown teamed with Jake Massie.

Brady Keeper made his scrimmage debut and skated alongside Ian McCoshen.

Keeper missed Friday’s action after taking a puck to the face and requiring stitches.

— With the Panthers trying a new grind line, rookie Aleksi Heponiemi found himself with new — and significantly larger — in-mates on Saturday.

The 5-foot-10, 147-pound Heponiemi teamed with the two tallest forwards at camp, 6-foot-5 Serron Noel and 6-foot-4 Rodrigo Abols.
Abols gave the crowd at Panthers Ice Den a scare when he crashed the crease and fell on top of Bobrovsky. The crowd in attendance audibly gasped then went quickly silent.

Bobrovsky was perfectly fine, but the moment of panic was justifiable.

Last season, the Panthers lost Luongo to a similar collision during the season opener against Tampa Bay. The former Panthers netminder missed the entire month of October, and Florida went 2-4-3 in that stretch.

— The Panthers packed approximately 500-600 into its practice facility for Saturday’s practices and scrimmages.

“That was pretty, pretty exciting,” Henrik Borgstrom said. “What was it, like, 10:10 in the morning? And it was already packed. People were cheering. It was amazing.”

The team also held a Q&A with team broadcasters for fans attending.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
After winning the Atlantic division four seasons ago, the Florida Panthers have been in a state of disarray since, missing the playoffs in every season with an average of 88 points each year. For a team that’s made the postseason just twice in its last 18 seasons, patience is wearing thin. The Panthers can’t afford to miss the playoffs again.

Last year, the team’s major problem was goaltending and they think they’ve solved that problem in the offseason, scooping a superstar tender to man the net for the next seven seasons. Add one of the best coaches in the league to the mix and there’s plenty of reason for optimism in the sunshine state.

A lot will depend on how much new head coach Joel Quenneville can get out of the current roster because as it stands now the team looks only slightly above average on paper.

Above-average is an upgrade over last season, but the margins are thin. Florida appears to be the seventh-best team in the East and despite making the playoffs more often than not, at 55 percent, their chances of qualifying are a coin flip. The Panthers will be in the thick of the playoff race and have the inside track but are susceptible to variances that can push them outside the picture. Plus, the East is very competitive. There’s a small chance they can push their way into the division’s top three (28 percent) which is where the team hopes to land this season, but they’re in the most difficult division to pull that off.

Their path likely goes through the wildcard race, and it’s why even if the team does make it, the journey may end up being short and bittersweet. Florida hasn’t won a round of playoff hockey since their improbable Stanley Cup final run in 1996 and it appears unlikely that streak ends this year as the Panthers only manage the feat in 21 percent of the simulations. They’re 38 percent underequals on average in the opening round in scenarios where they do make it, which makes sense given their most likely opponent is Tampa Bay, Toronto or Boston.

While that’s not as rosy as their successful offseason suggests, a new coach is the biggest trump card. Over the last two seasons, there have been 12 teams that began the season with a new coach and eight saw an improvement over their projected total with the average difference being 1.2 points and the median difference being 4.4 points (Arizona and Buffalo in 2017-18 really drags the average down). That would put the Panthers between 94 and 98 points on average, likely a bit closer to the center of the league for impact and it wouldn’t be surprising to see Florida take a bigger step than advertised here as a result.

Aside from goaltending, one of the team’s biggest issues was overall structure, manifesting in an expected goals rate of 48 percent that ranked 20th in the league and was 1.4 percentage points lower than their shot attempt share. That needs to be fixed, and while Quenneville’s recent history with the Blackhawks isn’t sparkling in that regard, Chicago’s dynasty era built on dominant possession teams provides some hope that it will be different in Florida.

Those changes need to start first and foremost on the back end, where the team has a collection of players that are earning a decent living, but haven’t lived up to their paycheque or pedigree in recent seasons.

Thirty million.

That’s roughly the total cap hit for Florida’s defense group for this season. It’s the second-highest in the league and a very high price to pay for a group that ranks 25th in total value. There’s absolutely zero bang for your buck happening here as the team is paying full dollar and then some almost across the board. Having every player live up to their contracts would go a long way in the Panthers becoming a contender, but that’s easier said than done for a group that’s consistently shown results contradictory to their current pay.

Aaron Ekblad is the big one at the top, making $7.5-million per season, a contract he has yet to grow into. The bet made at the time was that he would become a No. 1 defenseman and that price tag would be a bargain for the service. As it turns out, the price is low for a No. 1 defender, but Ekblad isn’t worth his contract. My model isn’t even sure if he’s even top-pairing caliber.

That may change this coming season as he steps into his prime – he is still only 23 – especially as last season was a big improvement over his prior two seasons. Ekblad’s numbers don’t look particularly special, but they ignore that he was burdened with some of the most difficult minutes in hockey, facing a tougher level of competition than anyone else. That means his 49 percent expected goals rate is much more impressive than it looks, especially since it was positive relative to the team. It’s also a step up from the season prior.

Ekblad’s best skill set is his ability to defend zone entries, likely stemming from strong gap control. Over the last three years of tracked data, few have broken up more entries or allowed fewer controlled entries than Ekblad. The issue then is why the team is still so porous defensively with him on the ice – he has one of the weakest defensive impacts in hockey – and it’s likely his actual play in his own zone. Looking at his isolated impact via Hockey Viz reveals two things, strong defense above the hashmarks but very weak on the right net front. Given his 12.9 high danger chances against was the 22nd highest in hockey, I would diagnose the problem as poor net-front presence. Ekblad defends the rush well, but not so much in the most dangerous area of the ice, which is a major concern – though I’m guessing his primary partner doesn’t help much with that.

On the surface, Ekblad appears to make up for that on offense with the team generating 0.4 more expected goals per 60 and 1.2 more actual goals-per-60 with him on the ice last season. While those numbers are strong, I’m not so sure Ekblad is the catalyst for them. His point rate is merely average (0.56 points-per-60, which ranks 80th among defenders last year), 70 percent of his assists are secondary and his shot contribution, zone entry and zone exit numbers are all below average or worse. He doesn’t come across as a huge offensive driver and it feels more like his strong offensive relative to the team stems from being compared to a defense group that doesn’t offer much offensive value. That, plus the opportunity of playing primarily with the team’s top six.

Some may point to Ekblad’s excellent 2.8 WAR last season, good for eighth among defensemen, to debunk all of that, but Ekblad’s season is perhaps one case where the over-pollination of using only goals for offense and only expected goals for defense may not jibe. For Ekblad, his on-ice goal differential was close to even (0.16) as was his expected goal difference (-0.04), but because the pace of both was wildly different (6.4 goals vs. 5.2 expected goals), using a combination of both metrics skews his impact, essentially equating to him having a 55 percent share of hypothetical Frankenstein metric that combines offensive goals and defensive expected goals. That likely gives him way too much credit for his season. That may be an over-simplification of the WAR process, but I’m guessing that’s what’s causing such a high valuation. The concept in and of itself makes sense, but likely doesn’t apply well to Ekblad.

Ekblad is the key here as him realizing his potential could be what makes everything better. Quenneville could be what gets him there too, but I’m cautious based on what he’s shown so far.

The rest of the defense isn’t very rosy either. Keith Yandle gets paid $6.4 million and while he offers the most value here, that’s almost entirely due to his power-play ability. He is excellent there and a big factor in the team having the second-best efficiency last year. Plus he’s a strong puck mover, but that all doesn’t completely excuse that he too struggles defensively. At age 33, I doubt anything changes here either.

Newcomer Anton Stralman is also 33 and got a very rich $5.5 million contract, but is a far cry from the player he was two or three seasons ago when he would’ve been worth the deal as a legitimate top-pairing option. The former possession driver had Tampa Bay’s lowest expected goals rate last season at 50 percent and no other defender was below 53.5 percent. That includes Dan Girardi. Stralman was the team’s worst play-driver on both offense and defense.

Then there’s Mike Matheson at $4.9 million to round out the top four, a player the Panthers are very enamored with, but doesn’t seem to be all that valuable. That top pair money and I don’t believe he’s that despite his ice time. To his credit, he can move the puck and is a strong penalty-killer (which unfortunately isn’t accounted for here) with the Panthers allowing only 6.1 expected goals against per 60 over the last two
seasons, 0.8 fewer than the next best regular penalty-killing defender. That doesn’t completely excuse his 5-on-5 numbers where he routinely gets out-chanced and out-scored. Last year’s 48 percent expected goals rate was ahead of only Yandle. Matheson may play a lot, but I’m not sure he does a lot for the team at evens. He’s classified as a top-four defender but is on the very low end.

On the bottom pair, Mark Pysyk and MacKenzie Weegar are both passable defensively but do so in sheltered minutes while offering little on offense – the prototypical third pair. Most third pairs don’t cost $4.3 million combined though.

To be completely fair, there is nothing wrong with any of the six here as they are all serviceable defenders in their own right. But for the role they’re playing and how much they’re getting paid to do so, the value provided is far from good enough.

What should help them all look better though – besides a new structure from a new coach – is a new goaltender, one who happens to be one of the very best in the league. Sergei Bobrovsky’s contract is a dangerous one for its length and cost, but for now, he does appear to be worth it as a goalie that has potential to be worth roughly four wins this season.

Over the last three seasons, only John Gibson has saved more goals above expected than Bobrovsky’s 75 and it’s the reason for his current high standing. My model’s projection for Bobrovsky is a .917 save percentage, which if applied to last year’s group would’ve equaled to 51 fewer goals. That’s a difference worth over nine wins, a testament to how brutal Florida’s goaltending was last season and when the team likely chances to happen with one of the league’s best in net instead. With that math, the path to being a 100-point team looks possible.

What that ignores though is that Bobrovsky’s play took a serious nose dive last season after back-to-back Vezina-calibre seasons. His .913 save percentage was one of his lowest of his career and he only ended up stopping three goals above expected, a far cry from the 27 and 45 he saved in the two seasons prior. If Florida is getting a goalie closer to last year’s version rather than the two prior, the difference in net might not be as large as they hoped. I think he’ll bounce back and be the goalie many are expecting him to be. If he can be, it’s much easier seeing the Panthers well inside the playoff picture.

Doing so will take more than just good goaltending though, and that’s where Florida’s ability to score should put them over the top. The team has a stacked top-six full of scorers and though their defensive acumen is collectively questionable, there’s little doubt they can bring the heat offensively, especially that top line which ranks as one of the league’s 10 best.

It all starts with the dynamic duo of Aleksander Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau, both of whom quietly broke the 90-point mark last season. Huberdeau was a consistent scorer all year and led the team in points per-60, while Barkov came into his own in the season’s second half. From Jan. 1 onwards, Barkov had 57 points in 44 games, a 106-point pace. For both, the high scoring rate was a result of getting a huge swath of power-play time, where both put up big numbers at over 30 points apiece.

The duo didn’t actually spend all season together and that might be the reason that Barkov wasn’t scoring as frequently to start the year. It wasn’t until game 25 that the two were on the same line and a dry stretch midway through the season also coincided with the two being split apart. When paired with Huberdeau, Barkov earned 2.53 points-per-60 in 689 minutes. Without, that dropped to 2.03 points-per-60.

The reason neither is rated high, despite scoring over 90 points last season, is the defense which may seem like an outlandish claim in particular for Barkov. He is often regarded as one of the game’s best two-way players and is a perennial Selke trophy threat, but was a bit of a surprise to Barkov. He is often regarded as one of the game’s best two-pointers while Barkov’s expected goal share was much better at 50 percent, and the duo heavily out-scored the competition 43-30.

Barkov does a lot of the little things well on defense that earns notice and is excellent on and off the puck, but those things didn’t translate to on-ice results last season – not like past seasons anyways, and especially without Huberdeau next to him. Considering how much of a problem team defense was last year, the team will need its No. 1 center playing up to his usual ability and taking care of all 200 feet of the ice. If he does, he could be in store for an MVP-calibre season considering how strong his offensive output has grown to be.

Barkov has also grown to be an excellent penalty-drawer while being very disciplined himself, earning a plus-31 penalty differential on the seasons that was behind only Nathan Mackinnon. An interesting tidbit with that though: he was plus-26 in the first half, but only plus-five afterward, a drop-off that coincides with a lot of publicity surrounding his excellent penalty-differential. Food for thought for the conspiracy theorist crowd.

Dadonov slides in on the right side of that duo and offers 70-point upside himself, performing very well in back-to-back seasons since coming over from the KHL. His scoring has been consistent, but his two-way play hasn’t. As mentioned above, his expected goals were the league’s 11th best last year at 46 percent, but what makes that more surprising is that he led the team the year prior at 55 percent. A decline in his ability to exit the zone with control might be partially to blame. It’s a sizeable drop-off in his play-driving that needs to be addressed to solve the future health of the top line. There’s enough talent here that the trio should be downright dominant on a nightly basis.

On the second line, Vincent Trocheck’s standing may catch people by surprise, especially if they believe he’s the 75-point scorer he was in 2017-18. It’s more likely he’s the 55-point scorer he’s shown to be in three of the last four seasons instead, though a potential return to the top power play could push that higher. It’s worth noting though that his production stems from heavy usage. Last year his 1.22 points-per-60 was one of the worst on the team, a fourth line rate. In the previous two seasons, his 1.62 wasn’t very impressive either as just barely second-line caliber.

Trocheck’s expected goals rate of 50 percent ranked second on the team last year (which says a lot), but his previous rates suggest he’s a very strong play-driver. That does go against his stats in transition though where he looks excellent. He’s a player where tracking stats could help illuminate more of what he brings to the table, but his reputation still likely oversells his value.

On his wings, he has two players – Mike Hoffman and Frank Vatrano – that can score but don’t offer much else aside from that. It makes for a decent second line, but one that may be in tough against other containing teams. Newcomer Brett Connolly is also a scorer and could also be an option there instead of Vatrano. He brings a lot of offensive upside to the team at a relatively cheap price. His 2.66 points-per-60 last year led the Capitals (and would’ve led the Panthers too) and he’s been scoring at a top-six rate for three straight seasons now. He could thrive in a bigger role. Over the last three seasons, his 1.13 goals-per-60 ranks 11th league-wide while his 2.19 points-per-60 ranks 34th. He may not offer much in the defensive end (meaning he should fit right into this group), but he looks to be a very productive middle-six player, one who has a strong shot and knows how to use it. His 17.8 percent shooting percentage at 5-on-5 over that time ranks third in the league. The only worry is whether that magic will translate outside the Capitals’ system.

The bottom six looks considerably weaker than the top six, but there’s a reason for optimism given the age of some of the team’s options here. Henrik Borgstrom didn’t have the best rookie season getting caved in and scoring at a fourth-line rate, but comes with a lot of hype and has potential to break out. Denis Malgin and Jayce Hawryluk interchangeably man the left side and while both scored at a decent second line rate, they struggled to generate chances for the team in terms of expected goals. There’s a lot of room from improvement from all three and if their potential is reached, them Florida’s bottom six immediately looks much more formidable. There’s further potential from other promising prospects like Owen Tippett or Aleks Heponiemi to make the jump too, possibly providing even more youthful upside.
From top to bottom there’s a lot to like here, but also a lot of question marks. It should be no surprise that the Panthers rank somewhere in the league’s middle class. They have elite stars, young players ready to break out, players with the talent to be better, depth, and an all-world goalie. On paper, there’s a lot to work with. But there are also a few players whose reputation supersedes their actual ability.

What’s there also hasn’t delivered in recent seasons, but that’s what makes this team so tantalizing as well as knowing who’s stepping in behind the bench to fix it. Even while under-achieving, the Panthers still grade out as a playoff bubble team. If Quenneville is still as capable a tactician as his lengthy resume suggests, there’s a very good chance he can squeeze even more out of this roster than currently forecasted and it wouldn’t be surprising in the slightest. Coaching effects are the biggest blind spot in my model, and with Florida, the algorithm might be playing with fire.

The Panthers haven’t impressed yet with their current core, but they’re building a bright future and look likely to take the next step in 2019-20, despite some big question marks remaining throughout the lineup. Time will tell if a new coach will have the answers to solve them and take them even further.

Market Expectations
Florida Panthers: 95.5 points
Remember the exercise in the lede measuring the possible effect of coaching? Well, that answer is how you get to a market price of 95.5 points which looks about right given what the Panthers have been in the past and who they’ve added this off-season on and off the ice. It’s a close evaluation to what my model has, with the added benefit of coaching likely sprinkled in.

What Fans Predict
Public Sample: 1,337
Fan Sample: 42
Not as many Panthers fan participated, but those that did had a clear range in mind: 95-to-105 points. That’s not out of the question, but likely a bit too high. They added some strong pieces, but the team wasn’t exactly great before then. The public is much closer to my model with many respondents in the 90-to-100 range which feels a bit more right for this group.

What The Athletic Insider Thinks
George Richards: These have been a frustrating few years for the Florida Panthers but instead of blowing things up, the team’s front office pushed everything into the middle of the table and have gone all in.

The Panthers believe in their core group of players who have put up numbers over the years but have failed to make the playoffs since 2016. They figure this group is good enough to do something special and went out this offseason to address the needs they feel needed fixing.

The first move of the offseason came before the season even ended as the team had decided to replace Bob Boughner behind the bench after reaching a handshake agreement with top free-agent coach Joel Quenneville.

Ownership gave GM Dale Tallon permission to spend to the salary cap and, within a few bucks, he did just that. Florida flirted with trying to lure both Sergei Bobrovsky and Artemi Panarin south from Columbus but once it looked like Panarin was headed to bright lights elsewhere, focused on fixing their biggest needs.

Goaltending was a glaring need and Bobrovsky, despite being 31 at the start of the season, should rectify Florida’s lusterless net play immediately. Florida wanted to address its forward depth and signed Brett Connolly and Noel Acciari; wanting a defensive-minded blueliner, the Panthers grabbed veteran Anton Stralman. While they may have paid Stralman too much, if he plays back to form at least a little bit, the Panthers get what they want.

This is an organization desperate for consistent on-ice success and hope they have the right pieces in place. This is the franchise’s 26th season, and it has only reached the postseason five times. The Panthers have won a playoff series in just one of those trips, not escaping the first round in 23 years (and counting).
We shouldn't be surprised if we make trades': Drew Doughty prepares for transitional year with Kings

By Lisa Dillman Sep 14, 2019

The Los Angeles Kings were far away from their homes, clear across the country when they held their first practice after defenseman Jake Muzzin was traded to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

It was in East Meadow, N.Y., on Feb. 1.

With the Muzzin trade essentially an unofficial announcement of the coming roster overhaul, I asked Kings defenseman Drew Doughty if he had wrapped his head around the prospect of rebuilding.

"Yep, I have to," Doughty said that day, "I signed here for a long time. I believe in everything this organization is about. I believe that (general manager) Rob Blake will do everything in his power to get us back to where we once were."

He added that he wanted to be a King for the rest of his life.

Seven months later, Doughty was holding court in the Kings' dressing room in El Segundo on the first day of training camp. Even if you hadn't been paying attention in the offseason, one glance at the Kings' training camp roster and lines and two words immediately came to mind:

Transitional year.

So that presented an obvious question for Doughty.

Do you think this rebuild is going to take a little bit longer than people thought?

"I think about it every day, but I really don't know what to say," Doughty said. "I don't want to get myself in crap or anything. I just want to bring this team back to where we used to be and the past in the past. We're a new team. We're rebuilding. We're going to be younger.

"We shouldn't be surprised if we make trades this year. Whatever happens, happens. We just got to be better."

Doughty doesn't self-edit much. But the player who is appreciated for unflinching honesty was walking a linguistic tightrope on Friday.

There is the simple fact that the rebuild is going on, coinciding with the first year of his self-negotiated eight-year, $88 million contract extension.

"I signed here because I like being in L.A. and I want to make this team a Stanley Cup champion again, and that's all I can say," Doughty said.

Doughty was his unfiltered self when it came to other matters. The Kings have won one playoff game since winning their second Stanley Cup championship, in 2014, and are coming off a 30th-place finish this past season. Todd McLellan will be their third coach since Darryl Sutter was fired in April 2017.

"We need to be a winning team this year," said Doughty, who was a career-worst minus-34 last season. "We were embarrassed with the last four seasons if you want to ask me ... since we won the last Cup, it's been shit."

Early on, Doughty has the sense that McLellan will be demanding but approachable.

"He cares about the individual and every individual in here, but at the same time, he's going to be hard on you and let you know what you're doing wrong when you're doing it," Doughty said. "He just wants to make this team better, and at times you're not going to like him and then other times you're going to love him. That's just the way coaches are."

The Kings will tell you there was a lack of accountability last season. A lot of the policing once came from the leadership group, as well as the coaches.

"When I was a young guy in the league, teammates and coaches got on me every day and it was more teammates and coaches, and that's kind of shied away (from)," said Doughty, who is going into his 12th NHL season. "Guys don't get on young guys like they used to in the past. I don't know why that is, but I think with this new coaching staff, everyone's going to be held accountable to the same level."

Early in Doughty's career, defenseman Matt Greene and center Jarret Stoll, and later, center Mike Richards, were especially proficient at holding their teammates accountable. Richards might not have been as vocal, as, say, Greene, but his words were effective.

Greene's worth extended well beyond his stay-at-home skills on the ice.

"He was like my dad for many years," Doughty said. "If I had a bad period, he'd come in and let me know. 'What the hell are you doing' type thing. Like I said, that doesn't happen as much anymore and sometimes I think that's why we've gone south because we don't have those guys that get on guys. So, I think our veterans need to get on each other and on the young guys and on everyone."

But ... some of the older players don't have the personality to do that, according to Doughty.

"That's just not at all how they are," he said. "And I'm sure some guys don't like that other guys get on other guys. ... So it's a very fine line. How hard to get on guys and what to say to guys. And now guys are a little more fragile, so you can't say as bad things as you could in the past."

That was an ideal segue to Sutter.

Admittedly, it was surreal to see photos of Sutter on the ice with the rival Anaheim Ducks at their training camp on Friday. Sutter is an advisor to the Ducks coaching staff and his relationship with Ducks GM Bob Murray goes back about 40 years to when they played for the Chicago Blackhawks.

IT'S TRUE, IT'S TRUE. DARRYL IS BACK.

PIC.TWITTER.COM/PR8K0Z2HNGP

— ERIC STEPHENS (@ICEMANCOMETH) SEPTEMBER 13, 2019

One of the architects of the Kings' two Stanley Cup championships had joined forces with the enemy.

Talk about a compelling plotline.

"I don't blame him at all," Doughty said. "He's obviously going to know how to or he's going to think he knows how to beat us in some ways, I guess. And he probably does know a few ways. So, I guess they have a little bit of an advantage there."

Doughty was not surprised a hockey lifer such as Sutter was back in the NHL.

"He loves the game of hockey," Doughty said. "He's a great hockey mind. Great coach. As much as, at the end, things kind of went south — we were getting in arguments and stuff like that — I love Darryl from the bottom of my heart. He's a great coach, great person, great family, and cared about his players and their families."

Finally, would it sting a bit if he saw Chris Sutter wearing a Ducks jersey?

"He was around all the time, so we loved hanging out with them," Doughty said. "I actually miss having him around. I don't know if he'll switch. I think he's still a Kings fan, but we'll see. Probably going to follow his dad, so that'll hurt a bit."

• Of note, Jeff Carter was centering Kyle Clifford and Trevor Lewis on Day 1. Ilya Kovalchuk was on a line with Tyler Toffoli, centered by Adrian Kempe. Kovalchuk was looking forward to a fresh start under McLellan after a tumultuous and underachieving first season with the Kings in 2018-19.

"He's just (an) honest person," Kovalchuk said of McLellan. "He said he doesn't care what you did before. You just have to show up and show everybody what you can (do)."

Kovalchuk said last season he didn't have any regrets about signing with the Kings and reiterated that on Friday.

"No, I'm not that kind of guy," he said. "You have to go through a lot of stuff to accomplish something, and this was another test for me."

• With Derek Forbort out because of an injured back, Doughty was paired with defenseman Joakim Ryan. Ryan, 26, signed with the Kings on July 1, after becoming a free agent when the San Jose Sharks did not give him a qualifying offer.
The pairing isn’t necessarily a fixed one.

“For me, it’s Day 1 and tomorrow it could be completely different,” McLellan said. “We just need a starting point. Those two haven’t played obviously together, but they have NHL experience. You look at lefties and righties, You look at the confidence level in both of them, they feel like they belong here, they’re not overanxious with a new coach or anything like that.

“We thought we would put them together and see what we’d get. I’m sure we’ll go a little while longer, and then maybe they find new partners until we find what we’re looking for.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
While he was of several members of the Kings organization ready to move forward after last season, Alec Martinez wasn’t ready to simply put what happened entirely in the rear-view mirror. The Michigan native took an intuitive approach to how he looks at the situation for himself and his teammates last season, noting that while intricate details are not worth stewing over, the entirety of what happened shouldn’t simply be forgotten.

“I think that you can’t necessarily flush it, because you’ve got to learn from it,” Martinez said following this morning’s camp practice. “Obviously it’s a good kick in our rears, I’m going to say it. P.C. I think that it’s important to learn from and it’s definitely knocked us down to size, so it’s important to remember that. As far as details and specifics, I’d say yeah, you flush it, we have a new opportunity here, a new year, a new coach and we’re starting back from square one.

Learning from your mistakes is not a new concept, but it was interesting to see how a player like Martinez approached it. The 32-year-old defenseman, like many of his teammates, has had a lot of success in the National Hockey League – Last season was a new experience for several members of the Kings, who had not experienced a losing campaign like the one that they endured. As Martinez noted, it’s important to remember certain things about the bigger picture of last season to learn from what happened as the group proceeds forward. The veteran blueliner believes that everyone in the room, young and old, is looking to continue to improve, regardless of the stage of their career.

“I know that I can speak on behalf of everyone, everyone still wants to learn, especially when we’re changing a system like that and things are going to come up on our end too,” he said. “We’re going to have questions and we don’t have all the answers, they don’t have all the answers, that’s why we’re a team and we’ve got to work through it together.”

The Kings are learning new systems and structures under Head Coach Todd McLellan and that has started with practices, specifically the pace. It only takes a few minutes of watching a practice through the first two days of training camp to pick up on the vast differences in the tempo during drills. There is no standing around, not even always moving in between drills and when there is, it was accompanied by a hard lap around the ice to keep the energy levels high. How does the Kings’ new bench boss define “up-tempo”?

“I want to be direct,” McLellan said. “I would like us to be very clear as a coaching staff of what we require of them, what their responsibilities are in certain areas, and then most importantly, why we’re doing it. I continue to try to get that point across – if they understand why they have a better system, overall I guess yeah, that’s fair. A little bit more aggressive, I think that we want to implement that’s what training camp’s for too. We’re changing a little bit of a system and a lot of guys in the room, we’ve played a very similar system and not that we’re making monumental changes, but there’s certainly going to be things that are new and you’ve got to get your reps in.

There’s going to be times where he’s going to have to stop and explain it and teach. I know that I can speak on behalf of everyone, everyone still wants to learn, especially when we’re changing a system like that and things are going to come up on our end too. We’re going to have questions and we don’t have all the answers, they don’t have all the answers, that’s why we’re a team and we’ve got to work through it together. He’s been really good at the teaching aspect as well.

On if it’s fair to say that McLellan has preached a more aggressive system, overall

I guess yeah, that’s fair. A little bit more aggressive, I think that we want to obviously create more turnovers and play more in the offensive zone, that’s the fun part of the game, no one wants to have to work their tail off to get the puck back, you want to have the puck. If we can do that a little bit more, and gain some offensive zone time, obviously that’s only going to bode well because you’re going to score more goals and you’re also not playing in your own end.

On if it’s what you want as a player to get a black and white approach with no gray area

Yeah, I think that regardless of your situation, in any aspect of life, you don’t want a [road apple]. You always want to know where you stand, you appreciate honesty. Sometimes, it’s not going to be what you want to hear but it’s important that you hear it. I guess that’s how I prefer it. I can’t speak for everyone, but I would think that a lot of guys appreciate that.

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1152781 Los Angeles Kings

MARTINEZ KEEN ON KINGS’ ABILITY TO KEEP LEARNING, “UP-TEMPO” ADJUSTMENTS

ZACH DOOLEY SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

won multiple cups. I know that we laugh about that, but he was very underrated skill wise. Everyone talks about his defensive prowess, he probably has one of the best defending sticks I’ve ever seen, but he can make plays.”

Alec Martinez on what he thinks of Todd McLellan thus far

He’s been great. We obviously had a few conversations over the summer time. I think that he’s going to be really good for us, both in terms of changing our style a little bit and also just the attitude in the room. I think that he’s hard but he’s honest and I think that’s going to be good for our group.

On if he’s had the chance to speak with Trent Yawney

Yeah – I stay here in LA in the summer time, so some of the staff has been in and out for development camp and things like that. Since cell phones exist, you can converse with people, even when they’re not here, which is pretty cool. Obviously, I think that he’ll be really good for our backend as well. Again, he’s tough but I think he’s honest, he’s straightforward and I think as an athlete, at the end of the day, that’s what you want.

On his first impression of how McLellan runs practices

It’s no secret, you guys can see it, they’re up-tempo. I think that’s something that’s been well documented that we lacked last year. It sounds like a joke, but I think there were still some TSC employees on the ice when the first practice started. When he blows that whistle, he wants to get going so you’re weaving in and out of about five or six guys to start that drill... but I think that’s a good thing. He wants an up-tempo practice, he wants to be able to fit an hour practice into 40 minutes and not 20 minutes of standing around. As a player, we appreciate that too. I like up-tempo practices, you get in there, you get your work done and you get out. I think that they’ve been really good so far. [Reporter: Almost working smarter rather than longer, in a way]? Yeah, I mean you keep up-tempo, you get your reps in. You’ve got to practice up-tempo, because games certainly are up-tempo and obviously I think that hurt us last year.

On McLellan not being afraid to stop things too and go over

I think that’s one of the things he’s pretty good at. He always stresses that he wants us to know why we’re doing something, not necessarily just how or to just put the blenders on and go do it. He wants us to understand that there’s reasons behind some of the structure he wants to implement and that’s what training camp’s for too. We’re changing a little bit of a system and a lot of guys in the room, we’ve played a very similar system and not that we’re making monumental changes, but there’s certainly going to be things that are new and you’ve got to get your reps in.

There’s going to be times where he’s going to have to stop and explain it and teach. I know that I can speak on behalf of everyone, everyone still wants to learn, especially when we’re changing a system like that and things are going to come up on our end too. We’re going to have questions and we don’t have all the answers, they don’t have all the answers, that’s why we’re a team and we’ve got to work through it together.

Martinez also spoke about the influx of youth in camp this season, specifically on the blueline. From their time in the NHL last season, Martinez knows about what Sean Walker, Matt Roy and Daniel Brickley can bring to the equation, and remembers being in their shoes earlier in his career. Now the veteran, Martinez recalled what he learned from past Kings veterans like Matt Greene, Willie Mitchell and Rob Scuderi as he himself was looking to establish his game as a full-time NHL player.

While Martinez noted that part of his job will be “trying to take guys under my wing”, he also had a little chuckle when asked specifically at one he mentioned as a mentor for him in Scuderi, who now works as a Skill Development coach with the Nashville Predators.

“A skill development coach... I have texted him about that and we’ve had some funny conversations,” he said with a smile. “One-timers, toe drags, cutbacks, his game basically... I obviously have the utmost respect for that guy. He played for a long time and was obviously very successful,
DAY TWO: McLellan talks Doughty, morning skates, instilling up-tempo play

JON ROSE
SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

More to come from Day Two of on-ice activity at Toyota Sports Performance Center, including conversations with Alec Martinez, Tyler Toffoli and Adrian Kempe.

Todd McLellan, on standouts on the second day of training camp:

I felt the group as a whole. I think we’ve got to look at it that way to begin with. I thought the first session, that group was a little more prepared than the last one. The last one, the ice conditions got a bit rougher, fatigue came into play, it dragged on a little bit. But both groups were very attentive. I saw the leadership skills from leaders on both teams, which is really good. Some of the kids were picking up concepts, which were coming at them very quickly. It’s still too early to single out certain individuals from either good play or bad play. We need a little bit more time to do that, and that’ll happen over the next little bit.

McLellan, on whether he runs the same drills and offers the same structure to both groups:

Yes. The way the day is set up, because of the three-hour rule, we’re only allowed so much time on the ice with them, and to fit the scrimmage in, one group gets some direction and structure. They get to put it in play in the game; the other group gets it after the game. Not ideal, but when we leave the rink, we’re all in the same spot heading into day three, tomorrow.

McLellan, on managing Drew Doughty’s colorful personality:

Well, Drew is a unique individual. I believe that some of these special players – and I would put Drew in that category – are unique individuals. They speak from the heart, they’re not afraid to put themselves out there, and when it’s all said and done, when you do that, you have to walk the walk, and I believe that Drew can do that on the ice and he can do that off the ice. That’s a good start for both him and I … as a player/coach relationship evolves. As we go forward, I’m going to let Drew be Drew. But it’s always going to be about the team first. He’s got to consider that with him comments and his beliefs. I don’t think that he puts himself in a bad spot very often, and maybe our game needs some colorful people, so there’s nothing wrong with that. [Reporter: Is there a parallel with Burnsie in some ways? You kind of let him be himself?] Burnsie is a unique individual. I would consider Brent Burns a special player. The things that he does and the characteristics that he brings to the rink and the life and the joy that he brings to the game, I do see that in Drew. It’s not fair to paint them with the same brush – they’re different people. I haven’t figured Drew out, I haven’t been around him enough to tie the two together, so I wouldn’t go there. But they are special players in the league. They’ve got a life of their own sometimes. There are characteristics about them that make them fun to be around and fans are attracted to them. Our game needs that, so it’s great to have those characters. [Reporter: So, the stuff you’d want curbed would be unsportsmanlike conduct or 10-minute misconducts where his temper gets his best of him – that’s team-first issues, correct?] I would say that’s fair, but there are always moments or situations. If you’re down by 6-1 and somebody takes liberties with you as an individual or a teammate, sometimes a penalty is worth it, so I don’t think we can lump ‘em all together. When we need all individuals – I’m not just talking about Drew – when we need key individuals to be on the ice, we want them to be available. I’m not coming in looking to curb anything yet in anybody’s game. I want them to show us what they bring to the rink on a daily basis. I don’t know how our group behaves after a loss or a win yet. We haven’t had any of that, so some of these questions are really good questions, and I know you’re very interested in the answers, but I can’t give them to you yet because I haven’t lived it. It’ll happen, and we’ll talk about it more as we go.

McLellan, on his morning skate philosophy:

I used to believe in them a lot. I’m certainly getting further away from them now. I believe that the old days, back in my day, when players were around, they lived a little differently, maybe, and they were instilled for a different reason. Now, the players: [Reporter: Jim?] Foxy? [Reporter: No comment.] He’s probably the one that behaved, right? [Reporter: I missed a few morning skates.] They found you later, did they? But I think now that the athletes are so well conditioned mentally and physically and they [expend] and use so much energy on a nightly basis – even the players that play six or seven minutes, they’re hard, heavy minutes – that’s sometimes important. There are players that are nervous, and on game days, as soon as you walk into the rink, they lose a lot of energy because they’re nervous. When they’re at home and they’re relaxing, they probably don’t eat up as much of their fuel base as they would being in and at the rink. Personal preference, I believe there are some older players in the league that like to have a pre-game skate because it triggers their day, it starts everything. So, we’re a mix between some that need that and some that don’t want it, and we’ll adjust as the year goes on.

McLellan, on his efforts to instill up-tempo play:

I want to be direct. I would like us to be very clear as a coaching staff of what we require of them, what their responsibilities are in certain areas, and then most importantly, why we’re doing it. I continue to try to get that point across – if they understand why they have a better chance at success. I don’t believe in wasting a lot of time at the boards or moving from corner-to-corner, or just loafing around. Let’s go. And what we used to get done – and I’m not insinuating this team – but what hockey used to get done in 60 minutes you can almost get done in 40 minutes now. Keep the pace up, keep the heart rate up. You don’t have to line guys at the end of practice all the time and skate them. Right, Foxy? You didn’t like that either, did you? [Reporter: No, I could skate.] Well, there you go. We just couldn’t find you in the morning. That’s why I think the pace is important in practice – and move from drill-to-drill and be prepared, don’t let your mind wander. So, if we can shorten practices up because we’re going hard, great. [Reporter: Are you pretty willing to jump in if you see things that you want to tweak or explore more in the middle of the drill?] Yep. That has to be done. They can’t skate around confused. If they skate around confused, we’re doing a poor job of relaying our message or giving instruction, then we get mad at them, it makes no sense. They don’t know. So, we’ve got to stop it, we’ve got to catch them doing it right more than wrong, which can be really valuable. But when they do make mistakes, let’s stop it, let’s talk about why it happened, let’s try and fix it and get better in that moment. [Reporter: Do you have any benchmark where ‘by Day One, by Day Five, I’d like to see them have this, or this, or work there’?] It’s hard. My experience with teams, San Jose was seven good years. By the time we got into Year Seven, they knew the drills, they knew the routine, language. We could fly through stuff, and you almost had to slow it down for the new players. Right now, this team is just as talented and skilled as those guys were, but they’re trying to absorb a bunch of new things. Let’s get a few concepts in place, let’s go play a few games, let’s fix some things and then add. And we’ll continue to do that.

McLellan, on whether he anticipates the questions he’ll be asked about adjustments to structure:

I think I know what you’re asking – yes, maybe based on the character or the tendencies of what I know about those players. But let’s face it, I know a lot more about Anze and Drew and Brownie, the guys that have been in the league for a long time who’ve played all those games against them. Lafallo and Walker, these types of players I’m trying to visually get there. I’d probably don’t eat up as much of their fuel base as they would being in and at the rink. Personal preference, I believe there are some older players in the league that like to have a pre-game skate because it triggers their day, it starts everything. So, we’re a mix between some that need that and some that don’t want it, and we’ll adjust as the year goes on.

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JON ROSE
SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

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Spurgeon, Wild continue successful partnership

By Sarah McLellan SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 — 6:27PM

When his agent called him Saturday at 7 a.m. with the Wild’s offer, Jared Spurgeon reflected on how he got to this point.

An undersized defenseman told by many in hockey he wouldn’t progress in the sport, Spurgeon went unsigned after the Islanders drafted him in the sixth round in 2008 and could have continued his career overseas in Austria.

Instead, it was another call from his agent Eustace King that set him on this path with the Wild.

The team invited him to development camp in 2010; if he performed well, maybe he’d stick around for the tournament in Traverse City, Mich.

But Spurgeon didn’t just impress enough to log a few prospect games.

He secured a contract, earned minutes in the minors and then merited a promotion to the NHL.

So when he discussed a new contract with his wife Danielle Saturday morning, he looked at her and asked if she’d ever think they’d be here in 10 years.

“It was pretty cool,” Spurgeon said.

Later in the day, not too long before he’d take the ice for the second day of on-ice action at training camp, Spurgeon signed a seven-year, $53,025,000 extension that’ll kick in next season and continues a partnership that has been extremely successful for both parties.

“It’s a perfect fit,” General Manager Bill Guerin said. “We didn’t want him going anywhere.”

Locking up Spurgeon is significant for a handful of reasons.

First, it keeps a vital player on the roster for the foreseeable future — a key move for a team seeking to recalibrate and get back to the playoffs.

Spurgeon’s value was only magnified by his career performance last season when he was a force all over the ice.

“His efforts for three years-plus that I’ve seen him [have] been extraordinary,” coach Bruce Boudreau said. “So you always like to see the little guy succeed. He might be small in stature, but his heart is so big that I think the Wild are really extremely lucky for seven more years.”

Getting him signed before the season nixes any potential of the negotiations becoming a distraction or added pressure on Spurgeon.

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How quickly Guerin acted to facilitate this deal made it clear he prioritized Spurgeon, awareness that reflects well on how he’s settled into his new role.

“We love Jared,” Guerin said. “He’s a homegrown guy. He’s been here for his whole career, and we want him to be here his whole career. It was very important to get this done.”

While Spurgeon said he didn’t think about free agency and always wanted to stay in Minnesota, Guerin also made him feel important and the message he relayed about his plan for the organization resonated with Spurgeon.

“He talked to me about the vision he has, and he’s won as a player and in management,” Spurgeon said. “To be in one spot as a player your entire career is a pretty cool thing. Ever since I’ve been here, all I wanted to do is win here. So I’m not sure why you’d want to leave.”

At $7,575,000, Spurgeon’s cap hit will be the highest on the team next season and it’ll rank 11th in the NHL among defensemen — a number that was in line with the other deals doled out this summer for established blue liners.

The Rangers signed Jacob Trouba to a seven-year, $56 million contract. Tyler Myers got five years for $30 million in free agency from the Canucks. And Ivan Provorov will receive $40.5 million over six years from the Flyers for his first deal after his entry-level contract.

None of these players are a perfect comparable to Spurgeon, but their contracts all highlight the rising cost of the position. Since Spurgeon has become such an integral part of the team, it made sense for the Wild to pay the price to keep him. And that can be a powerful statement.

“For the organization it’s important to keep the good people around,” captain Mikko Koivu said. “He’s first class on and off the ice. I think we all know his capability to play the game and what he brings each and every night, the way he battles, the way he overcomes everything like injuries and things like that. Having a quality person like he is, that’s the No. 1 thing I think about as a teammate.”

Despite having a high-profile contract, Boudreau figures Spurgeon will remain under-the-radar until the Wild reaches the Stanley Cup Final.

Pursuing that stage is Spurgeon’s ambition the next eight seasons.

“There’s a lot of work left to do, but we got a great group of guys down here and a leader that’s taking us in the right direction,” he said. “So we’re all excited.”

Less than an hour after signing the most lucrative contract of his career, a watershed moment for an undersized and overlooked player frequently told he’d never make it in hockey, Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon was on the ice at TRIA Rink participating in the first scrimmage of training camp.

It was quintessential Spurgeon.

Despite skating mostly outside the spotlight, toiling for nine years in the NHL with little fanfare, Spurgeon has become one of the team’s most important players through a stable, savvy style — a reliability that was rewarded Saturday with a seven-year, $53,025,000 million extension that beings next season.

“It’s pretty surreal,” Spurgeon said.

Getting Spurgeon, who was eligible to become an unrestricted free agent next summer after his current four-year, $20.75 million deal expired, signed was a priority for new general manager Bill Guerin.

He reached out to Spurgeon’s agents just two or three days after he was hired, and the two sides started negotiating — this after the team and Spurgeon’s camp had only one previous conversation.

Spurgeon was eligible to sign an extension July 1.

The turning point in talks came a couple days ago when Eustace King and Dean Grillo, Spurgeon’s representatives, traveled to the Twin Cities to meet in person with Guerin. What ensued was two, 13-hour days of deliberations.

“When people come into town, it shows how committed they are and how serious they are about staying,” Guerin said. “We were really happy about the whole process and really excited that the whole thing got done.”

This contract gives Spurgeon the highest cap hit ($7,575,000) on the team, surpassing the $7,538,461 average annual value of the 13-year, $98 million deals for winger Zach Parise and defenseman Ryan Suter.

The 29-year-old is also the only player locked up through 2026-27; he’ll be 37 at the deal’s conclusion.

Spurgeon’s contract also includes a no-movement clause before a modified no-trade clause that includes 10 teams he can not be traded to kicks in the final three years, sources said.

“He keeps himself in great shape, he’s an elite skater and when you get a guy that skates as fluently as he does, it definitely helps,” Guerin said. “It gives you more of a comfort level. We’re confident that he’s going to be playing good hockey all the way through this contract.”

Both parties were happy to reach a resolution before the season to eliminate any potential distractions, and Spurgeon said he didn’t think about free agency.

“I wanted to stay here, and we want to win and that’s the main thing,” Spurgeon explained. “When Bill came in, he had a plan in place and what he said hit home for me.”

After getting drafted 156th overall in 2008 and then going unsigned by the Islanders, Spurgeon latched on with the Wild by parlaying a tryout into a contract. He spent only 21 games in the minors before he made his NHL debut and by 2011-12, the 5-9, 166-pound Edmonton native was a full-timer with the club.
Since then, he’s become a mainstay on the blue line – carving out a niche in the top-four as a smooth-skating, heads-up defender who can handle all situations.

That skill set was most prominent last season when Spurgeon established career-highs in goals (14), assists (29), points (43) and games (82).

Overall, through 591 career games, Spurgeon has accumulated 70 goals, 178 assists and 248 points.

“To be in this position, it’s pretty crazy from the first Traverse City camp,” Spurgeon said. “I couldn’t be more grateful.”

Etc.

Defenseman Matt Dumba was under the weather Saturday and did not skate but is expected back Sunday.

Star Tribune LOADED: 09.15.2019
Wild sign defenseman Spurgeon to 7-year, $53M extension

Associated Press SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 — 3:25PM

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The Minnesota Wild signed defenseman Jared Spurgeon to a $53.025 million, seven-year extension Saturday that will begin next season and go through the 2026-27 season.

The deal carries an annual value of $7.575 million.

The 29-year-old Spurgeon set career highs last season of 14 goals, 29 assists, 152 shots on goal, 91 hits and 82 games played. He led the Wild with 145 blocked shots and was second behind Ryan Suter in time on ice with an average of 24:09 per game.

The 5-foot-9, 166-pound Spurgeon was drafted in the sixth round in 2008 by the New York Islanders, but the Wild signed him as a free agent before the 2010-11 season.

He has blossomed into one of the team's indispensable players, ranking in the top 20 among NHL defensemen over the last four years in goals, power play goals, blocked shots and time on ice.

Star Tribune LOADED: 09.15.2019
Wild signs Jared Spurgeon to seven-year contract extension

By Sarah McLellan SEPTEMBER 14, 2019 — 1:08PM

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Jared Spurgeon signs seven-year, $53 million contract extension with Wild

By DANE MIZUTANI | PUBLISHED: September 14, 2019 at 12:32 pm | UPDATED: September 14, 2019 at 5:13 PM

Jared Spurgeon woke up Saturday morning and shared a brief moment with his wife, Danielle, knowing he was a few hours from signing a seven-year, $53,025 million contract extension with the Wild.

“I just asked her, ‘Did you ever think we’d be here?’ ” Spurgeon said. “It was pretty cool.”

None of this seemed even remotely possible 10 years ago. Not when Spurgeon was heading into his initial training camp with the Wild on a tryout.

“I can’t thank them enough for the opportunity to get it started,” Spurgeon said. “The only other option I had was going to Austria after that, so I was going to take my last chance here for sure.”

Even crazier than Spurgeon somehow finding a way to earn an entry-level contract is the type of player he’s become over the past decade.

“I think (head equipment manager Tony DaCosta) was saying downstairs that when I first got called up they didn’t have a jersey for me,” Spurgeon said with a laugh. “I think it worked pretty well.”

No kidding, Jared.

Since making his NHL debut on his 21st birthday, Spurgeon, who will celebrate his 30th birthday in a couple of months, has grown until one of the best defensemen in the NHL.

Now he’s paid like it. Shortly after noon on Saturday, he signed a contract extension that will keep him with the Wild through the 2026-27 season. It goes into effect next season and will carry a $7.575 million cap hit, the largest in franchise history.

It’s a heck of a reward for Spurgeon, who might be the most underrated player in the league and is one of the most popular players in the Wild locker room.

“I’m really proud of him,” coach Bruce Boudreau said. “You always like to see the little guy succeed. Even though he might be small in stature, his heart is so big that I think the Wild are really extremely lucky for seven more years.”

No doubt his diminutive stature — he stands 5 feet 10 and might weigh 170 pounds — makes people forget that he is one of the best defensemen in the league. As does his sheepish demeanor in front of the cameras.

“That’s naturally who he is,” captain Mikko Koivu said, adding that Spurgeon is a “first-class” person who the organization is keep around. “I think the players know how good he is. I think maybe from the media and from the fans he doesn’t get the recognition that he should. But I think he’s OK with it.”

Talking to new general manager Bill Guerin, he emphasized that getting Spurgeon’s contract out of the way before the regular season started was extremely important for everyone involved.

“It can be a burden on the player, and we just didn’t want that,” Guerin said. “We love Jared. He’s a homegrown guy. He’s been here for his whole career. We want him to be here his whole career. It was very important to get this done and not go through that.”

It’s no secret Spurgeon has been top priority for Guerin since he arrived in the Twin Cities. He chatted with agent Eustace King shortly after being hired, and after meeting face to face this week, everything started to fall into place.

“We are just really happy that we got it done,” Guerin said, mentioning that there were a couple of 12-hour days throughout negotiating. “He is excited about it. We are excited about it. It’s a perfect fit. We didn’t want him going anywhere.”

Tabbed by goaltender Devan Dubnyk as a “right-handed Ryan Suter” on the back end, to say Spurgeon has steadily improved since he arrived in the Twin Cities then would be selling it short. He has gone from a complete no-name to a depth player on the blue line to a star.

He is coming off his best season, a career-high 14 goals and career-high 29 assists. His style of play also bodes well because it seems sustainable sustainable.

“You get a guy that skates as fluently as he does and it definitely helps,” Guerin said, crediting Spurgeon’s fitness, too. “It gives us more of a comfort level. We are confident that he’s going to be playing good hockey all the way through this contract.”

Aside from his production on the ice, the type of person Spurgeon is off the ice has helped make him invaluable.

“You know, when I say quality person, like I mean, you’d want him to be your kid,” Boudreau said. “He’s a good person. And he looks like he’s only 16, so I’ve got to believe he can play until he’s about 40 or 50.”

This will go down as the first big move for Guerin — as he put it. “This isn’t a two-way contract” — and it sounds like he couldn’t be happier with the result.

“This is an important player to this organization,” Guerin said. “I’ve heard it from everybody from (owner Craig Leipold) on down. You have a guy that is that good of a person and that good of a player. You definitely want to keep him. I’m thrilled.”

As is Spurgeon, who almost certainly will be buying some nice dinners for his teammates, though he has no big purchase planned for himself.

“I’m pretty simple,” Spurgeon said. “Maybe a new pair of New Balance shoes. That’s about it.”

Pioneer Press LOADED: 09.15.2019
Michael Russo Sep 14, 2019

This kid is a damn stud. From ‘nobody’ to payday, Jared Spurgeon’s Wild ride is complete

It was the 2010 prospects tournament in Traverse City, Mich., and Dean Grillo from the O2K Management Group was the only agent from his firm attending so he could watch their young client, Derek Stepan.

Grillo’s partner, Eustace King, had signed on to represent a smallish, baby-faced hockey player from Edmonton named Jared Spurgeon. After impressing at development camp earlier in the summer for the Wild, Spurgeon was invited to play in the prospects tournament with players like Marco Scandella and once-upon-a-time prospects like Tyler Cuma and Casey Wellman.

“He was a nobody,” Grillo said, laughing. Of Spurgeon. “But I remember watching the first game and I called Eustace because I had never seen him play before. I said, ‘Eustace, I have no idea where this story is going to end, but this kid is a goddamn stud.’ It was that obvious.”

Former NHL coach Pierre Pagé was also at the tournament that the Wild would end up winning. He was entering his fourth season coaching Salzburg in the Austrian Elite League and desperately wanted to sign Spurgeon to a contract to play in Austria, where his older brother, Tyler, was set to play.

“It was close,” Grillo said.

“No. It was done,” King said. “He was going to Europe. But (former Wild GM) Chuck Fletcher and myself and Dean Grillo already had a bunch of conversations about this kid being something special, but, ‘we don’t know what that means yet.’ That’s honestly how we ended up getting to this point. Jared Spurgeon could have been in Europe from the beginning, but the Wild gave him a chance. It was divine intervention. This was supposed to happen.”

What King meant by this was the fact on Saturday afternoon, that still-baby-faced, diminutive defenseman that few in Minnesota had ever heard of in 2010 signed a seven-year, $53,025 million extension for what amounts to the richest annual average salary in Wild history ($7.575 million per year from 2020-21 through 2026-27).

“When we talked about it this morning, I looked at my wife (Danielle) and just asked her if you’d ever think we’d be here in 10 years,” Spurgeon said touchingly. “It’s pretty surreal, especially being with family and talking to Eustice. I talked to (owner) Craig (Leipold) and thanked him for the opportunity from the beginning and to be in this position. It’s pretty crazy from the first Traverse City camp.

“I couldn’t be more grateful, especially for (GM) Bill (Guerin). It happened pretty quick. It was two days and it was done. There’s a lot of work left to do, but we’ve got a great group of guys down there (in the locker room), and a leader (in Guerin) that’s taking us in the right direction, so we’re all excited.”

It’s safe to say Spurgeon was one heck of a find by the old Fletcher/Brent Flahr regime.

“I’ll tell you this, I didn’t know what Jared was going to do at that point (in 2010), but I did know he was a helluva hockey player and what he was performing and doing at the junior level was elite,” King, Spurgeon’s agent from the very start, said of Spurgeon, a former star with the Memorial Cup-winning Spokane Chiefs. “There was just a concern about his size, but everything he did was just like all the top first round picks.”

When Guerin got to Minnesota in the second half of last month, he made crystal clear that his biggest priority was to extend Spurgeon, who was entering the last year of his current contract. Every single person, from coach Bruce Boudreau to Leipold, told Guerin just how important Spurgeon was to the organization, not just on the ice, but also the type of human being he is away from the ice.

“I’m really proud of (Spurgeon),” Boudreau said. “He’s earned every bit of it. His efforts for three years-plus that I’ve seen him have been extraordinary. You always like to see the little guy succeed. He might be small in stature, but his heart is so big that I think the Wild are really extremely lucky.”

A few days into his new job, Guerin called King to express how important it was to keep Spurgeon in Minnesota, well, forever. He also felt it important to sign Spurgeon to an extension before the start of this season. He talked to Spurgeon on the day of his own news conference and made Spurgeon, in his words, “feel pretty important about myself right then and there.” A week or so later, Guerin and Leipold took Spurgeon to lunch.

“It can be a burden on the player (to play hockey during contract negotiations) and we just didn’t want that,” Guerin said. “We love Jared, he’s a homegrown guy, he’s been here for his whole career, and we want him to be here his whole career. … This was the priority. We’re just really happy that we got it done. He’s excited about it, we’re excited about it, it’s a perfect fit. We didn’t want him going anywhere.”

Two nights ago, King, who is based in Southern California, flew to the Twin Cities, where he was met by his longtime partner, Grillo, who is based in northern Minnesota.

The two agents met with Guerin, assistant GM Tom Kurvers and director of hockey operations Chris O’Hearn at the St. Paul Hotel in what Guerin said were two 12- to 13-hour marathon sessions.

“We each set the tone before I got on the plane,” King said. “It came together really quickly. Billy and I talked about how much of a priority this was for both of us. So, we decided to get together. I came in and, to be honest with you, I felt as soon as I got here that Billy was deadly serious about doing something. We spent almost an entire day and evening with multiple sessions going back and forth and really digging into the contract and exploring all the different options.”

In between sessions, King would call Spurgeon to update him. At 7 a.m. Saturday morning, King called Spurgeon after not being able to sleep all night because he was so excited to deliver the details to a client he adores. Spurgeon said, “It took me a second just to take it all in and reflect on where you came from. (King’s) been there every step of the way for me.”

Added King, “Billy said this was a major priority for him and the franchise, and he made sure I wasn’t getting back on the plane without getting something done.”

To put that in perspective, there was “maybe one conversation” between King and former GM Paul Fenton prior to Guerin’s arrival and that came at the NHL Draft in late June.

“So we kind of started from scratch,” Guerin said. “I have a very good relationship with the agents. I had a lot of help from Tom Kurvers and Chris O’Hearn (and director of hockey analytics) Matt Selis. It was a big team effort.”

Spurgeon’s contract comes with a full no-trade clause this year and the first four years of the new contract, sources say. That means Spurgeon is safe from being exposed to Seattle in the 2021 expansion draft and cannot be traded or put on waivers in that span. The last three years of the new contract contains a 10-team modified no-trade clause.

Spurgeon, 29, will be 30 and less than two months from 31 when the new contract kicks in next season. That means Spurgeon will be 37 when the new contract ends. While he probably will still look 21 at that point, that’s still quite the term for a 30-something.

Guerin isn’t worried.

“He keeps himself in great shape, he’s an elite skater and when you get a guy that skates as fluently as he does, it definitely helps,” Guerin said. “It gives you more of a comfort level. We’re confident that he’s going to be playing good hockey all the way through this contract.”

Added Boudreau, “Unless we get to the Stanley Cup final or something like that, people won’t know what we know. We know what (Spurgeon’s) like every night in playing 23 minutes, and so dependable and such a, when I say quality person, like I mean, you’d want him to be your kid. I mean, he’s a good person and looks like he’s only 16, so I’ve got to believe he can play till he’s about 40 or 50.”

Among defensemen, Spurgeon ranks second in Wild history with 591 games, first with 70 goals, second with 178 assists, second with 248 points, second with a plus-51 rating, second with 80 power-play points, first with 13 game-winning goals and second with 944 shots. His 13,211 minutes rank third.
He scored a career-high 14 goals and 43 points in 82 games last season and analytically is one of the best defensemen in the NHL, let alone on the Wild.

"He can skate as well as anybody. He makes the right play," Boudreau said. "Even if you look at the scrimmage (Saturday), he just makes the right pass and he’s extremely good at anticipating and jumping into the play when need be, and yet he’s smart enough to know what the score is and when not to do it. So he’s a pretty complete player. Every coach has their certain players that you know you can put him over the boards and everything’s going to be OK for the next 45 seconds. Spurgeon’s one of those guys."

Spurgeon is also the type of person Guerin didn’t want to lose in the organization.

"This is an important player to this organization, and I’ve heard it from everybody from Craig on down," Guerin said. "When you have a guy that is that good of a person and that good of a player, you definitely want to keep him."

Captain Mikko Koivu echoed that sentiment, saying, "For the organization, it’s important to keep the good people around. He’s first class on and off the ice. I think we all know his capability to play the game and what he brings each and every night. The way he battles. The way he overcomes everything like injuries and things like that. But having a quality person like he is, that’s the No. 1 thing I think about as a teammate.

"I think the important thing is he has the respect from his teammates. That comes first. … He should know that his teammates have the respect for him and how he plays the game. I don’t think you’re going to find a person that’s going to say a bad word about him."

Spurgeon said he has never once thought about free agency from the moment Guerin took over. He wanted to remain in Minnesota, where he loves to live and where three of his four children were born.

"I’ve always said I wanted to stay here and we want to win and that’s the main thing," Spurgeon said. "When Bill came in, he had a plan in place and what he said hit home for me. … Being in one spot for your entire career is a pretty cool thing. Ever since I’ve been here, the only thing I’ve wanted to do was win here, so I’m not sure why you’d leave."

Boy, oh boy, Spurgeon has come a long way since he showed up to Calgary for his NHL debut on his 21st birthday and equipment manager Tony DaCosta didn’t even have a jersey for him. The beloved Spurgeon got a lot of hugs from his teammates, a lot of ribbing, like, "Where we going for dinner?"

He signed his contract at 12:10 p.m., then was on the ice 40 minutes later for the first scrimmage of his 10th training camp.

He has big plans for the extra dough in his wallet, too.

"Maybe a new pair of New Balance shoes. That’s about it," Spurgeon said.

The Athletic LOAED: 09.15.2019
Spurgeon, who made his NHL debut on his 21st birthday and will turn 30 on Nov. 29, is already in his 10th training camp after the Wild signed the Memorial Cup winner from the Spokane Chiefs as a junior free agent. He was originally drafted 156th overall by the New York Islanders in the 2008 draft but cut loose in the summer of 2010. He was invited to development camp that offseason, then invited back for the Traverse City prospect tournament. The Wild won that championship. Spurgeon was invited to the main training and he was signed to a free-agent contract a few weeks before the 2010-11 season.

He is entering the final year of a 4-year, $20.75 million contract ($5.187 million cap hit).

“We’re about to do 10 years this year. It’s pretty crazy, isn’t it?” Spurgeon told The Athletic earlier this month, the we referring to him and his high school sweetheart, Spurgeon’s wife of seven years, Danielle. “We’ve had three of our four kids in Minnesota. We’ve made some friends outside of hockey and having kids, they make friends, too. We love it here and obviously to bring a Stanley Cup here would be pretty special.”

Unearthed by the former regime of Chuck Fletcher and Brent Flahr, the 5-foot-8 Spurgeon is one of the biggest success stories in Wild history. Among defensemen, Spurgeon ranks second in Wild history with 591 games, first with 70 goals, second with 178 assists, second with 248 points, second with 80 power-play points, first with 13 game-winning goals and second with 944 shots. His 13,211 minutes rank third.

He scored a career-high 14 goals and 43 points in 82 games last season. While Spurgeon may still be one of the NHL’s most underrated defensemen, you don’t have to dig deep to figure out just how important he is to the Wild.

When it comes to WAR (wins above replacement), a metric that aims to estimate how many wins a team gets from a player compared to a replacement-level player, Spurgeon’s 11.3 is tied for sixth among all NHL defensemen and 24th among all NHL skaters since 2014-15, according to Evolving Hockey.

The only blue liners ahead of him? Victor Hedman, John Klingberg, Mark Giordano, Erik Karlsson and Ryan McDonagh.

Of the 139 defensemen with 4,000 or more or 5-on-5 minutes since 2014-15, Spurgeon is tied for 20th at 0.94 points per hour, according to Corsica Hockey. His goals per hour of 0.3 is tied for 15th. His power-play goals per hour of 1.22 ranks 12th.

According to Corsica, his expected goals-for percentage at 5-on-5 of 56.9 is first in the NHL since 2014-15 with Suter on his tail at 56.1. His actual goals-for percentage at 5-on-5 of 52.9 percent since 2014-15 ranks 35th.

His individual giveaways per hour at 5-on-5 of 0.8 since 2014-15 rank dead last among 139 defensemen. That’s a crazy stat when one considers how much Spurgeon plays with the puck and drives possession up the ice.

Since 2011-12, Spurgeon ranks 35th in the entire NHL in minutes logged (12,412:07). No NHLer has played more during that stretch and amassed fewer penalty minutes (94) than Spurgeon. He has taken 27 5-on-5 penalties taken since 2014-15.

“We just have to keep him healthy. That’s the biggest thing,” Suter said. “We’re excited to have him for a long time.”

More to come.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019

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**10 biggest cap hits in Wild history**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Cap Hit</th>
<th>Year Signed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jared Spurgeon</td>
<td>$7.575M</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan Suter</td>
<td>$7.538M</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zach Parise</td>
<td>$7.538M</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikko Koivu</td>
<td>$6.75M</td>
<td>2010</td>
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<td>Thomas Vanek</td>
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<td>Matt Dumba</td>
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<td>2018</td>
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<td>Mats Zuccarello</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niklas Backstrom</td>
<td>$6M</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikael Granlund</td>
<td>$5.75M</td>
<td>2017</td>
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*These are the type of people we want to play for the Minnesota Wild,* Guerin told The Athletic during a recent sitdown. “Character is huge to me, and this guy epitomizes that and you just don’t let guys like that go.”

Suter echoed that Saturday.

“Spurgeon is just a good person,” Suter told The Athletic on Saturday.

“Obviously he’s a good player, a good skater, but even more important, he’s a good guy. Obviously as a hockey player, he’s very good. Everyone sees that, but just the off-ice things, he’s just a good, quiet guy and from Day 1 we might be some of the closest teammates on the team. It’s exciting to see for him and it couldn’t happen to a better guy.”
Look at a guy like Nate Thompson, he's been in the league for I don't know how many years ... or Shea Weber, Carey Price. Those guys are still working on their games, so why wouldn't we? That's how it goes. You got to enjoy it.

“You touch the puck a lot more,” Domi added about playing centre. “You have a lot more speed going into the O zone, so it’s good. But with that comes, obviously, a lot of responsibility to play in your own end. Playing against other teams and once in a while you get hemmed in your own zone and you got to be able to defend. You can’t be just like a one-trick pony, right? Obviously, anyone in the NHL has to do that in playing the centre-ice position. It’s a pretty crucial part of the lineup and I really like it a lot.”

Drouin also has a new look at training camp — the opposite of Domi — after cutting his hair short with no more locks coming out from under his helmet.

“He did tell me that he’s going to grow it back,” Domi said. “It’s nice to stay warm. It gets a little chilly in Montreal, so protect the ears a little bit.”

Joining Domi and Drouin on their line at training camp is Artturi Lehkonen.

"It’s great," Domi, who is entering his second season with the Canadiens, said about being back with Drouin. "I think it’s a little bit different coming back in ... I already played here with a bunch of different guys last year, so it doesn’t really make a difference. You got to be able to play with everyone. But it’s great. Jo and I have some good chemistry not only on the ice, but we’re very close off the ice. He’s got a lot of skill, he can score, he can make plays, he’s fast. And then, obviously, Lehky as well is more or less the same thing. I played with both of them a lot last year. So hopefully we can as a group start on the right foot forward and as a line as well and help our team out any way we can.

“You know what you’re getting out of Lehky every shift,” Domi added about Lehkonen, who posted 11-20-31 totals last season. “He gives it everything he has. He doesn’t give up on pucks and he makes the right play. He’s a very simple hockey player, which is nice to play with, right? He’s always in the right spot at the right time. Give him the puck in the right spot, he’s going to put it in the net. So that’s all you can really ask of your winger and those two guys are very easy to play with, so I feel very lucky.”

Domi had a big smile on his face during practice Friday after watching Drouin make a nifty deke to his backhand before scoring on goalie Cayden Primeau.

“That’s just what you see from Jo on a daily basis when you practise with him,” Domi said. "It’s one thing to watch him in games. You see how talented he is and how amazing he is with the puck. He’s just out of this world when it comes to the ability to play with the puck and his skill level is just through the roof. He’s a huge, huge part of this team. I’m very excited for him. He had a great summer. He looks outstanding on the ice right now and I know he’s eager to get going, just as we all are. Again, a big part of our team and he’s going to be awesome this year.”

Domi was used at centre and on the wing during his three seasons with the Arizona Coyotes before being acquired by the Canadiens last summer in exchange for Alex Galchenyuk. Last season, he became an effective centreman at both ends of the ice, finishing plus-20. He did struggle in the faceoff circle, winning only 44.9 per cent of his faceoffs.

“There’s always going to be progression, right?” Domi said. “And progression comes from some slip-ups, too. So you learn from the mistakes and you keep growing as a hockey player. I think we’re all trying to learn and get better in any position. So for myself at centre, it’s always going to be a learning process. Not just this year, not just next year, but for the rest of my career I’m always going to be trying to learn. Look at a guy like Nate Thompson, he’s been in the league for I don’t know how many years ... or Shea Weber, Carey Price. Those guys are still working on their games, so why wouldn’t we? That’s how it goes. You got to enjoy it.

“You touch the puck a lot more,” Domi added about playing centre. “You have a lot more speed going into the O zone, so it’s good. But with that comes, obviously, a lot of responsibility to play in your own end. Playing against other teams and once in a while you get hemmed in your own zone and you got to be able to defend. You can’t be just like a one-trick pony, right? Obviously, anyone in the NHL has to do that in playing the centre-ice position. It’s a pretty crucial part of the lineup and I really like it a lot.”

Drouin also has a new look at training camp — the opposite of Domi — after cutting his hair short with no more locks coming out from under his helmet.

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Montreal Canadiens

Stu Cowan: Canadiens' Victor Mete bonds with Shea Weber on and off ice

STU COWAN, MONTREAL GAZETTE Updated: September 14, 2019

There was a lot of talk this summer about who might play on the left side of Shea Weber on the Canadiens' top defence pairing this season. Former Toronto Maple Leaf Jake Gardiner might have been a good fit, but the free agent turned down a contract offer from Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin and decided to sign with the Carolina Hurricanes instead. Bergevin did sign free-agent defenceman Ben Chiarot from the Winnipeg Jets, but it looks like he's going to play on the left side beside Jeff Petry on the Canadiens' No. 2 defence pairing.

So, when the Canadiens hit the ice for the first time at training camp Friday in Brossard, Victor Mete was beside Weber, just like he was much of last season.

"I didn't really hear about anything during the summer," Mete said Saturday after practising beside Weber for the second straight day. "I really don't pay attention to any of that stuff too much. I wasn't too sure what was going to happen, but I'm happy to be on his left side to start camp and just get prepared with him for the season."

Overshadowed by the summer talk about who might play beside Weber is just how well Mete played last season. Mete failed to score a goal in 71 games, but had 13 assists and was plus-17 while averaging 17:46 of ice time and playing against the other team's top line most nights. He was sent down to the AHL's Laval Rocket at the end of November to work on his defensive zone work and physicality — posting 1-3-4 totals and a plus-2 in seven games — and returned a much-improved player. Mete only turned 21 on June 7 and has turned into a diamond in the rough for the Canadiens, who selected him in the fourth round (100th overall) at the 2016 NHL Draft. He will only get better.

"I think we kind of work hand in hand," Mete said about playing with the 34-year-old Weber. "He's big and physical and I'm smaller and faster. If he can kind of do the dirty work in the corners, I can come in and scoop up the puck and we can spend the least amount of time in the defensive zone as possible and play more in the offensive zone, which benefits both of us. We're both pretty good at communicating. If we have a problem with one another with our play, we'll talk about it and come to an agreement."

Mete is much more comfortable in the Canadiens' locker room now thanks in large part to lessons he learned from Weber. On the road last season, Mete had someone looking to him for advice after rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi was made his roommate. That could change this year.

"I think if anything, I might get my own room," Mete said. "If one of the rookies or younger guys make it this year, then I think I'm on my own now. But if they don't, I guess we're stuck back together."

"That's good and bad," Mete added with a smile. "We go out to eat on the road every night together, so I guess we'll still see each other, but we won't be doing crazy stuff in the room. The worst part is he likes the room hot and I like it cold, so we can never find a middle. The best part is we're both funny and make jokes with each other, so we have a good relationship."

Sort of like the one Mete has developed with Weber.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.15.2019
Defencemen Noah Juulsen and Karl Alzner weren’t on the ice Saturday as the Canadiens’ training camp continued in Brossard.

Coach Claude Julien announced after putting Team A and Team B through practices that Juulsen had a headache when he showed up at the Bell Sports Complex on Saturday morning, while Alzner suffered a groin injury during practice Friday. Both are listed as day-to-day.

Juulsen was limited to 21 games last season because of a facial fracture and eye injury suffered when he was struck in the face by a puck twice during a game against the Washington Capitals on Nov. 19.

“I don’t want to get ahead of myself and hopefully you guys aren’t, either,” Julien said about Juulsen. “I said it the best way possible because that’s what I’ve been told. He wasn’t feeling well, had a bit of a headache — not a concussion. It’s not a concussion, it’s a headache, and our guys chose to be cautious here and evaluate him tomorrow. If he feels good tomorrow, then we move forward again. Those are things that your medical staff has to deal with and you have to respect.”

Alzner played only nine games with the Canadiens last season and 34 with the AHL’s Laval Rocket. The groin injury is another blow to the 30-year-old defenceman, who is heading into the third season of a US$23.125-million contract with a $4.625 million annual salary-cap hit.

“In his case, I think it’s pretty clear,” Julien said about Alzner. “We chatted with him. The biggest thing was that we want it to work. We’re not standing here saying we want this guy to fail. We’d like to see him do well. What he did for himself, he came in a little leaner. He understands that he’s got to be a little bit quicker. So he did all the work to adapt not to our team, but to the NHL. And he knows that quickness and all that stuff is becoming part of it now.

“So he does all that work,” the coach added. “You want to see him … you get anxious to see the changes that it’s going to make in his game. We kind of helped him with some of the things that we’d like to see from him and he gets injured. So I know it’s a bit of a setback, but at the same time he’s day to day. Who knows, a day, two? We might see him back.

Training camp, you don’t gamble with injuries to extend it any longer than it has to be.”

Brook getting a good look

The top defence prospect at training camp is Josh Brook, who the Canadiens selected in the second round (50th overall) at the 2017 NHL Draft.

Last season, the 6-foot-1, 193-pounder posted 16-59-75 totals and was plus-24 in 59 games with the WHL’s Moose Jaw Warriors and also played seven games with the Rocket, picking up one assist and was minus-2.

When asked Saturday what the 20-year-old defenceman would have to do to earn a spot with the Canadiens, Julien said: “I think he has to be able to do everything.”

“We all know offensively he’s a gifted player,” the coach added. “He carries the puck well, he moves it well. I think he anticipates well also. Kind of a little bit of a version of Jeff Petry, if we can put it that way. He represented his country (at the world juniors) because he’s one of the top junior defencemen in Canada. So that’s how good he is. I think at the end of the day, you got to evaluate how is he going to do with the rest of the game? It’s OK that you’re offensive-minded — I shouldn’t say offensive-minded — good offensively. You also have to be decent defensively. Last year, we sent Victor Mete down (to Laval) to get a little bit better in that area, which helped him a lot. He came back and was able to close and do better that way. I think we need to do the same here with Josh Brook and then look at his pre-season games and see where he’s at and the other parts of his game. It’s really the first time he’s going to be playing with men, so you have to be able to give him a chance and give yourself a chance to evaluate him properly.”

McCarron a forgotten man?

Mike McCarron, the Canadiens’ first-round pick (25th overall) at the 2013 NHL Draft might seem like a forgotten man with the Canadiens, but Julien insists that’s not the case.

The 6-foot-6, 223-pound forward posted 7-14-21 totals in 32 games last year with the Rocket before requiring season-ending shoulder surgery. McCarron has looked good the first couple of days on the ice at training camp.

“What I’ve seen is a guy who’s come in and looked even a little bit leaner,” Julien said about McCarron. “He’s really worked hard on his skating and his edges and all that stuff and he knows he wants to get better at that. He’s coming off an injury last year which slowed him down. From what I had heard, he was really playing well when he got hurt.

“He’s not a forgotten guy in our minds or on our roster,” Julien added. “Because what he brings, he brings toughness, he brings size. We lost (Nicolas) Deslauriers (to the Anaheim Ducks), there’s an element of toughness that you still need on your team at times and I think we have to consider (McCarron) as one of those guys that you can bring and then utilize in certain situations. Although he may seem like forgotten, we’re going to have a good look at him. Whether he’s here or whether we send him back (to Laval), do we feel confident enough that he can be a call-up? Those are the things that we’re going to look at in this camp.”

Sticking together

Julien put the trio of Phillip Danault between Tomas Tatar and Brendan Gallagher together on Day 1 of training camp last year and they spent just about the entire season together as a line. So it’s not a surprise that they’re together again at training camp this year.

“I think the three of us are pretty excited to get together, build on what we did last year,” Gallagher said on Friday. “I think we had some success playing a certain way and it’s nice that everyone can kind of be comfortable within that line. We want to be just as effective, if not more, so it’s cool to start from Day 1.

“What we did last year was we all bring something different,” Gallagher added. “We were able to do that and make it work together as a group. I think the three of us were able to play to our strengths. For whatever reason, it meshes well. We were able to compete against some of the top lines in our league and we want to continue that this year.”

Chiarot impresses

Gallagher said he has been impressed by new defenceman Ben Chiarot, who was signed as a free agent during the summer after spending the last five seasons with the Winnipeg Jets.

“I know from playing against him he does a lot of the little things really well,” Gallagher said about the 6-foot-3, 225-pound defenceman. “He’s pretty tough to play against. He’s a fun practice player to play against because he’s going to battle, he’s going to compete and push you to get better. I think he’s going to surprise people with how effective he is. He’s going to fill a role on our team and be pretty effective for us going forward.

“I know from playing against him he can wear you down,” Gallagher added. “It’s a part of the game that he enjoys. He’s a big, strong player, so he’s definitely use that and add something to our group that maybe we were missing a little bit.”

Camp d'entraînement, jour 3.

The lines

Here’s how the lines and defence pairings looked at the practices Saturday for Team A and Team B:

TEAM A
Lehkonen – Domi – Drouin
Hudon – Suzuki – Weal
Cousins – Thompson – Weise
Pezzetta – Evans/Alain – Barber
Mete – Weber
Kulak – Brook
Skenicka – Fleury
Ouellet

Stu Cowan, Montreal Gazette Updated: September 14, 2019

1152791 Montreal Canadiens
TEAM B
Tatar – Danault – Gallagher
Byron – Kotkaniemi – Armia
Varone – Poehling – Peca
Verbeek/Vejdemo – McCarron – Belzile
Chiarot – Petry
Leskinden – Folin
Reilly – Lamarche

Waiting for practice to get going at #Habs training camp in Brossard #HabsIO pic.twitter.com/jUT98ERBEE— Stu Cowan (@StuCowan1)
September 14, 2019

What next?

The Canadiens will play their annual Red vs. White scrimmage Sunday afternoon at the Bell Centre (1 p.m., RDS2). Tickets to the game cost $5 and are available on the Canadiens’ website. Tickets include a free hot dog, bag of chips and a soft drink or bottle of water. The Canadiens are inviting fans to visit the Bell Centre for free from 8-10 a.m. Sunday, followed by a tailgate party in the Rio Tinto Courtyard outside the Bell Centre from 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

The Canadiens will play their first preseason game Monday night at the Bell Centre against the New Jersey Devils (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio) and then face the Florida Panthers Wednesday night in Bathurst, N.B. (7 p.m., SN1, TVA Sports, TSN 690 Radio) in the NHL’s annual Kraft Hockeyville game. The Canadiens and Panthers will meet again Thursday night at the Bell Centre (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio) and then the Canadiens will travel to Ottawa to face the Senators next Saturday (7:30 p.m., TSN5, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 09.15.2019
The NHL Players’ Association’s original deadline to decide whether or not to opt out of the current collective bargaining agreement was Sunday. But a clause in the CBA allowed the NHLPA to push that deadline to Monday because the original deadline fell on a Sunday.

In late August, NHL owners opted not to reopen the CBA, which runs through 2021-22. “The benefits of continuing to operate under the terms of the current CBA – while working with the Players’ Association to address our respective concerns – far outweigh the disruptive consequences of terminating it following the upcoming season,” NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said in August.

Should the NHLPA decide to opt out, negotiations for the new CBA could continue. Should it opt out, negotiations still could continue but with the threat of a work stoppage attached.

Predators players representative Yannick Weber said escrow and the salary cap were two of the players’ bigger concerns but added he is “optimistic” a new deal would be reached without work stoppage.

There have been three lockouts, most recently in 2012-13, when a 48-game regular season was played. The entire 2004-05 season was lost over a labor dispute.

“It doesn’t look like anyone wants to go to war or pick a fight,” Weber said.

Tennessean LOADED: 09.15.2019
There's a chance this could be Pekka Rinne's last season with the Predators.

A slim chance, but a chance nonetheless for the man who's played 712 games and all 13 seasons of his career with Nashville.

The soon-to-be 37-year-old goalie hopes that's not the case, of course. Rinne hopes to play out, in full, the 2020-21 season, which is the last year of the two-year, $10 million contract extension he signed last season.

Sunday, seven years to the day when the last NHL lockout began, was the deadline for the NHL Players' Association to decide whether to opt out of the collective bargaining agreement that went into effect in 2013. However, that deadline was pushed back to Monday thanks to a clause in the CBA that extends that deadline a day if the original deadline falls on a Sunday.

"I hope my last year doesn't get pushed back or erased," Rinne said Thursday, when the Predators reported for training camp.

"I'm not prepared to retire after this year."

In August, NHL owners informed the NHLPA that it would not reopen the current collective bargaining agreement, which runs through the 2021-22 season should neither side opt out. Should one side opt out, the CBA would end after this season.

"Our analysis makes clear that the benefits of continuing to operate under the terms of the current CBA – while working with the Players' Association to address our respective concerns – far outweigh the disruptive consequences of terminating it following the upcoming season," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said in August.

What if?

Should the NHLPA decide to opt out, a lockout is possible during the 2020-21 season.

Should the NHLPA opt to reopen the current CBA, talks would continue until the current CBA expires or a new agreement is reached.

Predators defenseman Yannick Weber, like Rinne, said he's optimistic the 2020-21 season won't be interrupted.

Weber is the Predators' player representative in the union, as voted on by his teammates. Ryan Ellis is the team's alternate rep.

"I'm very optimistic," Weber said. "Seven years ago, the lockout before, there were bigger issues. ... There's not much the owners want to change (now). From the players' side, there's not much we complain about in our daily lives.

"This time around everybody seems fairly happy. The owners are definitely happy. Franchise values went up a lot. You see new franchises coming in, paying $650 million. Players make a lot of money."

Money talks

They also have been giving up some of that money, thanks to escrow, part of the CBA signed in 2013.

Then, the biggest issue was revenue sharing. Owners fought for, and eventually received a 50-50 split of hockey-related revenue. Before that, the players had received a guaranteed 57 percent.

Part of that resolution was escrow, where teams withheld a percentage of players' salaries to ensure the 50-50 split was met. If it was not met, money from that escrow would make up the difference to the owners.

Escrow, which has ranged from 8 to 11.5 percent of a player's salary, has become one of the biggest issues for players now, thanks in large part to the around 27-percent fall in value of the Canadian dollar during that span.
Following the Devils’ busy offseason, the team’s newest additions of Jack Hughes, P.K. Subban, Nikita Gusev, Wayne Simmonds and John Hayden finally stepped on the ice in Newark.

And even though the Devils’ 56-man training camp roster was divided into three groups, all of them debuted together.

The five appeared in the third and final practice session on Saturday, which marked the Devils’ first on-ice activity of the preseason.

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Playing in Group C, the five didn’t participate in a scrimmage on Saturday like the other two groups, but they went through an 80-minute practice to start their work.

Watch the video above to see some clips of their first on-ice session.

Pavel Zacha was slated to participate in Group C, but he did not skate on Saturday while sorting out his work visa. He may be unable to participate on Sunday, either, but the Devils expect him back soon.

Hughes, Simmonds, Gusev and Subban will be part of the early practice session on Sunday morning before playing in a scrimmage against Group B later in the morning. The Devils play their first actual games of the preseason with a pair of split-squad matches on Monday — one at home against the Boston Bruins and one on the road against the Montreal Canadiens.
Notable player combinations from Devils' 1st practices of training camp

Updated Sep 14, 12:58 PM; Posted Sep 14, 10:26 AM

By Chris Ryan

The first practices of Devils training camp started on Saturday, with the team's 56 players divided up into three sessions. Groups A and B also scrimmaged between their two practices.

While it's still early, the groupings gave a glimpse at some of the line combinations and defensive pairings the Devils could use early in the preseason.

Here are some notable combinations from each of the groups:

GROUP A

Forwards: Joey Anderson, Jesper Boqvist, Jesper Bratt, Ludvig Larsson, Mikhail Maltsev, Kevin Rooney, Brett Seney, Marian Studenic, Travis Zajac, Fabian Zetterlund

Defensemen: Xavier Bernard, Will Butcher, Connor Carrick, Josh Jacobs, Dakota Mermis, Colby Sissons

Goalies: Evan Cormier, Eamon McAdam

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Travis Zajac centered Jesper Bratt and Jesper Boqvist during the scrimmage. It's no shock to see Zajac with a guy like Bratt, since he'll be either the second- or third-line center over the course of the season.

What's notable is the inclusion of Boqvist. Boqvist projects as a top-six player once he reaches his NHL potential, and in his first training camp, he's getting an early shot to play with a couple of the Devils' top forwards. Boqvist scored a goal 29 seconds into the scrimmage.

Three NHL roster hopefuls — Kevin Rooney, Joey Anderson and Brett Seney — were also together on the same line. Will Butcher was paired with Connor Carrick.

GROUP B

Forwards: Brandon Baddock, Nathan Bastian, Graeme Clarke, Taylor Hall, Nico Hischier, Mitchell Hoelscher, Michael McLeod, Kyle Palmieri, Ryan Schmelzer, Yegor Sharangovich

Defensemen: Andy Greene, Julian Melchiori, Mirco Mueller, Michael Paliotta, Damon Severson, Ty Smith

Goalies: Cory Schneider, Gilles Senn

It didn't take long for the Devils to reunite their top line. Taylor Hall, Nico Hischier and Kyle Palmieri skated together from the start of the scrimmage. Michael McLeod and Nathan Bastian were on the same line, along with Yegor Sharangovich.

Damon Severson and Andy Greene were also reunited as the top defensive pairing in Group B. Ty Smith skated with Mirco Mueller.

GROUP C

Forwards: Blake Coleman, Brandon Gignac, Nikita Gusev, John Hayden, Jack Hughes, Nikita Popugaev, Wayne Simmonds, Blake Speers, Ben Street, Miles Wood, Pavel Zacha

Defensemen: Jeremy Grouleau, P.K. Subban, Matt Tennyson, Sami Vatanen, Michael Vukojevic, Colton White

Goalies: Mackenzie Blackwood, Akira Schmid

The group's drills in practice didn't involve any full 5-on-5 play, so we'll have to wait until Sunday to see how this group lines up.

Pavel Zacha didn't skate on Saturday while dealing with some paperwork for his visa. He is expected to skate with the team on Sunday.

Star Ledger LOADED: 09.15.2019
What if nothing the Devils do can convince Taylor Hall to stay put? | Politi

Published Sep 14, 7:15 AM

By Steve Politi

The Devils owned this offseason the way they once ruled the Stanley Cup playoffs, drafting the best available prospect, making the NHL’s most-talked about trade and revamping their roster in a way that has made everyone in the sport take notice.

One person, however, is taking a measured approach to all the hoopla, and sadly for general manager Ray Shero, that person just happens to be the one who matters the most. Taylor Hall, the only MVP in franchise history, is impressed.

But only to a degree.

“There’s no doubt about it that (the offseason) probably went as well as it could have,” Hall said as he arrived at training camp this week. “You’ve got to play the game though. We’re a team on paper right now that looks good, looks improved. We’re also a team two years ago that people picked us to be last and we finished in the playoffs and then last year was a huge, disappointing year.”

The important words here -- probably, on paper, looks improved -- seem to make it clear that Hall is in no hurry to march into Shero’s office, pen in hand, and sign the long-term contract that keeps him in Newark through the prime of his career.

Shero plans to have a “conversation” with Hall and his agent at the end of the month, and maybe Hall will decide that he wants the security of that contract before heading into his 10th NHL season. The GM, however, was blunt: “Don’t hold your breath.”

So the pressure on this team to perform this season just ticked up a few notches. The Devils not only need to win to satisfy a fan base starved to see meaningful hockey in the spring again, but to convince their best player that he doesn’t need to book a one-way ticket to Toronto on July 1, 2020.

But it’s hard not to wonder: How much success will Hall want to see to sign that long-term deal? Or, like another star player who once anchored a team in his market, will Hall leave no matter how compelling a case the team makes in the coming months?

Put another way: Is Hall the next John Tavares?

The star center said goodbye to the Islanders after the 2017-18 season, and the prevailing sense was that nothing the franchise did -- short of relocating to Ontario -- was going to keep him from heading to the Maple Leafs.

“That was the Islanders. That was Toronto. That was John Tavares,” Shero said. “This is Taylor Hall and the Devils, and we’ll see. The players have certain rights and we know what they are and their teams have certain rights. Until we have those conversations, I don’t want to speculate on Taylor’s part.”

Devils fans know this feeling all-too-well, of course. Zach Parise was a homegrown star who, quite literally, wanted to go home to Minnesota when he became a free agent. Even Scott Niedermayer, one of the greatest players in franchise history, signed for less money in Anaheim, where he and his brother, Rob, teamed to win another Stanley Cup.

It happens. Hall lives in Toronto in the offseason. He knows Tavares well, and this summer, he told reporters at a charity golf tournament that he admired the way his friend handled his decision. The NHL isn’t quite like the NBA, where superstars regularly ditch their teams when summer rolls around, and Hall seems to genuinely like playing and living in New Jersey.

Still: If Devils fans are looking for a reason to panic during what should be their team’s most anticipated season in years, they are everywhere.

“I think, to be honest, it seems like both sides are OK with going into camp and into the season without a new contract,” Hall said. “It’s really only in the last few years where there’s this whole paranoia about players playing the last season of their contract.”

Hall was clear on his expectations for this season: “Playoffs or bust,” he said, and Hall himself will need a far more productive season than his injury-shortened 2018-19 -- he played in just 33 games after his MVP performance a year earlier -- to make that happen.

The former No. 1 pick has just one playoff victory to show for the first nine years of his career. This Devils team, with newcomers Jack Hughes, Nikita Gusev, Wayne Simmonds and PK Subban, should be good enough to add to that total.

Are they good enough to match Toronto, Tampa Bay and the other top contenders in the Eastern Conference? That’s a big ask for a team that finished buried in the standings a year ago even after their much-celebrated offseason.

Hall has made it clear he wants to play on a winner, but the Devils may have to face the sad reality that even a much improved team might not be enough to keep their best player around.

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Star Ledger LOADED: 09.15.2019
Why Taylor Hall and John Hynes believe Devils’ Nico Hischier will make big leap in 3rd NHL season

Posted Sep 14, 6:15 AM
By Chris Ryan

Taylor Hall has been in Nico Hischier’s shoes.

As the No. 1 overall pick in 2010, Hall entered the NHL as an 18-year-old, and he carved his way to stardom over the course of his career, which included an NHL MVP award with the Devils in 2017-18.

But that success didn’t happen overnight.

It took Hall time to learn the ins and outs of the NHL to eventually feel comfortable playing at his highest level against the highest competition. If Hischier’s career trajectory follows Hall’s, Hischier’s time to truly shine is about to arrive.

“The third year was really where I felt my biggest change as a hockey player,” Hall said. “I went from a guy that was looking to carry play and to drive a line and all that, and my third year was really where I felt I could dominate games and have that approach, so hopefully he feels confident doing that. We need him to play great this year and I know he’s capable of it.”

As a rookie, Hischier centered Hall’s line to aid the left winger’s Hart Trophy campaign. So it’s no surprise that Hall also said he hopes to have the 2017 No. 1 overall pick back on his line for a third season.

Over two NHL seasons, Hischier scored 37 goals and posted 99 points over 151 games. Hischier played without Hall for the entire second half of the 2018-19 season, when Hall was sidelined with a knee injury. Yet the center found ways to drive a line on his own without leaning on Hall, and that experience should benefit the Swiss forward.

When Hall went down in December of last season, Hischier tried to approach each game the same way, as if Hall was still there.

“For me it didn’t change anything. I wanted to play my game and help the teammate next to me, help the whole team with the way I play,” Hischier said. “I think it’s important for me to focus on my game.”

The raw stats didn’t make a jump for Hischier in his second NHL season, but Devils brass saw plenty of signs that pointed to Hischier making strides. With Hall back and an improved core of forwards all around him, the results could show up in the box score in 2019-20.

“If you look at his first year he comes in, he’s 18, he has a tremendous year,” Devils coach John Hynes said. “He centered the Hart Trophy winner and we make the playoffs, and then last year he came back, we thought he was a better player. We really went through a lot of the clips on the line numbers and things like that. He was a really strong, impact player for us.

“I just think physically and mentally, in your third year, you’ve been around the league, he understands the league better, he’s bigger and stronger, he’s more confident. He’s had some highs and lows and a lot of times that doesn’t just happen in one year, but a combined two-year situation for him is good.”

Star Ledger LOADED: 09.15.2019
How Devils’ Ty Smith, Jesper Boqvist are approaching chance to make NHL roster

All eyes will be on Ty Smith and Jesper Boqvist in the training-camp battle for the final spots on the Devils’ opening-night roster.

Smith and Boqvist are among the handful of prospects fighting for jobs on the big club, but their unique circumstances make the preseason even more vital. If either doesn’t make the Devils out of camp, they’ll return to their former teams, since neither is eligible to play for the Binghamton Devils in the AHL.

That makes the next two weeks a crucial period for both prospects and for the Devils. The players have to show they’re capable of making an impact in the NHL now in order to stick around. Devils coaches and management have to decide if they’re truly ready for a full NHL season without impeding their long-term development.

Smith, a defenseman taken with the Devils’ first-round pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, nearly made the NHL roster as an 18-year-old last year. Smith had the tools to be a pro player, but the Devils opted for one more year of development in junior hockey to get Smith ready. Now Smith’s task involves showing he can handle the defensive responsibilities of a full-time NHL blue liner.

“Just being able to defend against pro players. I think that’s something that I needed to work on a little bit with the defensive aspects of my game,” Smith said. “It definitely needed a little bit of work last year. I think I did OK, but I definitely had more to offer in that regard. I need to continue to move the puck to the forwards and help build offense that way, get the puck in their hands. I think being here is an honor and it would be a privilege to play for the Devils, to try to play for the Devils this year, and not only play, but try to be an impact player.”

Boqvist, a forward and 2017 second-round pick, signed his NHL entry-level contract during the offseason, but it came with the caveat that if he didn’t make the Devils’ NHL roster, he would return to his pro team in Sweden for the season, since he had already signed a one-year contract there.

Boqvist fully intends on making a push to stay in the NHL, and he understands what’s riding on his preseason performance.

“Like any guy we’re going to put them out there, we’re going to let them compete, we’re gonna give them opportunities,” Devils coach John Hynes said. “Their play will dictate whether they’re ready.”

Given their pedigrees and early development, both Smith and Boqvist are going to be in the NHL at some point in the near future. It could be this season, or it could be in the next year or two, based on their individual progress.

Devils GM Ray Shero called their performance at the Prospects Challenge last weekend in Buffalo a very important first step for the two, and carrying that momentum into training camp will be key for their roster push.

“Are they engaged, are they strong, are their instincts (good) and does it translate on the ice?” Shero said. “Guys like Boqvist and Smith add some skill level, and I’ve talked about the difference between skill and hard
How the Devils plan to split time between Cory Schneider and Mackenzie Blackwood

Abbey Mastracco, NHL writerPublished 5:21 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019 | Updated 7:37 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019

NEWARK — One of the most successful workhorses to ever tend goal in the National Hockey League sits upstairs in the Prudential Center offices every day. His name has been retired and his name enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

There may never be another goaltender like Martin Brodeur because there may never be another goaltender who makes 78 starts in one season. At least not in today’s NHL, where a 53-50 regular season split, give or take a few games, seems to be the formula that leads to success.

You can count the New Jersey Devils among the teams that plan to deploy Cory Schneider and Mackenzie Blackwood in a similar manner this season.

“Ideally, the way that the schedule is if you can have someone in the 55 range, you’re supposed No. 1 starter, and the other guy play the rest (days),” coach John Hynes said this week as training camp opened. “It’s important when you look at the way the schedule is and the league is.”

Last season, exactly 50 percent of the teams that made the playoffs had their goalies start about 40-50 games. Eight teams had goalies with 50 or more starts and only five had a true No. 1 goalie that started more than 60 games. Tampa Bay’s Andrei Vasilevskiy may have had made 70 had he not gotten hurt. It appears the trend is here to stay thanks to an increased emphasis on speed and skill in the salary cap era.

The longest-tenured NHL player on the Devils’ roster, defenseman Andy Greene, played in front of Brodeur and in front of Schneider. He’s seen how the game has changed and how the goaltenders have adapted.

Feb 9, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; New Jersey Devils goaltender Cory Schneider (35) splits water during a break in the first period against the Minnesota Wild at Prudential Center.

“I just think the game is so fast now and so demanding,” the New Jersey captain said. “I don’t want to the game wasn’t demanding when I first came in, or 20 years ago or whatnot. I just think it’s the speed of the game is so fast now. I think maybe it puts more pressure physically more pressure on their bodies.”

There are some goalies who might point to the recent equipment changes made but those goalies aren’t in Newark. It’s no secret goals are up in the NHL and with the increase in scoring chances comes an increase in work for goalies. A heavier workload can lead to more injuries, in particular, those to the hips, groins and knees which tend to be common for goaltenders and other athletes who work laterally.

We know people are more effective and efficient when rested. Technological advances allow teams to track the energy exerted and better manage the workloads of their athletes between the pipes.

Schneider noticed the increased workload of No. 2 goalies early in his career when he was one of those goaltenders who started in more games than expected. He made 22 starts behind Roberto Luongo for the Vancouver Canucks in 2010-11. The formula worked, as the tandem won the Jennings Trophy for the fewest goals allowed and went to the Stanley Cup Final, where they fell to the Chicago Blackhawks, but at the time that was considered a heavy workload for a young backup.

When he made 28 starts the next season, he knew the roles of netminders were changing.

Feb 7, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; New York Islanders center Mathew Barzal (13) scores a goal past New Jersey Devils goaltender Cory Schneider (35) during the first period at Prudential Center.

“I think back then that was a big deal to say, ‘Hey, we want to give Roberto more rest so that we would make the playoffs he’s fresher,’” Schneider said. “And that was just 22 games.”

In the past, teams circled a few back-to-backs or busy weeks with lesser opponents to pencil in the backups. Scheduling is certainly still a key element but with the talent level as high as it is throughout the league it’s tough to justify letting one goalie start 65-70 games.

“There aren’t many 18- to 20-shot nights where they all come from the outside,” Schneider said. “More often, you’re working laterally, you’re working through screens, you’re working through tips, and I think just the stress on the goalie is higher than it was before.”

Schneider has also noticed organizations with greater goaltending depth. Teams aren’t running through veteran backups quite as much anymore. Why use a re merchant when you can develop your own talent and have them contribute while still on their entry-level contracts? This is another area where you see the salary cap come into play.

However, the dynamics of a platoon can be tricky. The two Southern California teams tried that for a few years and it didn’t work. The Ducks seemingly pitted Frederik Andersen and John Gibson against one another in 2015-16. A year prior, Jonas Enroth publicly criticized the Kings for only playing him in 16 games. He expected more of a platoon situation and wondered why the team would pay $1.25 million to sit him behind Jonathan Quick in a losing season.

But Schneider and Blackwood have a great relationship. The two might have different styles of play and different personalities off it, but they’ve grown close over the last year. Blackwood called Schneider often this summer for advice, though he said he tried not to call too much because he didn’t want to disrupt his offseason with his family, and Schneider was always happy to talk.

Goalie coach Roland Melanson is well respected by Blackwood and has been with Schneider since the Vancouver days.

And when Hynes had to make a decision between using Schneider or Keith Kinkaid in the postseason last year, he decisively called on Kinkaid, naming him the playoff starter early in order to eliminate the optics of drama.

It’s a thoroughly modern approach to goaltending but it’s what the Devils feel they have to do to win in the modern-day NHL.

“I think whoever the starter is it’s going to be a situation where I think as the season goes on, they’re going to be able to continue to play well and play the way we need them to play,” he said. “To win this league, you have to have a second guy that can win games for you and relieve the load and we feel like we have two guys now we’ll see how it plays out.”

Bergen Record LOADED: 09.15.2019
NEWARK — The future is now in New Jersey. The Devils held their first scrimmage of training camp Saturday at RWJBarnabas Health Hockey House and it was the kids who impressed the most.

The day consisted of practices for three groups. The first two groups scrimmaged after the first practice session of the day, playing two 15-minute halves with officials. Sunday will feature the same format with the second two groups scrimmaging in between practice sessions.

A few observations and notes on the day:

- Team Red defeated Team White 3-2. Top forward prospect Jesper Boqvist scored twice, including one goal just 29 seconds into play. Though the lines were shuffled a bit due to extra players, he primarily played on the right side of Travis Zajac with Jesper Bratt on the left.

There was some obvious chemistry between the two Jespers and the duo attributed it to having played together on Sweden’s Under-16 team years ago.

“It’s fun to see him grow as a player and taking his skills and his skating to the next level,” Bratt said. “He sees the ice very well. He knows what kind of areas to be in and he’s a shifty player. He knows where to be to create scoring chances and that’s going to be his biggest impact.”

- Boqvist drew high praise from Taylor Hall, who was back on the ice with the Devils for the first time since before Christmas.

“He gave me a couple minuses there early on,” Hall said. “He looks like a smart player. He gets a burst of speed as soon as the puck touches his stick and those are always fun guys to watch and fun guys to play with.”

- Hall’s surgically-repaired left knee gave him no issues during the practice or scrimmage. No surprise here, Hall was back on a line with Nico Hischier and Kyle Palmieri, which was beneficial given the fact that he said he felt “rusty.” It’s not uncommon for him or any player to have to knock some rust off at this point in training camp but Hall has had a nine-month layoff so he wanted to have that familiarity of playing with Hischier and Palmieri in his first go-around.

“For me, at the start of the season I always feel my timing is one thing I have to get back,” Hall said. “Whether it’s my timing or reading off players, jumping into holes at the right time. There are a lot of players here at camp that you’re not familiar with and you don’t know how to read them so some of the games can get a little scramble-y at times, so you do your best to push yourself in practices, try and get as many touches as possible and try and get familiar with making plays.”

Sep 17, 2018; Newark, NJ, USA; New Jersey Devils defenseman Ty Smith (48) plays the puck while being defended by New York Rangers center Kevin Hayes (13) during the first period at Prudential Center.

-Ty Smith scored from the slot for the white team. Smith and Boqvist are already making things on the team brass. Both appear to be ready for NHL action but they can’t be stashed in Binghamton with the club’s American Hockey League affiliate. Smith’s late birthday makes him ineligible for the AHL this season so he would have to return to his junior team, Spokane of the Western Hockey League, and Boqvist would have to return to Brynäs in the Swedish league, where he has a contract for next season.

- Pavel Zacha was not able to practice Saturday due to a visa paperwork issue. He’s expected to be able to participate Sunday.

Bergen Record LOADED: 09.15.2019
Here’s a change for the Islanders: Johnny Boychuk is not dealing with any physical issues at the start of training camp as he had the previous two years. It’s a positive sign for the 35-year-old defenseman, especially as his last season ended with him missing the Islanders’ four-game sweep by the Hurricanes after blocking a shot with his left foot in Game 4 of the first-round sweep of the Penguins.

After a few treatments and physical therapy sessions, Boychuk was still able to have “a normal summer” of working out and training.

"It should help," Boychuk said on Saturday, the second day of on-ice practices at Islanders' training camp in East Meadow. “You come into camp and you’re either injured or you’re coming into camp trying to work the kinks out of your surgery or the cartilage or the scar tissue, whatever you have. ‘It’s nice to come in and not feel like I’m already behind somewhat, or dealing with something,” added Boychuk, who dealt with knee issues the previous two training camps.

The Islanders open their seven-game preseason schedule on Monday night in Philadelphia. Boychuk is one of seven defensemen returning from last season – eight with Luca Sbisa in training camp on a professional tryout – so there will be strong competition throughout the preseason for playing time.

Boychuk is entering his sixth season with the Islanders and has a limited no-trade clause kick in this season in his seven-year, $42 million deal that runs through 2022.

The organization’s defensive depth is one thing Boychuk has seen evolve in his time with the Islanders. Another is the familiarity of playing in coach Barry Trotz’s defense-first system. Last season, Trotz’s first with the team, the Islanders allowed the fewest goals in the NHL.

“I think that will help, definitely because, last year, the first month, month and a half, it was a learning process,” Boychuk said. “We’ve got a lot of good players coming up. It’s exciting. We’re not playing as individuals any more. We’re playing as a team and we’re focused.”

Boychuk played 74 games last season, his most with the Islanders and just three games shy of his career high, compiling three goals and 16 assists.

"I thought it was pretty good but I’m looking forward to starting the year off right and being healthy and having a full season," Boychuk said.

Notes & quotes: Forward Tom Kuhnhackl missed his second straight day of on-ice work with an unspecified issue that Trotz called, “just a day to day thing, nothing serious...” Forward Simon Holmstrom, the 23rd overall pick in June, remained out from the team practices after blocking a shot with his foot back home in Sweden. Trotz said Holmstrom has resumed skating on his own. “I think he’s pretty close,” Trotz said … Defenseman Mitch Vande Sompel will miss a longer period of time after hurting his right arm in Friday’s practice. He was wearing a sling on Saturday.
Former Devil Slava Fetisov takes on global warming with help from Lou Lamoriello

By Andrew Gross
Updated September 14, 2019 8:17 PM

To say Lou Lamoriello is close with Slava Fetisov is to underestimate the depth of their friendship, which dates to when Fetisov took on the Soviet government and, with Lamoriello’s constant support, forced his way to the Devils in 1989.

In many ways, Lamoriello, the longtime NHL executive now running the Islanders, and the Hall of Fame defenseman, active as a Russian politician, hockey executive and activist, are similar, headstrong in their beliefs and unflinchingly loyal to their friends.

So, when Fetisov called Lamoriello about a month ago to discuss his grave concerns about global warming and inquire about bringing one of the Last Game exhibitions designed to bring attention to climate change to Long Island, Lamoriello was immediately receptive.

“It’s not really going to affect me but it’s going to affect my grandchildren,” the 76-year-old Lamoriello told Newsday about global warming. “You have to look at it. I’d never spent much time thinking about it but Slava and what he had to say, it certainly makes you concerned. The awareness and the association made me say, ‘Whoa, this is something that should be paid attention to.’”

The result: The latest game in Fetisov’s passion project in partnership with the United Nations will take place Tuesday at NYCBLive’s Nassau Coliseum at 3 p.m. In addition to Fetisov, former NHL players expected to participate include Arron Asham, Radek Martinek, Eric Boulton, Mike Richter, Bruce Driver, Jim Dowd, Grant Marshall and Randy Velischek. Boomer Esiason is expected to be one of the celebrity participants.

Over the last two years, Fetisov has staged Last Game events in Russia, Finland, Kenya, Israel and the United Arab Emirates. Future games are possible for Singapore, Ecuador, Japan, Monaco and Germany.

The goal is to play The Last Game at the North Pole to bring attention to glacial melting. A report by the United Nations Environment Programme predicted global warming might make the Arctic “nearly ice-free” by 2040.

“Sports and climate and ecology should unite everybody,” Fetisov said in April after the game in Israel.

Veteran New York-based journalist and filmmaker Jon Alpert has been working with Fetisov the past two years to produce a documentary on The Last Game and will be on the Coliseum ice shooting on Tuesday.

“When you have a tough guy like Lou Lamoriello and a tough guy like Slava Fetisov, two of the toughest guys in the world, hugging onto trees because they’re afraid they’re going to lose them, it should say something to everyone,” Alpert said. “There is Lou Lamoriello who is scared about what is happening to our planet. Slava Fetisov is scared to death about what is happening to our planet.

“That’s why I believe the planet cannot have two better friends than Lou Lamoriello and Slava Fetisov,” Alpert added. “If they have a soft spot for the planet and want to save it, I find that extremely inspiring.”

The first thing Alpert filmed for the project was Fetisov in Russia, looking for a frozen pond to skate on as he did so frequently in his youth. Even in the middle of a Russian winter, it took a long time to find one.

In Finland, Fetisov and Alpert visited the indigenous Sami people to witness how global warming has adversely affected their reindeer herds. In Kenya, it was the Maasai who have seen their cattle herds dwindle after lengthy droughts. In Abu Dhabi, built on the Persian Gulf, there are fears over rising water levels. In the Golan Heights, Fetisov and Alpert saw how the once-plentiful apple crop has disappeared, morphed into farmers planting mangoes because of the rising temperatures.

“The thing about Slava,” Lamoriello said, “is when he puts his mind to something, you know you’re going to get 100 percent out of him.”

Asham, a former Islander who also played for Lamoriello’s Devils, said, he, too, has seen the effects of global warming. Originally from Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Asham has visited Rankin Inlet in Canada’s Yukon Territory and said, “We’ve got to start worrying about it, glaciers are melting at a rapid pace.”

Here on Long Island, Asham, who has lived in Point Lookout since his time with the Islanders, said, “There’s a lot of erosion, it seems like we’re losing a lot of beach. Everything’s changing and it’s happening a little bit too quickly.”

In addition to the former NHL players and celebrities, Tuesday’s Last Game will also include local first-responders, among them Chris Princiotta, 37, of Long Beach, a firefighter stationed in Brooklyn’s Squad 252.

In 2012, the home Princiotta shared with his older brother Chuck, also with the FDNY, suffered severe water damage during Hurricane Sandy and ultimately had to be demolished.

Chris Princiotta now lives with his wife and two small children in a new home on the same property. He said concerns about climate change “weren’t really in my face until it happened.”

“I think it’s going to be a very great experience to get to see what it’s like to be on the ice with professional players,” said Princiotta, who has played for the FDNY hockey team for 13 years. “It will be very interesting to meet the people involved in this program and what can potentially happen in the future, to see if this can help.”

“I think it’s going to be unique,” Lamoriello said of Tuesday’s event. “But I think the message is what’s important. This event is giving the opportunity to get the word out more as to what the real problem is.”

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 09.15.2019
Psst, pass it on: Chris Kreider is going into the final season of his Rangers contract and is eligible to become an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

“It’s the third time already in my career,” the apparently unperturbed No. 20, who previously became a restricted free agent in 2014 and 2016, said Saturday in Tarrytown at the Rangers’ first full-team practice of training camp. “This is part of it, and it’s not a part of it I worry about.

“I’ve talked to Jeff [Gorton, general manager], JD [team president John Davidson] and everyone in management, and it’s all good. I’m here, ready to work every day. It won’t be an issue for me, and it shouldn’t be any issue for the team.

“Last year with [pending free agents Mats Zuccarello and Kevin Hayes], we kept that out of the room. The business-side is one thing. The hockey side is another. I’m here to play hockey. I want to get better every day.”

After playing for Team USA in the World Championships in Slovakia in May, Kreider said he took a family vacation in Europe. He stopped in to visit for Mika Zibanejad in Sweden. He also, as part of his “vacation” to a bike trip through Croatia in which he rode 40 miles a day.

“I’m leaner and I’m faster,” said Kreider, who is notorious for his workout regimen. “I want to control what I can control. After my work over the summer, I feel more confident in every aspect of the game.”

The situation remains status quo regarding the unsigned Tony DeAngelo. This could be a long siege.

“They know where we are and we know where they are,” Gorton told The Post. “I expect that I’ll talk to [DeAngelo’s agent, Pat Brisson] in the next couple of days.”

Jacob Trouba made his presence known during the club’s three-on-three cross-ice drills, burying Filip Chytil in front before taking out Kaapo Kakko and generally wreaking havoc.

“That’s an added element to our practices,” coach David Quinn said. “He just instinctively does that. That’s his DNA, and he has it to another level.”

The Rangers will conduct a full scrimmage on Monday.
New York Rangers

Pavel Buchnevich is X-factor on Rangers’ revamped top line

By Larry Brooks
September 14, 2019 | 6:33pm | Updated

Let’s remember this. For all of the good intentions and common sense displayed by David Quinn in anointing Artemi Panarin, Mika Zibanejad and Pavel Buchnevich as the Rangers’ first line, a year ago the coach opened with Chris Kreider on the left with Zibanejad and Buchnevich as the top unit … and stayed with it for all of two games.

So yes, though this year’s troika likely will have more staying power than last season’s top trio, nothing is set in concrete. The fact is, it will be up to Buchnevich to protect his assignment after being unable to do so last year, when he journeyed from the first line to the fourth and all points in between in a learning year. He was not reunited with Kreider and Zibanejad until Game 72.

Panarin, more of a distributor and transporter than a shooter, should form a perfect union with Zibanejad, more of a sniper than a dispatcher. The upside of this combination of high-end talents is through the roof.

Buchnevich, who has all of the attributes necessary to complement his higher profile linemates, is the X-factor.

“I was proud to see his progress and the way he finished after a tough start,” said Zibanejad, the Rangers’ captain-in-waiting. “I can see that there’s more maturity to his game. I want to help him continue to grow.”

Buchnevich recorded nine goals and four assists over his final 17 games to finish at 21 goals and 17 assists for the season, with a 17.6 shooting percentage in 64 games. His compete level and work away from the puck improved dramatically as the year evolved following four healthy scratches through the opening 49 matches. His work earned him a two-year contract worth $3.25 million per season and an assignment on the first line.

The AMP Line.

“Everybody knows they [Panarin and Zibanejad] are good players. It’s good for me to play with them,” Buchnevich said. “The first half of the year was hard for me, I was so focused on my contract and getting points, not playing for the team. After that, I just tried to have some fun and enjoy playing hockey.”

Panarin, whom Buchnevich called, “a legend in Russia before he came to [the NHL],” had a twinkle in his eye when he addressed the media following practice, his remarks translated by Elizaveta Nemchinov, Sergei Nemchinov’s daughter. She and Victoria Zelepukin, former Devil Valeri Zelepukin’s daughter, will serve as interpreters for the club’s Russian contingent throughout the season.

“We have everything we need [to succeed] with that line,” said Panarin, who arrived in New York three weeks ago after a seeming lifetime of waiting to play for the Rangers. “I can talk to [Buchnevich] in my native language and everyone knows what kind of player Mika is.”

There were jokes, of course, about the Swedish centerman having to learn some Russian in order to communicate with his mates. The fact is there is a universal hockey language, which is what they were talking when they broke off as a line between drills to chat among themselves.

“We want to build that chemistry on a hockey level,” Panarin said. “It will be great.”

Panarin talked about how he feels less pressure in New York than he did in Chicago, with which he signed as a 24-year-old undrafted free agent in 2015, and Columbus, to which he was traded for Brandon Saad (!) after two seasons, primarily because of cap concerns. Apparently No. 10 is unafraid of the expectations that come with the contract he signed on July 1, under which he will earn an average of $11,642,857 for the next seven seasons.

“I’m really happy with my team and my teammates,” said Panarin, who recorded 79 points (28-51) last season for the Blue Jackets. “Everything has been better than I expected.”

Panarin is a transformative talent who elevates the play of those on the ice with him. He will start with Zibanejad and Buchnevich. How long that lasts is up to them and to Quinn, the coach who last season sent Zibanejad out with 19 different sets of wingers over the course of the schedule.

Again. Nothing is set in concrete. But the AMP Line should have some staying power. This isn’t last year.

New York Post LOADED: 09.15.2019
Chris Kreider says he isn’t concerned about his contract status.

By Colin Stephenson

September 14, 2019 8:25 PM

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Chris Kreider will be an unrestricted free agent next summer, if the Rangers don’t sign him to a contract extension, which they haven’t done yet. But if you think Kreider is going to publicly lobby for a new deal with the Rangers, he won’t.

“I really don’t think there’s any (tension) to deal with,” Kreider said Saturday after the Rangers completed their first practices of training camp. “I’ve been in the last year of my deal three times now – I signed three different deals (over the course of a career). It’s not something that I’m concerned about. Camp’s starting. I’m worried about finishing off today; I’ve got to go get in the (hot and cold) tubs and recover. And then I’m worried about tomorrow and worried about winning hockey games.”

Kreider saw what happened to Mats Zuccarello and Kevin Hayes, who were in his position a year ago. The rebuilding Rangers didn’t sign either one of them to a contract extension, and eventually shipped out both players at the trade deadline in February, sending Hayes to Winnipeg and Zuccarello to Dallas. The same fate could very well await the 28-year-old Kreider next February.

But, publicly, at least, Kreider refuses to worry about that. Instead, he is focused on the possibilities that lie ahead for a Rangers team that was very active over the summer, trading for defensemen Adam Fox and Jacob Trouba, drafting Kaapo Kakko No. 2 overall, and signing free agent winger Artemi Panarin. Team president John Davidson said on Thursday, the day players reported to camp, that the playoffs will be a goal for the Rangers in 2019-20. And to a man, the players are focused on that goal.

“There’s a pretty good buzz, pretty good energy,” Kreider said of the Rangers’ locker room. “I think we got better, obviously. Definitely deeper. We have a ton of talent, but talent doesn’t really win hockey games if the will is not there, so we’ve got to continue to work on the stuff that we worked on and did a good job of last year.”

The arrival of Panarin, who signed a seven-year, $81.5 million contract on July 1, means Kreider, a fixture on the first line the past two seasons, will drop down in the lineup to the second line. At practice Saturday, he was skating on the left of center Filip Chytil, who turned 20 on Sept. 5, and Kakko, who is all of 18. So, in addition to providing speed and net front presence on his line, Kreider will naturally serve as a mentor to his young linemates.

Coach David Quinn is particularly looking forward to seeing how Kreider, who had 28 goals and 52 points in 79 games last season, meshes with Chytil (11 goals and 23 points in 75 games with the Rangers last season), who the coach says seems a lot more confident in himself this year.

“I think Fil can play at (Kreider’s) pace,” Quinn said. “I also think ‘Kreids’ will benefit from Fil’s hockey sense and creativity. And Fil’s not a small guy (6-2, 208). I know he’s only 20, but one of the things that one of the guys was saying, halfway through that practice, was, ‘God, Fil’s gotten stronger.’ I just think Fil’s in a different place, mentally. I think there’s a comfort level that’s going to help him, day in and day out. I’m anxious to see how (Kreider and Chytil) work together.”

Kreider recalled that he played with Chytil early on last season, with Hayes at center and Chytil playing right wing. He marveled at how much better Chytil looks this season.

“He’s stronger on the ice,” Kreider said of Chytil. “I saw him sitting on pucks today, protecting the puck. He doesn’t want to give it up.”

Notes & quotes: The Rangers broke the players into three groups, which each had its own practice session. They’ll do the same thing Sunday before re-organizing into two groups for Monday and having a practice that day and then a scrimmage. Quinn said he liked what he saw on the first day. “I just liked our intensity,” he said. “I liked our purpose. The first day, there were a lot of things to like.”...
We've got to keep our pace and our work ethic up.

Bruce Garrioch
Published: September 14, 2019
Updated: September 14, 2019 6:17 PM EDT

It's D-Day for the NHL Players' Association. And, while the battle for jobs will continue on Day 3 of the Ottawa Senators' training camp at the Canadian Tire Centre, there will be no shortage of players waiting to hear if the union will decide to opt out of the current collective bargaining agreement with a deadline of Sunday to make a decision.

While the league stated before its Sept. 1 deadline it had no plans to re-open the CBA, labour peace until Sept., 2022 won't be assured until the NHLPA announces its decision publicly. Though there's hope the players won't opt for the re-opener, if they do go the other route the current deal will expire in September 2020.

 Ottawa defenceman Dylan DeMelo, the club's player rep, told this newspaper Saturday he expects a conference call with the rest of the union representatives Sunday because no final decision was going to be made by the negotiation committee until everybody had a chance to speak with their teammates at training camp.

"We definitely have had some chats and the big day is (Sunday)," DeMelo said following the club's skate. "I'm not going to lean to one side or another, I just know whatever decision we make, we'll be unified in doing it. That's probably all I've got for you on that."

DeMelo said the NHLPA reps have held plenty of discussions internally about where the talks are at heading into this deadline. The two sides last met Friday in New York.

"We have (talked) because Sept. 15 is coming up and we all have to be on the same page," he said. "We'll have another one (Sunday) and then make our decision. It's been great conversation and there's been guys on both ends with the pros and cons of each situation. We'll have to assess, and whatever we decide we'll be unified."

DeMelo said he's fortunate that veteran defenceman Ron Hainsey, who was active in the negotiations of the last CBA, has helped him inform his teammates about the issues.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Only two days into the Senators' camp, those who have been here before were noticing a difference.

Coach D.J. Smith likes to have fun, however he's also demanding, and that message has been conveyed during the first two on-ice workouts.

"It's no disrespect to the other coaching staff, but everything has been very direct, very quick and it's run very thoroughly," DeMelo said. "D.J. has a great presence about him, a lot of energy, and the coaching staff has been great. Everything is like a tight ship around here, and going forward I don't think he's going to let anything slip.

"He's going to hold people accountable, and first off he's going to hold himself accountable, and I think that's why you look at our practices, the pace has been great, the drills have been awesome. We go through them pretty quick. It's been a lot of fun. Guys are moving pretty well and it's been pretty competitive so far."

Smith wants the players to enjoy coming to the rink, however he wants the players to do the job the way he expects it to be done.

"We've all gotten into hockey because we enjoyed it first, but now that we're doing it as a job you still can't lose that fun aspect, but you've also got to know when it's time to work," DeMelo said. "You've got to bring that lunch pail in and get to work. D.J. wants to have fun, but if we're not working hard that fun aspect goes out.

"We've got to keep our pace and our work ethic up."

THE LAST WORDS

Don't expect to see veteran winger Mikkel Boedker on the ice until later this week. He's sidelined with a hip flexor injury and Smith indicated he'll be out at least five days. "It's nothing really serious, but unfortunately he can't skate right now," Smith said Saturday. Winger Bobby Ryan was slashed on the hand and didn't finish Saturday's scrimmage, but is expected to be fine. Smith sent forward Filip Chlapik off the ice because "he looked like he pulled something, but it was nothing serious." ... Winger Anthony Duclair, acquired in the Ryan Dzingel trade with Columbus in February, has caught Smith's eye in the first two days. "I don't think you realize how quick (Anthony) Duclair is," Smith said. "I thought he might have been our best player overall. He worked in practice, he had the most chances in the scrimmage and I think you don't really realize how quick he really is and how dangerous he really is."

Duclair has been skating with Jean-Gabriel Pageau and newcomer Drake Batherson. "It's been awesome," Duclair said. "Pager I played a little bit with (each other) last year and he's a good, hard-working, two-way centreman. Drake, this is my first time actually seeing him, and he's really impressed me. He can skate and move the puck. He's not scared, he gets to the front of the net and I enjoy playing with those two guys. Hopefully, in pre-season we'll get a chance to do it again." ... Smith and goalie coach Pierre Groulx have to discuss how they're going to use veterans Craig Anderson and Anders Nilsson in the pre-season, but it certainly sounds like they'll split the duties, for the most part. The club has six pre-season games so it's possible that Marcus Hogberg, Filip Gustavsson and Joey Daccord may see action as well.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
Changes are about to be made at Ottawa Senators’ training camp

Bruce Garrioch
Published:September 14, 2019
Updated:September 14, 2019 5:50 PM EDT

The Ottawa Senators are expected to start reducing the size of their training camp Sunday.

Ottawa coach D.J. Smith told reporters Saturday he expects that general manager Pierre Dorion and the staff will likely start trimming the number of players from 63 when Day 3 of camp wraps up Sunday. The pre-season gets underway Tuesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs at the Mile One Centre in St. John’s, N.L.

“Maybe some younger guys and maybe some guys that aren’t scheduled for sure to be here,” Smith said. “I’ll talk to Pierre, but I’d say for sure after (Sunday) there will be a few guys that we’ll cut.”

The Senators could always send players with junior eligibility back to their respective teams and players who are on pro tryouts that aren’t expected to suit up for exhibition games could also be moved out. Ottawa hosts the Leafs at home Wednesday and will head to Vancouver on Sunday to the face the Canucks in two games next week.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
Craig Anderson is well-rested and he's not quite ready to hand over the reins of the Ottawa Senators' net just yet.

While there was plenty of talk before training camp got underway Thursday about the 38-year-old Anderson's role changing this season, he's preparing to battle for his playing time, and if he has success, then he expects to stay in the net as long as it continues.

Anderson, who's headed into the final year of a contract that will pay him $4.75 million this season, spoke to this newspaper Saturday after signing autographs on the concourse at Fan Fest on Day 2 of training camp at the Canadian Tire Centre.

"My role is still to compete on a nightly basis, earn your ice time and prove that you still belong," said Anderson, who makes his off-season home in Coral Springs, Fla. "That's probably just for myself and for the fans, to see that I'm still a competitive goalie, I can still steal games and I can still get in there and have my swagger and that type of thing.

"As far as my role, it's to compete for ice time," said Anderson, who spent a little less time on the ice this summer than in past years. "Again, you earn it, you play. You don't earn it, you don't play, and it's been that way since I was 20 years old. I was told everything you get in this game you earn, and now I've kind of got to pass that knowledge and pass that killer instinct onto the young guys."

"Hey, you're here because you're young, but if you want to be here long-term and you want to be the 40-year-old that's playing with 20-year-olds, then you've got to compete on a nightly basis and earn your ice time."

That's always been Anderson's approach, and since it has worked in the past there's no need to change it now. He wants to put coach D.J. Smith, goalie coach Pierre Groulx and the rest of the staff in a position where they don't want to take him out of the net in favour of Anders Nilsson, who was signed to a two-year extension in May.

"Give your team an opportunity to win each night and then you'll have the opportunity to play most nights," Anderson said.

You still want to be the guy they rely on?

"One hundred per cent, and as soon as you lose that killer instinct you don't belong in the league," Anderson said. "If you asked (Nilsson) the same question, he'll probably give you the same answer and he'll probably say he's going to fight for every single start he can get because the better he plays, the better I'll play. It goes back and forth."

"That killer instinct is the reason why 99 per cent of the players are in this league and it's 99 per cent of the reason why guys stay in this league."

Anderson has a good relationship with Nilsson, who arrived in a trade with the Vancouver Canucks in January and will make an average $2.6 million per season.

"It's good knowing we've got a guy who can come in and steal some games," said Anderson. "If I'm not playing well, you don't feel like you're letting the team down because you're not having a good week or you're having a bad two weeks, whatever that might be. Another guy can step in, fill that gap and let you go find your game so you can take that next step.

"Sometimes when you're that guy all the time and things aren't going the way you wanted, you get frustrated and you get mentally broken down because you keep throwing you in there because they don't have a guy that they have confidence in, that snowball just gets bigger and bigger and worse and worse. By having a guy like (Nilsson) being able to push and steal starts, it's going to force you to play better, but also it gives you time to work on your game."

Anderson didn't have the kind of year he wanted last season. He had a 17-27-4 record with a .903 save percentage, and he wants badly to bounce back so the Senators can enjoy more victories.

"As an athlete, you're disappointed when you don't have success," Anderson said. "If you're happy not having success, then you don't belong here; go find another job, and that's the mentality of a pro athlete. If you go down the list of all the guys and they say they were satisfied having a bad year, then they don't belong in the room."

"(I was) disappointed, dissatisfied and maybe my pride was hurt a little bit to by not being able to play as well as I wanted to and the team not playing as well as we wanted. The nice thing about this year, it's a fresh start and everybody starts at 0-0-0 so we can define our own destiny here."
Chris Stewart, a physical right winger who had two 28-goal seasons early in a career that was bursting with promise, knows this could be his last chance to earn a spot on an NHL roster.

He won’t go away quietly.

Stewart, 31, is battling for a bottom-six job at the Flyers’ training camp, and he has this working for him: His 6-foot-2, 243-pound frame might open room for his line mates, and he excels in board battles because of his size.

It also doesn’t hurt him that the Flyers no longer have Radko Gudas, Wayne Simmonds, or Dale Weise — who liked to throw around their bodies — and might want someone to pick up the slack.

“My expectations are to make this hockey club,” said Stewart, who has been on a line with Michael Raffl and Scott Laughton at training camp. “That’s the only thing on my mind. I prepare every day.”

Flyers general manager Chuck Fletcher, when he was Minnesota’s GM, twice made trades for Stewart, and he signed him to a tryout contract with the Flyers.

“I’ve dreamed about being a Flyer my whole life,” Stewart said.

In the 2006 NHL draft, Stewart was hoping the Flyers would pick him with the 22nd selection in the first round. He had always been enamored with their style.

Stewart didn’t last that long. Colorado took him with the 18th overall pick. Four picks later, the Flyers took Claude Giroux.

“This is where I thought I’d be drafted, and they ended up taking Giroux, so it worked out well for them,” Stewart said with a smile.

Why did he think the Flyers would select him?

“I was a bad ass. I was a young power forward coming up, and I think I had 40 goals and 15 fights the year before, so I kind of fit the mold,” he said. “That was my style of hockey. But it all worked out for Philadelphia” with Giroux.

Last season, Stewart had six goals and 13 points in 23 games in the Britain Elite Ice Hockey League, which isn’t exactly an NHL pipeline.

Now, he needs a strong camp to return to the NHL for the first time since scoring 10 goals in 54 games with Minnesota and Calgary in 2017-18.

“I think I just have to be me,” Stewart, a Toronto native who is best friends with Simmonds, said about earning a roster spot. “I think they know exactly what I am and what I bring, and it’s up to me to bring it. You’re getting critiqued and judged every day, so you have to bring it every day.”

Coach Alain Vigneault called the big winger an “up and down, simple player who gets pucks in deep and plays the body. He’s got a dimension and a role to his game that teams look for. I think there’s some good internal competition for that kind of role on our team.”

Kurtis Gabriel (6-4, 200) and Andy Andreoff (6-1, 203) are two other such wingers vying for a job.

For Stewart, who has 160 career goals while playing 10 seasons for six teams, this is likely his last chance to stick on an NHL roster.

“I’m not looking at it like that, but that’s probably the reality of the situation,” he said. “I’m not that naive. You never know what’s going to happen, but I do want to be here, and I’m going to do what it takes to make this team.”

He will get a chance to impress the brass in some of the Flyers’ four exhibition games in a six-day stretch, starting Monday.
Young Flyers fan writes recruitment pitch to Mitch Marner ... and sends it to Matt Marner

By Noah Levick September 14, 2019 11:15 PM

If you’re a hockey fan, there’s a good chance you’ve heard of Mitch Marner.

The Maple Leafs forward who was a restricted free agent this offseason just signed a six-year deal to remain in Toronto.

You might be less familiar with Matt Marner, who received a letter from a young Flyers fan intended for Mitch.

Josh made a pretty compelling case for why Mitch should have come to Philadelphia.

Though he’s a Maple Leafs fan, Matt was quite impressed with Josh’s letter.

It was pretty remarkable getting a letter to join the Flyers all the way from P.A.,” he told NBC Sports Philadelphia’s Taryn Hatcher. "I’m a die hard Leafs fan and it was impressive to know there’s a fan base whose fans are just as crazy about their team. It showed me that hockey is a passion that is shared no matter what team you cheer for. I just thought it reminded me of myself as a young hockey fan. But it was a very well-written pitch. I mean, there were mutual friends involved in JVR, he went over the coaching staff and the pieces the Flyers have down there. Then he took a shot at us about Kawhi as he signed off. He will make a great GM one day!

You do have to love the P.S. and the P.P.S. It’s hard to argue against the fact that the Flyers do have Gritty and that Kawhi Leonard did indeed leave Toronto.

Meanwhile, the Flyers are in the midst of training camp and Marner — Mitch, that is — is getting ready for the season in Canada.
VOORHEES, N.J. — Flyers head coach Alain Vigneault continued to implement his systems during another upbeat, on-the-move practice for Day 2 of training camp.

"I liked both groups that came to work," Vigneault said. "The pace was good. There was no downtime."

With that said, let's get into five observations from Saturday.

1. 'It's a different animal'

The Flyers gave prospects Morgan Frost and Isaac Ratcliffe an awfully tough challenge. In a large chunk of the 5-on-5 drills, Frost, Ratcliffe and Jakub Voracek went up against Claude Giroux, Sean Couturier and Joel Farabee.

Giroux and Couturier have often looked like they're on another level. Frost and Ratcliffe haven't played a game of pro hockey yet.

I mentioned that to [assistant coach Ian Laperriere] when we were standing on the net there, I think I said, ‘Those two kids are learning what the NHL pace is.’

I think for those two young men going against two elite players is a good thing. You just see the pace, you see the intensity. A couple of times, G on his backcheck stripped them of the puck. You see those guys never stop and are always moving.

- Vigneault

The Giroux-Couturier-Farabee line was with defensemen Ivan Provorov and Matt Niskanen. The group was dominant in the defensive zone.

"We’re going up against Coots, G and Farabee," Voracek said. "It’s a different animal, those three guys."

Good experience, nonetheless, for Frost and Ratcliffe.

2. Wingin’ it with Hayes

Two forwards that could be in for big years are James van Riemsdyk and Oskar Lindblom.

JVR was with a new team last season, missed 16 games from Oct. 9 to Nov. 13, was slow to find his rhythm when he returned, played on different lines, for two different head coaches and still finished with 27 goals.

Lindblom saw his role fluctuate in 2018-19 and still finished sixth among NHL rookies with 17 goals.

Now you add more familiarity and — early on — a center like Kevin Hayes.

"I've liked that line. I've really liked the way Kevin Hayes has worked and sort of led his two linemates both with and without the puck," Vigneault said. "For us, we wanted to get a look at Oskar on the right side, we're probably going to try him there during exhibition. Being able to play more than one position is a bonus. I've liked that line, I've liked their work ethic and I've liked how they've competed so far."

A James van Riemsdyk-Kevin Hayes 2-on-1 isn't really fair. Also, JVR puts the puck where he wants it. pic.twitter.com/eqqpgGzOsT

— Jordan Hall (@JHallNBCS) September 14, 2019

Among the forwards, a lot can change with Nolan Patrick's injury, Travis Konecny's situation and roster battles. But van Riemsdyk, Hayes and Lindblom make up an intriguing group and we could see the trio Monday at the Wells Fargo Center.

3. Nisky and Provy

Niskanen is a steady guy.

It'll be interesting to see what level he brings at 32 years old after a Stanley Cup run in 2017-18 and a short offseason followed by a long 2018-19.

It will also be interesting to see what he can do for a player like Provorov.

They've been paired together through the first two days of camp. Both can log heavy minutes and move the puck up ice. Provorov relied a lot on himself last season. Maybe Niskanen eases the burden a bit.

"Tons of experience, he's a great player," Provorov said Friday. "He's been in the league for a while, he's been on winning teams, he knows how to win."

4. Don't mark off Andreoff

Andy Andreoff might not be the most popular name for the Flyers' bottom-six competition but he's played well in camp and will be right in the conversation.

During Day 1, he had no problem being physical with Couturier and checking Provorov into the boards. He also brings some skill and scoring ability, which he showed Saturday.

The 28-year-old is on a one-way deal and scored 55 points (26 goals, 29 assists) with the AHL's Syracuse Crunch in 2018-19. Teams like depth guys with positional versatility, which Andreoff provides as he can play center or winger.

"He’s a physical, competitive, team-oriented kind of guy," Flyers general manager Chuck Fletcher said Friday. "There are some different elements he brings. We will see how the preseason goes. We feel he’s clearly a guy who can play."

5. A Hart blackout

Carter Hart was sharp in net Saturday as fans enjoyed watching behind the glass.

He was pretty sharp with his attire, too.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.15.2019
VOORHEES, N.J. — Kurtis Gabriel was sitting between Jakub Voracek and Joel Farabee in the Flyers' dressing room at Skate Zone. Voracek is entering his 12th NHL season. He was a 2015 All-Star and owns the league's ninth-most assists in the past five years.

As Farabee removed his gear, Voracek glanced over at Gabriel and smiled.

"Guy broke my ankles," Voracek said of the 19-year-old Farabee.

The kid is turning heads … and ankles. During a drill Saturday, Farabee had the puck along the boards with Voracek in pursuit. Farabee made a quick jolt to his right, then jetted left. Voracek jumped back, biting on the fake before recovering.

"I was thinking I could catch up to him, right?" Voracek said with a laugh. "It's not easy for us 30-year-olds, especially in the second day of training camp. I'm sure I'll get him one time."

Suffice it to say, Farabee is getting noticed. For those fueling his roster case, you couldn't have asked for a better start. With Travis Konecny's absence, general manager Chuck Fletcher and assistant general manager Brent Flahr placed Farabee on a line with Claude Giroux and Sean Couturier to open camp.

Just how seamlessly is the young winger clicking with the team's big boys?

"Today, for me, obviously this is just practice," Flyers head coach Alain Vigneault said, "but he showed that he belonged there. He was making some plays, he was working hard at both ends of the ice, it was fun to see. If you're him, playing with two pretty good players, it's a great opportunity and we'll see what happens moving forward."

The natural chemistry between Giroux, Couturier and Farabee has been eye-catching through two days of camp. The 2018 first-round pick knows how to find open gaps, play off their abilities — and he just works, works and works.

Below is a sustained possession that was all possible because of Farabee's relentless pursuit of the puck. Coaches watched it on the ice and front office officials saw it from the balcony above.

"When I play my worst games, it's when I'm not really hard on pucks, when I'm not forechecking," Farabee said. "I've learned over the years, when I play my best, it's when I'm all over guys, just forechecking. When I do that, I play my best. That's just what I'm trying to do right now."

Prior to the announcement of Nolan Patrick's injury and Konecny's holdout from camp, Farabee was already in position to push for a vacancy on the Flyers' third line. Suddenly, the Flyers could be looking for more depth within their group of forwards.

"We've got some decisions to make," Vigneault said. "That's what you want in camp. You need surprises, we need some of these young kids to step up and force us into some decisions. That's how your team gets better and we're going to give them an opportunity to do that."

"There's no doubt that Coots, Giroux and Farabee were dominant in the little 5-on-5 competitions that we had, whether it be on the forecheck or whether it be in the offensive zone play."

What did Voracek see?

"Smart player, it's not always easy to jump into a line with Coots and G and understand right away what they want from you," he said. "It looks like he does understand what they want — it's really hard to do. He's doing a great job so far."

"It's been two practices, it's hard to judge it because we haven't played games yet. Trust me, the games are different than the practices."
Kevin Hayes is new to Flyers but already having an impact on teammates

By Brooke Destra September 14, 2019 4:55 PM

Whenever a player begins the next chapter of their career with a new team, there is always a chance that they may come across a familiar face. Luckily, that's the case for Kevin Hayes.

It's the first time we're seeing Hayes on the ice with the Flyers. Normally during training camp, it takes some time to shake off the rust of the offseason and prepare for October — but doing that while also adjusting to a new team and city isn't typically an easy task for anyone.

It doesn't seem like the case for the newly acquired center. Hayes is here and already looking to make an impact. His previous relationship with head coach Alain Vigneault has already helped him in the first days of camp.

"It's old stuff obviously with a new team," Hayes said Friday. "But with the same coach that I had my first four years, it's relieving to be able to get as comfortable with the coach as soon as possible."

This relationship is turning out to benefit those around the two as well.

As soon as I signed here, I was getting text messages from some of the players. I'm an older guy now — kind of. Try to help all the young guys, try to explain how quick the drills go from one drill to the other. He likes to keep it short but he likes to keep the pace up, so I try to tell everyone about that. It was fun.

The 27-year-old knows that he wants to do as much as he can on and off the ice to help his new team. He already has a leadership mentality in the locker room.

"When I was younger, I looked up to guys and I'm just trying to be that guy now," Hayes said.

It was no secret at the time of free agency this offseason, the Flyers wanted Hayes. Toward the end of the 2018-19 NHL season, one of Chuck Fletcher's first moves was to trade a 2019 fifth-round pick for the contractual rights to Hayes prior to July 1.

Later this summer, after Hayes' name was signed on the dotted line, a comment surfaced on Crossing Broad's "Snow the Goalie" podcast about the newest Flyer. It indicated that Hayes ran into a current NHL player during the Stanley Cup Final and told him the only way he would sign with the Flyers is if they overpaid him.

The specific incident was not directly brought up to Hayes, but he certainly made the effort to touch on the matter.

Everyone knows July 1 is a big deal. Rumors came out about some stupid stuff but that's all in the past. Someone made up something and that's all I'm going to say about that.

There is still plenty of time before the start of the season to build chemistry on the ice with his teammates and grow into the veteran leader he hopes to become, but he is already in a good place.
Wayne Simmonds’ departure may mean a job for his best friend, Chris Stewart.

Dave Isaac, NHL writerPublished 4:23 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019 | Updated 5:59 p.m. ET Sept. 14, 2019

VOORHEES — It was around the time of the draft this summer that Chris Simmonds got to Phase 3.

His plan — constructed with his brother Anthony, a 2003 first-round pick who has since retired to become a coach, trainer and analyst on Toronto radio — has been more than a year in the making. Stewart, 31, is in training camp with the Flyers on a tryout and hoping to take the job that his best friend, Wayne Simmonds, once filled.

When the Flyers traded Radko Gudas in June, and Simmonds and Dale Weise were both long gone, Stewart thought they lacked “sandpaper and physical presence.” So he called his agent, Eustace King, and had him ask Flyers GM Chuck Fletcher, who twice traded for Stewart in Minnesota, for a tryout.

Last season Stewart played in only 24 games, all but one of them in the United Kingdom. He signed a contract with HC Slovan Bratislava of the Kontinental Hockey League, but when it came time to board the plane to Russia he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“I thought once I signed something would happen, I’d flip the switch in my head and be excited to go and it came the day to go and I just wasn’t there mentally so I chose just to take a step back and re-evaluated my decision,” Stewart said. “I ended up going to England in January and in between that I came up with a plan with my brother to make my comeback in the NHL. Phase 1 was going to England just to play and work on my skills and my game. It wasn’t really about where I was going to play or a status-type thing. It was just more about me. Phase 2 was getting back to Toronto and training with Matt Nichol, who’s one of the most world-renowned trainers and Phase 3 was getting a tryout. This is where I am.

“I’ve dreamed about being a Flyer my whole life and I’m going to speak it into existence.”

He thought the Flyers would take him in the 2006 draft because he fit the Broad St. Bully mentality of scoring nearly 40 goals with the Kingstron Fighting 15 opponents.

The Flyers had the 22nd pick that year and the Colorado Avalanche took Stewart at 18.

“They ended up taking (Claude) Giroux... so I think it worked out well for them, that’s for sure,” Stewart cracked.

Maybe now is his chance. He’ll have several players to beat out if he earns the job.

Others like Kurtis Gabriel and Andy Andreoff play a physical brand of hockey, too, only they already have contracts. The last time the Flyers offered one to a player on a tryout was 2013 when they took both Hal Gill and, a couple months later, Chris VandeVelde.

Stewart, who scored a career-high 28 goals in the league 10 seasons ago, isn’t looking at the tryout as his last chance at the NHL, but knows, “that’s probably the reality of the situation.” He certainly has some brand recognition as he tries to beat the odds in Philadelphia.

“For me, I’ve known Stewie. We’ve played against him quite a bit on my different teams,” said new Flyers coach Alain Vigneault. “He’s an up-and-down, simple player. North and south, pucks in deep, plays the body. He’s got a dimension and role to his game that teams look for. I think there’s some good internal competition for that type of role on our team. He’s going to be one of those guys battling for those positions and one of those roles.”

No one knows that role better than Simmonds, who is now on the rival New Jersey Devils.

“Stewie is my best friend. He was the best man at my wedding, so I think we’ve had a lot of talks throughout the summer,” Simmonds told USA Today Network. “We spoke about it and I think he knows what he needs to do. His head is in the right spot right now.”

In the first two days of camp, Stewart was on a line with Michael Raffl and Scott Laughton, two Flyers whose spots on the roster really aren’t in question. That’s a good start, but Stewart will have to play very well in exhibition games to earn a contract.

So what did Simmonds, who was also the best man in Stewart’s wedding, have to say about the organization he spent eight seasons with?

“One for sure is that it’s a first-class organization and a tight-knit group in the dressing room and great fan support,” Stewart said. “It was really tough for him moving from here and I’ve been traded mid-year a couple times. It’s tough to start out on a new foot in the middle of the season. It’s a lot of changes but he had nothing but good things and praise for this organization.”

One of the things that made Simmonds beloved in orange and black was his intimidating presence against opponents. Stewart thinks that’s still necessary in the Metropolitan Division, citing Washington Capital Tom Wilson and New York Islander Matt Martin.

Now there’s also Simmonds to contend with in Newark.

“The first time we played against each other in L.A., I went running at him after a whistle and he kind of side-stepped me and threw me head-first into the glass. We got into a big scrun there and almost got into a fight,” Stewart said. “We’ve been best friends since we’re 15 years old. We’ve had more than one encounter with each other, away from the rink, too. That’s my brother, man. We’re kind of the same person. I can tell you exactly what he’s thinking. That’s how close we are. We share a lot of things in common, a similar upbringing and we’re family people. He’s my favorite power forward in the league right now.”

And Stewart wants to be in the same league. If he is, it will be from this tryout, which his older brother Anthony finds ironic because that’s how Chris got his start in the first place. Anthony hooked his little brother up with a tryout for the Frontenacs, the same team he played for, and Chris made the most of it.

Anthony Stewart finished his NHL career with the Carolina Hurricanes in 2013. Upon being traded to the Los Angeles Kings, he thought he’d be in a top-six role and instead was relegated to the American Hockey League.

“When you see other guys in the league that are still playing you feel that you should have that opportunity and you don’t get it, it sort of makes you a little bit bitter,” Anthony Stewart said. “So just getting over that mental part where you know you can play, you know you can contribute, you know you’re an NHL hockey player and you don’t get that opportunity, it messes up your psyche. With me, I couldn’t get over it and I ended up retiring because of it because I didn’t want to have to go through the grind of having to go to the minors or maybe the East Coast Hockey League. I just quit. That just shows his determination because he could have easily called it quits. He’s made a lot of money in his career. He’s financially stable. The easy thing would be for him to quit, but he’s been a fighter his whole entire life and nothing has come easy to him.”

Courier-Post LOADED: 09.15.2019
Brandon Tanev already seeing prominent role for Penguins alongside Evgeni Malkin

For the second consecutive day, Brandon Tanev, the Pittsburgh Penguins most prominent free agent signing this offseason, practiced and scrimmaged on a line with one of the NHL’s most prominent players in Evgeni Malkin.

Tanev, who primarily played a third-line role with the Jets previously in his career, has been skating with Malkin as well as Alex Galchenyuk over the course of 48 hours and hasn’t looked overwhelmed by the assignment. During Saturday’s scrimmage in Cranberry, Tanev received a stretch pass from Malkin to create a partial breakaway which was snuffed out by goaltender Tristan Jarry.

After Friday’s scrimmage, Malkin lauded Tanev as one of the NHL’s fastest players.

Tanev has a pretty favorable opinion of his would-be linemates.

"It’s easy to play so far with (Malkin) and (Galchenyuk), said Tanev. “They’re both great players, and I’m looking forward to keeping that going throughout camp.”

Considering Malkin is a former Hart Memorial Trophy recipient and Galchenyuk was the No. 3 overall pick in the 2012 draft, Tanev, who was undrafted, would appear to have a clear-cut role on this line.

"I like to play a physical game," Tanev said. “When the games come around, I like to play tenacious and physical and try to get on the body as much as I can.”

In other words, his game could be something of a combination of the ferocious Chris Kunitz and fleet Carl Hagelin, each former Penguins forecheckers who, at times, excelled on Malkin’s wing.

Signed to a six-year contract with a cap hit of $3.5 million, Tanev didn’t find out about his considerable assignment until Friday.

"Just the first day of training camp," he said. “They put a jersey in your stall and you’re told who you go out there with and you try to build some confidence and chemistry.”

"One of the things we like about him is he got a real conscientious 200-foot game," coach Mike Sullivan said. "He can really skate. He’s got a physical edge to his game. He’s good on the forecheck. We think he can force turnovers, create loose-puck opportunities for a player like (Malkin), and he’s good at both ends of the rink. He’s a guy that could be complementary of (Malkin) and Alex. We thought we would try him through the course of training camp and see where it goes. That’s something that we’ve been seriously considering.”

Tribune Review LOADED: 09.15.2019
It's now or never for Tristan Jarry with the Penguins

SETH RORABAUGH  | Saturday, September 14, 2019 6:30 p.m.

In 2013, Tristan Jarry was the future.
Now? His future is anyone’s guess.

When the Pittsburgh Penguins drafted Jarry, former general manager Ray Shero dealt forward Tyler Kennedy, a member of the franchise’s 2009 Stanley Cup championship team to the Sharks in exchange for the 50th overall pick. That pick was then moved to the Blue Jackets for the No. 44 pick, which was used on Jarry.

With long-time starting goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury approaching his 30s, the Penguins had to start looking at the future in net.

They thought it was Jarry. It ended up being Matt Murray.

Murray shot up the organization’s depth chart and eventually supplanted Fleury as the franchise’s goaltender by backstopping the team to back-to-back Stanley Cup titles in 2016 and ’17.

And while there are plenty of concerns about Murray as it relates to health and consistency, no one of consequence is questioning his status as the Penguins’ No. 1 goaltender.

But Jarry? That’s a bit more complicated.

First, the organization’s depth at the position is ample. Behind Murray, Casey DeSmith seemingly has established himself as the No. 2 goaltender. The trust coach Mike Sullivan and, perhaps most importantly, goaltending coach Mike Buckley have placed in DeSmith over the past year and change is clear. Last season, Sullivan and Buckley weren’t afraid to go start DeSmith over Murray when the latter struggled.

Management wasn’t hesitant to trust DeSmith — who joined the organization in 2015 on an ECHL contract with the Wheeling Nailers — and signed him to a three-year contract extension with a cap hit of $1.25 million, which begins this season.

Sullivan professed willingness to give DeSmith and Jarry equal opportunity to claim the No. 2 job this preseason.

"Obviously, they have a significant body of work with the Penguins," Sullivan said. "We're all very, very familiar with their respective games. This is an important training camp for those guys. It's a competitive league. We have a competitive roster. That healthy competition at all the positions pushes all of (them) to be at their best, those two guys in particular. The exhibition games will be a great opportunity for both of them."

Beyond the NHL roster, the AHL depth chart also is a bit crowded.

Emil Larim, a 22-year-old undrafted free agent who led his team in Finland (HPK) to the championship of that country’s top league (the Liiga) is in his first NHL training camp. Additionally, the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins signed Dustin Tokarski, a 29-year-old veteran who has played with the Lightning, Ducks and Canadiens during his career, to an AHL contract.

It’s difficult to see either of those players spending significant time with Wheeling.

But the most important component to Jarry’s future is his contract, which has a year remaining with a cap hit of $675,000. If the Penguins wanted to assign Jarry back to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, he would need to clear waivers before the start of the season.

Regardless of the circumstances, Jarry’s focus is clear.

"My goal is to be in the Pittsburgh organization," he said. "That’s been my goal since Day 1. That will be my goal going forward as well."

Still, he realizes he could be suiting up for another organization when the regular season starts in October.

The Penguins are believed to have sought a trade for Jarry this offseason, but any potential deals did not yield satisfactory return.

General manager Jim Rutherford might explore that option again if only to get something in return, even if its only a late-round draft pick, instead of losing Jarry for nothing through waivers.

"It’s something I can’t really control," said Jarry. "It’s not my choice. It’s (management’s) choice. Whatever they decide to do and whatever happens, it happens."
David Warsofsky eager for his third chance with the Penguins

SETH RORABAUGH | Saturday, September 14, 2019 3:44 p.m.

The Penguins brought back a familiar face this offseason when they re-signed defenseman David Warsofsky to a two-year, two-way contract.

The 5-foot-9, 170-pound defenseman previously played for the Penguins during the 2015-16 and 2016-17 seasons. His best stretch during that time came around New Year’s during the 2015-16 campaign when a rash of injuries forced Warsofsky to play significant minutes, including as the quarterback on the top power-play squad.

“It was clicking then I had an unfortunate injury that set me back for a while,” said Warsofsky, 29. “A lot of it it just luck and timing at the right time. The team is playing well and you get that opportunity. Hopefully, that happens again this year.”

The injury Warsofsky referenced wasn’t just unfortunate. It was also just simply bizarre. During a 5-0 home win against the Hurricanes on Jan. 17, 2016, Warsofsky suffered a concussion when referee Tim Peel tripped and slid into Warsofsky as he skated backwards while defending a rush by Carolina forward Jordan Staal.

“That was the hardest part about it,” Warsofsky said. “It was a complete fluke. It’s not like I blocked a shot and hurt my foot. It was extremely unfortunate for me. After that, it was extremely hard for me to come back. At that point, the team was really rolling. Sometimes you get good luck, sometimes you get bad.”

Later that season, Warsofsky was lost to the Devils through waivers but he returned the ensuing offseason as a free agent. His second season in Pittsburgh was hardly as effective as he only appeared in seven NHL contests. He signed with the Avalanche during the 2017 offseason and appeared in 16 NHL games in 2017-18 then spent the entire 2018-19 season with the Avalanche’s AHL affiliate, the Colorado Eagles.

Familiarity led him back the Penguins for a third time.

“Obviously, I want to get back to the NHL level and I thought this was a good opportunity for me,” Warsofsky said. “I’m comfortable with the staff here and the players since the last time I was here. So I think it’s a comfort level also. And you kind of want to go to somewhere where you’ve had success. Looking at the other options I had, this was the best opportunity.

“Already being here two years, I’m not starting fresh. The staff knows what I can do. Hopefully, I can make the (NHL) team, but if I don’t, hopefully they have trust in me to call me up.”

Considering the Penguins have plenty of incumbents established on the blue line, Warsofsky realizes his road back to the NHL might not go through Pittsburgh, if at all. He would need to clear waivers in order to be assigned to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

“It can be a bit of a roller coaster sometimes,” he said. “I know what to expect coming into it. If I do get sent down and waivers are (a possibility), that can be a good thing at the same time. You can get an opportunity somewhere else. Obviously, I don’t want that to happen. I want to stay here. But that’s the business and decisions have to be made.”

Tribune Review LOADED: 09.15.2019
Penguins pair up Justin Schultz, Marcus Pettersson on second day of camp

SETH RORABAUGH | Saturday, September 14, 2019 12:49 p.m.

On the second day of the Penguins' training camp in Cranberry on Saturday, the Penguins used a variety of defensive pairings during a scrimmage.

Few of them resembled anything that would be used in a regular season contest in 2019-20.

Massive veteran Erik Gudbranson skated with AHL mainstay Kevin Czuczman while Brian Dumoulin, virtually bolted on to the NHL roster's top pairing, was with Calen Addison, a promising 19-year-old prospect who has all of three AHL games on his professional resume.

The day prior, Kris Letang, the franchise's career leader in points by a defenseman, was teamed with David Warsofsky, a journeyman embarking on his third stint with the Penguins.

The only pairing in two days of scrimmages which does appear to be NHL-caliber was the duo of Marcus Pettersson and Justin Schultz. Any use of them moving forward would be a relatively new experiment for the Penguins as they skated a combined 20 minutes of common five-on-five ice time together last season according to Natural Stat Trick. In contrast, Pettersson's most common partnership was with Jack Johnson (376:54).

By the time Pettersson arrived in a December trade last season, Schultz was nearly two months into his recovery from an ankle injury, an ailment which ultimately kept him sidelined until mid-February.

Pettersson appears intrigued at the notion of skating with Schultz, one of the team's top offensive talents on the blue line.

"I feel like we think hockey the same way," Pettersson said. "Initially, good. We had a couple of minutes on the power play last year. I know it's not the same thing (as five-on-five play) but you can see how the person moves when you can see him up close, where he likes to be and stuff. But we've got a great system, a system that we can lean back on. But initially, it's good."

The duo would offer an ideal scenario of pairing a right-handed defenseman such as Schultz with the left-handed Pettersson. It would also potentially provide a steady defensive presence in Pettersson which would allow Schultz to be aggressive offensively.

That doesn't mean the offensive game is a domain Pettersson is prohibited from.

"We can both do that," Pettersson said. "I feel like that's how we both want to play. Not get over-enthusiastic and we both go at the same time, but if we can read off each other like that, I think we can both do that."

Pettersson and Schultz's team fell in Saturday's scrimmage, 2-1. The winning team got goals from Jon Lizotte, a defenseman in camp on an AHL contract, and forward Jake Lucchini, an undrafted free agent signing. Veteran forward Dominik Simon scored the lone goal for the losing squad.

Tribune Review LOADED: 09.15.2019
From undrafted to Sidney Crosby’s line, Dominik Kahun continues his precipitous climb

MIKE DEFABO
SEP 14, 2019 6:33 PM

Domink Kahun sat in front of his computer screen, his eyes glued to the live stream, when the names started popping up, one-by-one.


“Everyone thought I would never make it here. I just showed everyone something that’s complimentary,” Sullivan said. “We thought that maybe that be Jake [Guentzel] excel in that area. We felt as though Sid [Crosby] and [Eugen] Malkin on my list."

Chances are, Kahun's name will be called tonight. In this year’s draft, the Penguins, who acquired Kahun from Chicago in the Olli Maatta trade, immediately plugged him in on Sidney Crosby's line during the first two days of training camp.

The player who many considered too small and too scrawny to succeed


Maybe it is lucky. Kahun built off the momentum of that Olympic medal-winning performance. In May of 2019, at the IIHF World Championship in Slovakia, NHL teams began to take notice.

By this point, the game had changed. Big, lumbering players were being replaced by smaller, faster ones, just like Kahun. He said that he talked with about ten teams before choosing to sign with the Blackhawks.

That’s when the whirlwind began: the rise up the depth chart, the strong season, the trade.

Now, he’s looking to make the most of his chance to play alongside Crosby.

“It’s like a dream come true, obviously,” Kahun said. “It’s also not easy…

I was a little nervous to play with a guy like that. But I have the confidence that I can play with him and make the plays for him. I just try to keep going like that. Hopefully I can stay there as long as possible.”

It’s early. But so far, he’s making a good first impression. Penguins coach Mike Sullivan praised his offensive instincts and ability to maneuver in tight areas.

“They can make those small, subtle, two-foot passes through people’s skates or under sticks, and [can] play that give-and-go game that might create opportunities,” Sullivan said. “We feel as though Sid [Crosby] and Jake [Guentzel] excel in that area. We thought that maybe that be something that’s complimentary.”

It took years. But Kahun is finally getting the opportunity to see his name next to the game’s brightest stars.

“My goal was to get drafted in the NHL,” Kahun said. “Unfortunately, it didn’t. Now I’m really happy I didn’t get drafted.”

Post Gazette LOADED: 09.15.2019
After all six Penguins goalies arrived for the first day of training camp Friday, they probably could have started the morning by playing the same game.

Matt-Matt-Bo-Batt, Banana-Fana-Fo-Fatt Murray remains entrenched as the No. 1 goalie here in Pittsburgh. And Casey DeSmith and Tristan Jarry are again battling to see who will stick around to be his primary backup this season.

But beyond those three incumbents whose pro careers have been intertwined, the Penguins have added three others to the organizational depth chart.

Dustin Tokarski and Emil Larmi both played on championship teams this spring before joining the club as free agents. And Alex D’Orio, who originally signed with the Penguins in 2017 after he went undrafted, went pro this summer.

Pittsburgh Penguins winger Dominik Kahun goes through drills Saturday, Sept. 14, 2019, at UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex in Cranberry. After being acquired via trade this offseason, Kahun is getting plenty of opportunities early in camp. He’s skated with Sidney Crosby's line in both of the first two practices of the season.

That’s six guys jostling for four spots in the NHL or American Hockey League.

“We wanted to build more depth,” general manager Jim Rutherford said Saturday. “And we have the three NHL-caliber goalies that we’ve had. So we have to sort that situation out. I’m sure it will sort itself out here in the next few weeks.”

Based on performance, DeSmith has the inside track to back up Murray.

He was solid most nights, spectacular a few others, last November and December while Murray was on injured reserve. He cooled off a bit once Murray returned but finished with a 2.75 goals-against average and .916 save percentage.

DeSmith the past two seasons proved capable of playing well after long layoffs, important if Murray can become a wire-to-wire regular-season workhorse. And he is a respected teammate who seems comfortable in his role as the No. 2.

Jarry, meanwhile, may be stopping pucks in his last Penguins training camp.

The Penguins were open to trading Jarry during the offseason, in part because the 2013 second-round draft pick can no longer be stashed in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton without having to clear waivers first. Now 24, Jarry is no longer a kid.

Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Matt Murray makes save on Florida Panthers center Jared McCann Tuesday Jan. 8, 2019 at PPG Paints Arena.

Matt Vensel

Penguins 2019-20 camp preview: Will Matt Murray finally become elite in the regular season, too?

“It’s his time now,” Rutherford said. “He’s gone through the development stage He’s a very good goalie. He’ll have a chance to be a No. 1 goalie in the NHL at some point as long as he keeps developing. Fundamentally, he’s gotten sounder and his confidence grows every year. He’s ready to play in the league.”

Rutherford said Jarry, who watched Murray lead the Penguins to back-to-back Stanley Cups, has matured the past two years. Once, Jarry looked “lackadaisical” around the rink. “But he’s grown out of that now,” Rutherford said.

Coach Mike Sullivan said Saturday that nothing has been decided yet.

“This is an important training camp for those guys,” he said. “It’s a competitive league. We have a competitive roster. We think that healthy competition at all positions pushes all of us to be at our best, those two guys in particular. I think the exhibition games will be a great opportunity for both of them.”

The Penguins are praying for a strong camp and preseason from Jarry because it will help them one way or another. Either he beats out DeSmith and saves the cap-conscious Penguins some bucks or nets them something in a trade.

If the Penguins part ways with DeSmith or Jarry, Rutherford said that the Penguins will sign Tokarski, who is currently on an AHL contract, to an NHL deal.

“He’s a winner. He has experience. Fundamentally, he’s a very good goalie. We like his work ethic. He’s a real team guy,” Rutherford said.

“We like a lot of things about him. … He’s dealt with adversity through his career by moving around.”

Tokarski snatched tournament MVP honors while backstopping the Western Hockey League to the Memorial Cup in 2008. He was between the pipes when Canada won the world juniors in 2009. He also has two Calder Cups on his resume, one with Norfolk in 2012 and another with Charlotte this spring.

Tokarski was taken in the fifth round of the 2008 draft by Tampa Bay. After five years and five NHL starts with the Lightning, he was dealt to Montreal, where the young goalie would be thrust into the spotlight during the 2014 playoffs.

During Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals, an injury knocked star Canadians goalie Carey Price out of the series. Michael Therrien, the former Penguins coach who was behind the bench in Montreal, had to pick between the 24-year-old Tokarski and Peter Budaj, an NHL veteran with 296 games under his belt.

“You look at his track record, he’s a winner,” he said after going with Tokarski.

Tokarski was solid and stopped 31 of 32 shots in the deciding Game 6, only to have Henrik Lundqvist send the Rangers to the Cup finals with a shutout.

After two more seasons sitting behind Price, Tokarski bounced around the NHL, spending time in the Anaheim, Philadelphia and New York organizations.

Late last season, the Rangers loaned Tokarski to the Charlotte Checkers, the AHL affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes. The Checkers already had Alex Nedeljkovic, the AHL’s goalie of the year. But they counted on Tokarski, too. He made five playoff starts, including one in the Calder Cup finals. He went 5-0.

“It was a heck of a team,” Tokarski said. “Winning is fun. It always is.”

Tokarski signed with the Penguins in part because he enjoyed playing for Mike Vellucci in Charlotte. Vellucci is now the coach for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

“When someone wants you, that’s a good feeling,” the 29-year-old said. “I’m excited to come and be a veteran presence and someone they can count on Tokarski, too. He made five playoff starts, including one in the Calder Cup finals. He went 5-0.

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What happens with DeSmith and Jarry will have a trickle-down effect on the three newcomers. If the Penguins keep both, it could bump, at least briefly, Tokarski or Lamii down to the ECHL. Barring a surprise, D’Orio winds up in Wheeling either way.

So, yeah, there’s a lot to figure out. First things first, everybody’s names.

Post Gazette LOADED: 09.15.2019
Mike Sullivan isn’t concerned about the shortage of righties up front.

**MATT VENSEL**
**SEP 14, 2019 5:12 PM**

Mike Sullivan isn’t concerned that a shortage of right-handed sticks up front could lead to one or more lefties having to skate on their off wings this season.

“We have guys that are familiar with playing on their off sides,” he said.

In fact, the Penguins coach thinks it will be beneficial in one critical area.

Before hearing him out, let’s run through the roster. The Penguins this offseason traded Phil Kessel, their most productive right winger, and signed three wingers who are lefties. That leaves center Nick Bjugstad and wingers Patric Hornqvist and Bryan Rust as the only sure-fire NHL forwards who shoot right-handed.

Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Matt Murray, pictured going through drills Saturday at UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex in Cranberry, remains entrenched as the No. 1 goalie. But beyond him and backups Casey DeSmith and Tristan Jarry, the Penguins have added three others to the organizational depth chart.

During the first two days of training camp, the lines centered by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin each had three guys carrying left-handed sticks. Dominik Kahun and Brandon Tanev, two of the newcomers, both skated on their off wing.

That has its perks in the offensive end, where, say, a left-handed shooter coming down the right wing can more easily cut to the middle and sling a good shot. But conventional wisdom is that it creates problems while escaping the defensive zone because that lefty will have to corrall breakout passes on his backhand.

“But,” Sullivan said, “when you think about how the game’s being played today and how aggressively defensemen pinch down the wall and put pressure on the puck, there’s a lot of wrapped pucks, a lot of rims. So your ability to play the puck off the boards and be able to make that next play is critically important.”

Too often last season, the Penguins weren’t able to make that next play. During their playoff sweep against the New York Islanders, they rarely did.

Opponents made a conscious effort to eliminate the quick home-run passes that helped Sullivan and the Penguins win back-to-back Cups in 2016 and 2017. It also didn’t help that their collective speed seemed to drop back to the pack.

That forced them to more methodically work their way up the ice, sometimes, as Sullivan put it, having “to go back and sideways before you can get out.” So he thinks having a forward on their off wing could actually be beneficial.

“I think it all depends on how you look at it. I’m trying to best understand how the game’s being played and some of the evolutions of the game, and that’s one,” he said. “There’s an advantage to playing your off side on both ends of the rink.”

Pittsburgh Penguins winger Dominik Kahun goes through drills Saturday, Sept. 14, 2019, at UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex in Cranberry. After being acquired via trade this offseason, Kahun is getting plenty of opportunities early in camp. He’s skated with Sidney Crosby’s line in both of the first two practices of the season.

That said, he has not switched everyone over to their off wing. So playing on the strong side, while maybe not as big of a deal as it once was, is still preferred.

Potential pairing

Sullivan in the first two days of camp has not seemed overly concerned with potential blue-line partners finding chemistry. For example, Kris Letang has been partnered with journeyman David Warsofsky, not Brian Dumoulin.

One duo that could stick, though, is Justin Schultz and Marcus Pettersson.

Other than teaming up on the second power-play unit, the two didn’t really play together last season. But with the Penguins looking to put more on Pettersson’s plate this season, they could bump up the youngster to the second pair.

“They’re both good players,” Sullivan said. “We’re just trying to explore some combinations and we’ll see where they go. But that certainly is an option for us.”

Thirty-somethings

Both Malkin and Kris Letang spoke in recent days about how they are running out of opportunities to chase Cups as they inch further past 30. But Sullivan said he isn’t concerned about the team’s aging nucleus, which includes Sidney Crosby.

“They’re older, but they’re certainly not old. That’s a big difference,” he said. “These guys are still really good hockey players. They’re still on top of their respective games. So I’m really not concerned about three or four years from now. I’m concerned about this year. And I think we have a great opportunity.”

Around the boards

Malkin was slow to get up after colliding with Dominik Simon during the morning scrimmage but didn’t miss a shift. … Jake Lucchini scored a beauty on Dustin Tokarski to help give Malkin’s squad win the scrimmage, 2-0. … The announced their preseason games on Sept. 16 and 25 will be streamed on their website.

Post Gazette LOADED: 09.15.2019
Patric Hornqvist says he's ready to go after longer-than-normal layoff

BILL BRINK
SEP 14, 2019 9:41 AM

Patric Hornqvist scored his 16th goal of last season March 1 against the Buffalo Sabres. More than three hours of ice time, around 330 shifts and almost 40 shots came and went between that goal and his return from his second concussion of the season Jan. 19.

Hornqvist scored just three times in his final 35 regular-season games and went pointless in the playoffs, and at times, the Penguins turned to Jake Guentzel on the power play.

Despite those struggles — and suffering at least five concussions since 2014 — Hornqvist said he feels great as Penguins training camp begins.

"My expectations for Patric are like they always are," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "They're high, because he's a good player, and he's a big part of this team. He's a heart-and-soul guy, he plays the game extremely hard, and that's what makes Patric what he is. That's what makes him unique."


At 32 years old, Hornqvist understands the benefits of a lengthy layoff, frustrating as the cause of that layoff might be. He said he is not doing anything differently in light of his concussion history.

"I think it's always good to have a longer summer for preparation and all that," Hornqvist said. "But the thing is, you have to take care of it too. If you have an extra month or two, you can't just think you're going to be better because of that. You have to take care of your body and build it up and go from there."

Hornqvist is aware of not only his age but that of his teammates. At some point, the period of contention that began in 2006, the first year Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin took the ice together, will conclude. But not yet.

"I think the window starts for sure to slide a little bit," Hornqvist said. "We're starting to get older. But at the same time, we still have at least three, four good years in us. You can only go one year at a time. We know we have a good team in here. We just have to get it together and work for each other and clean up some mistakes. I think everyone feels the same in here."

Those mistakes led to a first-round exit in the playoffs last season, a four-game sweep against the New York Islanders. This summer, the Penguins traded Phil Kessel and Olli Maatta and acquired Alex Galchenyuk, Brandon Tanev and Dominik Kahun.

"That energy's hard to match," Crosby said. "Guys get opportunities and they get a fresh start, they come to a new team, I think there's always something to be said about that, the energy they bring. Whether it's youth or a guy from a different team coming in, I think little things like that go a long way and that can definitely help us."

So would more production from Hornqvist. He had 18 goals and 37 points in 69 games last season after scoring at least 21 in each of his previous five years and 29 in 2017-18. His power-play goals dropped from 15 in 2017-18 to six last year.

Pittsburgh Penguins winger Dominik Kahun goes through drills Saturday, Sept. 14, 2019, at UPMC Lemieux Sports Complex in Cranberry. After being acquired via trade this offseason, Kahun is getting plenty of opportunities early in camp. He's skated with Sidney Crosby's line in both of the first two practices of the season.

The Penguins signed Hornqvist to a five-year extension in 2018 that carries a $5.3 million cap hit annually. They're projected to be out of cap space, making Hornqvist's production even more important.

"We didn't play well enough last year," he said. "We got a longer summer than the other guys. Back in better shape. We've got a flavor in our
Clubs have until the regular season to be cap compliant.

After Pettersson signed a one-year contract worth $874,125 on Thursday.

The website Puck Pedia has the Penguins at $49,125 over the cap actually would come at a great cap cost to the Penguins playing in 92 fewer regular season games than Ruhwedel. But Riikola actually would come at a great cap cost to the Penguins by $150,000 — if he was on the roster to open the regular season.

As things stand, the Penguins do not have a dime to spare under the cap. The website Puck Pedia has the Penguins at $49,125 over the cap after Pettersson signed a one-year contract worth $874,125 on Thursday.

Clubs have until the regular season to be cap compliant.
Forward thinking: Why Sharks’ Meier, Labanc signed new contracts so early

By CURTIS PASHELKA | PUBLISHED: September 14, 2019 at 2:20 pm | UPDATED: September 14, 2019 at 5:06 PM

SAN JOSE — Timo Meier was the first player in his group to take the ice on the opening day of Sharks training camp. Kevin Labanc, in the same cadre of players, joined him shortly after.

Both Meier and Labanc then took spots alongside center Logan Couture in what has the makings to be the Sharks’ top line for the start of the regular season.

That, in and of itself, was noteworthy. While so many players who were in their position earlier this summer as restricted free agents remain unsigned, Meier and Labanc — who will undoubtedly be key contributors for the Sharks this season — inked deals early in the process.

Meier was signed to a four-year, $24 million deal on July 1 and a week later, Labanc came to terms on a one-year, $1 million pact.

The contracts left many observers to wonder how Doug Wilson was able to pull this off with little or no drama while other NHL general managers are still haggling with player agents about dollars and term.

“The mode there is win, and guys are buying in,” said NHL Network analyst Mike Rupp, who played 609 games in the league over an 11-year career, “and you’re seeing that on the contracts.”

The list of impactful RFAs still without deals remains long. Just in the Western Conference, Vancouver’s Brock Boeser, Calgary’s Matthew Tkachuk, Winnipeg’s Patrik Laine and Colorado’s Mikko Rantanen all remain unsigned. All four, and a few other RFAs, could wind up with contracts that make them the highest-paid players on their respective teams.

Meier is now — in terms of average annual value of his contract — the third-highest paid Sharks forward. Meier’s deal has an AAV of $6 million, while Couture is at $8 million and Evander Kane is at $7 million.

“I’m not too worried about those other players. My focus is on the team now,” Meier said about the unsigned RFAs. “I’m not the guy that looks around and sees what other guys are doing. My focus is on this training camp, come in here, have fun and work hard every day and chase our team goal.”

The key to Meier’s deal is the fourth and final season, which carries a salary of $10 million. Meier will still be a RFA when the deal ends, but to qualify Meier at that time and retain his negotiating rights, the Sharks will have to offer at least a one-year deal at another $10 million.

So, it wasn’t cheap, but the deal may turn out to be a relative bargain once all of these RFAs are under contract. After all, Meier had 30 goals and 66 points last season.

“It’s nice, from my vantage point, when you have guys put aside the individual goals of a contract or statistics,” Sharks coach Pete DeBoer said, “in order to get back and be here on time and try and win a Stanley Cup.”

Because of the Meier and Labanc deals, the Sharks, per CapFriendly, have about $2.6 million in space remaining under the NHL’s salary cap. Perhaps a player from another team — that the Sharks could use — becomes available for cap reasons once those other RFAs sign.

“You always explore that,” Wilson said last week, “but I think the big thing was taking care of our own people.”

Labanc’s deal is team friendly, but maybe only in the short term. If he has another season like he did in 2018-19 when he had 17 goals and was tied for sixth on the team with 56 points, he’ll undoubtedly receive a longer, more lucrative deal.

“We want to be a winning team. We want to make it to the Stanley Cup every year, and you can only negotiate so far,” Labanc said. “We’re RFA’s. We don’t really have much leverage.

“I think we’ve been given a pretty good chance here coming into the season and having a top-six role on the team. We just wanted to take care of business and kind get it done and over with, start focusing on the offseason. Now, we’re focusing on the preseason.”

The Sharks have a history of getting contracts done — particularly in the cap era — in a timely manner. In the early part of this decade, Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau usually agreed to deals without a lot of fuss.

More than one person around the Sharks said that Thornton, in particular, has set that tone.

This summer, for instance, Thornton told Wilson to figure out the deals for Meier and Labanc first, and maybe even look into other options to add to the roster, before finalizing his contract.

“For me, when I was in (Meier and Labanc’s) spot, I watched Jumbo and Patty and those guys take many, many discounts to stay here,” Couture said. “They could have gotten a lot more if they wanted to fight for it, but they wanted to play on a good team and that message trickled down to me.

“If you were to ask (Meier and Labanc), they’ll give you the same answer. They watched other guys do it and the main goal on this team is to win a championship and win a Stanley Cup. If that happens, then individually, then everyone is going to do well as well.”

Note: DeBoer says defenseman Radim Simek has been skating of late, but that team is “taking it slow. There is no rush right now. But he skating and he looks good.” Simek tore the anterior cruciate and medial collateral ligaments in March, and Wilson said last week the belief is that he’ll be healthy for the start of the regular season.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 09.15.2019
Sharks' Aaron Dell reveals extra motivation ahead of 2019 NHL season

By Chelena Goldman September 14, 2019 5:48 PM

San Jose - Nothing can motivate a team at the start of training camp quite like missing out on making the Stanley Cup Final the previous season.

As Sharks netminder Aaron Dell told NBC Sports California on the first day of training camp, coming that close can even make it difficult to get your summer vacation started.

"I think you're a little bitter for a little bit longer than normal when you get that close," he said. "I think it gives you a little bit more motivation to get started, actually. I think you get that little bit of an edge."

But the carryover from last season stops there. It's a brand new season, and Dell knows he has to put his previous campaign in the rearview mirror and get back to work -- which includes solidifying his job as Team Teal's defacto backup netminder.

"Every year when you come in, the last year is kind of a wash, regardless of how it went," Dell said of proving himself yet again at the start of the season. "It's kind of a 'what have you done for me lately?' kind of thing."

Both Dell and starter Martin Jones experienced a downturn in performance during the 2018-19 season. Part of the problem came from defensive breakdowns in front of the crease -- a problem the rest of the team has acknowledged on more than one occasion.

"The foundation of our game since I got here has always been about defending well," Sharks head coach Peter DeBoer said. "We did score last year, we did give up too much in that area. And I thought we started to find a little bit of a happy medium down the stretch and through the playoffs."

Nevertheless, both netminders ultimately gave up more than they had in past years, ending the regular season with save percentages under .900. Dell himself went from registering a 2.64 goals-against average through 22 starts in the 2017-18 season to a 3.17 through 20 starts during the 2018-19 campaign. There's understandable motivation to get those numbers down with a new season about to start.

The 30-year-old Airdrie, Alberta native may be feeling a little more heat to up his game up given he's heading into the final season of his current two-year contract with the Sharks. Not to mention the team is particularly excited about the crop of young players they have coming into this year's camp and might feel inclined to give one of the up-and-coming goalies a look. San Jose Barracuda starter Antoine Bibeau has two NHL games on his resume from when he was part of the Toronto Maple Leafs' organization, having gone 1-1-0 with a 1.99 goals-against average.

But Dell's doing the same thing to get ready for this season as every other one -- even with that "bit of an edge" from his team narrowly missing a Stanley Cup Final bid last spring.

"You try not to let it (affect you)," Dell said. "You try to do the same things every year, do what works for you. But I think when you get in that situation, you find extra things you could've been better at."

"I'm just excited to get going," Dell summarized with a smile. "Just excited to get some games going and get back into it again."
Blues turn back the clock for third jersey

By Tom Timmermann St. Louis Post-Dispatch 14 hrs ago

The Blues will wear throwbacks to their jerseys of the mid to late 1990s on three occasions this season, bringing red back to their jerseys as well as trumpets.

The team unveiled their third jersey between sessions of their training camp on Saturday at the Centene Community Ice Center.

The jerseys are the types worn by the team on the road from 1994-95 to 1997-98. (Back then, NHL teams wore white at home and colors on the road.) They have the diagonal musical staff at the bottom, above a band of yellow and red and with trumpet patches on the shoulders.

The team will wear them at three home games this season: Nov. 21 vs. Calgary, Feb. 27 vs. the New York Islanders and March 31 vs. Detroit.

The uniforms, while liked by some fans, were necessarily a big hit in their day. When their replacement uniforms were unveiled in November of 1997, Brett Hull said, "They're back to where they should be . . . the St. Louis Blues and not the St. Louis Reds," he said. He said the current uniforms "never should have been there."

Here's more from the Post-Dispatch story when it was announced the jerseys with the red in them would be replaced:

"At the time, the Blues hoped the redesign would help stimulate retail sales by incorporating trendy elements of other top-selling jerseys. The sharp angle at the bottom of the jersey was a direct lift from the Anaheim Mighty Ducks. The red as primary road jersey color came from the success of the Florida Panthers' road uniform. The current design was ridiculed from the start, particularly the garish road uniforms.

"I think, generally speaking, most fans agree the home look is acceptable but wouldn't be their preference," (Blues vice president for marketing Jim) Woodcock said. "The road uniform is . . . well, awful. I can't think of a better word to describe it."

In the new design, Woodcock said he wanted to "return to an identity that's befitting of an NHL franchise that's been around for three decades."

He pointed to the Philadelphia Flyers, who came into the league with the Blues and wear basically the same design as they did as an expansion team in 1967, with only a minor tweak here and there.

Woodcock said the Blues opted for a classic look because he also wanted something that would stand the test of time well into the 21st century."

Last year, the Blues, and the rest of the NHL, didn't wear a third jersey as the league changed uniform providers. Prior to that, the team wore the baby blue jerseys they had worn at the Winter Classic.
For the first day of practice, the sweetest sight for the Blues – other than their brand-new training facility at Centene Community Ice Center in Maryland Heights – was that Vladimir Tarasenko was on the ice and ready to go.

Tarasenko had surgery on his left knee not long after the Blues’ Stanley Cup run ended. Whatever was the nature of the injury, it wasn’t enough to keep him out of action in the playoffs, though he did routinely miss practices at the end of the season, though some of that may also have been because of a shoulder injury.

“Everything’s fine. Everything’s good,” said Tarasenko, who said he had been on the ice for a while. “(I’ve been) skating with the guys. I feel good.”

“He feels good,” coach Craig Berube agreed. “That’s good news.”

One of the complications of the Blues playing into mid-June was less time for injuries that required offseason surgery to heal. Tarasenko had his surgery on June 25, at which point the Blues said he would be re-evaluated in four weeks.

Two other Blues who needed surgery in the offseason didn’t beat the clock, though they seem close. Forward Robert Thomas had wrist surgery and forward Jordan Kyrou had surgery to fix a kneecap injury.

While both were on the ice Friday, the two weren’t in the two main groups of players. Instead, they skated with a third group consisting of players headed for the minors or back to juniors.

“We’ll slowly get them into competition,” general manager Doug Armstrong said. “What we’re trying to do is be smart with them and not be penny-wise, pound-foolish. We think they’ll both be ready for the start of the season. That’s the plan going in at least, but we want to be smart with them.”

“Got to be a little cautious with them right now,” coach Craig Berube said. “We’re going to keep them working and moving out there and the more they can do, we’ll advance them into the bigger group and hopefully we can get them into some of the exhibition games here.”

NO FOLEY

Forward Erik Foley, acquired by the Blues in the Paul Stastny trade in 2018, was on the roster of players attending camp that the Blues announced, but he wasn’t on hand on Friday.

Foley suffered a concussion at the prospects tournament in Traverse City, Mich., prior to last season and hasn’t been on the ice since. He didn’t pass his team physical this season, which puts this season in doubt too.

“It certainly doesn’t look good for him,” Armstrong said. “He got hurt last year in training camp, a concussion in Traverse City, and hasn’t felt well ever since. ... It’s a slow process and he’s going to continue to work, but there’s no actual light on the end of the tunnel.”

Two other players weren’t on the ice because of injuries. Forward Tanner Kaspick, the team’s fourth-round pick in 2016, is out with a concussion suffered in Traverse City. Armstrong said he was making progress and was doing light exercises. Forward Nikita Alexandrov, the team’s second-round pick (and first pick for the team) was out with an upper-body injury also suffered at Traverse City. He had his arm in a sling.

“We don’t want to rush him,” Armstrong said. “He was drafted last year and we want to make sure we’re smart. He’s going to go back to juniors at some point and we just want to get him healthy as soon as possible.”

MAKING LINES

Berube deployed his forwards on the first day of practice much the same way he did in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. Jaden Schwartz, Brayden Schenn and Tarasenko were together on a line, Zach Sanford, Ryan O’Reilly and David Perron were on another and the fourth line of Ivan Barbashev, Oskar Sundqvist and Alexander Steen was also back. All three of those were together in Game 7. Robby Fabbri took Pat Maroon’s place on a line with Tyler Bozak and Sammy Blais.
Unfinished business for Pietrangelo, Schenn

By Jim Thomas St. Louis Post-Dispatch Sep 13, 2019

Make no mistake, Doug Armstrong wants Alex Pietrangelo and Brayden Schenn wearing the Blues bl.NonNull
tote a year from now and beyond. The Blues general manager said he has expressed that desire to both players.

"We'd love to have them here," Armstrong said Friday as the Blues opened training camp for the 2019-20 season. "Both players — you'll have to confirm that — I think they want to be here.

"But the way I look at this is to get a deal done, both sides have to be comfortably uncomfortable. If only one of us is comfortable and the other one's uncomfortable, the deal won’t get done."

Because if the latter is the case, it's probably not a good contract for the "uncomfortable" party.

It was an offseason in which Armstrong and the front office got much done contract-wise. Nine restricted free agents were re-signed. Unrestricted free agent Carl Gunnarsson re-upped just a couple of weeks after the Blues' Game 7 victory over the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup Final.

Also in late June, coach Craig Berube signed a contract extension. And as recently as the NHL Prospects Tournament in Traverse City, the word was that the Blues were finalizing extensions for assistant coaches Steve Ott and David Alexander.

"If the team's doing well, more times than (not), the individual's going to do well," Schenn said. "And that's a prime example of last year. You see a lot of guys that got rewarded with contracts."

But there are only so many dollars to go around, and in the case of player contracts — only so much room under the salary cap. So as the Blues step out of the offseason and into training camp, Pietrangelo and Schenn remain unfinished business.

No disrespect to defensemen Jay Bouwmeester and Joel Edmundson — the only other Blues scheduled for unrestricted free agency after this season. But Pietrangelo is the team captain and Schenn is a top-four center or at worst a top-six forward, and both were all-stars during the 2017-18 season.

Armstrong doesn't sound worried, and isn't worried about a timetable.

"I've been doing this for a long time and I understand how it works," Armstrong said. "But I don't get too hung up on it. The league moves on and both those guys are gonna be playing in the NHL next year. And the St. Louis Blues are gonna have a team next year."

(With uniforms and everything.)

"Hopefully, we're all together, but we'll just let that play itself out."

Armstrong continued. "I don't put any timelines on it, like we won't stop negotiating or talking at a certain point. What we will do though is stop talking to you guys about it."

Which is Armstrong's way of saying that Friday was the last time he plans to talk to reporters about the contract status of Pietrangelo and Schenn until they sign with the Blues or sign elsewhere.

"I think I told you guys the Jerry Jones line when I was working in Dallas: 'Money has no emotion,' " Armstrong said. "We want the players to be happy. But we need to do what's right for the organization also. The main goal is to try and find something where everybody's comfortably uncomfortable."

Yes, that was a reference to Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, back from the days when Armstrong worked in the Dallas Stars' organization.

Armstrong isn't one of these GMs who won't negotiate once the season starts. His door, and Tom Stillman's checkbook apparently, are always open.

"I don't see why you can't have (in-season) conversations," Armstrong said. "These are adults. They're grown men. They can multi-task. Most of the discussions are with their representatives anyway."

For their part, Pietrangelo and Schenn do not want their contract status to be a distraction for the defending Stanley Cup champions.

"We all know it's a great organization here," Schenn said following the team's first practice at the new Centene Community Ice Center. "Brand new practice rink. We get treated really well. Obviously, a really good team on the ice.

"But at the end of the day, I've been through this situation before, I've been in a contract year before. It's kind of the third time going through it. So I don't think I really want to talk about it, moving forward.

"No sense letting it be a distraction. We obviously know me and Petro are in the same situation. So we'll play it out. We're comfortable. See how it shakes out here."

For his part Pietrangelo had even less to say on the subject Friday.

"I don't want it to be a distraction," he said. "I don't really want to talk about it. We can talk about the season but I don't need to talk about that."

He said it was nice to know that Armstrong wanted him (and Schenn) back, "but my goal is to get ready for the start of the season, and the rest will take care of itself."}

Last season alone, Armstrong re-signed one pending free agent relatively early in the season (Robert Bortuzzo), struck a deal late in the season with Bouwmeester, and then got Gunnarsson done right after the season. Armstrong also realizes the dynamics of a negotiation can change over the course of a season.

"Right now, if we get off to a great start and these guys are having their best years ever, of course the economics go up," Armstrong said. "The reverse happens also. So right now we know the ground rules. They change as the season goes along with good (or) bad play, health, injuries. All those things factor in to what decisions you make moving forward."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 09.15.2019
Blues hit the ice for first day of training camp at new facility

By Tom Timmermann St. Louis Post-Dispatch Sep 13, 2019

A new season of Blues hockey, a season where the team is the defending Stanley Cup champions, got underway on Friday at the first day of training camp at their new facility, the Centene Community Ice Center in Maryland Heights.

Everything isn't quite ready at Centene. There's still a lot of construction dust, there are construction workers and equipment all over the place, the Blues dressing room isn't finished, which meant players walking back and forth from place to place, but it's getting there and will have its first big test on Saturday when practice is open to the public.

The Blues obviously aren't ready either, this being the first day of practice, but almost everyone was there. Vladimir Tarasenko, who had surgery done on his left knee right after the season, was on the ice and a full participant in practice. Jordan Kyrou (kneecap) and Robert Thomas (wrist) were both on the ice as well, but both took part in a smaller session at the end of the day after most of the team had practiced.

Coach Craig Berube said they would be brought along slowly, but couldn't say how long it would take for them to join the rest of the team.

General manager Doug Armstrong said the plan right now was they would be ready by the start of the season.

Not on the ice, in an event that doesn't bode well going forward, was forward Erik Foley. Foley, acquired from Winnipeg in the Paul Stastny trade, missed all last season with a concussion and general manager Doug Armstrong said he didn't pass his physical and still wasn't cleared to play.

"It's a slow process and he's going to continue to work but there's no actual light on the end of the tunnel," Armstrong said.

Also out were forward Tanner Kaspick, who suffered a concussion in Traverse City and who Armstrong said has begun doing light exercise and is feeling better every day, and Nikita Alexandrov, the team's top draft pick last season, who suffered an upper-body injury in Traverse City. Alexandrov had his arm in a sling on Friday.

The practice on Saturday begins at 10 a.m. and there's a $10 admission fee, with the money going to Blues For Kids, the team's charitable arm.

One advantage of the new facility that they were able to put in use on Friday was that the team started practice on one rink, and then after about 20 minutes, when the ice was getting chewed up, the team walked through a passageway to another rink and kept on practicing while the other sheet was being resurfaced.

LINES

The lines, for starters, on the first day of practice were:

Sanford-O'Reilly-Perron
Fabbri-Bozak-Blais
Schwartz-Schenn-Tarasenko
Barbashev-Sundqvist-Steen

On defense:

Dunn-Pietrangelo
Gunnarsson-Reinke
Bouwmeester-Parayko
Edmundson-Bortuzzo

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 09.15.2019
Brandon, Fla. — Julien BriseBois sat at a table in the lobby of the Ice Sports Forum Friday afternoon and pondered the question for several seconds.

"I think what happens throughout the NHL is relevant, what happens in your organization is more relevant," BriseBois said Friday, before Marner’s signing was announced. "This has always been true. Teams are at different places in their success cycle, they’re looking for different things. Some teams put more value on having the knowledge they have a player signed to a long-term deal. Other teams don’t value that as much.

“You have to have all of that in your evaluation. At the end of the day, you have to do what’s right for your organization. A player has to do what is right for him. That’s how decisions are made.

The Leafs, for example, have $40 million (about half of their salary cap) put into four players: Marner, Auston Matthews, William Nylander and John Tavares; The Athletic’s James Mirtle reports they may carry only 20 or 21 players on the roster during the season. The Lightning have cap challenges of their own. It’s easy to look at the $8.4 million Tampa Bay has left in remaining cap space for this season and say, Give it all to Point. But Tampa Bay is heading into a significant crunch and remain a perennial contender.

BriseBois declined to get into specifics of the Point negotiations but offered his general thoughts on whether the market shifting impacts how they handle talks.

"It’s too late — I can’t do anything about the 2018-19 Cup," BriseBois said. "But I can still sign Brayden Point. And I’m optimistic I will — eventually."

It doesn’t sound good at the moment. The Athletic’s Pierre LeBrun reported Friday that both sides are far apart, with the Lightning’s offer believed to be a three-year bridge at a $5.7 million annual average. With the Maple Leafs signing their superstar restricted free Mitch Marner Friday to a massive, six-year deal with a $10.893 million AAV, the natural pivot would be to Point. How much would Marner’s contract impact talks with the Lightning center?

The answer: likely not as much as you think.

While it appears the NHL’s marketplace has shifted for young stars coming out of their entry-level deals, the Lightning’s reported offer is a sign that they are sticking to their organizational philosophy. Tampa Bay’s M.O. over the years has been to offer three-year bridge deals to their young stars, like Tyler Johnson, Ondrej Palat, Nikita Kucherov and Andrei Vasilevsky — all of whom followed that by signing long-term contracts. It’s part of the way the Lightning navigate through salary cap crunches and remain a perennial contender.

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The Lightning have cap challenges of their own. It’s easy to look at the $8.4 million Tampa Bay has left in remaining cap space for this season and say, Give it all to Point. But Tampa Bay is heading into a significant crunch next summer, with $67 million already committed to just 13 players (not including Point), plus Anthony Cirelli, Mikhail Sergachev, Erik Cernak and Mathieu Joseph all due raises as RFA.

“There’s no doubt in my mind it’ll be our hardest summer,” BriseBois said. “For years, people have been saying eventually we won’t be able to keep all of our players. And to this point we’ve been able to keep pretty much everyone. But eventually the time is going to come and more likely it’ll be next summer. What shape or form that will take, I don’t know."

What makes a bridge more palatable for the Lightning is that, by the time it is over, they should be able to move several $4-$5 million salary cap hits off the books. Winger Alex Killorn, for example, has a no-trade clause now (which he wasn’t asked to waive this summer), but knows it may be a question next offseason when the clause moves to a modified list of 16 teams he could be moved to.

Here’s how their no-trade clauses shake out, per CapFriendly.

Tyler Johnson: On June 15, 2021, his full no-trade clause turns into a modified clause with a 20-team list he can’t be traded to.

Alex Killorn: Starting in 2020-21, he submits a list of 16 teams he can be traded to.

Ondrej Palat: In 2021-22, he can submit a 20-team trade list he can’t be traded to.

Yanni Gourde: On July 1, 2022, he can submit a 22-team trade list he can’t be traded to.

When Killorn was asked about whether teammates were worried about Point’s contract impasse, he brought up how “we’re pretty fortunate knowing Pointer’s personality, knowing the way he is. He’s a very ‘team guy.’ I know he wants to be here.”

And that “team-first” culture, created during the Steve Yzerman era, includes both on the ice and at the negotiating table, as captain Steven Stamkos explained last year.

“Part of the culture that we have here in Tampa is kind of that team-first mentality, and if you want to keep a good team together, guys are going to have to make little sacrifices along the way,” Stamkos said. “Whether that’s in terms of money or term or ice time or role on the team.

“That was something that — it’s kind of non-negotiable on this team, in terms of doing whatever it takes to help us keep the core together and keep being a productive team. That message was pretty loud and clear early when Steve got here and established himself as a GM, and continued to be that way.”

Stamkos could have likely received more than the $8.5 million annual average in the summer sweepstakes of 2016, but he signed a long-term deal with Tampa Bay two days before hitting unrestricted free agency. Kucherov’s $9.5 million annual average over his eight-year deal puts him just 16th in the league, and that’s for a Hart Trophy winner who just set an NHL record for a Russian player with 128 points. You can argue Point, the team’s No. 1 center and a 41-goal scorer, is certainly worth closer to the range of what Marner is getting paid, or previous long-term comps like Buffalo’s Jack Eichel (eight years, $80 million).

Kucherov’s previous contract negotiations, back in the summer of 2016, seems most similar to this current Point negotiation period. Kucherov, coming off a 29-goal season and dynamite postseason, could have been looking for a long-term deal in the range of what Flames’ star Johnny Gaudreau landed that summer (six years, $6.75 million AAV). But by the time Tampa Bay got to Kucherov, they had already signed Stamkos and Killorn to long-term deals, and had just $5.5 million remaining.

Like Point, there were conversations with Kucherov’s camp at the NHL Draft and in early July that summer, then a quiet period for about six-to-eight weeks. It ramped up in September, when Kucherov remained in Russia (away from camp) as he awaited a resolution for his contract.

It sounds like the Lightning held pretty firm on a bridge deal with Kucherov, who signed the three-year, $4.76 million AAV deal two days before the season opener. It was a tough spot for Kucherov, who could have let his impasse linger into the regular season and miss games. He didn’t want to play in Russia, which would have potentially given him more leverage in talks. And Kucherov likely didn’t want to have to wait until Tampa Bay had to trade one of his teammates in order to make room for him on the roster.

They got the deal done, in the nick of time.

"We didn’t want him to miss time," Yzerman said then. “He didn’t want to miss time.”

Yzerman said he was open to pursuing a long-term deal in a couple more years, but the bridge “made sense.” He fulfilled that promise by signing Kucherov to an eight-year, $76 million deal in July 2018, with one year left on his bridge deal.

You can imagine this is a selling point the Lightning are using with Point.

"I would say that all these players that sign shorter deals coming out of their entry-level contract all end up signing long-term deals and stick with our organization," BriseBois said. “Tyler Johnson, Ondrej Palat, Alex Killorn, even Stamkos and Hedman at the time, they signed five-year
deals. Kucherov. It worked out for all of them, and it worked out for the organization. We were able to keep a great number of players in their primes.

While the three-year, $5.7 million AAV offer to Point doesn’t seem to be moving the needle, it likely won’t be the end of negotiations. According to @EvolvingWild, the projection for a three-year deal for Point would be just over $7 million AAV.

It’ll be interesting to see how strong both sides push back in negotiations. Is Point willing to stay away from camp for the entire preseason, or even potentially missing games? All we know is that a deal that everyone thought would be done earlier this summer, and BriseBois was “confident” would get done before training camp, is not close.

Naturally, Lightning fans are concerned. But is BriseBois?

"I’m not concerned," BriseBois said. “I’d much rather him be here, being around our guys, getting ready for the season and us knowing we have a deal. But am I concerned? I’m not overly concerned."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Mitch Marner and Toronto Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas put up a united front when speaking to media about the forward’s new contract.

The pair stood side-by-side on Saturday while fielding questions about the six-year deal Marner signed in time to join his Maple Leafs teammates for the second day of training camp in Paradise, N.L.

“We’re just happy to be here. We missed no games and that’s really the objective,” said Dubas. “Obviously he wanted to be here and we got it done.”

The former restricted free agent agreed to a six-year deal with Toronto on Friday, with an average annual value of US$10.893 million.

Marner, who grew up in the Toronto area, said he was relieved to see the process come to an end. He added that his teammates shared his excitement when he broke the news about his contract to them.

“We wanted to be here, we didn’t want to miss many days and wanted to get on the ice with all these guys. Lucky enough we get to do that tomorrow,” Marner said.

Dubas thanked the 22-year-old for his commitment to the team by agreeing to a salary slightly below his expectations, in order to have the team in a good place for the start of the season.

“I think Mitch would want more and we would want less, but it’s something that we both agree on,” Dubas said of the deal, adding hopes that Marner’s pay rate and his time with the Maple Leafs set him up well for his next contract. The star right-winger, who was drafted by the Maple Leafs in 2015, signed his first long-term contract with the team after a long period of off-season of negotiations. Dubas said contract talks came to a head with a lengthy and direct conversation on Thursday.

Dubas thanked the responsible staffers are dealing with the team’s salary cap, which is now about US$13 million over its upper limit of US$81.5 million with Marner’s deal.

According to CapFriendly.com, Toronto will have to place Nathan Horton, David Clarkson and Zach Hyman — all of whom are currently injured — on long-term injured reserve by the end of training camp to create enough relief for cap compliancy. Even then, the Maple Leafs may have to become creative with their roster.

Complicating matters is the fact that Hyman will likely be fully recovered from his ACL surgery by late October.

After last year’s negotiations with William Nylander bumped up against the December deadline, Dubas said he was “thrilled” that discussions with Marner wrapped up relatively quickly by comparison.

Dubas said he would have preferred all players’ contract negotiations to wrap up at the same time, but said he felt positive about Marner’s agreement, which sets his team up with a solid core of players for the next few years. Years training with the same players will take pressure off the athletes, Dubas said, allowing them to focus on their sport.

“I understand that people will look at it and say no team has done it this way before. That said, we have these guys committed to us for an extended period,” Dubas said. “We can just enjoy being together, have fun being together as a program, continuing to grow together without having to worry about anybody going anywhere. To me, in my position, it means a lot.”

Training camp will wrap up Sunday afternoon in Paradise.
PARADISE, N.L.—Kasperi Kapanen will get the first opportunity to replace injured left winger Zach Hyman on the Maple Leafs’ top line with John Tavares and Mitch Marner.

But a pair of Russians — Egor Korshkov and Ilya Mikheyev — might also get a look-see while Hyman continues to rehab his right knee.

“We’re going to start with Kapanen there and we’ll see what happens,” Leafs coach Mike Babcock said Saturday. “I thought Korshkov had a real good day. Big man, makes plays. What slows him down right now is, you have to understand the language. Mikheyev is another big guy that can really do it … The thing about Zach is, he’s such a good forechecker and he’s so heavy on the net. He gets those guys the puck over and over and over again, so we need someone to do that for them.”

Babcock said he’d prefer to have Kapanen on the right side with centre Alexander Kerfoot and Mikheyev when the team is at full strength.

“That’s one heck of a line,” said Babcock. “I think that’s why you come to these camps.”

BATTLE TESTED: Jason Spezza doubts he’d have ever come to the Maple Leafs directly from the Ottawa Senators, where he played for 11 seasons. “The five-year hiatus in Dallas helped,” he said. “I don’t think I ever would have come from Ottawa to Toronto. It was too big of a rivalry for us.”

CECI’S JOURNEY: Playing as Morgan Rielly’s defence partner, Cody Ceci feels like he’s getting a fresh start after the Leafs acquired him in a trade with the Senators over the summer. “We’ve had our ups and downs in Ottawa,” said Ceci. “I just have to move on from that, take all the positives away from it and just bring it here and try to help the Leafs out. It’s a great organization. A bunch of new coaches and new faces all around. I’m just trying to get used to everybody and feel them all out and get ready for game one.” That, by the way, will be against the Senators.

MARCHMENT’S QUEST: Mason Marchment’s progress through the Leafs system was stalled last year by a severe hand injury that he says only really fully healed over the summer. It affected his shot and limited him to 44 games, but the 24-year-old says he’s resilient. “I’m a hard worker and I just have to keep on pushing and try to get better,” he said. “I’m a late bloomer and I have to catch up. I feel like I’m right there. We’ll see what happens.” Marchment is six-foot-four and caught Babcock’s eye in the AHL playoffs. “He’s said some nice things about me, so I’ll take it and run,” said Marchment.

YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN...

CALLING ROSEN: The overhaul of the Leafs’ roster meant an overhaul of the Marlies’ roster too, with defenceman Calle Rosen sent to Colorado in a multi-player deal over the summer. Rosen had been earmarked for the NHL after a late-season call-up. Defenceman Timothy Liljegren, who partnered with Rosen last year, said he’ll miss his playing partner. “He had an unreal last season,” said Liljegren. “It would surprise me if he didn’t crack the Avalanche roster. New chance for him to play in the NHL. Good for him. Liljegren, the Leafs’ top draft pick in 2018, is paired with free-agent signing Teemu Kivihalme in training camp.
Mitch Marner blinked first in contract staredown with Maple Leafs

By Kevin McGran
Sat., Sept. 14, 2019

PARADISE, N.L.—Mitch Marner and the Maple Leafs had been miles apart, two camps trying to get the other to budge. There was little budging over the summer.

Many deals were discussed — long-term, short-term, big salary numbers, bigger salary numbers — but two things never changed: Marner wanted to be a Maple Leaf, and he didn’t want to miss any games.

So on Thursday, when camp opened for medicals in Toronto, Marner budged.

"I just expressed to Kyle that I don’t want to miss any games and want to make sure I’m with the team as soon as possible," said Marner. "From that moment on, the next day or so, everyone on both sides just bore down and realized that both parties want the same thing and we came to an agreement."

"We’re here, we only missed a day or so, and it will be good to get on the ice (Sunday). I’m excited."

When Marner budged, the Leafs budged.

"We had a sit-down on Thursday for quite a while," said general manager Kyle Dubas. "It was great for Mitch to tell me how he felt, and me to explain where we were at and what we were proposing and so on. About how he fit into the team, how the team was going to move forward and everything of that nature. It was a real positive in the process."

And finally, there was a deal. No regular season games lost. No animosity. No hard feelings.

Marner was smiling and making the odd joke as he spoke to the media Saturday after signing that six-year extension. He looked relieved, too. But more important, he was simply eager to get going.

"I’m excited to be part of this team," said Marner. "Obviously seeing this roster and what they did in the summertime, it looks like a great team. Hopefully I can contribute to that and help out."

The 22-year-old forward signed a monster deal — $65.358 million over six years (all dollars U.S.) — to become the seventh-highest-paid player in the NHL on an average annual basis ($10.893 million), and third on the Leafs behind Auston Matthews ($11.634 million) and John Tavares ($11 million).

For Dubas, it’s an exclamation mark on a young career that saw him make a bold promise: "We can and we will." He said that in the heat of a contract impasse last season with William Nylander, promising that he would get all of his core players signed. He has, although he now pays four forwards about $40 million a year, almost half of the NHL’s salary cap.

"They were excited just as much as I was," Marner said of his teammates. "A lot of them reached out when rumours got out there (Friday) and everything. That’s when I kind of broke the news to them that I’ll see them tomorrow. It was excitement on both levels. We wanted to be here, not miss many days and get on the ice."

His coach was elated.

"He’s a real good player," said Mike Babcock. "He doesn’t have to worry about this now. He doesn’t have to negotiate another contract for a long period of time. I think you think sometimes it’s going be fun. It’s not fun."

"The other thing about it, you’re talking about a financial package that most people can’t fathom in their lifetime. Then for fans, it’s hard for them to understand. I’m just glad it’s all done. But he’s a heck of a player. He just has to keep getting stronger and more time in the league, and he’ll just get better and better and better."

With their exciting, game-changing forwards under contract plus additions over the summer, such as Tyson Barrie and Alexander Kerfoot from Colorado, the Leafs promise to be a juggernaut that Marner didn’t want to miss out on.
What do fans think of the Leafs' Mitch Marner signing?

By Raneem Alozzi

Sat., Sept. 14, 2019

Toronto Maple Leafs signing unrestricted free agent Mitch Marner to a hefty six-year contract worth $65.385 million is generating a mixed reaction from fans.

After months of negotiations, Marner signed a deal at an average of $10.893 million a year (all dollars U.S.).

The forward player is now the team's third highest-paid player behind centres Auston Matthews ($11.634 million) and John Tavares ($11 million).

The Leafs now have three of the seven highest-paid players in the NHL.

The deal puts the Leafs payroll at nearly $95 million, almost $11 million over the NHL's salary cap.

On Friday night, Marner tweeted that he was “proudly continuing the tradition with the Maple Leafs.”

Fans were divided in their opinion of the deal.

Toronto Star LOADED: 09.15.2019
Leaves finally add Mitch Marner’s name to their prepaid plan. They better get dialled into a longer Cup run

By Dave Feschuk
Sat., Sept. 14, 2019

Kyle Dubas vowed he would, and he did. You’ll forgive the legions of armchair sports executives out there for rightly assuming they probably could have done it, too — at least, at those prices.

Still, more than a year after vowing to figure out a way to fit the young trio of Auston Matthews, William Nylander and Mitch Marner under a salary cap crowded by John Tavares’ $77-million arrival — “We can, and we will,” has since become the GM’s signature phrase — Dubas finally jammed the last giant piece into that complicated jigsaw on Friday. It’ll be up to Maple Leaf fans to decide whether it was a bad omen that Mitch Marner scored $65 million (all figures U.S.) in guaranteed salary on Friday the 13th.

Not that Marner, like the rest of the men earning Toronto’s top-four salaries, isn’t a jaw-dropping, fan-wooing talent with tantalizing upside. Not that Dubas wasn’t obliged to lock him up, even if he did so while being violently dunked on by another predatory sports agent who sensed weakness in the Toronto front office and delivered his client a Kawhi-on-Giannis doozy of a contract.

But if there’s reason for a sober pause amid the sighs of relief that a generation of contract talk is done in Leafland, it’s this: There’s never before been an NHL core that’s been given so much for achieving so little.

Tally up the relevant scores. Together, the four highest-paid Maple Leafs have been signed to deals worth a combined $245 million — more than a quarter of a billion Canadian dollars. Together they’ve won a combined one career NHL playoff series — and that was by Tavares as a member of the New York Islanders way back in 2016. When Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane first began earning north of $10 million apiece back in 2015, Patrick Kane first began earning north of $10 million apiece back in 2015, of the New York Islanders way back in 2016. When Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane first began earning north of $10 million apiece back in 2015, they’d already won three Stanley Cups.

Who knew the Shana-plan would turn into the burner phone of pro sports — as in, fully prepaid. Now that the top-earning Maple Leafs have largely overhauled the negotiating table, fans will respectfully suggest it’s time to do likewise on the ice.

Maybe it’s simply a temporary reality that the 0.1 percenters now leading Toronto’s NHL team have produced a postseason one-and-done three years running.

There’s Tavares, the GTA’s prodigal son, whose return in free agency in the summer of 2018 earned him $77 million in guaranteed money that will take him beyond his 34th birthday.

There’s Matthews, he of the league-shaking five-year deal that kicks in this season and will give him the option to leave Toronto as a free agent at age 26.

There’s Nylander, who, thanks to his victory in a bailey standoff with Dubas in December, has already been paid more than $17 million of his $41-million nut, or about $17 million per postseason goal.

And now, of course, there’s Marner. He demanded the Matthews deal and ended up with an annual average value a notch below, six years at $10.893 million. (Hockey romantics will love how Marner included a Dougie Gilmour tribute in his symbolic AAV while Matthews, at $11.634 million, threw in a homage to himself). Add all that to the fact Marner signed his deal a day after teammates suffered through the widely hated annual ritual of training-camp fitness testing — “#VeteranMove,” was the hashtag in a congratulatory tweet from former Leafs strength and conditioning coach Matt Nichol — and it’s difficult not to admire a clear-eyed understanding of a hometown market that belies Marner’s 22 years.

Give Marner’s camp this: Though they’ve been widely accused of delusion, they got their man paid — and paid far more than he would have received if he’d signed last summer, when sources say Dubas could have had him on an eight-year deal worth an annual average of about $9 million. And they secured that bag while understanding the importance of limiting the collateral damage.

It’s not a coincidence that, after months of negotiations, the deal was only consummated in the hours after a leak of a team-friendly detailing of the contracts Marner had so far left on the table, including a Tavares-esque seven-year pact — details that played so poorly in the court of public opinion they threatened to turn Toronto’s heart-and-soul bringer of joy into an unredeemable villain.

Here’s the thing, though. While fans generally take the side of the team in tense contract negotiations, especially in a high-salary-capped league like the NHL, fans rarely resent a player hitting the jackpot so long as he provides value on the dollar. Marner, who’s led the team in scoring for two years running and is playing with a source of puck-elevating energy that seems like a near-sure bet to spend his next handful of seasons getting better and better. If anyone can live up to a big number, in other words, it’s No. 16.

Now that Dubas has completed his epic trilogy of restricted-free-agent negotiations, he can take a breath and ponder his work. It’s a roster so top-heavy it might as well be wearing stilts. Toronto’s now employing four players taking up about $41 million of an $81.5-million cap — oh, and one lone defenceman, Morgan Rielly, under contract beyond this season. That’s about 50 per cent of the salary limit being commanded by about 17 per cent of a standard 23-man roster. Which is why the Maple Leafs, as head coach Mike Babcock acknowledged the other day, are likely to roll with a day-to-day lineup numbering something more like 20 or 21 players.

Dubas has bet big on youthful potential (which beats the franchise’s decades-old tradition of paying handsomely for aged has-beens). He’s bet big on high-end skill, even in an era when the Cup still seems to find its way into the hands of teams displaying rare will. And, in a way, he’s bet on Gary Bettman. The Leafs GM can only hope the commissioner-induced influx of revenue from a 32nd franchise in Seattle, from a new-in-2022 U.S. TV deal and from legalized gambling will lead to a more dramatic rise in the salary cap than we’ve seen in recent years. The quicker the ceiling rises, the quicker team-elevating Toronto’s highest-paid players is reduced. It wouldn’t hurt if a few Canadian franchises went deep in the playoffs in the coming years. This is still a gate-driven, north-looking league, and that playoff money can have a considerable effect on league finances. In other words, one of the best ways for the Maple Leafs to ease the pressure of the cap would be to play for the Cup.

Isn’t that a novel concept? If you’ve been living in a city consumed by contract-focused sports chatter these past couple of years, it’s been easy to forget it’s the hoisting of a long-awaited chalice, not the signing of ground-breaking contracts, that’s supposed to be the point here.

Then again, management sets the tone. And don’t think Toronto’s players and their agents didn’t notice team president Brendan Shanahan scored a lucrative contract extension back in May — a signing that largely escaped any real scrutiny when it was announced during the Raptors’ run to a title.

Do the math on that one. Add Shanahan’s six-year extension to the five-plus years he’s already been in town and he’s now ensured of 11 years of highly paid employment for delivering precisely zero trips to the postseason’s second round or beyond.

Prepaid, indeed. Like president, like player.

Dubas vowed he would, and he did. Now it’s time for the Shana-plan to deliver results beyond stuffing bank accounts. The bulk of Toronto’s core has received its payoff. Nobody will begrudge the money, nobody will remember the sports-agent slam dunks, so long as the Maple Leafs move the needle in the playoffs.

Toronto Star LOADED: 09.15.2019
SIMMONS: Life-changing money won't change Marner's hockey life

Steve Simmons
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ST. JOHN'S, NL — At his lowest moment as a Maple Leaf, when Mike Babcock had banished Mitch Marner to the fourth line, and almost everyone around him, his father, his agent, was telling the world he was being mistreated, veteran Matt Martin took him aside and told him everything was going to be okay.

That could have been a seminal moment for Marner. He could have been caught up in too many people telling him he was being screwed by the Leafs. He could have drifted the way of Jonathan Drouin or Jesse Puljujarvi.

Instead, he said almost nothing, listened to Martin, invested in himself, worked hard and over time has built himself into a star.

You can learn a lot about professional athletes, especially young ones, when things don't go their way. You learn what they have on the inside. You learn how they can block out the noise, especially when it's coming from your own home. When agents are calling reporters complaining about their client's ice time, it's easy to get trapped in the conversations.

But Mitch Marner never got trapped. He wouldn't allow himself. He never took his eye off the ball. He might have listened to what was being said around him — how could he not? But he kept on believing in himself, his game, his style of play, his exceptional vision, the very skills that made him special as a kid and a junior and now as one of the better players in all of hockey.

And quickly, he moved from fourth line to third to second to first. To leading scorer. To penalty killer. To key man on the power play. To a player Babcock — who he knows didn't want to draft him — can trust in just about any situation.

Marner got a cheque (or do they do direct deposit these days?) for $15 million upon signing with the Leafs. That was the first payment. Imagine being 22 years, a Toronto-area kid, a Leafs fan growing up, a hockey rinkrat of sorts, and here you are in your home town, with the best Leafs team in years, and you're putting $15 million in the bank. Fifteen million? What's the first thing you do? What's the first thing you buy? Do you ever spend another minute of your life wondering or worrying if you can afford something?

It's life changing to sign the kind of contract Marner did and my suspicion is he's not the life-changing kind of guy. He's not particularly complicated. He's a hockey player. He signed this long-term deal and the first thing out of his mouth is the short term. He wanted to be at training camp. He didn't want to miss any games. The money is part of the price of doing business in today's NHL.

He's probably overpaid by most standards but I don't see him getting consumed by the dollar figures because he isn't that kind of kid. Years ago, Bryan McCabe signed a large contract with the Leafs, never lived up to the dollars, never liked being the centre of attention and it ate away at him, ruining his final years with the Leafs and in some way setting his career backwards.

Money can do that to some. It can take over an athlete's life. I've seen it up close. But I don't see anything in Marner that tells me that will happen here. He made the kind of jump from Year 2 to Year 3 that stars on the rise do. He had 61 points as a rookie, 69 as a sophomore, 94 last year and that number could have been higher had he finished the regular season in better form. Now where does he go from 94 points and one the elite passers in hockey?

He has 17 points in 20 playoff games, which is a reasonable number on its own. Nikita Kucherov, the league's MVP, has 19 in his last 20 games. Brad Marchand, the great Boston right winger, has 17 points in his last 20 post-season games. That's good company for Marner and also a goal for him — to reach the heights Kucherov and Marchand have already known.

With training camp about to begin Thursday, Marner had a face-to-face meeting with general manager Kyle Dubas. Just the player and the manager. No agents. No dads. No capologists. Just a hockey player and a young executive, trying to get things done. The six-year deal got done shortly thereafter.

Hockey players just want to play hockey. It's what Mitch Marner does best. It's what he will continue to do in Toronto for at least the next six seasons. He has a gift, and is ready to prove he's worth every penny. The money won't consume him, the bet is here. This morning in Newfoundland, he'll be back on the ice with his friends, doing what he does best, not trying to live up to any expectations but his own.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
PARADISE, Nfld. — Kyle Dubas found the task of signing the top three restricted free agents on the Maple Leafs was like herding cats — with all the scratch marks to prove it.

"I don’t know that we’ll ever be in that situation again," Dubas said Saturday as Mitch Marner joined William Nylander and Auston Matthews on Millionaires Row. "I’m open to say I’ve screwed some things up, made some mistakes … I’m not afraid to ever admit that. That’s how you learn. I’m happy we’ve gotten to the conclusion we wanted."

After Nylander took the general manager to the Dec. 1 wire last year before signing for just under $7 million US a year and Matthews became the highest paid Leaf at $11.63 – 4 million, Marner was headed for the messiest showdown of all in his camp’s quest for Matthews’ money. Until Friday when a six-year, $65.358–million deal (an AAV of $10.893 million) secured the last of the trio, who together with John Tavares ($11 million), defenceman Morgan Rielly and netminder Frederik Andersen (a combined $10 million) secured the core for another playoff run in 2019-20.

Given a re-do, Dubas said he’d have locked the trio up at once a year ago, particularly Matthews and Marner. But the enormity of the Tavares free-agent signing last July had ramifications for talks with Marner’s camp, which played hardball all summer.

"You learn about the process, of things you do differently for the next time," Dubas said. "With William, I wish we’d have been on it earlier, with Auston’s case, we had the information and we were projecting headward to go with him. In the end, I’m happy we’re able to deliver all three and bring John in as well."

Criticism of Dubas for the summer or inactivity on the Marner front and what seemed like hollow promises to get a deal done gave way in recent weeks to sniping media streams that Marner was asking too much. When the Leafs acquired dead contract money as insurance for some kind of deal, their efforts seemed to sway the battle of public opinion.

Thursday turned out to be the breakthrough as the Leafs took off for their Newfoundland training base while Dubas stayed behind for a one-on-one with Marner, letting the leading scorer hear his justification for not going beyond $11 million, listening to the counter-claims.

"From that moment on, the next day or so everyone on both sides just bore down and realized that both parties want the same thing," Marner said. "I just expressed to Kyle that I don’t want to miss any games (Nylander never fully recovered from his two-month absence). We’re here, we only missed a day or so and it will be good to get on the ice."

Marner, Matthews, Tavares and the other high rollers must now justify their paycheques, certainly a record amount for a team with three of the top seven AAVs in the league, but one that has lost three consecutive first-round series. Dubas has been pushed over the salary cap, which must be reconfigured by opening night Oct. 2.

"I’ve got a great person to handle that, (assistant GM) Brandon Pridham," he said with a glance to the back of the press conference room. "That pressure will go to him."

Marner was unfazed about scrutiny on his production numbers.

"I’m from Toronto, I live here and play here, there’s pressure in that always," he said. "You don’t think about it, just go out and play hockey like I have my whole life. I want to make sure every night I’m ready to play, no matter whom I’m up against, the minutes or everything like that."

Also relieved to be moving on with a full roster, but under no less heat himself, is head coach Mike Babcock.
1152842  Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs and the Maritimes have historical bond

Lance Hornby
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Updated: September 14, 2019 7:24 PM EDT

ST. JOHN'S, NL — Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation on March 31, 1949, two weeks before the Maple Leafs extended their dynasty to four Stanley Cups in the decade.

Lord knows, these two 'nations' have had their ups and downs since and been the punchline of a few national jokes. In the interim, the Montreal Canadiens won 17 Cups to rightfully carve hockey royalties in half down East. But somehow the Rock — indeed most of the Maritimes — is still tethered to Toronto and vice-versa.

Glenn Stanford, former president of the AHL St. John’s Leafs and now part-owner of Toronto’s ECHL affiliate, the Newfoundland Growlers, thinks the “generational” pull of the Leafs enabled locals to keep the faith.

“Our parents and older siblings were all fans of the Original Six and being Canadian, the Leafs were on top of the list along with Montreal. It might have changed a bit with the younger generation, but no doubt there are a tremendous amount of Leafs fans here in Newfoundland. It goes way back, family to family.”

With the Leafs holding training camp here for the next week for the first time since 2001 (they were also a hit in Halifax in 2015), a look at Maritimers players and personalities who have become synonymous with the blue and white.

ALEX FAULKNER, Bishop's Falls, NL — first Newfoundlander in the NHL.

Faulkner nearly missed his date with history.

Called up by the Leafs from the farm on Dec. 7, 1961, when Dave Keon was hurt, the easy-going centre was so intently reading his newspaper at the airport in Rochester, N.Y., that he missed his plane to Montreal to join the team.

“That'll give you an indication I wasn’t all that nervous,” Faulkner told the St. John's Telegram in an earlier interview. “I had to take a taxi over to Syracuse to pick up a flight.”

Faulkner wore No. 8 and was used sparingly by coach Punch Imlach in a 4-1 loss and when reaching for a long pass from Red Kelly was body-checked by Sydney, N.S.’s Al MacNeil. After the game, Faulkner and young goalie Gerry Cheevers were returned to the minors.

Yet a Newfoundlandlander getting into just one game was huge news in Atlantic Canada. Faulkner was ‘discovered’ during King Clancy’s coaching clinic trip a year earlier, alerted by ex-Leaf Howie Meeker, who was coaching in St. John’s at the time. Faulkner and his brother, George, were playing for the Conception Bay CeeBees, who were a top senior amateur team and winners of the Herdman Trophy for supremacy in Newfoundland. Faulkner was a crafty centre and the league’s scoring champion.

The siblings thrived on the frozen Exploits River in central Newfoundland and while the Leafs offered a basic contract to both, George had already failed a tryout with the Habs and said no. Alex agreed to sign, if guaranteed a few games with Rochester, where he impressed with 18 points in 41 games in 1960-61. At camp the following year, Faulkner put some nice dekes on the likes of Tim Horton, giving him confidence he could make the NHL. A hot start in Rochester warranted his call-up.

But on a deep Leafs team bound for four Cups in the ’60s, he was unprotected and claimed by Detroit. Not only did he become a Wings regular, they played Toronto in the 1963 Cup final, during which Faulkner received 4,000 telegrams of support from home. In Detroit’s only win in the series, Faulkner scored twice and was interviewed by Bob Cole, who was with Hockey Night In Canada radio at the time.

“I’d much rather be in Newfoundland tonight,” Cole confided to him.

“There’s a lot of excitement there.”

It would be almost 40 years before Danny Cleary of Harbour Grace was the next player ‘from home’ to appear in a Cup final. Injuries limited Faulkner’s NHL time after his big year in Detroit and he eventually went back to dominate play in provincial senior circuit.

GORDIE DRILLON, Moncton N.B. — Toronto’s last Art Ross Trophy winner

For more than 80 years, Drillon has been a lingering piece of Leafs trivia.

He actually predates the minting of the Art Ross by a decade. But after that productive 1937-38 season — Drillon led the league with 52 points in 48 games — he was so well known across New Brunswick that his mail only needed his newspaper head shot glued on the envelope for the post office to forward it to the Gardens.

Drillon required almost no minor-league seasoning before promotion to the Leafs in 1936-37. A big man for the pre-war league at 6-foot-2, he came out of the front of the net and became prolific with rebounds and deflections.

It was fortuitous that Charlie Conacher, the first star of the Gardens era, was beginning to fade at the time, with Drillon giving the Leafs a new impact right winger. Syl Apps was emerging as a dominant centre and they made a potent combination.

It was neck-and-neck between those two for the league points title in the last two games of the ’37-38 season, a home-and-home with the New York Americans. But despite Drillon being denied a penalty shot because it was determined New York goalie Earl Robertson “wasn’t ready,” he finished two points ahead of Apps.

Drillon was already a provincial sensation that season, the mayor of Moncton travelling to Toronto to present him with a gold watch before a game. He led the Leafs in scoring four times, was an all-star on three occasions, and also became their first player to win the Lady Byng Trophy, in 1937-38.

But Drillon was something of a liability defensively and coach Hop Day benched him after Toronto fell behind 3-0 in the 1942 Cup final against Detroit, with the replacements helping in a historic comeback. That helped speed a trade to Montreal and though his one season there netted a career-high 28 goals, he departed the NHL to join the Royal Canadian Air Force.

After the war, he coached in Grand Falls-Windsor Nfld., scouted for the Leafs in the Maritimes (P.E.I.’s Errol Thompson was one of his finds) and worked with youth activity programs in Moncton. He was elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1975 and passed away 11 years later.

Since Drillon won the Ross, only 12 Leafs have made top five scoring, the last one Mats Sundin’s fourth-place showing in 2001-02. Three were runners-up, all back in the war years; Apps, Gaye Stewart and Drillon himself when he and Apps were in a five-way 44-point tie behind Boston’s Norm Cowley in ’40-41.

RICK VAIVE Ottawa/Charlottetown P.E.I. — First 50-goal man for the Leafs

Vaive scored 50 not once, twice, but three times and was a team captain.

But ‘Spud’ was very much a victim of his Leafs generation, the dysfunctional 1980s, which had far more dead ends than paths to glory.

“Disarray was everywhere from top to bottom,” Vaive told the — in a retrospective about the decade. “No question, we were something of a product of everything that went on around us. As players we have to take some of the blame, but when players can’t develop and systems aren’t conducive to the team, then you have problems.

“It just wasn’t a well-run, well-oiled machine that developed great draft picks. You just knew we were asking for it.”

But in his prime, when the Leafs still ruled Toronto regardless of their record, Vaive with his big stick (“the log,” teammate Gary Leeman used to say of its weight) was immensely popular.

He was born in Ottawa to parents Claude and Mary, but spent his teenage years in Charlottetown watching a team called the Islanders, who scored and scrapped their way to notoriety.

“If there weren’t four or five fights on a given night, fans went home angry,” Vaive told the Leafs Hub web site. “It was wild times.”
He played in the Quebec Pee Wee tournament on a team from Amherst, N.S., in 1970 and `71. On the island, he played for the Colonel Gray Colonels and Charlottetown Generals, the latter provincial junior champions in 1975-76.

That year, Vaive was already showing scoring prowess with 42 goals and 79 points in 34 games. Brothers Stevie and Ron followed him to the team, but Rick was scooped by the major junior Sherbrooke Castors in Quebec. The right winger notched 50 and 76 goals, convincing the WHA Birmingham Bulls to take him in their 1978 raiding party of underage juniors from the NHL. With the demise of the WHA, Vaive was Vancouver’s first-round selection in 1979, from the famous class of 21 picks who all made the NHL.

Moving to the Leafs with Bill Derlago in the blockbuster trade that sent Tiger Williams to the Canuckies, Vaive was under scrutiny on Carlton St., but quickly found a scoring rhythm, mostly on a line with Derlago and John Anderson. The franchise had waited 65 years for its first 50-goal man, with Vaive beating Mike Liut of the Blues on March 24, 1982 at the Gardens. Derlago got the assist.

“Bill and I had an uncanny chemistry,” Vaive said. “We worked a lot in practice, using the faceoff dots as a reference and that’s where Bill passed to me for that goal.”

Dave Andreychuk and Leeman are the only Leafs to hit 50 to date.

JOHN BROPHY, coach — Antigonish, N.S.

“Who are they?” Brophy snapped of his team after a galling loss to the Islanders.

A career minor-league player, he felt everything he earned in the game was through self imposed hard labour and if need be, nefarious tactics. It served him well, but proved a bad match with the mostly young and naive Austrian farm team in 2001, the first person the arena crew invited to skate on it was Bob Cole.

Brophy didn't see his role as changing lines as much as charging ashore with them on D-Day through heavy enemy fire.

His memorial in the Nova Scotia Sport Hall of Fame diplomatically explains his often manic approach “as a person with an unusual work ethic who asked no more of his players than he expected to give of himself”.

A career minor-league player, he felt everything he earned in the game was through self imposed hard labour and if need be, nefarious tactics. It served him well, but proved a bad match with the mostly young and naive Leaffs in the late 1980s. But what headlines those confrontations generated.

His Leafs tenure was just part of the Brophy legend that began in Antigonish in 1933. He left home to join the Halifax St. Mary's Juniors where he began carving a reputation as “a hard competitor who asked no quarter and certainly yielded none.” In the summer, he'd been a construction worker and a lumberjack where he and his logger lout pals would chase bears up trees at night for fun.

Beginning with the senior Moncton Hawks in the early 1950s, Brophy went up and down the Eastern seaboard as a player and later a coach, the minor-league rogue that Paul Newman's role in Slap Shot was partly based upon. But Brophy got results as a firebrand mentor, first with the Canadiens' farm team in Nova Scotia and then Toronto's AHL affiliate in nearby St. Catharines. His white mane and mischievous grin became familiar — and feared.

“IT's 70 miles to St. Catharines and 70,000 miles back,” he'd bark at fringe Leaffs, a stern warning not to waste their chance in the NHL.

Former Leaff owner Harold Ballard loved war stories of Brophy smashing windows on the team bus after a loss and menacing AHL players and coaches. But such antics had a short shelf life with youngsters and Europeans who needed more teaching and less trades.

Brophy was fired in December 1988 and went back to the minors, but was always grateful for his 15 minutes of NHL fame. In 2013, an alumni team with some of his ex-Leaffs dropped by unannounced at his retirement home in Antigonish.

“It was a series of cottages near a field with sheep running around,” winger Mark Osborne recalled of the humorously un-Brophy setting. “As soon as we went in, he just lit up, he was just tickled.

“The funny thing is, his unit had five elderly women. He keeps on telling them he once coached the Leafs and they don't believe him. They say, 'Oh, sure you did John.'

Brophy passed away in 2016.

BOB COLE, broadcaster — St. John’s, N.L.

When the new Mile One Centre in St. John’s first put in ice for the Leafs farm team in 2001, the first person the arena crew invited to skate on it was Bob Cole.

Not only a fitting tribute for a man who’d kept the Leafs’ glory days alive on The Rock through Hockey Night In Canada, but a gesture bringing him full circle from being the first to crunch a blade in the old Memorial Arena in 1955. Then in his early 20s and a long way from the pond at the Gardens, Cole and friends had been skating out on nearby Quidi Vidi Lake.

“The workmen asked us if we wanted to go on,” Cole recalled to the Sun. “So I’ve been honoured twice.”

About a year after his lap of the old arena — named for the Newfoundland and Labrador volunteers killed in action — Cole’s on-air career received a huge boost. Returning from a trip to New York via Toronto, Cole stopped by Foster Hewitt’s office with an audition tape. The sports radio pioneer, who made “he shoots, he scores” famous from sea to sea, must have received many such applications. But Hewitt took time to hear the tape and offer Cole valuable advice about raising and lowering his voice with the flow of the game — and to save his best call for the big moment.

Cole’s “Oh, baby” would become his signature, though not until the 1991 Pittsburgh-Minnesota playoffs when watching Mario Lemieux’s stickhandling show.

“I don't know when (Oh, baby's) going to come out,” Cole once said. “I don’t script the thing. It's ad-libbed and that's what broadcasting's all about.”

Young Cole dreamed of being an athlete, proficient at baseball, football and soccer, but was bed-ridden by an injury at age 12, with an infection serious enough that amputation was discussed by doctors. While laid up, he began calling mock games about the 1940s Leafs, with pictures of Toronto and Montreal stars on his night table. HNIC wasn’t yet available in the region.

Cole kept improving his delivery and eventually found work at Memorial Arena calling senior hockey games on VOCM radio, while reading news and playing records. HNIC came calling in 1969 and a few years later, Cole was in Moscow beside Hewitt, calling the Summit Series on radio while Hewitt handled TV. The Leafs and Cole were rarely separated on the tube from 1980 onward, the echo of Cole on memorable goals during the 1993 and ‘94 playoff runs with partner Harry Neale. Cole’s last game was the final regular-season match between the Habs and Leafs last April 6 — but just try keeping him away from the press box that bears his name when the Leafs return to Mile One this month.

DOWN EAST LEAFS

F Darryl Boyce (Summerside, PEI)
D Bobby Coup (Port Elgin, NB)
F Gordie Drillon (Moncton, NB)
F Harold Druken (St. John’s NF)
F Alex Faulkner (Bishop’s Falls, NF)
F Dick Gamble (Moncton, NB)
F Collin Greening (St. John’s NF)
F Forbes Kennedy (Dorchester, NB)
F Stan Jackson (Amherst, NS)
D Joe Lundrigan (Corner Brook, NF)
G Joey MacDonald (Pictou, NS)
F Parker MacDonald (Sydney, NS)
F Don MacLean (Sydney, NS)
F Billy MacMillan (Charlottetown, PEI)
D Al MacNeil (Sydney, NS)
F Pat Nolan (Charlottetown, PEI)
F Zach Sill (Truro, NS)
D Ted Stackhouse (New Glasgow, NS)
D Billy Stuart (Sackville, NB)
F Errol Thompson (Summerside, PEI)
*F Rick Vaive (Charlottetown, PEI)

Coach

John Brophy (Antigonish NS)

* – Born in Ottawa

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
Kapanen, Tavares get look as Leafs linemates

Lance Hornby

Published: September 14, 2019
Updated: September 14, 2019 11:27 PM EDT

PARADISE Nfld. — Auston Matthews called it “the elephant in the room,” but now that the Mitch Marner distraction has been squeezed out, it’s time for the Leafs to get serious as training camp enters its third day.

That starts Sunday when Marner gets on the ice and John Tavares rejoins the team from maternity leave. Coach Mike Babcock will have Kasperi Kapanen on Tavares’ right side, replacing the injured Zach Hyman on the potential first line.

“We’ll see what happens,” Babcock said after Saturday’s session. “I thought (Russian rookie Egor) Korshkov had a real good day, a big man, makes plays. What slows him down right now is you have to understand the language.

“(Rookie Ilya) Mikheyev is another big guy that can really do it. Kapanen will get the first kick at the can. The thing about Zach, is he’s such a good forechecker, and he’s so heavy on the net. He gets those guys the puck over and over and over again. So we need someone to do that for them.”

Babcock is also considering a line of Mikheyev, Alexander Kerfoot and Kapanen, now that Marner is back on right wing, a slot above William Nylander.

WELCOME MATT

Matt Read calls this his “last chance” to be an NHLer.

At 33, recovering from lower body injury and a few years removed from his prime as a Philadelphia Flyer, he’s come to the Leafs on a pro tryout contract for one of the openings as a checker on the bottom six forwards. His cause was aided Saturday with a short-handed goal and assist in Team Salming’s 4-0 win over Team Clancy.

“The Leafs talked to my agent, they were looking for a solid two-way forward who can play on any line and help this team get to that next level,” Read said. “It’s up to me to have a good camp and show what I have.”

The PTO is a high-risk, high-reward move as Read turned down chances to sign firm deals with lesser leagues. But having watched the Leafs —Bruins series last April and the obvious trouble Toronto had killing penalties, he went after this NHL opening.

“I kind of pride myself on PK and thought this was a great opportunity. We’ll see where it goes.”

Read also has vastly improved health after not playing a full season since 2015-16 as well as motivation to work near his hometown of Ilderton, north of London, Ont.

“When you get old and do a lot of stuff, knees and stuff are slowly gone. But this is the first summer I can run without pain, stay in shape, do all the little things I missed the last couple of years. They’re all fixed now. I’ve been on the ice a lot more than normal, trying to keep up with these young guys who are out there the whole year.”

In his brief NHL call-up last season with Minnesota, he replaced Pontus Aberg in the Wild lineup. Now both are competing for spots here. But Read’s first ties are to Philly where he spent seven years and more than 450 games with nearly 200 points.

“I can’t say anything negative about them. You’re in the limelight there, fans can get on you really quickly if you’re playing bad, but it’s the same kind of mentality here. I enjoyed being there seven years, but it’s also good to have new life.”

MORE HELP IN GOAL

Another former Flyer on a PTO here is goalie Michal Neuvirth. Arriving just before camp started, he’s a man of mystery, but at age 31 with more than 260 NHL games, has more experience than the main contender for the back-up job, Michael Hutchinson.

“I had a couple of opportunities (including Europe), but I decided to try the Leafs,” said Neuvirth, who has had injuries and was part of 2018-19 upheaval in the Philly crease with eight different goalies employed. “I’ve changed my trainer, I’ve worked hard, lost some weight. This is the best organization in the NHL and it means a lot that I got this opportunity.”

The Czech-born Neuvirth says he has a lot to offer and says he, Hutchinson and No. 1 Frederik Andersen will get along off the ice no matter what.

ABERG BRINGS ‘A’ GAME

Aberg hopes to get a job on the wing and find the stability that’s eluded him the past two years when he went through four teams. Nashville, Edmonton, Anaheim and Minnesota. Kyle Dubas courted the 25-year-old, who signed a one-year $700,000 US deal, the GM no doubt recalling what he did in 16 playoff games for the Preds a couple of years ago.

Aberg, who is separated, is bringing his young daughter and his mother from Europe. He also thinks it would be great to play for the same team as Mats Sundin, who, like Aberg, is from Stockholm and starred for club team Djurgarden.

“I cheered for him as a kid,” Aberg said. “All the legends over there have their pictures up in the locker room. I think his jersey is hanging on the wall, too.”

LOOSE LEAFS

Read went to school in Ilderton with figure skaters Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir. “Scott’s Dad drove the school bus,” Read recalled … Before Matthews had a point in Saturday’s scrimmage game, he was in the tiny penalty box at the rink in Paradise serving a minor. He has only 58 total minutes going back six seasons to the U.S. Development team … Aberg insists he didn’t bestow the nickname ‘The Pope’ on himself, “but it’s kind of funny and I’m going with it” … The Newfoundland Growlers might not be back as Toronto’s ECHL farm team after this season. Negotiations with the city at Mile One Centre aren’t going well.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
PARADISE, Nfld. — Mitch Marner is back with the Maple Leafs, hoping to escape a social media flare-up in the closing days of his contract talks.

The millennial Marner usually has fun with social media platforms, but as the talks dragged on, the trolls came out.

“I expected stuff to come at (agent) Darren Ferris and myself,” Marner told TSN on Saturday. “But I saw a couple of comments about my father (Paul, who had taken an active part in negotiations) that no one is going to like seeing or reading. It was pretty disappointing to see some of the people express themselves about my family and my family name.

“Social media has its benefits, it’s good for certain things … but people express their hate for people. It’s something a lot of athletes go through on social media.”

During a Saturday afternoon press conference here, Marner commented on the role his family and agent played in the protracted discussions.

“They’ve been with me through everything in my hockey career. Same with Darren, he’s been with me a long time and all three, together with my brother, they’re someone I can depend on to ask those heavy questions and get their honest opinions.

“They’ve meant the world to me throughout this kind of discussion. Without them, who knows what would’ve happened. But I’m glad it’s over, it’s time to get to work and have fun with it.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
SIMMONS SAYS: Marner the winner as Leafs pay him more than NHL’s MVP

Steve Simmons
Published: September 14, 2019
Updated: September 14, 2019 11:21 PM EDT

ST. JOHN’S, NL — Kyle Dubas was smiling like he had won the Stanley Cup. But it should have been Mitch Marner with the Cheshire Cat-like grin.

He was the winner on this Saturday afternoon. The winner by knockout or unanimous decision. You take your pick.

The deal is done and Marner will be paid $65+ million over the next six years — which makes sense if he was a better player than Nikita Kucherov in Tampa or Brad Marchand in Boston.

Which he may be one day but just hasn’t been yet.

Kucherov is the NHL’s most valuable player and leading scorer. He’ll earn $1 million a year less than Marner with the Lightning. Marchand, older and more accomplished than Marner, will be paid $6.1 million by the Boston Bruins, a whole $4 million less than Marner comes in at.

And the two teams that finished ahead of the Leafs in the Atlantic Division have their best forwards all signed up for far more economic circumstances than Toronto finds itself in.

It’s great the Leafs avoided an extended contract snafu with Marner after going through the losing season of William Nylander. It’s great that all the salary-cap talk has been put to rest for now and training camp resumes Sunday.

Marner didn’t want to miss camp or games during the coming season. He learned that much from the Nylander watch.

But the price Dubas paid was enormous: He overshot the runway with the money he doled out for all three of his young stars — Auston Matthews, Nylander and Marner. He didn’t take a hard stances. More than $29 million for the three in salary cap terms? Forty million if you include John Tavares.

Combined playoff rounds won as a Maple Leafs between Dubas and his big four: Zero.

THIS AND THAT

Two Mike Babcock misconceptions to correct. One, he is adamant he hired his own assistant coaches this season. They were not foist upon him. And the widely reported premise that Babcock’s contract was front loaded, which would make it easier and less expensive for the Leafs to let him go, is not true. The Leafs insist Babcock’s contract pays him the same amount for each of his eight seasons. This is his fifth season. He has three years to go after this one if he makes it that far … One thing about Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment: They have never been shy about firing coaches or front office executives and paying them to go away … For his next act of magic, Dubas will make Paul Marner disappear … How did a star like Marner end up with a less-than-star-like player agent like Darren Ferris? Cut rates, I’m told. Normally, NHL agents charge 3% to their clients. Ferris apparently agreed to work for less than that. It worked in his favour. He’ll still make more than $1 million over six years for getting the $65.3-million deal done and just over $300,000 for his part in the initial signing bonus … Here is my simple rule for watching Leafs camp: The better Martin Marincin looks, the more you have to downgrade everything else you’re seeing. And Marincin had a good day Saturday. Word is, he’ll be among the Leafs’ seven defencemen. They believe if they try to send him to the AHL, they’ll lose him on waivers … One thing I did see: An expanded Matthews. More puck-carrying. More confidence. More trying to get fancy with Nylander. He looks like he’s taken another step in Year 4 … A quick word about St. John’s: If you haven’t been here, go. It’s worthwhile. And the people — the best.

HEAR AND THERE

Three years ago, the Blue Jays hired Brian Parker, who two months after he drafted Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio. You might have heard of them. If some scouts do that, they’d get promoted. You know who the Jays should hire? The scouts who keep recommending outfielders who can’t play defence. If Ross Atkins isn’t embarrassed by this, he should be … And this is odd: Devon White was coaching hitters at Buffalo this season. He should be teaching outfielders how to field. Nobody did it better than him … If I ever grow up, I want a job working for Dubas. Damn, he pays well … This is unusual: If the Jays and Kansas City wind up losing 100 games, which remains possible, the majors will have the most 100-loss teams in history. And if the Braves wind up at 100 wins, which is possible, this will be the most 100-win teams in a season as well, four … How big was the Bianca Andreescu tennis audance in Canada? Well, mean anything to you. But he’s worth remembering if only for being a journeyman’s journeyman: Sixteen seasons played, 15 teams, six leagues, six countries … Women’s tennis is in flux. Serena Williams is nearing the end. Caroline Wozniacki has enrolled at Harvard Business School. Kim Clijsters, at 36, is making a comeback … So there was Alex Rodriguez, broadcasting a Yankees game, and he was talking about Aaron Judge’s slump when suddenly he brought up the name Tie Domi and called him a good friend. He referenced Domi’s 333 NHL fights, a record, he said, that will never be broken. “If I was in a struggle, he would always text me. ’Alex, don’t think, just play.’” If could text Aaron Judge today, I would tell him the same thing.” … You know what would be fearsome: Aaron Judge fighting.

AND ANOTHER THING

So how do the Raptors replace the 37 points nightly they lose with Kawhi Leonard and Danny Green gone? And all that defence? That’s the challenge for coach Nick Nurse when training camp begins later this month in Quebec City. … It’s too late now, but Marcus Stroman finally had a Stroman-like start for the Mets. His National League earned run average is 4.50. He had a 2.67 ERA against American League East teams this season … No one has ever done this before: Dave Robertson, the Montreal closer, has 39 home runs, 36 stolen bases. Two weeks to go to get to 40-40. Only four players in baseball history that managed that before — Alex Rodriguez, Barry Bonds, Jose Canseco and Alfonso Soriano … Happy birthday to Dan Marino (58), Gaylord Perry (81), Joel Quenneville (61), DeVone Claybrooks (42), Patrick Marleau (41), Tom Kuhnver (57), Jimmy Butler (30) and Al Bernstein (80) … And hey, whatever became of Earnest Byner?

LEAFS COULD LEARN FROM RAPTORS

When asked what kind of captain he wanted for the Maple Leafs, coach Mike Babcock immediately referenced Kawhi Leonard. When asked about this coming Leafs season, Brendan Shanahan talked an awful lot about the championship run of the Raptors and what he took from it.
As different as hockey and basketball may be, it’s clear the NBA title team at Scotiabank Arena under the ownership of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Ltd., has had a profound impact on their friends from the Maple Leafs.

“It’s great for all teams to watch what the Raptors did,” Shanahan said.

“The journey was fascinating. Having watched the team closely since I’ve come back to Toronto, they took such a businesslike approach to every game in the playoffs. That, to me, is an example of almost all championship teams.

“They just never got too high, never got too low. It was great to see. It was a great education. It was a great way to see it as a fan. It was great to see for the city of Toronto.”

What also impressed Shanahan, the ability of Masai Ujiri to make difficult decisions. The firing of Dwane Casey. The trade for Leonard. The trading away of DeMar DeRozan.

“Those moves took guts,” said Shanahan, who is close with Babcock and may have to make a difficult decision down the road.

The model is there, though. If you have a chance, go for it. No matter who you might have trip over along the way.

BROOKE CAN’T DRAW LIKE BIANCA

When Bianca Andreescu won the U.S. Open, I compared her victory to some of the greatest individual achievements in Canadian sporting history. And compared her victory on a scale of how it affected the country — and how it transcended sport.

I compared it with Donovan Bailey’s gold-medal runs in 1996 and Mike Weir winning the Masters in 2003 and, from team points of view, Paul Henderson and Sidney Crosby scoring golden goals of different generations.

And I didn’t mention Brooke Henderson. That upset some people. And many interpreted that as I was slighting Henderson’s golfing achievements or forgot about her.

I did neither.

Here’s where I drew the line: Andreescu’s win at the Open had a record television audience of more than three-million viewers on TSN and RDS, had non-tennis watchers talking tennis, grabbed disinterested sports fans and suddenly made them interested.

When Henderson played recently at the CP tournament at Magna Golf Club, she got strong press coverage, contended, but got nowhere near the television audience and nothing, really, from the casual sports fan. The average broadcast of the CP women’s tournament was just over 275,000.

In other words, Henderson attracted an audience less than one-tenth of what Andreescu drew in the U.S. Open. That’s not an opinion. That’s a fact. And not a slight against anyone at all.

A RISING CAP WOULD HELP BUDS

I hate writing about the salary cap. I think it bores people for the most part.

Today, I’m breaking my own rule. And I’m doing that with the caveat that math was just about my worst subject to school.

But it’s almost impossible to look at the Maple Leafs and not break down salaries and where this franchise is going. And where it’s going to need help in the years to come now that long-term deals have been signed by John Tavares, Auston Matthews, William Nylander and now Mitch Marner.

The salary cap essentially comes from hockey-related revenue in the NHL. And what the Leafs are going to need in the years to come is for the cap to increase in size. Maybe significantly.

Logic says the cap has a chance to move in the right direction in the coming years. The league’s American television rights are up for sale and there’s talk of including a second American network, the giant ESPN, with the next deal. The deal comes at a time when revenue from sports gambling should enhance the league’s economic view. And it comes with eventual expansion funds and revenue from the Seattle franchise that’s on the way. And imagine, just for a moment, that the Canadian dollar increases, even slightly.
Here's a stat for you.

Now that Mitch Marner has finally agreed to a six-year contract worth $65.358 million, there are now 13 players in the National Hockey League with a cap hit of $10 million or more. Of those, nine are playing on teams that did not make the post-season a year ago.

That's the bad news if you're the Maple Leafs.

The good news, however, is that three of the four players who did make the playoffs are playing in Toronto. (San Jose’s Erik Karlsson is the other)

In other words, the Leafs have so far been the exception to the rule that states if you pay your star players too much money, there won't be enough in the kitty to fill out the third and fourth lines.

And it's now up to GM Kyle Dubas to keep it that way.

That's where the focus now shifts. This isn't about whether Marner and Matthews, who are entering Year One of their new contracts, will earn the many zeroes on their paycheques. This is about whether Dubas will earn his.

Signing Tavares, Matthews and Marner — and even William Nylander — turned out to be fairly easy. The challenge will come next summer, when five of the team's defencemen need new contracts and two years from now when Frederik Andersen hits free agency, and suddenly Dubas is digging through the couch cushions looking for cap space.

It's a challenge that general managers' Stan Bowman and Jim Rutherford know all too well.

With their top four forwards eating up 50% of the cap, the Leafs now have the same problems facing the Chicago Blackhawks and the Pittsburgh Penguins, albeit with one small difference: they haven't actually won a Stanley Cup yet. They haven't even advanced past the first round.

And unless the cap significantly rises in the next couple of years, don't expect that to change.

From a marketing perspective, the NHL is becoming a star-driven league. But on the ice, depth matters. It wasn't a coincidence that the two teams in last year's Stanley Cup final did not have a single player earning more than $7.5 million. But also keep in mind that neither St. Louis nor Boston had a No. 1 overall draft pick on their rosters — much less two of them.

Boston didn't have a 40-goal scorer. The Blues didn't have a single player ranked amongst the top 30 in scoring. The Leafs had two of them ranked in the top 16 and would have had another if Matthews had stayed healthy.

Toronto's salary imbalance is a problem, especially if the cap continues to remain stagnant. But at the same time, it's not exactly a bad problem to have. No GM in the history of the NHL ever complained about having to pay top dollar for a player who produces.

Really, what was the alternative?

Matthews and Marner are not David Clarkson or Jason Blake. This isn't Phil Kessel or Dion Phaneuf getting more money than they were worth on the open market or Patrick Marleau getting more term than his aging body could justify.

These are not deals that might look worse as the years go on. In fact, it's probably the exact opposite.

Regardless of what they make, Toronto is a better team with Matthews, Marner and Tavares than without them. If the team wins a Cup, these are the three players that will lead the way in the same way that Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane led Chicago to three championships.

This is their team now. It's up to them to get it done. If not, they will rightfully shoulder the blame, no matter how many points they put up or what the defence and goaltending looks like.

You can be sure that others will be watching closely.

Toronto might be the only team with three players earning $10 million or more, but it won't stay that way for long.

You can bet that Winnipeg’s Patrik Laine and Calgary’s Matthew Tkachuk and the many other restricted free agents who are still unsigned have bigger smiles on their faces today. They might not sign for $10 million. But now that Matthews and Marner have set the market in terms of what a young star player coming off his entry-level contract is worth, good luck trying to convince Colorado’s Mikko Rantanen or Tampa Bay's Brayden Point in taking a hometown discount.

Let's see what Vancouver ends up paying Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson and Quinn Hughes. Or what New Jersey dishes out for Taylor Hall, Nico Hischier and Jack Hughes. How about Colorado’s Rantanen and Cale Makar or New York Rangers, In a couple of years, the Sabres could be paying Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Rasmus Dahlin a combined $30 million.

More are joining the eight-digit club. The question is whether more of them will be in the playoffs or not.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.15.2019
Mamer turned 22 in May. He should only get better. That might not mean a whole string of 90-point seasons (though plenty, likely, in the ballpark), but a Mamer who keeps evolving into an all-around force capable of dominating five-on-five, on the power play and on the penalty kill.

He’s pretty good in those capacities already.

And that’s a huge part of what’s changing in second contracts like his. Teams are finally starting (or being forced) to pay their young studs what they’re going to be worth. The old model typically had clubs paying below-market deals for that class and way-above-market deals for players on (or soon to be on) the decline.

Though they probably should have forced things along more urgently last summer, the Leafs found themselves in a difficult but not unenviable position (who wouldn’t want all that young talent!) in which their three big young talents all came up for renewal around the same time. A changing RFA landscape, along with the pressure of not denting a Cup-worthy core and not repeating the Nylander saga with Mamer, led them to resolutions that weren’t quite what was originally envisioned.

(Jonas Siegel / The Athletic)

But that doesn’t mean they’ll regret it. Not at all.

It’s tough, borderline impossible, to replace a talent like Mamer (or Nylander or Matthews) if you don’t have it. Look how long it took the organization to come up with guys like that in the first place. Where, exactly, would the Leafs go to find a 22-year-old, 90-point winger, who just happens to have been born and raised locally, if they didn’t have Mamer?

“You’re not replacing Mitch, Johnny, or any of these (core) guys,” said Mike Babcock, especially upbeat Saturday afternoon ahead of Mamer’s arrival in Newfoundland. “You got depth, but you’re not replacing these players. They’re just too good.”

Back when Mamer played in London, the Knights’ coaching staff often showed him video of Kane, another former Knight and top-five pick. It’s the comparison that persists most with Mamer, and Kane was Kané’s second deal with the Blackhawks that came up all the time during the long lead-up to his new deal.

Had he gotten paid exactly like Kane on his own second deal — with a hit worth about 11 percent of the cap — Mamer would have ended up at around $9 million. That difference, nearly $2 million, obviously isn’t nothing, but Kane’s deal (and this part’s often forgotten) was for five years, a year less than Mamer and signed almost 10 years ago, long before the current revolution of young players demanding (and now, getting) a larger slice of the pie.

It was also before his entry-level contract had even expired. He was less than halfway to what was then a career-best 88 points in his third NHL season. In other words, his track record at the time wasn’t as full as Mamer’s.

The Blackhawks closed that season with their first Stanley Cup in 49 years. Though they probably should have forced things along more urgently last summer, the organization was facing a difficult but not unenviable position (who wouldn’t want all that young talent!) in which their three big young talents all came up for renewal around the same time. A changing RFA landscape, along with the pressure of not denting a Cup-worthy core and not repeating the Nylander saga with Mamer, led them to resolutions that weren’t quite what was originally envisioned.

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The Blackhawks closed that season with their first Stanley Cup in 49 years, so there’s that.

But take a look at how closely Mamer’s first three seasons align with Kane at that the same stage of his career. From all the bold numbers on Kane’s side, you’d think he had the definite edge but dig a little deeper. Notice Mamer’s not-insignificant advantage in even-strength production, and while the overall point totals are basically the same, Mamer managed his numbers with more than 300 fewer minutes.

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That’s not to suggest that Marner was better than Kane, or will be better than Kane, or that he’ll keep skipping along Kane’s rich career path, which included two more Cups, a Conn Smythe, an Art Ross and that Hart. It’s only to suggest that his new deal isn’t so egregious in light of what he’s done, what he’s going to do and how he fits into that changing landscape.

For now, Marner might trail only McDavid, Panarin, Matthews, Erik Karlsson, Drew Doughty and Tavares with his new cap hit. But he sits 14th in cap hit percentage (13.4 percent). The cap should continue to rise (quite possibly under a new CBA), meaning that what’s now a quite healthy slice of the pie will probably shrink in the context of what the Leafs have to spend each year.

Meaning this will get easier for the Leafs GM as things roll along.

“The way that we evaluate these things, we think that all of the contracts we’ve signed, their production and output and what they bring to the organization will match their level of pay,” Dubas said. “And I think we all hope they exceed it, and that sets them up well for their next contracts.”

Dubas has always said that having four players eating such a large chunk of the pie means the responsibility rests on him and his staff in finding players wherever possible to surround that core — an Andreas Johnsson in the draft here, a Jake Muzzin in trade there, a Trevor Moore plucked from college and developed elsewhere. It’s much easier to find the supporting cast than it is the stars, the ones who truly make the whole thing go.

“It’s been interesting,” Dubas said of signing Marner, along with Nylander and Matthews before him. “Every single one of the players is different. They have different personalities. They have different backrounds. They bring different things to the club. And it was a very unique situation. We’ve got young players who are extraordinarily talented and already some of the best at what they do. I think we all have room to grow. And I think they would be the first to tell you that they’re not close to reaching their potential yet. And it’s our job to try to help them get there, and their job to put the work in to continue to get there. But they’ve already accomplished great things in the league individually, and I know in speaking to all of them, it’s important for them that now we’re continuing to grow as a team and we’re starting to work towards greater team success.”

Marner is signed until 2025, one year longer than Matthews. (Tom Szczerbowski / USA Today)

It was Marner’s reluctance at having a repeat of the Nylander saga that seemed to nudge things along. He and Dubas sat down this past Thursday, the day that camp opened in Toronto, and delved deep into the whys of their respective positions.

“I just expressed to Kyle that I don’t want to miss any games,” Marner said, with members of the Leafs coaching staff and front office, including team president Brendan Shanahan, looking on. “I want to make sure that I’m with the team as soon as possible.”

Said Dubas: “I think it was great for Mitch to explain to me how he felt, and for me to explain to him the reasons why we’re at where we’re at, and what we were proposing and so on and so forth. And then about how he fit into the team, and about how the team was going to move forward, and everything of that nature.”

As you might expect, Dubas looked like someone with a major weight off his shoulders. He signed Tavares seven weeks after he took over as Leafs GM. Nylander took until December. Matthews followed in February. And now, Marner a couple of days into camp in September. Those are some big dominoes to tip over in a very short time, and they lock in the core of the team for the foreseeable future. Next up is Frederik Andersen in 2021, and a year after that, Morgan Rielly in 2022.

For now, the Leafs can rest, though. Happy they have Marner back. Happy it’s over. And feeling no regret.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Can the Leafs win with their current cap structure after signing Mitch Marner?

By Dom Luszczyszyn Sep 14, 2019

Well, the dramatic saga is finally over: Mitch Marner has signed a massive six-year deal that will pay him $10.893 million per season, an unprecedented figure for an RFA winger.

The contract is a massive overpayment relative to his comparables with similar restricted status, no question about it, in which the ballpark of $9.5 million would’ve been closer in line to previous deals for players of Marner’s standing. That’s no secret, but the fact it is an overpay is clearly by design, as Marner’s camp had goals of resetting the market closer to what younger stars deserve based on their on-ice value. Kyle Dubas and Co. lost the battle here, but this might be the new normal as players fight for their rights. We’ll see what happens with Brayden Point and Mikko Rantanen as a result.

In the context of on-ice value, Marner should very much be worth the money (there’s a 74 percent chance he brings positive value, though Sebastian Aho, for example, does so 89 percent of the time) as the expected value from the deal is 17 wins, an average of 2.8 wins per season. That’s just under what you’d expect from an elite forward (around three wins), something my model expects Marner to be through the life of his deal.

He’s an incredibly crafty player, one of the league’s most gifted playmakers and a guy who drove goal production to a strong degree on one of the league’s most potent lines last season. He’s excellent with the puck on his stick, downright captivating to watch and should be worth closer to 3.6 wins on average over the next six years as a result, a total difference of nearly five wins over the six seasons. Marner projects to be one of the 15 most valuable players in the league over the next six seasons.

Age is incredibly important here, with research showing that a player’s peak generally occurs from age 23 to 26. This contract locks up all of Marner’s prime years and paying for it is much more palatable than doing the same for a 28-year-old who likely declines through the life of the deal. I’ve made the comparison before and I’ll do it again: Artemi Panarin got $11.6 million on the open market, and I have few doubts about who’ll be a more valuable player over the next six seasons. Though the deal might look iffy now given the context of past RFA deals, it probably won’t sooner rather than later. He’s worth the dough even if players in his position of contractual leverage haven’t historically been compensated as handsomely as he has.

The error range is important here. The shaded blue area represents one standard deviation of results in both directions, and the expected value from the deal — the aforementioned 2.8 wins per season — lands near the bottom of his projected distribution of results. It’s why he has such a high chance of providing positive value despite the lofty salary. Regression is likely after his incredible performance in 2018-19 — the 3.6-win projection falls right in between his past two years — but even if he doesn’t live up to that season, he shouldn’t drop off to a point at which he doesn’t live up to his current salary.

Those salary figures at the bottom of the chart above (which are likely a bit eye-popping) represent open-market value based on his likely win rate, all higher than his current deal, which is no surprise given he has an above-average chance of exceeding expectations. RFA value is a different story (the chart for that can be found in this story from the start of the summer), and in that vein, it’s going to be a difficult pill to swallow for Leafs fans after seeing past RFAs become bargains during the life of their deals — oftentimes at the moment of signing. Marner likely won’t be to nearly the same degree at that price point, and that’s the problem, even if he does bring positive value overall.

While the price is unprecedented, it’s not exactly a bad bet given what he can provide, and that’s a difficult dichotomy with which to reconcile.

As a result of the deal, though, the Leafs are now in a very precarious position cap-wise. They’re paying Auston Matthews, John Tavares and Marner $11 million each, give or take, leaving the team in uncharted waters in terms of salary-cap structure. All three are among the league’s seven highest-paid players’ $5.96 million deal (which sure looks like a bargain now, doesn’t it?) to the fray and the team will be spending roughly $40.5 million on four players. Their best players, yes, but that’s still 49.7 percent of the salary cap, which, again, is unprecedented.

That leads to two questions: Does blowing half your budget on your four best players make sense and can a team compete for a Stanley Cup under those constraints?

While hockey is often viewed as a team game in which every part matters, some parts matter exponentially more than others. Under the salary cap, stars have never been paid accordingly, though, due to a bifurcated middle-class market. Paying for the actual value coming in might be the new normal in the NHL, and while it might sound crazy on the surface, much of a team’s value does come from its four best players, generally speaking. According to GSVA, the average roster is worth about 20.4 wins above replacement, while the average value of the team’s top four players is 10.4 wins, or 51 percent.

As you’ll notice above, the data is skewed a bit by also-rans at the bottom of the standings without much of a supporting cast — the top five teams in top-four percentage of team value all fit the bill. If you look at just the league’s best 16 teams, the percentage of value brought in by a team’s four best players is 49.6 percent, almost identical to what the Leafs are paying.

The Leafs’ four are worth 48.3 percent of the team’s total on-ice value, and that’s actually rather low for a team with such a strong top end (it’s fourth-most valuable in the league), thanks to their depth. There are nine teams whose top four players are projected to be worth 11 wins or more combined, and they’re worth 53.8 percent of a team’s total value.

Half doesn’t seem that crazy now, and it reminds me of the mob scene from “The Dark Knight” when the Joker is laughed out of the room and called crazy for wanting half of everyone’s money to dispose of the Batman. The stakes are obviously quite different, but I get the sense the common sentiment surrounding the Leafs’ current structure is similar now that they’re paying half to just four players. In five years’ time, I doubt it looks that crazy, especially when the cap rises (significantly with the new TV deal) and the percentage moves farther away from 50 percent.

As for whether the team can contend under such circumstances, a top-five team carries 25 wins of value overall, so call that the contender cutoff. The Leafs’ top four is at 13 1/2 projected wins, so as long as the other half is allocated properly financially, it shouldn’t be a problem at all finding another 11 1/2 wins from the other 14 players. I mean, the team is already well ahead of that 25-win cutoff as we speak, so that answers that. Everyone fits this year — barely, but they fit, and the players who do form a collectively strong group.

Whether they can continue to be that strong in the future is the challenge, though, and as long as they have their core, it shouldn’t be a huge issue. After all, getting three guys even worth $11 million is the hard part. That they offer that much value in the span of one roster spot alone is a substantial edge, and the Leafs have three such players. It means the other 16 only need to be worth about 0.72 wins apiece. Piece of cake, now and going forward.

That’s because the gap in value between the elite and the middle class is substantially larger than the one between the middle class and the bottom of the lineup. An elite forward is worth three wins or more, while the average forward is worth around one win, meaning those players on second and third lines are often closer to replacement level than they are to elite. That’s the group that’s been overpaid for far too long relative to its services, and as long as the team stays away from that, it should be fine.

Having the Leafs’ big three, plus Nylander, is a huge advantage for the team despite the price tag attached, and the rest of the roster can be filled efficiently without missing much of a beat. That’s especially true if the team’s core players can elevate marginal players into looking better than they are, something all four have shown to do in the past.

But while it does make sense and the team can still very much contend, the problem the Leafs face is that for the time being, they’re playing under different rules than other clubs, putting the team at their own personal competitive disadvantage.

Few teams might have what the team has up front, but no other team is paying for it the way Toronto is. The Lightning aren’t spending 50 percent
of their salary cap on Nikita Kucherov, Steven Stamkos, Victor Hedman
and Brayden Point. (Well, unless Point signs a $14.5 million deal.) The
Bruins aren’t spending 50 percent on Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand,
David Pastrnak and Charlie McAvoy. The Penguins aren’t spending 50
percent on Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Jake Guentzel and Kris
Letang. You could go on and on throughout the league. The four highest-
paid contracts take up 37 percent of a team’s cap hit on average, thanks
to many other stars taking much friendlier deals. The Leafs’ 49.7 percent
is 5 percentage points higher than the next-highest team: Tampa Bay’s
44.7 percent.

By price tag, the difference is even more staggering, as $40.5 million is
$6 million more than the next-priciest four: San Jose’s (though Tampa
Bay’s group will likely be higher after Point’s deal). For some teams such
as Carolina and Colorado, the difference is significantly larger.

That’s a huge market inefficiency mostly due to timing that is now
unavailable to Toronto, which will instead pay top dollar for its superstars.
Worth it in a vacuum? Yes. Relative to other teams? Probably not. A lot
will depend on where the market goes after this, and if Marner did indeed
set a new precedent for RFAs, then it won’t be long until many more
teams go through the same trouble.

For now in Toronto, it means the team will have to be extra creative in
filling the supporting cast (something the Leafs have already been
proactive about this summer), more so than any other team. The margin
for error on any signing increases significantly, putting even more
pressure on the front office to build around its expensive core.

In terms of “problems to have,” having such an expensive core of elite
talent is one that many teams will take with open arms, especially if they
do expect to provide positive value like all four do here. When it comes to
overpaying market prices, it’s better to do it here at the top of the roster
with three skaters just entering their prime, where they’ll likely deliver the
goods in terms of on-ice value. Market, schmarket. Signing one of the
best free agents ever was probably also a no-brainer.

It’s far from ideal, obviously, but if the alternative use of cap space is
overpaying middle-of-the-road free agents who don’t move the needle to
nearly the same degree, if at all, this pill looks much easier to swallow for
Toronto. The Leafs should be just fine.

They can and they did, but it cost them. Time will tell if it was worth the
price. That’s measured in Cup rings, and though it wasn’t easy or cheap,
the Leafs have still put themselves in a good position to be a Stanley Cup
contender for this season and beyond.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Cody Eakin isn’t dwelling on ending to Golden Knights’ season

By Ben Gotz

September 14, 2019 - 7:02 PM

Cody Eakin spent all but one week this summer at his lake house near Manitoba, fishing for his dinner and relaxing after a career year.

Not once during that time did the Golden Knights center watch his final play of the 2018-19 season. He’s not sure he ever will.

“Maybe, if it comes up,” Eakin said. “But I’ve seen it enough, you know?”

The play in question was the major penalty heard ’round the NHL. Eakin was given a controversial five-minute penalty and game misconduct for cross-checking San Jose Sharks captain Joe Pavelski after a faceoff in Game 7 of their first-round playoff series.

The call, which was derided by teammate Jonathan Marchessault postgame and led to an apology by the NHL, gave the Sharks life down 3-0. They eliminated the Knights in overtime, and Eakin could only watch from the locker room.

It was a crushing finish to a season in which he scored a career-high 22 goals and 41 points, and a rule change requiring video review for all major penalties in June probably didn’t soften the blow.

Eakin doesn’t seem to be dwelling on that, though. He’s just ready to get back to work.

“I’ve got a short memory,” he said. “That’s about enough as advice as I need (on how to move past it).”

He’ll be motivated to do so, as his contract expires in the offseason. He and the rest of the Knights also get a rematch with the Sharks in their season opener.

“The guys were really working hard this summer because we were pretty upset with the way things ended,” left wing Max Pacioretty said. “We want to come out with a vengeance this year.”

Rookie watch

Coach Gerard Gallant used the words “perfect” and “ideal” to describe the first two days of training camp leading up to Sunday’s preseason opener against the Arizona Coyotes at T-Mobile Arena.

He also said “three or four” rookies that participated in three games at the Anaheim Rookie Faceoff last week have caught his eye. He declined to name them, worried that he would forget somebody.

“The rookie games didn’t go as well, but I’m watching some of those kids here and they’re playing better here than they did in the rookie games,” Gallant said. “That’s a good sign.”

Punishment laps

Saturday was only the second day of training camp, but Gallant sent a message by having right wing Alex Tuch skate two laps in practice as punishment.

“They went offsides three times,” Gallant said with a smile, referring to Tuch’s line in a 3-on-2 drill. “It’s only fair. Tuchy’s an easy target, too.”

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 09.15.2019
Golden Knights’ Gerard Gallant to stick with trusted top 6

By David Schoen
September 14, 2019 - 6:41 PM
Updated September 14, 2019 - 9:17 PM

Jonathan Marchessault and Mark Stone formed immediate chemistry while playing for Team Canada this spring.

It seems perfectly reasonable to speculate the high-scoring wingers could work equally well together on a line with the Golden Knights.

“I don’t care what they did in the world championships,” coach Gerard Gallant snarled.

Welp, so much for that.

The Knights fell from top five in the NHL in goals scored during their first season to middle of the pack, and the dip partly explains their 16-point difference in the Pacific Division standings.

But Gallant indicated after practice Saturday at City National Arena he has no intention of deviating from the top two forward lines he finished last season with in an effort to find more offense.


“I know one thing: Stone and Pacioretty and Stastny played real well in the playoffs last year,” Gallant said. “You guys can say what you want about coaching, but they were pretty good. So, we’ll see where it goes.

“I don’t care if we get more goals as long as we get more wins. But it works hand in hand, obviously.”

Led by its dynamic first line of Karlsson, Marchessault and Smith, the Knights surprised even their coach during their inaugural season and ranked fifth in the NHL with 268 goals (3.27 per game).

The additions of Pacioretty, a five-time 30-goal scorer, and Stastny to a revamped second line was supposed to complement Karlsson’s line and provide even more offense.

But that took time to materialize, as Stastny missed three months after he was injured in the third game and opposing teams allowed the Knights’ speedy attack less time and space. Gallant even temporarily broke up the Karlsson line on a handful of occasions in an effort to ignite the offense.

The Knights finished 13th overall in scoring with 246 goals, more than a quarter of a goal per game difference (3.00 per game).

“Obviously you want your offense to be good, but we want as a team that our game is good,” Marchessault said. “I think we’d rather give up a lot less goals than score a lot of goals. Overall, I think our general play needs to be as a top team in the league.”

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 09.15.2019
Last year’s new guys ready for second act with Golden Knights

By Justin Emerson
Sunday, Sept. 15, 2019 | 2 a.m.

One year ago, Max Pacioretty was enjoying fifth day as a Golden Knight, Mark Stone was still an Ottawa Senator and Paul Stastny had yet to wear a Vegas sweater in a game. Hockey players aren’t different from anyone making a big move in needing time to adjust their new city, coworkers and life.

A year later, an entire Golden Knights line has spent a summer knowing where they would play and when, and the second act begins for them at 1:30 p.m. today when the Golden Knights open their preseason slate against the Arizona Coyotes at T-Mobile Arena.

“When I flew in here and kind of looked around and I realized this is was the group and the organization that I was going to be with for the next eight seasons I couldn’t have been happier,” Stone said. “It’s a simple group but we have fun, we enjoy coming to the rink, we enjoy being around each other.”

Rewind to last summer when Pacioretty and Stone were under contract with different teams and Stastny was a free agent. It takes a toll on player when he needs to uproot his life to come across the continent and a join a team in a city he has maybe visited only a handful of times.

Stone's acquisition got the most attention when he came over at the trade deadline. But remember Pacioretty spent a summer in Montreal hearing that he might get traded but not knowing when or where. He was traded to Vegas on Sept. 10, three days before training camp began.

“I was sitting here last year in the hotel worrying about a lot of stuff — all good things — but where to live and what to expect after being in an organization for 10 years,” Pacioretty said. “I feel really comfortable right now. We’ve been here for about six weeks. The kids started school, I have everything set up ready to go and try to have the best camp possible.”

This year Pacioretty arrived in Vegas with time to spare before the preseason, spending time with the facility and around his teammates. He participated in a charity golf tournament two weeks ago and got to live life in town outside of hockey. He’s also not asked to be the new guy on a team that went to the Stanley Cup Final.

“Obviously I wanted to help the team but at the same time they had so much success prior to the trade that I was a little bit walking on eggshells,” Pacioretty said. “Knowing now that I’ve kind of earned my right to be a part of this team and spend a lot of the summer here and spend it with the guys and get close to them, it’s a much different feeling in camp for me this year.”

What was arguably Vegas’ best line last season did not exist in full until February. Two-thirds of it wasn’t there until mid-September, and the first didn’t arrive until Stastny signed on July 1. The three were terrific during the regular season and virtually unstoppable in the postseason.

If a year of being together in the summer makes them any better, watch out.

“The more you play, the more you build (chemistry), the more you hang out off the ice and talk the game and talk to your roommates, obviously the more trust you have in each other,” Stastny said. “The closer we are as guys, all of us, I think the closer we’ll be as a team.
Golden Knights’ Shea Theodore ready for camp after cancer scare

By Justin Emerson (contact)
Saturday, Sept. 14, 2019 | 2 a.m.

There’s a word Shea Theodore associates himself with these days. It’s an innocuous enough word, if not one you would consider for someone who spent the offseason the way he did.

The Golden Knights defenseman revealed Thursday on The Players’ Tribune he beat testicular cancer this summer and is fully recovered. He spoke to the media in Las Vegas on Friday and fell back to one feeling that summed up his takeaway from the ordeal.

Lucky.

“Failing that drug test and the result that came of it, I was extremely lucky,” Theodore said. “The doctors have got a close watch on me and I’ve done all the tests and I’m ready to go for camp. I feel good.”

As detailed in his essay, Theodore failed a drug test while in Slovakia for the IIHF World Championships in May. The hormone that flagged the testers was called hCG, which though normally found in pregnant women, can be a sign of testicular cancer. When he returned to North America, blood tests showed a lump that needed to be removed.

What scares Theodore the most is not what happened, but what would have happened if the circumstances were different. If the Golden Knights advanced further in the postseason he wouldn’t have been playing for Team Canada. If he wasn’t in Slovakia, he may not have gotten drug tested. If he didn’t know he had cancer, it could have spread.

“It’s crazy. When you look at it like that, it’s not something anyone can write up and anyone can plan for,” Theodore said. “I was very fortunate to find out that way.”

Theodore didn’t skate as the Golden Knights practiced for the first time Friday, though it’s not because of the cancer recovery. He’s healed and ready to get on the ice, but tweaked something during an informal skate and is considered day-to-day.

“It really makes you stop and realize there are obviously way more important things than hockey,” center Paul Stastny said. “The first reaction is hoping that he’d be OK. Selfishly sometimes it’s like ‘Oh is he going to be ready for the start of the season?’ When you take a step back and have perspective you just realize, no no no, hopefully they can get rid of the cancer and go from there and day-to-day life for him is back to normal.”

Theodore, who has been a major part of the Golden Knights in their initial two seasons, just turned 24 last month. That adds to the shock of an otherwise healthy athlete getting the diagnosis of a nightmare.

“You never want one of your loved ones to get touched by it,” forward Jonathan Marchessault said. “It’s bad news there, but you have to think he’s blessed and lucky. Look at him right now, he’s great, he’s doing awesome. I cannot be more happy for him.”

It’s an important season for Theodore on the ice. He took a step forward with career-bests in goals (12), assists (25) and points (37) in the 2018-19 regular season, and followed it up with eight points in seven postseason games and seven points in 10 games at Worlds.

Theodore will be looked upon to be one of Vegas’ best defensemen this season. While the team’s first thought is making sure he’s cancer-free, the Golden Knights are thrilled to be getting him on the ice as well.

“I thought it was really courageous by Shea and real scary for him,” General Manager Kelly McCrimmon said. “He’s a very talented player, he is an effortless skater that we expect is really going to develop for a few years. I think he’s improved so much and he has all kinds of potential still.”

Testicular cancer is on the rarer side of male cancers, but is the most common type among those aged 15-35, according to the Mayo Clinic. Luckily for Theodore, it is one of the most treatable, and he found it early enough that it did not spread to another part of his body.
Kids Back In School; VGK Boys Back On Ice In Las Vegas

September 14, 2019
By Alan Snel

The coach is relaxed, but still not too chatty about the juicy stuff like identifying which Vegas Golden Knights prospects have caught his eye. VGK defenseman Jon Merrill enjoyed spending time in Denver during the summer. And the Golden Knights flagman is back waving his beloved VGK flags.

The boys of hockey are back on the ice at City National Arena, where VGK players with familiar names like Jon Marchessault, William Karlsson and Alex Tuch joined several dozen other players in a scrimmage on the day before the Golden Knights play their first of seven preseason games.

The Vegas Golden Knights' 2018-19 season ended painfully and in a bizarre manner in April when the Knights blew a 3-0 lead in Game 7 of the first round playoff series to the San Jose Sharks thanks to a five-minute major penalty in the third period. The Sharks poured in four power play goals during the five-minute major before beating the Knights in overtime, 5-4, and sending the VGK home after the expansion team reached the Stanley Cup Finals in its inaugural season the year before in the 2017-18 season.

These days, ticket sales are strong and VGK merchandise is being sold around the planet as owner Bill Foley has the lofty goals of winning multiple Stanley Cups and making the Knights a worldwide brand. Fans are hungry to return to T-Mobile Arena on the Strip, with four preseason games serving as rejuvenation for many South Nevada residents to don their jerseys and VGK accessories.

The boots are $325 and the leopard print jacket is $235 at the team store at the VGK training center.

And naturally, superfan Matt Helfst — the famed Flagman — returned to the Knights' training center/headquarters at City National Arena in Summerlin with his flags. He was given a spot in the stands where Helfst was allowed to wave his Golden Knights flags.

“They're being much nicer to me today,” Helfst said of receiving permission to engage in his flag-waving activities.

LVSportsBiz.com LOADED: 09.15.2019
Evgeny Kuznetsov doesn't need our scorn. He needs our support.

By Barry Svrluga

September 14 at 6:14 PM

What Evgeny Kuznetsov needs right now isn’t wrath or scorn but support. The three-game suspension the NHL handed the Washington Capitals forward Saturday was a punishment. What he needs is a path forward.

The good news for Kuznetsov — and no one else — will determine whether that path is a direct line to becoming a consistent, accountable, productive professional or whether it’s the meandering and (occasionally) maddening route his career has been on thus far.

Even after Kuznetsov faced questions from the media and spoke for the first time since he tested positive for cocaine during the world championships in May, there’s only so much we can know. Is he someone who used the drug once, regretted it and moved on? Or does he have a problem for which he needs help?

“I said everything in the statement already,” Kuznetsov said Saturday, referring to a release issued by the Capitals.

Forget that he didn’t address that issue in his statement. This isn’t a time for condemnation, because whether he dabbled and put it down or was a regular user, he has been outed. That has the benefit of being good for Kuznetsov personally and professionally because he can get himself right. It also, in a roundabout way, can be good for the Capitals.

Regardless of the magnitude of the problem — minuscule or major — exposure was the best route to making sure Kuznetsov acts, each and every day, not only like one of the centerpieces of an organization that has entrusted him with much money and responsibility but also like a 27-year-old father of two, a more important role.

On Saturday at the Capitals’ Arlington training facility, Kuznetsov said a lot of the right things.

“There’s a lot of people who are supporting me, and I’m going to appreciate it,” Kuznetsov said. “And as a hockey player, the only chance to say thanks to them is to prove on the ice. Growing as a person, I want to get better, and I’m going to learn from this, for sure.”

But he also said a few things that seemed misplaced, incongruous with what he was facing, which were serious questions about his state of mind, his maturity, his professionalism, his reliability, his health. Keep in mind: Kuznetsov is inherently loopy, a goofball who wants to lighten the mood in any room with a joke. So often over the monotony of an 82-game season, that works. Faced with serious questions about his own accountability, that might not be the best approach.

Either way, the core question for a Capitals fan — shoot, for a Capitals coach or a Capitals executive or a Capitals teammate — would be: Evgeny, did you have off-ice issues that affected your performance in 2018-19, which was, shall we say, uneven?

“Probably no,” Kuznetsov said. “Of course, after 70 points, a bad year, you look for the bounce back, right?”

Without question, he said it flippantly. Seventy points is a lousy year, and you have to look for off-ice reasons that caused it? Please.

Here’s where Kuznetsov needs to be careful, even as so much of what he says is contrite, even as teammates have publicly and privately shown support. The Capitals believe he is an elite talent. Yes, the 72 points Kuznetsov produced in 76 games last year could be considered a career achievement for players of a certain ability. List any of those players, and the Capitals believe Kuznetsov is more talented. What Kuznetsov didn’t say: that 72-point season featured one 25-game stretch in which he scored just one goal. Too many nights, you didn’t notice he was on the ice, and he’s way too good for that.

So had a video of Kuznetsov with a substance that appeared to be cocaine never surfaced, had he not tested positive, this training camp would have opened with questions about who Kuznetsov will be: the best-guy-on-the-ice-every-night character who appeared during the Caps’ run to the 2018 Stanley Cup or the will-he-show-up-or-not enigma who disappeared in last spring’s first-round exit? It’s an important issue for the future of the organization given that after cornerstones Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom have moved on — it’s coming, people — Kuznetsov will remain. He has six years remaining on his eight-year, $62.4 million deal.

“There’s more there,” Coach Todd Reirden said Saturday.

Everyone on the Capitals realizes that. Forty-five players registered more points than Kuznetsov last year. You think Kuznetsov thinks there are 45 better offensive players in the league? He shouldn’t, because there aren’t.

Still, drawing a direct line between Kuznetsov’s positive test and his inconsistent performance is risky. The Capitals themselves aren’t doing that, not in the front office, not in the dressing room. I asked Ovechkin the other day whether, as the team’s captain, he had reached out to Kuznetsov in the wake of the news.

“Not as captain,” Ovechkin said. “As a friend.”

That’s the right approach. Put aside the hockey. If you need help, we’re here, in the room or in the stands. Should you choose to cheer Kuznetsov when he first appears in the regular season at Capital One Arena, which would be Oct. 8 against Dallas, those cheers shouldn’t be seen as an endorsement of his previous choices but as support for the pledges he has made to be better because of it.

“I’m not a bad person,” Kuznetsov said Saturday.

You so want to take his word for it, and yet trust must be rebuilt. When the video first appeared, Kuznetsov issued a statement that he had “never” done drugs. He initially said that to both the Capitals and the NHL, too, and while the league said his suspension was for “inappropriate conduct” that we would assume related to the subsequent positive test, it could have related to misleading the team and the league when the issue first came up.

Either way, the time for judging is tomorrow and the next day and the next and into January and through June because that’s when Evgeny Kuznetsov will show us what path he has chosen.

“I feel bad for my friends, for my teammates, for the organization, for the fans that they have to deal with this news,” he said. “But I will pay back more than people give me right now.”

Support that idea, and help him follow through. Maybe Evgeny Kuznetsov slipped up once. Maybe he had a full-blown problem. What matters is the path ahead. It is his to choose.

Washington Post LOADED: 09.15.2019
Evgeny Kuznetsov, suspended after positive cocaine test, says, 'I'm going to learn from this.'

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

Washington Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov has been suspended three regular season games without pay for "inappropriate conduct," the NHL announced Saturday. Kuznetsov will not appeal the suspension.

Kuznetsov tested positive for cocaine while representing the Russian national team at the world championships in May, earning a four-year ban from international play from the International Ice Hockey Federation.

"I agreed to the suspension," Kuznetsov said Saturday, the first time he has addressed the incident with reporters. "I want to say thanks to this organization, to the [NHL Players' Association], to the NHL for their support and to the fans. There's a lot of people who are supporting me, and I'm going to appreciate it, and as a hockey player, the only chance to say thanks to them is to prove on the ice. Growing as a person, I want to get better and I'm going to learn from this, for sure."

The IIHF considers cocaine a prohibited drug. The NHL does not, so typically a first positive test does not lead to a suspension, and though the league didn't initially announce any discipline for Kuznetsov, it left open the possibility pending a meeting with Commissioner Gary Bettman to review his conduct. That meeting took place Monday and probably centered on how Kuznetsov apparently misled league officials in late May, when a video of Kuznetsov sitting beside two lines of a white, powdery substance during a team trip to Las Vegas last season circulated on social media.

At the time, he issued a statement denying that he ever used drugs, and the Capitals and NHL also issued separate statements deeming the matter closed after conducting their own investigations and accepting his explanation. Kuznetsov maintains that he did not take drugs the night the video was taken, according to a person with knowledge of the situation.

Asked if he regrets putting out a statement in May saying he never used drugs, Kuznetsov said: "I'm sorry, but I cannot add anything more. I want to move forward, and the one thing I can do best is play hockey. I feel bad for my friends, for my teammates, for the organization, for the fans that they have to deal with this news. But I will pay back more than people give me right now."

NHL players who test positive for cocaine or marijuana may be contacted by the league's Substance Abuse and Behavioral Health Program and recommended to a treatment program, but it's not required. After the IIHF announced Kuznetsov's positive test last month, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly released a statement saying Kuznetsov voluntarily sought help through an education and counseling program and agreed to a regular testing protocol as part of that program.

Kuznetsov called this a "pretty hard summer" and said he "learned how to be father of two children" in the process. He and his wife welcomed a baby boy, Fedor, in early June. He decided to stay off social media and focus on his family.

"He and I have had a number of conversations," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said. "This is a really — I think it's a career-defining time in his life. So I think he's probably a little bit relieved to just be able to move past it and realized that the league has made the decision that they want to make and now we can get totally moving forward. But in our conversations, him and my relationship is one that it's important that I am there for him, but I also make sure that he's accountable for what's happened and realizing that how he reacts to this adversity is what's important to me."

Kuznetsov was the Capitals' leading scorer in their run to the Stanley Cup in 2018, tallying 12 goals and 20 assists in 24 games, and Washington is hopeful he can return to that form after what General Manager Brian MacLellan previously referred to as a "frustrating" last season. His overall play was inconsistent, with 21 goals and 51 assists in 76 games.

"He's one of the best players in the league, in my mind," MacLellan said. "He's a big part of our organization, a big part of our team, and he was a big part of our Stanley Cup win. He's an important member for us, and we have expectations that he'll get back to that level and maybe even better going forward."

The Capitals will get some salary cap relief while Kuznetsov is suspended because his $7.8 million cap hit will be off the books until he returns Oct. 8 against the Dallas Stars. With a projected 23-man roster, the team is currently more than $1.3 million over the salary cap ceiling of $81.5 million, according to CapFriendly.com, so Kuznetsov's suspension will buy them an additional week to become compliant. With Kuznetsov not available to start the season, Washington probably will have to carry at least one extra forward in addition to him. The Capitals open the season Oct. 2 in St. Louis against the defending Stanley Cup champion Blues.

"There is some people who look for motivation in their life and there is always challenges in your life, and for me this opportunity is pretty clear," Kuznetsov said. "I can prove to a lot of people that I'm still a pretty good player."

Washington Post LOADED: 09.15.2019
Evgeny Kuznetsov suspended three games by NHL over cocaine test

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times - Saturday, September 14, 2019

The NHL suspended Washington Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov three games without pay to start the season following a positive test for cocaine at the IIHF World Championships. The league made the announcement Saturday.

Kuznetsov will not appeal the suspension, according to the league. He will miss the Capitals' first two road games and the home opener Oct. 5 against Carolina. He is eligible to return Oct. 8 for a home game against the Dallas Stars.

In May Kuznetsov tested positive for the drug while playing for the Russian team at worlds, and the IIHF later announced a four-year ban from international competition. The NHL considers cocaine a "drug of abuse" which does not often warrant league punishment.

But before this incident, Kuznetsov was on the record denying ever using illicit drugs after a video leaked showing him in a Las Vegas hotel room sitting next to a table that appeared to have lines of cocaine.

That insincerity may have factored into the NHL’s decision. Kuznetsov met with commissioner Gary Bettman Monday before the league announced its punishment for "inappropriate conduct." Neither cocaine nor drug abuse in general was mentioned in the NHL’s press release.

Kuznetsov released a statement saying that he disappointed his family, teammates and the team and that he would “do everything in my power to win you back with my actions both on and off the ice.”

He later met with reporters.

“There’s a lot of people who are supporting me and I’m going to appreciate it and as a hockey player, the only chance to say thanks to them is to prove on the ice,” Kuznetsov told reporters.

The 27-year-old said he’s learned to be a father to his two children and to stay off social media more.

“I don’t know, it just feels like I spend a lot of time over there, watching some pictures or whatever and then you get so addicted to some comments or people, you know?” he said. “I was focusing more on spending the time with the family and the kids, just getting away from that. It’s actually pretty nice to get away from that.”

Coach Todd Reirden said it will be “a career-defining time” for Kuznetsov, whose production slipped off last year when he posted just 72 points.

“It’s important that I’m there for him, but I also make sure that I understand that he’s accountable for what’s happened and realizing that how he reacts to this adversity is what’s important to me,” Reirden said.

“Whether you’re dealing with your son at home or you’re dealing with young players, for me this is life-changing stuff that we have here, not just for himself but the way that he can impact younger players on our team.”

Washington Times LOADED: 09.15.2019
How Kuznetsov's suspension helps the Caps' salary cap situation

By J.J. Regan September 14, 2019 6:05 PM

ARLINGTON, Va. -- The suspension to Evgeny Kuznetsov means the Capitals will begin their brutal October schedule without one of their top centers for the first three games. There is a silver lining, however, in terms of the salary cap. Generally when a player is suspended, his cap hit continues to count against the team even though he is not playing. According to a team official, however, because the suspension is not a Department of Player Safety issue, his cap hit will not count during this suspension giving Washington a massive $7.8 million worth of cap room to work with for the first few days of the season.

For a team facing some serious cap issues heading into the season, that is a huge break.

Initially, it appeared a Capitals team that was already over the cap would have to find a way to shed enough salary to afford another player to replace Kuznetsov or go the first three games without an extra forward at all. Instead, the extra cap room essentially gives Washington another week to make the tough roster decisions it will ultimately need to make to get under the cap.

““This is something we have to deal with and react accordingly as a team and putting the best players on the ice in the best spots,” head coach Todd Reirden said Saturday. “We’ll start to get a look at some different combinations.”

It is important to note that the Caps will not be banking cap space. This will work in much the same way as long-term injured reserve. Kuznetsov will not count against the cap for the first three games, but Washington will not be recouping the cap space it will not be using in his absence.

Eventually the Caps will have to pick a fourth line and move Chandler Stephenson, Travis Boyd or Brendan Leipsic to Hershey. Djoos’ $1.25 million salary will force someone on defense to get traded or waived. Now, however, those decisions can be made based on actual regular-season games against NHL competition rather than based on training camp projections and preseason games.

This also could be an opportunity for Washington to get younger players into a game they otherwise would not have been able to afford.

““There’s going to be some opportunity potentially for some different guys,” Reirden said. “They should take advantage of an opportunity here that is going to be in front of them.”

The team has raved about Martin Fehervary since returning to camp, does he get one of the first three games? Does the team bring in a prospect forward to play center with Kuznetsov out? Getting Ilya Samsonov and Vitek Vanecek playing time this season is a goal for the team as well. This could give general manager Brian MacLellan an opportunity to get one of them a game without having to place Pheonix Copley on waivers to free up space.

One of the biggest storylines of the Caps’ training camp was the salary cap and how the team intended to get under the ceiling by Oct. 1. The Kuznetsov suspension is not good news for the team, but it does give MacLellan an extra week to make the really tough decisions.

““There’s a lot of things that can possibly happen,” MacLellan said on Thursday during media day. “We’re going to try to play it out until the end. If something makes sense in the meantime, I think we’d pursue it.”

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.15.2019
NHL to suspend Caps center Kuznetsov for start of regular season

By Brian McNally September 14, 2019 10:20 AM

The NHL will suspend Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov for three games for conduct detrimental to the league, according to a press release from the NHL. He is not expected to appeal.

Kuznetsov, 27, tested positive for cocaine at the World Championships in May playing for Russia and was suspended four years by the International Ice Hockey Federation.

That normally would not affect his NHL contract. Under the CBA, “drugs of abuse” like cocaine don’t require a suspension. Instead, the league steers players toward treatment.

Kuznetsov agreed to take advantage of the NHL Players Association’s treatment programs and extra testing. He also arrived in Washington much earlier than normal for European players in August to take part in informal workouts.

But Kuznetsov misled the NHL and the Capitals during an investigation of a video that surfaced on May 27 showing him in a Las Vegas hotel room with a white powdery substance on a table directly in front of him. Kuznetsov insisted he’d never used cocaine, which wasn’t true giving the timing of the failed drug test at Worlds.

The failed IIHF drug test proved that false. Kuznetsov’s positive test came from a sample taken on May 26 the day Russia played the Czech Republic for the bronze medal at Worlds in Slovakia. That was the day before the video appeared on social media.

“We’ve had discussions after, and I think for the most part, he’s been truthful,” Capitals GM Brian MacLellan said at media day on Thursday. “I think we want to get him in a spot where he’s going to make a different choice next time.”

Kuznetsov’s salary-cap hit is $7.8 million per season, but this year his base salary and bonuses amount to $8.4 million. He is expected to forfeit some salary for the suspension and his hit will still count against Washington for the time he is out.

On May 31 the NHL released a statement by deputy commissioner Bill Daly saying the league had reviewed the video, interviewed Kuznetsov and cleared him.

“While we certainly do not condone or endorse some of the decisions he made on the night in question, Mr. Kuznetsov’s account of the events that transpired aligns with other information we have been able to gather, and we have found no basis to question his representations with respect to what did -- and what did not -- occur,” Daly said.

The Capitals also met with Kuznetsov to hear his side of the story and released a statement attributed to him that same day.

“While I have never taken illegal drugs in my life and career, I would like to publicly apologize to the Capitals, my teammates, our fans and everyone else, for putting myself in a bad situation,” Kuznetsov said. “This was a hard lesson for me to learn.”

Kuznetsov was provisionally suspended by the IIHF just two weeks later on June 13 after the failed test. That was upheld and made public on Aug. 23. That led to an in-person interview with NHL commissioner Gary Bettman this week and the subsequent suspension.

The Capitals expressed both disappointment and support for Kuznetsov. MacLellan was asked if cocaine use affected Kuznetsov’s play during an up-and-down season where he still finished with 72 points.

“I mean, that’s hard to say. You’d have to ask him that,” MacLellan said. “There’s no indication that those are correlated. It could’ve had an effect, or other stuff could’ve had an effect.”

No teammate said Thursday that Kuznetsov had to address the group about his cocaine use and the consequences. He is banned from international competition until June of 2023, which means Kuznetsov will miss the 2020 Winter Olympics in Beijing if NHL players are allowed to participate.

“That’s ultimately up to him. Our job right now is we support him,” goalie Braden Holtby said. “There’s always consequences to actions. But main thing that we want to be there for (him) as teammates is to help him come through stronger, whether it’s off the ice, on the ice, to support him to make himself and make our team stronger.”

Kuznetsov will miss games against the defending champion St. Louis Blues on Oct. 2, the New York Islanders on Oct. 4 and the Carolina Hurricanes on Oct. 5.

“It’s very unfortunate what happened,” Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom said. “But at the same time for us as friends, I think it’s really important we support him no matter what and we’re going to fight this together as a family here.”

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.15.2019
With Evgeny Kuznetsov suspended, Caps GM Brian MacLellan details how team will move forward

By Tarik El-Bashir Sep 14, 2019

ARLINGTON, Va. — Although training camp just started to heat up, there was a collective sense of relief Saturday at MedStar Capitals Iceplex.

The Capitals have known for a while that star center Evgeny Kuznetsov tested positive for cocaine at the world championships. What General Manager Brian MacLellan and his staff didn’t know, however, was how it would impact their season.

Now they do. Kuznetsov was suspended three games by the NHL for "inappropriate conduct." He will not appeal the league's ruling.

MacLellan, in a one-on-one interview with The Athletic, said he was shocked by Kuznetsov’s positive test “because of the person” involved, but he had braced himself for a potential suspension due to the publicity Kuznetsov’s missteps received.

“We’ve been in contact since this all started,” MacLellan said from behind his desk at the team’s Ballston headquarters. “We’ve been in communication with (the NHL) trying to keep abreast of what they’re thinking, how they are processing it.

“So I don’t know that we are surprised. I know they’ve gone back and forth internally and with the (NHL Players’ Association) about what they think is fair to address the situation.”

In the near term, the Capitals can now move forward with their planning for the season. They’ll also begin to think about their opening night roster decisions differently. (More on that later.)

Big picture, though, the team’s focus will be on ensuring that Kuznetsov, a key player whom they have invested heavily in, remains on the straight and narrow.

It begins with communication.

“We try to ask, ‘How’s he doing with everything?’” MacLellan said. “We want to make sure that he feels comfortable talking to somebody within our organization. We’ve already had a number of people have conversations with him, just to see if he needs anything. Does he need outside counseling? We just want to give him the opportunity to make that choice.

“We’ll just continually make sure that he’s OK. And if he needs anything, we’re going to be there to support him.”

The conversations began the moment the team learned of the positive test, and they’ll continue until, well, it’s determined they are no longer necessary. As of right now, there’s no time table on that. But MacLellan also believes, from what he’s seen and heard, that Kuznetsov is taking the steps necessary to avoid putting himself in a similar predicament.

“I don’t envision it becoming a problem,” MacLellan said. “He’s been remorseful. In all of the conversations I’ve had with him, he understands that he made a mistake. He’s looking to move forward. He’s going to grow from it. He’s going to grow as a person and as a player.

“It’s an opportunity to reset, get focused and play at a high level. And so far in camp, he’s done that.”

MacLellan said Kuznetsov’s teammates have responded the way he hoped they would.

“There’s been a lot of support,” MacLellan said. “Guys seem to be OK with it and are willing to listen to anything he wants to talk to them about.”

Despite the warm reception Kuznetsov received in the room, MacLellan still would like Kuznetsov to address his teammates as a group – when the time is right.

“That’s been my suggestion,” he said. “I don’t want to make a big deal about it. I think you just address it with your teammates, tell them what you’re thinking, what happened and let’s move forward and have a good year.”

“IT WAS A PRETTY HARD SUMMER FOR ME.” — EVGENY KUZNETSOV. #CAPS PIC.TWITTER.COM/YMIYDVUXPH

— TARIK EL-BASHIR (@TARIK_ELBASHIR) SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

MacLellan intently watches each training camp session from a balcony above the rink. And so far, he likes what he’s seen from Kuznetsov on the ice, as well.

Kuznetsov, who was a regular at the facility over the summer and reported to camp in prime condition, crushed the conditioning test on Friday. He’s looked sharp in drills, too.

“I think he’s looking forward to playing more than he ever has,” MacLellan said. “I get the sense that he wants to make amends.

“And playing hockey is the way that he’ll do that.”

Back to the short term implications.

Kuznetsov’s absence during the regular season’s first week won’t help Washington, of course. He’s one of the Caps’ best players and they visit the defending champion St. Louis Blues and Barry Trotz’s Islanders before opening the home opener against the Hurricanes, the team that ousted the Capitals in the first round last spring.

While Kuznetsov is out, Nicklas Backstrom will center the first line, and Lars Eller will get promoted to the second.

“For three games, I think we’re fine,” MacLellan said. “Lars bumps up and then we’ll make some decisions based on performance (in training camp) on who plays third line (center) for the first three games.”

From an accounting standpoint, the Caps will get some much-needed salary cap relief while Kuznetsov sits out because his $7.8 million salary won’t count against the cap until he returns. The reprieve is just a temporary one, of course, but MacLellan will take every bit of help he can get. The Caps currently sit $1.36 million over the limit with a roster of 23 players, including Kuznetsov, according to CapFriendly.com’s calculations.

But as MacLellan answered questions about the cap ramifications and roster-related details, it was obvious that he was more interested in discussing Kuznetsov, the person, not Kuznetsov, the first-line center.

MacLellan was the Caps’ assistant general manager when Kuznetsov was drafted 26th overall in 2010. He’s seen No. 92 hoist the Stanley Cup. And in recent months, he’s seen him experience the lowest of the lows. Now he’d like to see him play up to his immense potential and leave the questions that have dogged him all summer in the past.

“I want him to be comfortable,” he said. “I want him to enjoy coming to the rink every day. Whatever issues he might have, I want him to have an outlet to talk about them. Hopefully, he’s comfortable here, and he enjoys playing, enjoys his family, has a good life and a good career.

“That’s what I would like to see.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Gabriel Bourque (white jersey) keeps the puck away from Nathan Beaulieu during practice at the Bell MTS Iceplex Saturday.

Let’s be clear: Mason Appleton and Gabriel Bourque aren’t going to be mistaken for Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor. Not now. And likely not ever. Heady, useful players, sure. But hardly the type to bring fans out of their seats or create a buzz around the NHL.

But the cold, hard reality is that with Laine, 21, and Connor, 22, both missing from Winnipeg Jets training camp as a result of ongoing contract disputes, two major vacancies on the wing will need to be filled until the restricted free agents are signed to new deals and return.

And that’s where the likes of Appleton, 23, and Bourque, 28, may come in. They are among a handful of players who are not only battling for depth spots with the team, but also the increased opportunities that may immediately present themselves.

Fans watch a Winnipeg Jets practice with great interest.

There was Appleton on Saturday, skating in Connor’s traditional spot on the left wing beside No. 1 centre Mark Scheifele. Veteran forward Mathieu Perreault was on the right side, and that trio is expected to get at least one pre-season game together this week.

“Terrific player, obviously sees the ice really well and can make plays in all three zones and finish very effectively,” Appleton said of Scheifele.

“It’s fun to play with those high-skilled guys. Obviously, some of the best in the world. It was a good practice.”

Appleton was selected by the Jets in the sixth-round, 188th overall, of the 2015 NHL entry draft. That’s a position that hardly screams future NHL player. But the 6-2, 193-pounder has impressed at every level, finishing up a terrific college career at Michigan State, winning the AHL rookie of the year award with the Manitoba Moose in his first pro season in 2017-18, and then splitting last year between the Moose and Jets, showing he is more than capable on the biggest stage.

“What I’d like to do there is expose them to different styles of games. I’d like to see Mason play with a centre with a tremendous amount of skill and vision and see where he’s at with it. There’s that idea, expose all of these guys to something they don’t get to see a lot so we can see where they’re at in their skill development and then there were always two veteran players with a young player,” coach Paul Maurice said of putting the trio together.

Appleton had three goals and seven assists in 36 games with the Jets last year, and 15 goals and 17 assists in 40 games with the Moose.

“Far more comfortable. Feel better right out of the gates. There’s always those jitters, a little bit, especially in your first few years. But those are non-existent now. It’s just hockey, having fun, enjoying training camp and learning from the process. Feel very comfortable,” Appleton said of his current mindset.

“For me, it’s always about trying to focus on myself and just playing my best game. I can’t control when guys are here. Wherever I’m needed in the lineup, I’m going to do my best to fill that spot and play to the best of my abilities.”

— Mason Appleton

“For me, it’s always about trying to focus on myself and just playing my best game. I can’t control when guys are here. Wherever I’m needed in the lineup, I’m going to do my best to fill that spot and play to the best of my abilities.”

Bourque took a different path to the Jets, signing a one-year, two-way free-agent deal this summer. He has 361 career NHL games on his resume, all in the Central Division with Nashville and then Colorado. He has 38 goals and 59 assists during that time.

“It’s a good group of guys. Bigger and stronger, so that’s good for me. It’s always a tough place to play for when I’ve come here, so it’s nice to finally be on the good side, can’t wait to get in the first game,” Bourque said of landing in Winnipeg.

“For me and my family, it was a good place, with the NHL and AHL in the same place. For sure, the way they play and the style of game and an older group, it was a good fit. After the talk I had with them, it was a good match. A good chance for me to come here.”

The 5-10, 206-pound Bourque is known as a physical checking forward who is especially adept at the penalty kill, which is an area the Jets struggled with at times last season. Losing forward Brandon Tanev in free agency won’t help the cause, so the opportunity was there for Bourque, even before Laine and Connor were no-shows.

“He’s a character guy and a real good pro. Usually when I say that, it’s that he has a clean understanding of what his game is. These are guys that aren’t in your office every two weeks wondering what they can do more of. They know their game. They know how to play it. He’s been in the League enough that he knows other teams as well.... so real good pro and we think he’s going to be able to fit. We can move him around a bit, pretty versatile,” Maurice said.

As for Laine and Connor, there’s no contract developments. However, it was reported Saturday that Laine will join SB Bern, a pro team in Switzerland, to skate and train for the time being.

“Really good. Absolutely. Pro hockey, too. Sticking around and I get it, they join an amateur team that they used to play with or a junior team. But if you can get out on the ice with a pro team and there are men there that are going to train faster, I’m really happy to hear (that).” Truly,” said Maurice, who would prefer to have the Finnish sniper in Winnipeg.

Although their absences are duly noted, Laine’s good friend, Nikolaj Ehlers, said life goes on for everyone else in camp.

“You want them here, no doubt about that. But if the 45 guys we do have here sit and miss them every day, we’re not going to move forward as a team. We obviously want them back, and when they do, we’re excited. But right now, with the new guys that we have coming in, we’re excited to create something with them and see where that takes us. It doesn’t change a thing in this locker room right now,” Ehlers said.

“They’re two guys we’ve played with for three years, they’re like brothers, we want them back. But that’s how it is. We can’t just sit and wait for them to come back, we’ve got to do something while we’re here.”

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 09.15.2019
Ehlers takes coach dad's advice, goes over all his games

Mike McIntyre

Posted: 09/14/2019 9:25 PM

Nikolaj Ehlers wasn't happy with how last season played out, which included a career-low points total and being held without a goal for a second straight playoffs.

And so the streaky Winnipeg Jets winger set out on a summer-long fact-finding mission, hoping to bring more consistency to his game. Every night before bed, Ehlers would pull out his tablet and re-watch every shift of the previous campaign, one game at a time.

It was an idea his hockey coach father gave him.

"I hope I learned something. I went through every single game and looked at what I did a lot, good and bad things. Try to change it now on the ice, try to do it better. And the things I do well, try to keep doing that and work on that as well," Ehlers said Saturday as his teammates hit the ice for the first on-ice sessions of training camp at Bell MTS Icereplex.

"I've learned a lot from my dad, especially since we talk about hockey every single day. It was fun. You learn every year, and this was something new I wanted to try and do."

Ehlers hopes his homework pays off, his importance to the Jets perhaps greater than ever right now. With restricted free agents Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor still without contracts, Winnipeg could start the season missing 64 goals from last year's lineup. Throw in defenceman Dustin Byfuglien currently on a personal leave of absence, with no return date set, and that's a lot of production that is sidelined.

A strong start by Ehlers would be most welcome. The 23-year-old from Denmark had the lowest offensive output of his four-year NHL career last season, with just 37 points (21 goals and 16 assists) in 62 regular-season games, then nothing in six playoff contests.

"I think I've had really good preparation to do my best at camp and put myself in a good position. I feel really good right now and just have to keep working," Ehlers said.

A pair of young Winnipeg prospects were shaken but otherwise unscathed after getting in minor a car accident on Friday.

Forward Kristian Vesalainen and defenceman Sami Niku were together in the same vehicle, which was clipped by another.

"Got in a little bit of a fender bender," is how coach Maurice described it. No other details were provided. As a precaution, the two Finnish skaters were held out of the main group skates on Saturday.

"They came in a little bit sore in the morning," Maurice said.

Vesalainen and Niku skated on their own in a brief side session, along with Jets forward Andrew Copp (minor groin injury) and Manitoba Moose forward Skyler McKenzie, who is still working his way back from off-season surgery. Maurice said all four players could join the main groups as early as today.

With plenty of jobs at stake, it didn't take long for the intensity to ramp up.

There were a number of spirited battle drills and physical contact, including Adam Lowry absolutely crushing 18-year-old rookie defenceman Ville Heinola along the boards early in the morning session on Saturday. The Finnish teen defenceman absorbed it well and got right back up.

"Welcome to the league, man," said Maurice, who singled Heinola out for praise.

"That was a good opportunity for him to get out there. He moves really well. Does it all with his head up. That's welcome to the national league, there's a lot different sizes these guys are used to. There's some big men that move and some little guys you can't catch. I liked his day today," he said.

There was another moment later in the skate, where captain Blake Wheeler beat Heinola in a one-on-one battle drill, then gave the kid a friendly, supportive tap and pulled him to the side, spending a couple minutes going over the last play and what could have been done different.

"(Wheeler) has always been able to do that, reach out to those guys and have a little bit of fun with it, too. When you're 18 years old and you show up to your first NHL camp and you're trying to figure out what door to walk in the building, let alone every drill is brand new for you, none of the players you know, especially the defencemen," Maurice said.

"You can't judge anyone, you don't know their speed or their skill. There's so much going on. Every time one of those veteran guys stops by and slaps those kids on the pads, it makes them a little bit more relaxed and that's what your first pro camp is all about: getting to everybody and getting a little more comfortable."

Heinola is an intriguing skater, for sure, especially with Winnipeg's blue line in a rather depleted state. As a European skater, he could be assigned to the AHL to play pro right off the hop, assuming he doesn't start the season with the Jets. The other option will be to return home to play in Finland.

Expect to see a rather young and inexperienced squad suit up in Winnipeg's first pre-season game Monday night in Edmonton.

Eric Comrie and Mikhail Berdin will share the goaltending duties, meaning Connor Hellebuyck and Laurent Brossoit won't see action until later in the week at Bell MTS Place.

Several other Jets regulars will also be given a pass for the initial dress rehearsal against the Oilers.

Maurice expects Hellebuyck to play three of the remaining six pre-season games, with Brossoit getting two. Comrie would likely get another start along the way.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 09.15.2019
The Winnipeg Jets have hit the ice for the first official on-ice workout at training camp, with a huge crowd of spectators taking in the annual Fan Fest down at Bell MTS Iceplex looking on.

Here's how coach Paul Maurice has worked his lines and defence pairings for the Group A session. Note - Adam Copp is not skating today.

Forwards:
- Mathieu Perreault - Mark Scheifele - Mason Appleton
- Joona Luoto - Adam Lowry - Blake Wheeler
- Nikolaj Ehlers - Bryan Little - Logan Shaw
- Gabriel Bourque - Mark Letestu - Jack Roslovic

 Defence:
- Josh Morrissey - Neal Pionk
- Anthony Bitetto — Nathan Beaulieu
- Logan Stanley - Tucker Poolman
- Ville Heinola - Dmitry Kulikov

Group B skaters, which largely consist of depth forwards, Manitoba Moose regulars and prospects, will skate at noon.

Fan Fest runs until 4 p.m. and is free to public.
BILLECK: Jets’ Stanley defying the doubts he’s faced for years

Scott Billeck

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Doubters. Logan Stanley has had his share of them for a while now.
You didn’t have to venture very far after Stanley was drafted 18th overall by the Winnipeg Jets in the 2016 NHL Draft to get a pretty clear verdict in the court of public opinion.

The Jets had already had the luxury of selecting Patrik Laine with the second pick earlier in that first round. Stanley, whom Winnipeg traded up to get, was your prototypical project pick.
A towering figure at 6-foot-7, Stanley was still growing into his massive frame, which weighs in around 230 pounds these days.
He was raw from a skill standpoint and still working to find his coordination after a growth spurt. He was going to need some time.

Some of those truths bleed into those initial verdicts, which were damning at times.
“Bust.”
“Wasted pick.”

You can Google others. The early, scathing reviews — snap judgments, if you will — aren’t hard to find.
And they found Stanley along the way.
He wasn’t blind to the critics, but then again, it wasn’t necessarily anything new to the then-18-year-old

“I’ve been getting those snap judgments since my first year in junior,” Stanley, now 21, said on Saturday at BellMTS Iceplex after skating with the team’s first group made up, largely, of veterans. “You don’t read into it, but obviously, you’re aware of it. You come across it once and a while and you see it.”

Playing defence is Stanley’s full-time job, but it’s a mental skill, too, one that has allowed him to block out the naysayers.
Getting rattled isn’t part of Stanley’s plan or path to the NHL.

“Kind of in one ear, out the other,” he said. “I know what I have to do to play in the NHL and I know I’m capable of that. That stuff doesn’t bother me.”

Jets head coach Paul Maurice has said in the past, and reiterated on Saturday, that he has all the time in the world for Stanley and his development.

“When we drafted him, our scouts said, ‘This guy is going to take this much time. It’s going to be a while,’” Maurice said. “Not because he’s at a deficit in a lot of things, (the scouts) were right about him.”

Stanley had six goals and 16 assists in 73 games with the Manitoba Moose this past year. He spent this past summer working on his foot speed down low and in the corners, things that he singled out for improvement after his first pro season.

Maurice said he’s not surprised by the instant scrutinies these days.

“I understand that because you turn the TV on now and there’s an 18-year-old or a 19-year-old in the league scoring 50, so there’s the bar,” Maurice said. “But dial this thing back 15 years ago, 20 years ago where it felt like one or two guys who got drafted played because they had to but nobody was ready to play for three or four years, so it was normal.

“A guy went to the minors for three or four years and then he showed up and you said, ‘Geez, boy this guy has developed well.’ (Stanley) hit an unusual window there, where we were drafting high enough that these guys were stepping in to play.”

And some of the guys who didn’t step in right away suffered from some of the criticism that Stanley has been saddled with.

Mark Scheifele, if you remember, was an off-the-board pick in 2011 that left many scratching their heads. Now, he’s one the NHL’s elite two-way centres.

Josh Morrissey was once a not-developing-fast-enough defencemen like Stanley after being taken 13th overall in 2013. Morrissey is now considered one of the best shutdown defenders in the league and beloved by Winnipeg’s fanbase.

“He isn’t behind (the development curve),” Maurice said of Stanely. “I actually think his hands and his feet are ahead of where I thought they would be at this time. This is a big man and he had a real good year of pro last year. I think maybe what (happened to) Logan, it’s more about being drafted by the Jets. We had a run of three or four years where you throw them in (the lineup) and they score 25 (goals) and then your expectation is that they all should.

“This is a big, powerful defenceman that is going to take a while to get up to speed in the NHL. I think he’s going to be a player, I really do. I’ve been very happy with him. He doesn’t need to be the best defenceman to get a look in training camp. He just needs to show that he’s getting better.”

And by all accounts, he is. And some who doubted early on are now beginning to come around on him.
Not that Stanley cares.

While it’s nice to show people something they think he couldn’t do, Stanley said at the end of the day it’s not about that.

“It’s about helping the Winnipeg Jets win hockey games and win the Stanley Cup,” Stanley said.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 09.15.2019
Patrik Laine will train with Swiss hockey team SC Bern, according to reports out of Finland on Saturday.

"There is a shortage in our lineup, so we can offer him both team practice and extra training," Bern head coach Kari Jalonen told the paper. "The decision was not here alone, but made with the club leadership."

Jalonen and Laine have some history as they both won a silver medal at the 2016 IIHF World Hockey Championships. Laine had seven goals and five assists in that tournament.

"I want to help Patrik in his situation," Jalonen said. "We'll probably go forward one week at a time. He won't play for us next season."

Jets head coach Paul Maurice categorized the move as "really good" on Saturday.

"Absolutely. Pro hockey, too," Maurice said. "Sticking around and I get it, they join an amateur team that they used to play with or a junior team, but if you can get out on the ice with a pro team and there are men there that are going to train faster, I'm really happy to hear (that). Truly."

FENDER BENDER

Two of Winnipeg’s budding Finnish prospects were involved in a bit of a fender bender on Friday.

Kristian Vesalainen and Sami Niku were on the ice on Saturday morning after the accident, but were limited to a light session with the team’s other walking wounded.

Any lingering fears were alleviated when Maurice spoke with the media following the second session of the day.

"Got in a little bit of a fender bender yesterday," Maurice said, smiling. "I'm sorry for smiling. I had a Mario Andretti reference hanging there.

"They got into a little bit of an accident. We had them scheduled for the second group just in case they came in stiff and they did. They came in a little bit sore in the morning. They skated, all of these guys. They may all be back on the ice in groups tomorrow."

Skyler McKenzie, who is still rehabbing after offseason surgery, and Andrew Copp, who has a minor ailment, also skated with the infirmary grouping.

WELCOME TO THE NHL

The first day of camp was anything but relaxed at BellMTS Iceplex on Saturday.

From the first whistle that ushered in the year’s opening on-ice drill, bodies were flying — sometimes into one another — as things got off to a feisty start.

The day’s biggest lickin’ came early during the first group’s session. Populated largely by veterans, it was one rookie 18-year-old that received the year’s first big thump.

Ville Heinola was checking Adam Lowry on a one-on-one drill when the play moved into the corner. Unwilling to give the 2019 first-rounder any chance of embarrassing him on the play, Lowry lowered the boom into the young Finn, sending him crashing to the ice.

"Welcome to the league, man," Maurice said after the day’s sessions were over. Other than being on the wrong side of a runaway Lowry train, Maurice was pleased with how Heinola performed.

"That was a good opportunity for him to get out there," Maurice said. "He moves really well, does it all with his head up.

"I liked his day today."

LINES... WITH A GRAIN OF SALT

Day 1 of training camp is no time to be reading heavy into line rushes, but there was a purpose to the trios that were put together on Saturday. These were the lines that Maurice put together for the veteran group (plus a couple of younger players):

Joono Luoto – Adam Lowry – Blake Wheeler

Mathieu Perreault – Mark Scheifele – Mason Appleton

Nikolaj Ehlers – Bryan Little – Logan Shaw

Gabriel Bourque – Mark Letestu – Jack Roslovic

"A lot got moved around based on the fender bender and Copper," Maurice said. "I'm not going to spend any time worrying about the line chemistry in the first two games. I want to see a bunch of guys with different people. If everybody had stayed healthy, I think I had Copp with Letestu and Roslovic coming into that, maybe Vesalainen was running with Lowry and Wheeler. The first two games will run pretty close to that."

On defence, and with Dustin Byfuglien missing because of a personal leave of absence granted by the team on Friday, Josh Morrissey partnered with Neal Pionk on the blue line.

That left Logan Stanley alongside Tucker Poolman, Nathan Beaulieu with Anthony Bitetto, and Heinola with Dmitry Kulikov.
Winnipeg Jets captain Blake Wheeler says the intense scrutiny on his team and the pressure to win the Stanley Cup got to him last year.

Making matters worse were post-season media reports Wheeler says were inaccurate.

“There was even some conversation about me making a statement because there was just so much that was untrue,” Wheeler said as the Jets opened training camp, Friday. “Report what is true. We’re hockey players and we’re giving everything we have to this town. If we fall short, it’s not because we hate each other.”

Wheeler was referring to reports of dissension within the ranks, clashes over roles and questions about his leadership.

The 33-year-old first challenged some of those reports in an interview with TSN earlier this week.

“A year ago I was nominated for the Mark Messier award, and people were telling me I’m a legendary leader,” he told TSN’s Sara Orlesky. “And this year I’m the problem. There were some moments you would have liked somebody to step up in your defence… there was just unfortunately a lot of incorrect stuff coming out about our team after last year. The media has a certain accountability that needs to be held, and it was lost after last year.”

Wheeler acknowledged that as captain he should face his share of the heat for the Jets’ failures.

“Write about how bad we played in Game 6,” he told TSN. “That would be accurate. We didn’t show up. And if you think that’s because of bad leadership, then maybe that’s a conversation that can be had.”

The Jets entered last season as one of the Stanley Cup favourites, and in the TV interview Wheeler says he didn’t handle the expectations well off the ice, even if he had a career year on it.

“I lost touch with myself as a dad, as a husband, first and foremost, because I invested so much into trying to win,” he said. “And when I was home, that’s where I was. I was trying to win the Stanley Cup. And when I was in the building, sometimes I was spitting nails just because I wanted to win the Stanley Cup.”

Wheeler says he took the summer to recharge and is rejuvenated.

He’s also learned some things about leading players who are more than a decade younger. They might be more coddled than he ever was, but they still need to be shown how hard they have to work.

“That’s where I just try to lead by example. I try to do it every day, try to show them what it looks like… it’s tough, no matter how talented you are.
There were a pair of quarters on the floor marking the spot where the TV types wanted Kevin Cheveldayoff to stand for his media scrum, Friday. The Winnipeg Jets GM noticed them immediately, and bent down as if he was going to pick them up.

“You know what, I might need this,” he joked.

Hey, every two bits count when dealing with contract stalemates that are keeping star players from attending training camp.

The Jets kicked off the 2019 edition of Camp Maurice without Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor, the GM and the player agents locked in a staring contest that’s now affecting preparations for the coming campaign.

Cheveldayoff said he has no idea where the players are, likely still at their summer homes.

Adding insult to injury, defenceman Dustin Byfuglien is AWOL with what the team is only calling a “leave of absence.”

It might be a little early to call the Jets Team Turmoil, but it’s not exactly a rousing way to start erasing the memory of a season cut surprisingly short by a first-round playoff exit.

“We may hit opening night and not have any of these problems,” coach Paul Maurice said. “Have all three guys back in the lineup.”

That’s possible, of course.

The Jets can take some solace in the fact they’re not alone in having marquee players who are more focused on salaries and contract length than systems and shift length.

“If we were the only team in this situation you might be sitting there wondering what’s going on,” Cheveldayoff said. “But there’s others. Doesn’t make it right, doesn’t make it wrong.”

Makes it a bit of a cluster for the lines, although that’ll work itself out.

The biggest concern for the Jets, and the next red-letter day in this dollar-bill deadlock, is the start of the games that matter.

Speaking of ill will and grudges, last season disintegrated into a cloud of rumours and even some legit reports about a room divided, a group not on the same page and bickering over roles.

Maurice added some fuel to the fire with his comments about “ruffled feathers” in his playoff post mortem.

Asked on Friday how much of his summer was spent smoothing out those ruffled feathers, the coach was at his down-playing best.

“So I’m picturing this bird with a couple little feathers out, and you just kind of slide your hand and they’re gone,” Maurice said, reaching his hand out in front of him as if petting a songbird. “You’re thinking more pterodactyl. I was thinking more sparrow at the time. It wasn’t that big a deal. Bad analogy, I guess.”

The coach also Friday confirmed his summer vacation included a trip to visit Laine in Finland to talk about the kid’s development and how Maurice sees his role this coming season.

As for Laine’s desire to remain a Winnipeg Jet, which some are questioning, the coach says that never even came up.

And then he reminded all those with their Jets knickers in a knot what happened with another rising star who was in a similar contract stalemate at this time last year.

“The Josh Morrissey lesson is a good one,” Maurice said. “Josh wasn’t here at camp last year at the start and just signed an eight-year extension.”

Right now the Jets would settle for an appearance anywhere inside the Perimeter.

Or just outside it, at the Iceplex.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 09.15.2019
At a time of the year when enthusiasm is usually plentiful and optimism abounds, the mood was a bit more reserved on the opening day of Winnipeg Jets training camp.

A big part of that was because of who wasn’t there — and it turns out that group didn’t only include unsigned restricted-free-agent forwards Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor.

Before the first player hit the ice for testing Friday morning, the Jets had released a statement to announce that defenceman Dustin Byfuglien had asked for and been granted a personal leave of absence.

Details about the reason for the leave were scarce, which was not surprising given the private nature of Byfuglien, who prefers to avoid the spotlight.

Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said neither Byfuglien nor his family was dealing with a health issue, but he didn’t shed much light on the situation itself, nor did he predict when the blueliner might be back.

“He was here. He is here. He reached out to me and said he wanted to chat with me. We connected and obviously, we issued the statement,” said Cheveldayoff. “It’s all still fresh. It’s less than 24 hours. We’ll see as time goes on here and keep a tab on it.”

The news was surprising, given that Byfuglien had joined his teammates for an informal skate Monday and took part in the team’s annual production day Tuesday.

Byfuglien’s absence was impossible to ignore, especially when there is no timetable for his return.

Jets head coach Paul Maurice put on a brave face when asked how this latest development could affect things on his already-changing blue line.

“Well, we don’t know if it impacts it at all,” said Maurice. “For (Saturday’s) skate it will. But we’ll get into timelines again, and I don’t have those answers for you. We’ve got some new faces back there and camp is important for them, but if you’re looking for silver linings, there’s more (preseason) games now possibly if Dustin misses games to take a look at some of those guys.”

The next-man-up mentality isn’t a new development in professional sports; it’s commonplace.

“Camp is about everybody here. There’s a renewed sense of purpose,” said Cheveldayoff. “We’ll get into games relatively quickly here and the opportunity will be there for a lot of players to be used in different roles. It’s up to them to make an impression on the coach.”

There is something to be said about the enthusiasm a group can feel when there is a greater chance presented for players to grasp a roster spot or enhance their respective roles.

“Well, I think it makes for obviously some competition,” said Jets captain Blake Wheeler. “There’s going to be some opportunities there for players to step into some pretty meaningful and important roles. With that, there should be quite a bit of excitement in camp. There aren’t many grumpy old guys like me walking around. There’s some enthusiasm in the group, some guys who have been waiting in the wings to get some opportunities. We’ve got some veteran guys who’ve maybe played down our lineup last year due to circumstance who are going to get some more opportunity this year. It could be a pretty good mix.”

At a time when the Jets were already preparing to deal with the daily questions about the 64 goals missing from their lineup when training camp opened, not having their most experienced defenceman around — for however long that might be — compounds the issues.

The mood was decidedly different from just one day earlier, after the Jets inked Josh Morrissey to an $8 million contract extension that kicks in next season.

External expectations for this group pale in comparison with last season, when the Jets entered training camp as one of the betting favourites to not only reach but also capture the Stanley Cup.

A natural progression was expected after the Jets set a franchise record for points (114) and reached the Western Conference final before being dispatched by the Vegas Golden Knights.

After the Jets were eliminated in six games in the opening round of the Stanley Cup playoffs and saw the departure of some key pieces via trade or free agency, some pundits wonder whether Winnipeg will even qualify for the postseason for a third consecutive spring.

At this time last year, the Jets were going out of their way to temper the outward expectations lest they become an unwanted distraction.

Of the four individuals who were made available Friday, only one faced a question about how those lofty expectations have faded quietly into the background.

“I don’t think we have to explain what our expectations are to anyone,” said Jets veteran centre Bryan Little. “Yeah, the fans in the city want to see us win the Stanley Cup and do well, but we have our own expectations, and I promise you they’re higher than anyone’s.

“We know we have a good team in there, it’s just a matter of putting everything together and it’s a long season and it’s a long grind and the playoffs are a different animal. You honestly can’t look too far ahead right now. We’ve got a lot of stuff going on with our team and we’ve got to be focused for training camp, not thinking about the playoffs.”

There’s no shortage of storylines to monitor as training camp begins to take shape.

With news that Mitch Marner agreed to terms on a six-year deal worth $65.36 million ($10.89 million AAV), the expectation is that it could be the contract that speeds up the process for the remaining RFA forwards.

“It’s hard to speculate what’s going through every other player’s minds, what’s going through our own player’s minds. Because every team situation is different, every path to a situation is different, every opportunity is different,” said Cheveldayoff, several hours before the Marner news broke. “We sat here last year and talked about Josh Morrissey on the day of today, and then I left here and we made some progress right after that. These are the things that can change on one phone call, can be advanced tremendously on a phone call or can be parked for a period of time.

“To categorize or characterize one or the other, certainly when they’re not your own, it’s hard. But I think every team is in the same situation, every player’s in the same situation. They’re working hard at trying to come up with something that works for both sides.”

How quickly that relates to the Jets on the fronts of Laine and Connor remains to be seen, but beginning Saturday, the process of trying to become a better defending team begins in earnest.

Having to do so without a minute-munching defender like Byfuglien will create its own set of challenges.

“There are specifics to playing defence that need to get developed with a young team,” said Maurice. “Most of this league is just a transition game, what happens, what you give when you get your chance and what you give up and that would be an area that we focus a lot on here at camp.

“We’ve got four things. Come to camp every day and you’ll know what they are because we’re going to work on them right from Day 1. We’ve got four things defensively we really want to cue in on and be good at. And some of it’s kind of re-establishing, some of it is a new way of handling certain events that happen in the game defensively. So you guys get to come and watch and get all the details.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
VICTORIA — Zack MacEwen may have found the answer to a pressing question. The big and skilled Vancouver Canucks prospect winger needs explosiveness in his first few strides to get up to NHL speed. It’s often the separator for those who flourish in the minors but can’t quite make the leap to the NHL.

During a Saturday camp scrimmage in which MacEwen was aligned with Brandon Sutter and Tanner Pearson, it was obvious his skating has improved, but is there another level he can reach?

MacEwen answered the query by training with David (Eli) MacEachern, who teamed with Pierre Lueders of Team Canada to share Olympic gold with Italy in the 1998 two-man bobsleigh at Nagano.

Think about it. Those bobsleigh starts are all about power and weight transfer and endurance.

"I’m just trying to get more speed in my footwork and more power in my legs and it has helped me make a big jump in the last two years," said the undrafted 23-year-old MacEwen. "I had a good summer and I feel great and playing with those guys today, it was good because you can see the work that they put in and how helpful they are for me on the bench. "You need this to get your intensity level back and your timing."

MacEwen had 52 points (22-30) in 69 AHL games last season with the Utica Comets and also made his regular-season debut with the Canucks. He had one assist in four outings, but the big take-away was showing what he had learned and the willingness he has to get to the next level.

"It was getting that taste and knowing what I have to strive for," recalled MacEwen. "You have to get a feel for the lifestyle and everything that it takes to get there and stay there. "It’s a good feeling to be noticed because it keeps me on my toes to develop all aspects of my game. They’ve put the time and effort into me and I’m taking in as much as I can."

All that is not lost on an organization that took a chance on a raw prospect whose 6-3, 205-pound frame is tailored for the NHL game, especially in the post-season.

"He has to just play his game, be rambunctious, be aggressive and good with the puck," said Canucks coach Travis Green. "Has he gotten a little quicker to play in the NHL? I know he works extremely hard and has become one of our better pros in a short time period and has really high character. "He wants to be an NHL player and is willing to do a lot to be one. His overall skating is close and it was close last year. He’s a smart kid and understands what he has to do to make the next level. The onus always comes back to the player."

Comets coach Trent Cull lauded MacEwen’s willingness to be a consummate pro at the minor-league level and do the tough stuff away from the ice.

"The work that he put in has changed his body," Cull said. "He’s done a great job and is hungry to learn. He’s doing a better job at (defensive) zone coverage and when he protects pucks, he’s a tough guy to play against."

If that isn’t enough of a ringing endorsement, Comets teammate Guillaume Brisebois had this to say of the winger’s continuing progress: "He’s an amazing player. He’s been really important for us in Utica because he has played big minutes and he really presents himself every game. Big player. Power forward. He brings everything."
The Canucks’ goaltender situation is as clear as it has ever been.

The primary starter, most here believe, is Jacob Markstrom. His backup will be Thatcher Demko.

We know Michael DiPietro is the next “goalie of the future” and that he’s going to get plenty of time to marinate his game in the minors.

We know that Jake Kielly is another prospect, but more of a long shot. Arturs Silovs is headed to Barrie of the OHL and is perhaps the next, next one.

And we know that Zane McIntyre and Richard Bachman are the veteran hands, around to insulate the likes of Kielly and DiPietro as they transition to professional hockey. Bachman, at 32, is the most senior of the bunch and has played 48 NHL games in his career.

But last year was as tough as it gets. His lone appearance for the Canucks was in mid-November, a 6-2 shelling at the hands of the Minnesota Wild.

His season in Utica, though, had been going well until a freak collision in early December saw him tear an Achilles tendon.

“Just unfortunate timing where everything’s rolling and all of a sudden, everything just gets stopped dead in its tracks,” he said.

After surgery to repair the damage, he was in a walking boot for 2½ months.

“I wasn’t allowed to put pressure on it,” he said. “And then I worked out with a boot on for probably close to five months. So it wasn’t until June that I even start skating. … Not even doing full stops, just strides and backwards skating. And that was that for a while.

“And it wasn’t until mid-July that I really started playing fully competitive, real shooters taking open shots, open looks. So it was a lot of waiting, trying to stay positive throughout it.”

He had a couple of nervous moments about coming back, he said.

“Something as easy as walking on your tippy toes and it’s not there. You’re like ‘oh man like this is the real deal.’ Like you don’t realize how much you use it. Just everyday things. But I’ve been training, we had a good plan in place and it kept progressing,” he said.

“I feel good. I feel a few years younger than I did going into it, so I’m glad I was able to at least take some positives.”

And now he looks ready for a three-way battle in Utica. He admitted it’s clichéd, but yes, he’s going to take it day by day.

“Whatever happens, it’ll sort itself out in the best way. And I also have to remember that I still have another kind of role down there to help out Mikey or Jake, whoever it may be, and try to help bring them along, too.”

Juolevi’s knee

Although it appeared at the end of Friday’s practice that Olli Juolevi was perhaps favouring his surgically repaired right knee, he was back on the ice Saturday skating with the third group.

He didn’t take part in the scrimmage between the two main groups, but coach Travis Green said that was simply about load management for a young player who is still working his way back from injury.

“I think it was hard for everybody,” he said of the hard skate and how he felt after. “Of course coming off from long-term injury, it’s not the easiest, but again that’s the thing, that’s what you need to do, you need to fight through, it doesn’t matter what’s going on, you’ve got to fight through and hopefully next time it feels better again.”
Ben Kuzma: Canucks’ shot-blocking Benn, Tanev get creative for better protection

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VICTORIA — Sacrificing the body is a staple for NHL longevity. At some point in any game, a player must deliver a check, absorb a hit or do what has become second nature to Jordie Benn and Chris Tanev. When vulcanized rubber is whipped their way, the Vancouver Canucks’ defencemen instinctively step or slide in front of pucks destined for the net.

And because Benn led the Montreal Canadiens in blocked shots last season, and Tanev was second but has broken several limbs attempting to be the ultimate team player, the defenders are always looking for better protection.

After all, if the Canucks’ back end is going to look as good on the ice as it does on paper to improve from allowing the 18th most goals last season and being ranked second last in back-end goal scoring, improving shin pads had to match the will to take one for the club.

Benn only missed six games the last two seasons while Tanev missed 96 in the last three. If the Canucks expect to contend for a playoff position, they can’t afford to lose veterans to injuries that could be prevented with some creativity.

"With all the padding I have on the sides, he (Tanev) was checking mine," Benn said Saturday. "I flattened mine out and made them longer and made sure they’re a little bit bigger than most shin pads. It’s just purely for shot-blocking."

Tanev was tired of shots finding spots where he didn’t have adequate protection. He worked in concert with the Canucks’ equipment staff, and an outside source, to use materials that aren’t included in conventional shin-pad design.

"I skated with the gear all summer and they did a really good job redesigning it," said Tanev. "It’s going to help me a lot. There are certain areas in normal pads that are vulnerable a bit and led to back-to-back broken legs for me."

For this to be a happy homecoming for Benn — the Victoria native signed a two-year, US$4 million free-agent contract on July 1 — the 32-year-old has to bring strong positional play, quick puck movement and some bite in a potential pairing with Troy Stecher.

Benn was also third in hits for the Canadiens last season, had a career season with 22 points (5-17) and played in every pairing. He was so consistent the Canadiens offered the undrafted 6-foot-1, 204-pound defender the same contract as the Canucks. But the West Coast tug was pretty strong.

"It’s being close to family and my sister just had a baby just over a year ago," said Benn, who is a 15-minute drive from the Save-On-Foods Arena for some home-cooking.

"Montreal is a great, great place to play and I would have loved to have gone back, but it was kind of a no-brainer to come home to a team you grew up watching."

Benn played for Victoria in the BCHL and ECHL and had stops in the CHL and AHL before logging four full seasons with the Dallas Stars where he joined his younger brother Jamie. The passion for the game came from their close and supportive relationship, and fuelled by being invited to a Canucks camp as a 21-year-old in 2008.

"It was a surreal moment," recalled Benn. "My level of game obviously wasn’t like theirs and it has come full circle. I don’t look at the big picture, it’s who we play next and what team is coming to town and not looking too far ahead."

Benn can’t help but feel the Canucks might have something brewing on the back end. Edler and Tyler Myers are the top pairing, while Quinn Hughes has been aligned with Tanev and Benn with Stecher.

"It’s great to knock some rust off and I’ve done this hard camp pace before and it’s good," Benn added after the first camp scrimmage Saturday. "We’re not out there 1 ½ hours and just messing around because your mind starts slipping.

"For me, it’s being engaged and moving my feet. Sometimes, you get tired and get sloppy and when I move the puck and get gritty, that’s when my game is the best."

Said Stecher: "He’s vocal. A big solid guy who plays simple and doesn’t wear a visor, so that sticks out. He tells me where to put the pucks and that might help me offensively to get up in the play more knowing he’s back there and is reliable."

Defending isn’t easy. Players are faster, skilled and slippery. The Canucks concentrate on pinning opposition forwards to the cornerboards and look for support to trigger the transition.

"With the kids today, they look like they’re going left but they’re actually going right," said Benn. "It’s a challenge to get on them quickly so you don’t give them a choice — you just put them into the wall as fast as you can."

Maybe Travis Green put it best about Benn.

"He’s going to be a real good leader for us," said the Canucks coach.
VICTORIA — Your first child alters life in a way you never really knew was possible.

For Sven Baertschi and wife Laura, the April arrival of son Callan couldn’t have come at a better time.

New dad Baertschi was coming off the most difficult seasons of his NHL career, one where he had at times wondered if he’d be able to keep playing the game he loved.

A concussion suffered in a hit from the Vegas Golden Knights’ Tomas Hyka in October last year kept him out of the lineup for two months. He returned after Christmas and played well, but on Feb. 2 in Denver suddenly felt “off” again. Medical assessments determined he was suffering from post-concussion syndrome because of the October hit.

It was crushing news for the player, who later admitted he feared for his career. But he eventually recovered, playing another handful of games before the season was finished.

“It was terrifying, to be honest,” Baertschi said. “It’s something that, you know, you can’t see from the outside, it’s an internal thing. And if you just don’t feel all right, you know, the rest of the body feels great, you just want to play. But then the mind says no, you know. It was something I had to go through and it definitely wasn’t easy, but I’m over it now, and I’m excited to play hockey again.”

And then came Callan, who changed everything.

“It was phenomenal to see,” Baertschi said of his son’s birth. “At the beginning, he really looked like me. So it’s almost like I was watching myself being born. A little mini me. I’m like, this is crazy. It’s been an unbelievable experience.

“Obviously, as new parents we’re learning each day and getting to know what we’ve got to do with him. He definitely likes to be entertained now. And he’s a guy who’s all smiles all day. That’s exciting. Each day as a parent, I think I’ve just learned something new. He’s started to build his own little character. It’s fun to see it.”

Given the head injury, Baertschi said he definitely came to appreciate the chance to prepare properly for the coming season.

“Definitely a long summer for me. You know, wanted to get skating right away but still took a little bit of a break,” he said. “I wanted to make sure that I’m coming to camp, that I feel good on the ice.”

And off the ice, he feels great.

“It’s the most incredible thing I’ve experienced, nothing comes close,” he said. “Each day I wake up and I see my little guy beside us and he puts a smile on his face right away and it gets you going for the day.

“And then it also motivates you to know everything becomes about him, like I’m doing this for him. And I want to set him up for a cool life and so that’s something that’s definitely changed.

“It’s been amazing, and my wife’s been an absolute champion, you know. I could tell before like she always wanted to be a mom and she loves babies and now she’s got one of her own and she’s doing amazing so I’m really, really happy.”

Parenting tips from the new dads

Baertschi isn’t the only new father on the Canucks: both Tanner Pearson and Josh Leivo have been light on sleep in recent months. (And Alex Biega and wife Diana became parents for the third time in April, welcoming son Parker to the world.)

We asked the three rookie dads for their advice on parenting.
Recap: Day two at Canucks training camp

Patrick Johnston
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News and notes as they happen at 2019 Vancouver Canucks training camp in Victoria.

Saturday was the second day of training camp for the Vancouver Canucks in Victoria at the Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre.

If you missed day one, here’s a recap.

Here’s what we saw and heard over the day…

2:30 p.m.
Olli Juolevi spoke with us after skating with the Utica group and was all smiles. It’s been a long way back for the Finn, who hurt his knee last November and underwent knee surgery.

“I felt good. I got a good day. And I think I’m in a better spot again,” he said.

That he looked spent at the end of the day, and perhaps showed some worry about his knee was overblown.

He was able to push himself to the limit on Friday and felt good and he was happy about that.

“It’s been a couple good days so far.”

Also, colleague Kuzma and others spoke with Travis Green about the fallout from the Virtanen demotion.

Green on Virtanen, who was in the third group Friday, elevated Saturday and noticeable in a camp scrimmage: “You want young players to take responsibility and part of developing players is hoping they learn from lessons. Sometimes tough ones sink in the most.” #Canucks— Ben Kuzma (@benkuzma) September 14, 2019

1:30 p.m.
So, after being asked yesterday if it was the first time he’d signed a baby, Elias Pettersson chuckled and replied “no.”

“I didn’t know what was hanging down and then I see the dad hanging down his baby so it was kind of fun,” he said. He’s very cognizant of himself as a role model and is happy to play the part.

“I think for me it’s fun, like I don’t take it for granted because I’m just trying to play my best out there,” he said. “I don’t expect people to have me as a role model so I’m just trying to do my best to be a good role model.”

On Saturday, he spent nearly an hour signing autographs after practice.

Elias Pettersson has been signing autographs for almost an hour pic.twitter.com/xw4A6Fb3hy— Patrick Johnston (@risingaction) September 14, 2019

1 p.m.
Good news: Olli Juolevi appears fine.

He’s skating with the Utica group today. Given his return from a knee injury, this makes sense, why put him into a full game yet?

Travis Green said Juolevi’s discomfort post-practice on Friday was simply down to him having push himself to the limit in completing the bag skate, nothing more.

12:30 p.m.
Pettersson was last off the ice.

Noon
Lots of interesting thoughts from the first group on the ice.

Troy Stecher, asked about the idea of being pushed to a fitness limit right off the bat, as he and his teammates were on Friday: “It’s not a surprise; it’s an expectation for our group to come in, in shape.”

Adam Gaudette, on top of getting quicker and stronger over the season said he focused on improving his shot.

“Getting it off quicker and kind of adding different types of shots into my arsenal,” he said.

He said he was happy with how his rookie season went, overall.

“I think I learn better, and I get the hang of things better, when I’m thrown right into the mix and I think that kind of accel’d a little bit of my learning curve,” he said about getting more NHL time than perhaps most expected coming into the year. “You know, just being out on the ice with these guys, it forces you to get faster, forces you to think faster, forces you to play at their level.”

10:49 a.m.
It’s 5-0 for team white, as Justin Bailey shovels home a backhandler and then as time expired Tyler Graovac banged home a rebound.

He’s an interesting name to keep note of as a call-up. He’s done very well through two days and has NHL experience.

The crowd got a salute from the players and they applauded in appreciation.

Time to get some audio.

10:38 a.m.
And it’s 3-0 for team white, as Quinn Hughes turns the puck over at the blue line, Brandon Sutter pounces on the puck, carries it down to right of Bachman’s doorstep before calmly sliding it across the top of the crease for Tanner Pearson to wire home.

10:30 a.m.
A few more chances to finish the period, including a 2-on-1 rush for Horvat and Goldobin that had a give ‘n go between the two but no one got a good shot off.

It’s 2-0 after the first.

New goallies, by the way: Zane McIntyre for white, Richard Bachmann for blue.

10:22 a.m.
Moments after JT Miller nearly evened things up for team blue*, the white squad has taken a two-goal lead. Tyler Myers dangled through the blue defence to create some space for himself at the top of the left faceoff circle before sliding a deff pass to Brandon Sutter, who picked the top corner.

*Miller got his chance on a turnover off a loose breakthrough by white, drove to the net and nearly deked out Jacob Markstrom. The puck slid left of the net, while Miller and Markstrom got tangled up and slid to the right.

The puck actually eventually came to Troy Stecher, who fired into the empty net but the referee immediately waved it off.

Jordie Benn gave his defence partner a nice tap.

10:12 a.m.
Pettersson scores our first goal, using a combination of power and silky stickhandling to get to the slot and then sliding a shot through Thatcher Demko’s five-hole.

It’s 1-0 for white.

10:10 a.m.
Brendan Batchelor is calling this training camp scrimmage on Sportsnet 650 radio. He says it’s a near-impossible task to describe, since both teams are names that everyone is used to hearing on the same team.

John Shorthouse told me yesterday that the last time he remembers the Canucks having a proper, full-on, go-right-after-it scrimmage was the 2007 training camp here in Victoria and that Sami Salo, who else, suffered a broken wrist.

Looks like it’s Gary Agnew and Jason King running the team blue bench and Trent Cull and Glenn Carnegie running the white bench.
10 a.m.

We’re getting a scrimmage in about 10 minutes or so. Group A vs. Group B.

We were joking that clearly Travis Green must be upset with Elias Pettersson since his group, which went first on Friday, was going second on Saturday.

Seriously though, there’s nothing to it.

Group B, which opened up, went through their drills for about 45 minutes. They’ve returned to the ice wearing blue socks, helmets and and sweaters.

Reminder of how they’re lining up:

As noted, Jake Virtanen has joined this group, replacing Lukas Jasek, who will presumably skate with the Utica group later, along with Olli Juolevi.

Group A, which features the likes of Pettersson and Tyler Myers, is in white. They hopped on the ice about 10 minutes before the blue squad.

9:21 a.m.

First “oooooh” of the day from the crowd as Virtanen and depth forward Francis Perron crashed into Thatcher Demko and the net behind him, knocking it off his moorings.

9:15 a.m.

Here are your skaters in the first group. It’s a solid bunch.

Day 2. group 1 pic.twitter.com/7wvqDy9CN — Jeff Paterson (@patersonjeff) September 14, 2019

And word is that Juolevi is going to skate with the Utica group at the end of the day.

As was observed by many, including yours truly, he seemed to be in discomfort at the end of the day yesterday following a bag skate. It could have been simply about the challenge of recovering from a knee injury, but given said knee injury, it does bear watching how he does today.

Olli Juolevi isn’t with the group he skated with on Day 1.

2016 first-rounder is slated to skate with a different group later in the day (Group 3), according to the #Canucks.— Thomas Drance (@ThomasDrance) September 14, 2019

It could too, of course, be about not making him a talking point until the final group.

9:10 a.m.

Group one is on the ice and surprise, surprise, it features Jake Virtanen back with his boys.

The winger apparently came up short in fitness testing and was banished to the Utica group on day one at camp.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 09.15.2019
Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien granted leave of absence

JUDY OWEN
THE CANADIAN PRESS
PUBLISHED 2 DAYS AGO
UPDATED 2 DAYS AGO

Dustin Byfuglien’s name was a surprise addition to the list of key Winnipeg Jets players absent from the first day of training camp on Friday.

As expected, restricted free-agent forwards Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor didn’t show up for fitness testing as they’re seeking new contracts, but the NHL club also announced Byfuglien was granted a leave of absence.

“I met with Buff [Thursday] and we had some conversations and in the conversations he indicated that he needed some personal time,” Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff said.

“We certainly granted it. Dustin is a big part of our family here. There’s always an open policy for discussions. We always care about people of our family. One thing I will say, health-wise everything is good for him and his family. But again, from our standpoint, we support Dustin and look forward to the resolution.”

There is no timeline for the veteran defenceman’s return and the club declined to reveal the reason for the leave.

“Let’s just put it this way – there’s nothing sinister to this,” Jets coach Paul Maurice said. “You start going down the list and then the process of elimination … he has his right to privacy in this.”

Cheveldayoff said Byfuglien was in Winnipeg skating before the start of camp and remains in the city.

When asked if there was reason to be concerned for Byfuglien, Maurice said, “No. I think it’s going to be well-handled.”

The 6-foot-5, 260-pound Byfuglien, 34, had four goals and 27 assists in 42 games last season and has played 869 career NHL games.

“He’s been an unreplaceable element to our team,” Jets captain Blake Wheeler said of Byfuglien, who’s an alternate captain. “Obviously, what he brings on the ice is pretty recognizable. He’s a really unique guy in the room for us, doesn’t have many bad days, keeps it pretty light.”

The Jets already were thinner at the back after losing defencemen Jacob Trouba, Ben Chiarot and Tyler Myers during the off-season. Chiarot (Montreal Canadiens) and Myers (Vancouver Canucks) left through free agency, while Trouba was traded to the New York Rangers in June for young defenceman Neal Pionk and the 20th overall pick in the draft, which turned out to be Finnish defenceman Ville Heinola.

Wheeler said he wasn’t surprised Laine and Connor weren’t at camp because other players across the league are in the same situation.

“Clearly, we’re a better hockey team with those guys in our lineup and, once again, as friends of theirs and teammate, you support them and you want them to capitalize on their value and come into camp excited about being here,” Wheeler said.

“But the rest of it is out of our control and, to a large degree, is out of their control. It’s going to get dealt with and figured out and when it does, we’re going to give them a big, old hug and get them in the group and get them up to speed.”

Laine and Connor each played 82 games last season, both spending time on the top line with Wheeler and centre Mark Scheifele.

Laine, 21, had 30 goals and 20 assists. Connor, 22, fired in 34 goals and finished with 66 points.

Maurice confirmed he visited Laine in Finland during the summer, but emphasized he’s done that with other players and it had nothing to do with the sharp-shooter’s contract.
Bo Horvat couldn’t recall the last time a winger took a draw for him.

“It’s been a long time,” Horvat said when asked how frequently he’s ceded the circle to a winger in his hockey career. “That hasn’t happened very often.”

It happened Saturday morning in Victoria, though, when J.T. Miller stepped in for Horvat and took a pair of faceoffs for Team Blue.

“(Miller) came over and said, ‘I’m pretty good on my forehand,’ and I said, ‘sure,’” Horvat explained. “Any time you want to jump in, I’m more than happy to get you into the faceoff dot. He’s phenomenal in the dot as well, so that’s great to have on your wing.”

“I asked him!” Miller confirmed. “We were talking the last few days, and he asked, ‘You take a lot of draws?’ and I said, ‘Yeah, but I only take a lot of draws on my forehand.’

“I know he’s good in all areas,” Miller continued, “but I said, if he’s ever struggling on his ‘bad’ side, that’s where I take all my forehands. So a lot of time when I play with lefty centres, I told him that in the past — and you’re the quarterback, you tell me what to do — but if you aren’t feeling it, all the lefties take it on the left, and I’ve always taken it with the forehand on my right. I’ve done that for the last few years, stepped in with left-handed centres, so I just told him that and he said go take a couple.”

We’ll see if it persists, but Miller seemed to look at it as an audition of sorts, something he wanted to offer a potential new linemate to help take some pressure off.

It could be a relief for Horvat, who led the NHL in faceoffs taken last season.

“Hopefully I keep winning a couple and I get to take a few,” Miller said. “It’s just about making it easier for him. He’s obviously the quarterback in those situations. I won’t ever step in, but if he wants me to take it, I’ll take it.”

Best dinner plans

Horvat played with newly extended Maple Leafs star Mitch Marner for a season in junior with the London Knights.

Back in 2013-14, the crowds at Budweiser Gardens were treated to a show.

Though the core of that Knights team never won a Memorial Cup, they boasted one of the sickest major junior forward lineups in recent memory with such current NHLers as Max Domi, Chris Tierney, Josh Anderson, Michel McCarron and Christian Dvorak in the lineup, in addition to Horvat and Marner.

“Yeah, we had a really good team,” Horvat recalled after Saturday’s scrimmage.

“I played with Mitch quite a bit, actually,” Horvat continued. “He set me up for a lot of goals, and that was as a 16-year-old. You knew then he had the skill and the fundamentals to be a great hockey player.

“For me, he’s top 10 in the league, by far. … I’m really happy for him.”

Horvat hadn’t yet reached out to congratulate his former junior teammate on the new deal, but he plans to once things calm down a bit.

“I haven’t shot him a text yet,” Horvat said Saturday. “I’m going to let the storm blow over, then I’ll send him a note and tell him congratulations, you deserve it.”

And will you pick your restaurant?

“Exactly, yeah. I’ll be letting him know that I’m free whenever he wants to take me out.”

The return of Shotgun Jake

Fresh off Friday’s fitness controversy, Jake Virtanen looked like a man on a mission. At least for the first 10 minutes of the first session he’s skated with the NHL group at Canucks training camp.

Returning to the main group, Virtanen played like he had a chip on his shoulder, an edge that we haven’t seen in a long time.

He took the puck hard to the net on the two-on-two rush drill, crashing into Thatcher Demko.

On the next rush, Virtanen entered from the right side and made a slick cross-slot pass, flashing the vision and distribution skills Canucks fans have hoped to see from him for years. Shortly after, in the five-on-five battle drill, he crushed Josh Teves against the boards.

The top form didn’t last for long, though.

Quinn Hughes put Virtanen in the dryer with a flurry of spins and dekes in a one-on-one offensive zone battle, a sequence that ended with a defeated Virtanen flat on his back, looking up and making no effort to rise as Hughes continued to swirl around the net.

The next one-on-one against Horvat ended with Virtanen crashing into a second goaltender and seeming to clip his knee against the post. From that point on, it was a mostly quiet performance from Virtanen.

Big Country fallout

Travis Green seemed like a head coach who just wanted to move on from the great Virtanen bag skate controversy of 2019. And who can blame him?

Green was direct and brief in his answers Saturday. He told media that Virtanen’s return to Group 2 wasn’t part of some wider plan. That Green didn’t decide Virtanen would return to an NHL group until after Friday’s on-ice session.

“He worked hard, it was good” was all Green would say of how he thought Virtanen performed Saturday.

“I think that’s good to hear, you want young players to take responsibility,” Green said of Virtanen’s handling of the controversy in the media on Saturday. “Much like, a lot of us are parents, and coaching is a lot about that: trying to develop players and hoping that they learn lessons. … Sometimes tough lessons sink in the most …”

And so Virtanen, quite rightly, earned praise for facing the music, taking responsibility and maturely handling a difficult situation in the media.

Then the veteran NHL forward declined to make himself available to the media to discuss the fallout from the past 24 hours and his return to an NHL group at Canucks training camp.

One step forward, one step back.

Elias Pettersson is special.

You saw it Friday in how he blew his group away in the bag skate. And you saw it Saturday in how aggressively he looked to score a beautiful goal in a training camp scrimmage, deking out his teammates and asserting himself on the ice.

You also saw it in the patience he had for fans.

The alien is in demand. At training camp in Victoria this weekend, throngs of Canucks-clad supporters and children are just looking to get a piece of him.

On Saturday, he stood in the crowd and signed autographs for an hour. When he walked out of the rink on the way to the team bus, he was greeted by fans lining the path to the bus. They screamed when he exited the building, and they gathered two or three bodies deep behind the metal barriers.

Pettersson signed and posed for photos with every single fan on his way to the bus.

To an observer, it seems as if Pettersson isn’t just growing into his role as a leader on the ice but also appears to be taking ownership of his role as an ambassador for the brand off it.

“I’m just happy they look up to me,” Pettersson said of the attention he’s received in Victoria. “I’ve been that kid, too, and I was too nervous to ask, like I remember when I saw Nicklas Lidstrom, I was too nervous to ask him. I’m just trying to make their day, sign a hat or jersey or whatever. It’s just fun to meet kids, it brings a smile to their face, and it’s special for me as well.”
As for the baby he signed, well, he disputed that he signed a baby at all. “Well, I signed the baby’s jersey, not the baby,” Pettersson insisted to laughs. “It was a funny video.”

Load management comes to the West Coast
We’re still a month out from Kawhi Leonard and the Los Angeles Clippers visiting Vancouver, but we’ve already entered the “load management” era on Canada’s West Coast.

Last December, Canucks prospect Olli Juolevi underwent knee surgery that knocked out nine months of his young hockey career.

He’s still working his way back, and while he looks smooth on the ice most of the time and had a summer in which he worked, by all accounts, extraordinarily hard on his recovery, there are times when the work is hard. There are times when he is still sore. And there are times when he needs to monitor how he’s recovered after pushing himself to the limit.

On Friday, the club put players through as gruelling an on-ice session as they’ll encounter all season. Juolevi, who hasn’t seen game action in nine months, completed all of it.

Toward the end of the session, observers noted that he looked gassed. Of course he was.

And Saturday morning, he was moved from Group 2, the group he skated with Friday, to Group 3, the group composed mostly of AHL-level players.

“A bit of a ‘load management,’ I guess you could call it,” Green said of the club’s handling of Juolevi on Saturday. “He’s feeling good today, we just want to make sure we bring him along well. We anticipate that he’ll be back with the group tomorrow, but we’ll check with the medical staff and see how he feels after the skate today.”

The goal is to get Juolevi back to where he was before the injury. To the point where he’s a credible option to be the first defender called up toward the latter half of this upcoming season.

So expect the Canucks to be patient with Juolevi the rest of camp and do everything they can to be prudent with his ongoing recovery.

“Yesterday’s skate was hard,” Juolevi said Saturday. “Coming off of a long-term injury it’s not the easiest day, but you have to fight through it. Hopefully next time it feels better again.”

“It’s hard, obviously it’s hard. (Pushing through it) is something I need to do more and more all the time. Missing so much time, there’s a lot of work to do.”

Between the pipes
Goalie succession planning has been a core tenet of Jim Benning’s tenure as Canucks general manager.

Benning cut his teeth in Buffalo when the club had Dominik Haasek. He won a Stanley Cup as part of the Boston Bruins management team on the back of Tim Thomas’ remarkable run of .950 goaltending.

Building from the net out. It’s something Benning believes in and has practiced in his five years in Vancouver.

It’s why he signed Ryan Miller and wouldn’t countenance trading him. It’s why he’s used a good deal of draft treasure to select goaltenders like Thatcher Demko and Michael DiPietro relatively early in the draft. It’s why Canucks third goaltender Zane McIntyre has a $400,000 AHL salary.

As the Canucks go into this season, their NHL tandem is set: Jacob Markstrom and Demko will be between the pipes this season.

At the AHL and ECHL levels, things are a bit more fluid. While the priority is developing DiPietro, a third-round pick in the 2017 NHL Entry Draft, the club has another goaltending prospect in Jake Kielly and two well-compensated veterans in Richard Bachman and McIntyre.

“If you have a couple of young goalies in your system, (then the ECHL is a great option),” Benning told The Athletic on Saturday. “If they’re good enough to play in that league, they’re going to get a lot of ice time.

“As a goalie, you want to see game action. You need shots. You can practice all you want, but in playing an actual game, you gain a lot of experience, so that’s why your young goalies need time.”

It’s expected that at least one of Vancouver’s young goaltenders — DiPietro or Kielly — will be a regular starter with the club’s ECHL affiliate in Kalamazoo while the other serves as a frequently used backup with the Utica Comets in the American League. And the club is open to entering the season with three goaltenders on the Comets roster, depending on how training camp plays out.

However it goes, the club wants DiPietro and Kielly to develop and see regular minutes facing professional shooters.

“It’s a lot different than the NCAA,” Kielly said of his first NHL training camp. “In college, you have basically two months to get ready for the season. … Really in this process, you have three days to get ready and then you’re right into it. Seeing pro shots, seeing the pro game, it’s obviously different, but it’s enjoyable.

“I’m just out here to learn as much as I can. Obviously, Markstrom and Demko are up at the NHL level, so I’m just trying to learn from (Canucks goalie coaches Ian) Clark and Curtis (Sandford) and we’ll see how the dust settles.”

DiPietro’s big tip
DiPietro has the high-end athleticism and speed to be a star goaltender. Around the Canucks and around the industry, people rave about his character and competitiveness.

He’s also a student of the goaltending position. He’s had access to an enormous level of goaltending resources so far in his career, and he’s used them.

He developed a close relationship with Dan Cloutier, who often visited with him in the junior ranks before resigning as the Canucks’ director of goaltending last week. He’s worked on mastering Clark’s three-stance system. And over the summer, he got a crucial tip from an NHL and American League veteran.

“I’m lucky enough to have a guy in my area, Michael Leighton, who played in the American League, played in the NHL…” DiPietro told The Athletic this past weekend at Canucks prospect camp. “He pulled me aside this summer. He basically told me that while you have to play high above your crease, in some situations, you have to taper it down a bit.

“You have to be more aware of where you are in the crease and where you aren’t. Make sure you have that good backside push, make sure you get to those pucks.”

DiPietro and Leighton — both Windsor Spitfire alumni — have skated together when DiPietro was playing in Windsor, and they worked out together this past summer.

“He’s a really fast goalie, but he is a little bit on the shorter side,” Leighton said about providing DiPietro feedback on his depth over the summer. “I just let him know that in junior, maybe he could away with being out a little further out because he’d have time to get back, if he’s scrambling, he could get back no problem.

“At the pro level, though, if he makes a save out at the top of his crease and it hits a body or a skate or a rebound, everything happens a lot quicker. Sometimes, in certain scenarios, you just can’t get caught out that far. I just warned him, to prepare him for what’s to come.”

Leighton also talked to DiPietro about the crowded battle for American League jobs at Canucks camp. Leighton, a veteran professional goaltender with more than 300 games of AHL experience and more than 100 at the NHL level, knows more than most about navigating the ups and downs and the recalls and reassignments.

“It doesn’t matter where you play,” Leighton said of his advice to DiPietro.

“You go to camp, you have a good camp, you get sent to the AHL, don’t be mad, just play your best.

“If you go to the ECHL, don’t be mad, just play your best.

“You can’t control the movement. … The more you think about those things — ‘Am I going to be the call-up?’ — when those thoughts creep into your mind, your game goes down. I told him not to worry about it. Any goalie takes time to develop.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
Since he was drafted No. 37 overall in 2018 by the Vancouver Canucks, Jett Woo has been described as a throwback, old-school defenceman. It’s not hard to see why — he brings a hard-nosed physical presence and meanness on the ice that makes him a thorn in the side to play against. Woo takes care of things in his own end first and prides himself in being able to shut down the opposition’s best forwards. “Whether I get a lot of points or not, my head is always focused on playing well in my own end,” Woo said. “I’ll always be someone who takes pride in the defensive side of the game. Even when I was growing up, the biggest compliment I can get is when someone says they wouldn’t want to take me down low one-on-one. That’s never going to change.”

The tough-as-nails, defensive persona remains his identity as a defenceman, but one can’t help but acknowledge the strides he’s made offensively. After registering 25 points in 44 WHL games with the Moose Jaw Warriors in his draft year, Woo exploded to more than a point-per-game — notching 66 points in 62 contests. This is important not only because it could suggest more upside to Woo’s game, but it increases his odds of becoming an NHL player, period. Scoring well in junior hockey as a defenceman is a pretty strong prerequisite for becoming an established NHL player more than it is a sign of what they might produce offensively at the next level. If you don’t have the puck skills to produce offensively in the CHL, it’s very unlikely you have what it takes to graduate to the highest level of hockey in the world, even if you’re a defensive-oriented guy.

In examining Woo specifically, one of the many ways we can put his performance into perspective is by establishing a group of comparables and then looking at how they fared later in their careers. NextGen Hockey founder Jeremy Davis’ Prospect Graduation Probabilities System (pGPS) is one way to accomplish this. Davis’ model considers various factors, including age, production and size among others to create statistical matches and then looks at how those comparables fared in the NHL.

Woo’s profile returns 35 comparables, of which, 67 percent went on to play at least 200 NHL games. A vast proportion of them became impact contributors — a shade under half of the 35 matches (48.6 percent) graduating into top-four NHL defencemen. These graduation probabilities sound extremely encouraging given that only about one-in-three players drafted between 36th and 40th overall become regular NHLers.

Context, however, is necessary with the model’s glowing results. I really like Woo as a prospect, but let’s start working back with some of his draft+1 production comparables.

Above, I compiled a list of all the WHL defencemen who scored between 0.96 and 1.16 points per game in the season right after they got drafted. In red, I’ve boxed the defencemen who went on to have meaningful careers as top-four defencemen.

Excluding the most recent prospects who are still developing, just over two-thirds of the cohort went on to play 200 NHL games. It’s a strong group of players overall and the graduation rate is almost the exact same as the pGPS model (which should be expected given most of the names are also matches in pGPS).

One would be fairly confident and excited about Woo looking at these names and the overall group’s success.

There’s more than meets the eye, though and I think the initial findings could be a bit misleading. If you take a step back and examine the group’s entire WHL resume (beyond just the draft+1 season), Woo’s production lags his comparables before this year by a significant margin.

Among this cohort of defencemen, Woo was the least productive among those who played in the WHL in their draft+1 season. In his draft year, meanwhile, Woo only bested the scoring rates of Travis Sanheim and Andrew Nielsen. Providing this background information is important because you can see the defencemen who emerged as top-flight offensive guys (Tyson Barrie, Mike Green, Shea Theodore, etc.) were a lot more productive before getting drafted.

In short, Woo’s production was great in his draft+1 year and compares right in line with some very talented defencemen, but it’s hard to say that’s an appropriate comparison because the others were so prolific in their entire WHL career, as opposed to Woo who was quiet before this season.

This is where you’d need to do extensive research (which would go far beyond the scope of this article) to look at whether a larger, multi-year sample is a better gauge of projecting NHL success or whether recent performance for players, especially those who could be late bloomers, is more apt.

After considering the full sample, Josh Gorges, Andrew Nielsen, Joe Hicketts and Travis Sanheim stick out to me as the most appropriate statistical comparables for Woo. These players line up fairly closely, all things considered, and make a lot more sense as comparables.

Two of the four players (Nielsen and Hicketts) wound up as busts, but Gorges was a very steady defenceman for 13 NHL seasons while Travis Sanheim emerged as two-way, top-four defenceman this year. These range of outcomes seem more realistic and while it’s not as exciting as some of the other names (Morgan Rielly, Barrie, Green, Hamhuis, etc.) it still suggests Woo has a good chance of developing into a quality NHL blueliner.

The video report
We’ve spent a lot of time using production to evaluate the odds that Woo can graduate to the NHL, so it’s important that we supplement by dissecting how he looks playing the game.

While not overly big (6-feet and 205 pounds), Woo is built very strong and is aggressive in laying out the body. Puck carriers not cognizant of their surroundings will be subject to open-ice punishment — a type of intimidation that’s becoming a dying art.

Footage link
This booming hit was late and led to an interference call, but for the most part, Woo is clean and clinical with his checks. Functional physicality from those who can hold their own on the ice (as opposed to some skaters who just chase the play and make hits because they never have the puck) is a coveted commodity as an element that makes your team harder to play against.

Fortunately, his goes beyond just brash physicality — he’s a very capable defender who’s counted on to shut down the opposition’s top offensive weapons.

Woo operates with a smart stick that consistently takes away passing and shooting lanes and generally makes good reads. He’s rarely out of position and when the puck is in his reach, he latches on and disrupts with conviction. The Winnipeg native battles extremely hard in front of the net to get inside positioning and is just all-around very reliable.

The only area I’d point to as a sign for improvement is defending in an arc against attackers near the boards.

Defending in an arc is a concept best explained by The Athletic’s Mitch Brown’s visual.

Image from Mitch Brown
To put it simply, you want to defend at an angle that chases the forward up the wall and toward the point to ensure he doesn’t have the option to turn down low.

In the clip above, however, Woo takes more of a straight-on angle — enabling the Tigers forward to turn back down low. Because Woo is good on his edges and maintains a tight gap he ultimately prevents a high-danger chance, but it’s just a small detail to keep in mind moving forward. I believe this is the type of thing that can be worked out when Woo rounds out his game.

The neutral zone is an area where Woo picks his spots. We saw in the first clip he can be aggressive in standing up in the neutral zone and he definitely breaks up a lot of sequences, but he can also be passive in some situations where he backs up toward the goaltender while playing a
loose gap. I'm not sure if this is because he's trying to conserve energy
given the many minutes he logs, but it'll be an intriguing part of his game
to follow moving forward.

On top of his defensive ability, Woo can also retrieve pucks quickly while
owning the composure against forechecking pressure to lead consistently
solid breakouts.

Data and visualization courtesy Mitch Brown

Above is microdata that Brown tracked in Jett Woo’s draft year. It's
encouraging that he’s among the WHL’s top defenders in leading zone
exits with possession of the puck. In watching him on retrievals, he
doesn’t carry out himself often but can be quite effective when he has
forwards low, slow and available.

Offensively, Woo got a lot more opportunities this season —
quarterbacking Moose Jaw’s first power-play unit and logging a ton of
minutes in all situations. The 19-year-old’s puck skills aren’t anything
special, but he’s mobile in walking the line, has good vision and can
reliably make tape-to-tape passes.

This clip does a good job highlighting the lateral agility to Woo’s skating,
even if he’s not the most explosive skater. From there, he’s confident in
skating toward the middle and maintaining full eye contact with the top
penalty killer — ensuring that he creates a passing lane across which
leads to a goal.

He shows similar acumen in connecting on a cross-seam pass to the left
circle in the clip below as well.

Woo shows good poise in hesitating at the last moment before making
the feed across to ensure the defender’s stick is out of the lane.

I’m not sure if Woo has dynamic elements and can effectively run a
power play at the NHL level, but he’s shown good improvement and is at
least capable at distributing the puck in the attacking end.

Woo plays a hard, in-your-face game that you don’t see often at the NHL
level anymore. He’s reliable in his own zone but also possesses the
processing ability, vision and basic puck skills to lead the simple but
efficient play. Woo will certainly need to improve the pace at which he
operates to be effective at the highest level, but that’s the case with most
prospects and no doubt there’s lots of time for him to develop.

His value to a Canucks team that lacks right-handed blueliners in the
system makes him a prized piece.

That his offensive game has flourished in an increased role bodes well in
projecting his chances of graduating to the Canucks one day. Defenceman
who don’t produce in junior rarely make the cut as full-time
NHLers (even if they’re defence-first guys) so it’s encouraging to see
Woo take a step in the right direction.

All told, Woo is a promising prospect with all-around tools who has the
potential to one day mature into a supporting role in the top four. The
attitude and intensity with which he competes brings back memories of
another era and could very well make him a fan-favourite in Vancouver.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
By Thomas Drance Sep 13, 2019

Canucks training camp: The Jake Virtanen thing, Elias Pettersson is on ‘a mission’ and the new-look blueline

In a disappointing turn of events, Jake Virtanen lined up with Utica Comets mainstays Carter Bancks and Wacey Hamilton on Day 1 of training camp.

It wasn’t quite how anyone had hoped to see it drawn up.

Make no mistake: this was a banishment. Canucks head coach Travis Green explicitly left Virtanen out of the two earlier groups peppered with NHL players on one-way contracts because Virtanen failed to hit previously agreed to, but unspecified fitness targets.

Green didn’t share details, but he was direct in addressing the matter with media on Friday afternoon in Victoria, B.C.

“Yes, there is” Green replied bluntly when asked if there was a reason Virtanen was included the third group. “I’ve been with Jake a long time. I think he’s a big part of our team, I think he’s a big part of our future. I don’t want people reading into anything other than that he wasn’t in the groups today.

“Jake and I have had a lot of conversations over the years, and Jake wants to be better as well, and progress as a player, and I want him to take a step – even become a leader on the team.

“There’s certain expectations that he wanted to reach and that I wanted him to reach. There were goals that had to be met and if he didn’t meet them he probably wouldn’t be in the first two groups on the first day of camp. There’s nothing more than that. I’m not going to get into it more than that …”

Asked for follow up, regarding his level of disappointment, Green refused to elaborate.

“I’m fine. We can dig all you want, but I’m not going to get into it more than I already said. It’s between Jake and I.”

Virtanen sang from the same hymn book, telling the media that Green informed him on Thursday morning – the day all Canucks reporting for camp conducted fitness testing at Rogers Arena – that he would be skating with the third group.

“Me and Travis had talked and he told me he was going to put me in the group yesterday morning,” Virtanen said. “I’m not going to get into the details, but I worked hard today and hopefully I’ll be there tomorrow with the boys.”

Virtanen insisted that he was close on the targets and, to his credit, he faced the music on Friday afternoon. He took responsibility, said he was frustrated with himself and defended Green when asked if he’d felt picked on.

“That’s the kind of coach he is,” Virtanen said. “He wants his players to be the best they can be and he’s like that with everybody. He wants you to be better, he wants everybody to be better and he’s not afraid to tell you. He’s honest.”

It’s a tough way to start an extremely competitive scramble for forward spots, particularly for a young player entering a contract year with a lot to prove.

High fitness levels are a significant priority for Green, as they are for all modern NHL coaches. The days of playing your way into shape are long gone.

It seems likely that Virtanen will be back in an NHL group on Saturday. If he works hard and performs well, then perhaps this will be quickly forgotten, a blip to begin a season in which the 2014 sixth-overall pick takes a big step forward. At this point it is a straightforward equation: Virtanen didn’t hit a goal that Travis insisted on and skated with group three on Day 1 of training camp.

One should avoid making more out of this than what it is, but it’s an incident that begs uncomfortable questions that only Virtanen’s performance and work ethic in the weeks ahead can answer.

Pettersson blows the pack away

Elias Pettersson is a thoroughbred.

Friday’s on-ice sessions in Victoria were extremely high-paced. Even from the comfort of arena seating, it looked excruciating.

The drills were fast, with coaches regularly and loudly reminding the group to keep the pace up. Green even chased tired players early from bench-side water breaks.

The sessions were broken up into two exhausting segments, separated by a brief scrape of the ice surface.

And it all culminated with a lengthy bag skate.

Pettersson has only been a full-time Canuck for 12-months. Already, close observers of this team have become accustomed to the extraordinary.

On Friday morning, Pettersson lined up in one end of the ice with Alex Edler, Tyler Myers, Micheal Ferland and Reid Boucher to begin the bag skate. Within a length of the ice, he was leading the group by a 30-foot margin.

— BRENDAN BATCHelor (@BATCHHOCKEY) September 13, 2019

Add another episode to the growing lore that’s beginning to surround Pettersson in this province.

“It was a good thing I had some energy left,” Pettersson said, in understated fashion. “I’m feeling great. I feel like I have more power, more conditioning and I’m ready to get out there and work.”

Green was, not surprisingly, more effusive in describing his first-line centre’s performance.

“It says a lot,” summarized Green of Pettersson’s pace in the bag skate.

“That’s a young man that wants to be a good player. He knows certain areas of his game still need to improve, but it looked like he was on a mission to prove that he was leading the way. That might not have been the case last year.”

As for the players lagging behind Pettersson in his group, you could tell his pace and stamina made a significant impression.

“Petey was buzzing,” laughed Myers. “You look across our group and you have the four of us in a line, basically, and Petey is 10-15 strides ahead of us. It was pretty cool. He’s obviously showing that he’s an up-and-coming player in this league. He’s showing that he put a lot of work in this summer, being able to do stuff like that.”

Asked if it was impressive, or maybe even a little bit aggravating, Myers just shook his head and laughed.

“It’s amazing, but he could’ve slowed down a little and made us older guys look better!”

Best Admission

Travis Green on whether one should read anything into the forward lines he showed on Day 1 of training camp:

“I can’t, so I wouldn’t try it if I were you.”

Best Context

“There’s rhyme and reason,” Green continued on the composition of his forward lines on Day 1. “I wanted to play Ferland with (Pettersson) and I wanted to get Miller with Horvat.

“I had a couple of different looks when I had (Brock Boeser) slated into the team, but I’m also trying to spread it around. We don’t just put the lines on paper without thinking about it – but I wouldn’t read into it.”

Asked if you could read into the defensive pairs, Travis didn’t split hairs.

“Yeah you can read into it a little bit,” Green laughed. “That one you probably can.”
The new-look top six

Green tends to make some statements on the first day of training camp. Forget the Virtanen thing, even as it soaks up headlines across British Columbia. That’s not the sort of statement I mean.

After all, Green tends to speak most loudly with his lineup decisions. Bold and prepared, Green has traditionally opened up his training camp with clear intent.

Last year it was the decision to start Pettersson at centre from the get-go. It was a gutsy call, one that paid off immediately and perhaps altered the trajectory of the franchise.

While there was nothing quite so dramatic this year (what could be, from a deployment perspective?), Green still made it readily apparent that he has a clear idea of how he wants to deploy his significantly upgraded defence corps.

Myers skated with Alex Edler, for example, giving the Canucks a pair of big bodied, veteran defenders that they probably fancy as a matchup pair.

“Well, I’ve been around long enough to know that things can change very quickly,” Myers said of his first-day-of-camp assignment. “Usually what we see on day one is something we try and see if we can make work. Playing with Alex is exciting, he’s smart, very smooth, he’s been around a long time and that experience means a lot.

“When you look at the two of us,” Myers continued. “We cover a lot of ground and we can both make plays coming out of the D-zone.”

It’s an interesting quirk to note that Myers and Edler have actually been paired up before: over a decade ago when were teammates with the Kelowna Rockets of the WHL.

Prized rookie defender Quinn Hughes, meanwhile, was paired with Chris Tanev – the perfect steady, defensive-minded player to put with a high-octane rookie defenceman.

“Every day you can play with somebody new (at training camp) so I don’t really read into it,” Tanev said. “Today it was Quinn, if it’s Quinn again tomorrow I’ll be happy.”

It wasn’t long ago that Tanev was being shepherded into NHL games in the highest leverage situations imaginable during the 2011 Western Conference final and Stanley Cup final. His teammates were so impressed by Tanev’s calm demeanour and unflappability back then that Kevin Bieksa even joked about him smoking a cigarette on the ice.

It may make Tanev feel old to recall those days, but having evolved into an elder statesman on this Canucks roster, taking a player like Hughes under his wing is something he relishes.


“It’s exciting though to play with a young player like Quinn who is 20 and is a tremendous talent. To be put with him, entrusted with helping him move forward as a player, it’s actually a big honour.”

And on what we might expect to be the third pair, Green and the Canucks paired Jordie Benn and Troy Stecher on Friday. Stecher fared very well against top-end competition when Vancouver’s blueline battled through injuries last season, but against soft competition, he could be an absolute beast. The calibration of his pair with Benn – a heady, hard-nosed defender capable of playing either side and moving up and down the lineup – is something that both players were excited about after the first day of camp.

“I’ll let Troy be more offensive and I can just take care of our defensive zone,” Benn said.

“I already told Troy, I’m going to give you the puck and you go with it. He’s a special player who can make plays, so if it’s one of those scenarios where I give him the puck, I want him to go and I’ll back him up when shit hits the fan.”

“I’m pretty good friends with Brendan Gallagher, who played with Jordie last year in Montreal,” noted Stecher. “We trained together all summer long and he said that Jordie was an awesome guy. He’s a bigger, stronger guy in corner battles. If he can win those battles when we play together, it’ll pop to the middle and I can use my feet.”

A really strong third pair, which you can envision with Stecher and Benn, could help Vancouver cover for some of the deficiencies in their bottom-six forward group. It could also help the club spread the blue-line minutes around a bit, a crucial element for a team that traditionally uses 10 or more defenders every season as a result of injury.

“It’ll be the coaches decision, but from afar, looking at the depth that we have, I think we can spread out the minutes more, keep guys fresh,” Stecher said. “Hopefully that can help keep us healthy and help us win games too.”

The Marner thing

At long last Toronto Maple Leafs superstar Mitch Marner, the crown jewel of the much ballyhooed 2019 second-contract forward class, has signed a rich contract worth over $65 million over six years.

The annual average value or cap hit of the Marner deal has been confirmed at $10.893 million. It’s a significant ticket, but not a market bending one necessarily.

While the Marner contract sets a high watermark for the second contract forward class, we should be wary of reading too much into how it will, in fact, set the market.

The fact is, so many of the teams looking to lock up these skilled young forwards to bridge or mid-range or long-term type contracts are dealing with a variety of additional factors that are shaping the respective negotiations.

In the case of Brayden Point, for example, there’s Tampa Bay’s overall salary cap situation to contend with. Similar salary cap-related dynamics hold for players like Boeser and Calgary’s Matthew Tkachuk.

An industry-shaking agreement like the Marner deal in Toronto can create a sense of urgency on all sides of a similar negotiation. That urgency can stimulate talks and lead to an agreement.

Negotiations like the ongoing talks between the Canucks and Boeser are their own story, though. Those negotiations will continue to be more influenced by the unique factors underpinning those talks than by the agreement Marner and the Maple Leafs agreed to on Friday evening.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.15.2019
PARADISE, N.L. — One year at a time.

That’s the simple, unsexy answer to how the Toronto Maple Leafs plan to balance the most top-heavy lineup in the NHL.

No one can say with certainty if it will work. Not even Kyle Dubas, who flew here Saturday with new signing Mitchell Marner and new papa John Tavares, and seemed relieved when he met reporters at Paradise Double Ice Complex with a day or two’s worth of facial hair growth.

His Leafs are trying to become the first team in the NHL’s Salary Cap Era to win a playoff series with a $10-million player on its roster. And Toronto now has three, with Marner and his freshly signed $10.893-million contract joining John Tavares and Auston Matthews in the penthouse district of the dressing room.

“I understand that people will look at it and say that no team has done it this way before,” said Dubas. “That said, we have these guys committed to us for an extended period. We’ll get into a stretch here where we can just come to the rink every day and play. We won’t have any of this hovering above.”

The bet is understandable given where the Leafs started from when he was elevated to general manager in May 2018. They’ve since locked up elite talent for prime years and that’s the most sought-after commodity in the sport.

Where it could turn problematic for the front office is that the elite young talent came with UFA price tags, and that’s going to bring on roster construction challenges sooner than they would have originally forecasted.

Friday night’s Marner signing also comes against the backdrop of the collective bargaining discussions between the NHL and NHL Players’ Association, which bear watching. While nothing has yet been agreed upon between those parties, sources with knowledge of the talks believe the salary cap could end up being frozen at its current $81.5-million level for two more years or raised only minimally — as a way to lower players’ escrow payments.

That will unleash reverberations across the entire industry if it happens, but will arguably impact a team with $40.5-million tied up in four forwards most acutely.

Just navigating the upcoming 186-day regular season should prove difficult enough. The Leafs have committed something in the neighbourhood of $94-million to players — a number they can only carry because they’re going deep into the long-term injury provision.

Operating beyond the cap will limit in-season changes to dollar-for-dollar transactions and should prevent them from carrying more than an extra player or two on the roster most of the time. They may even have to play a game without a full bench depending on injury luck.

Still, the Leafs find themselves in an enviable spot.

There was speculation going back two years or more that they wouldn’t be able to find room for Marner, Matthews and William Nylander, and they not only accomplished that, they also added Tavares to the fold.

“It was a very unique situation,” said Dubas. “You’ve got young players who are extraordinarily talented and already some of the best at what they do. I think we all have room to grow and I think they would be the first to tell you that they’re not close to reaching their potential yet.”

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliott Friedman and Jeff Marek.

The degree to which it happens will probably dictate whether this is ultimately viewed as a successful team-building strategy in a cap world.

However, even if it doesn’t immediately result in a big playoff breakthrough, it’s not as if there won’t be opportunities to change course.

Each of these players has a bonus-laden, front-loaded contract and will remain a highly movable asset, if necessary.

That’s where the year-to-year evaluation part comes in. The Leafs are arguably only locked in as long as they want to be.

Further to that, they’ll also continue to have the resources to search for value at the margins by signing European free agents and replacement-level depth players on league-minimum contracts while also prioritizing skating and skills development below the NHL level.

You need only look at someone like veteran Jason Spezza at this current training camp for an example of how to plug holes while trying to limbo under the cap. He’ll earn just $700,000 in his 17th NHL season because he bought into the organization’s vision.

“Kyle was pretty aggressive in calling me,” said Spezza. “I thought it was a great opportunity and wanted to do whatever possible to make it work, and knowing the team was going to have salary restraints. I was willing to kind of accommodate that and not get hung up over that.”

There’s something to be said for taking care of another major contract decision long term.

It brought a little extra excitement to camp when Marner joined his teammates on the ground in Newfoundland. He’d only technically missed three days of team activities and already his absence had been noticed.

“I’m just glad it’s all done and let’s get on with it,” said coach Mike Babcock. “You can say ‘Oh it’s not a distraction,’ if it’s a huge distraction. You can say whatever you want, but that’s not reality.”

“Of course it’s kind of the elephant in the room,” said Matthews. “Now we don’t have to hear about [contract negotiations] for a bit. So check back in three, four, five years and we’ll do it all over again.”
Mitch Marner is officially back with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

After a contract standoff that spanned almost the entire summer, Marner and the Maple Leafs agreed to terms on a six-year, $65.358-million deal Friday evening that will see the now-former RFA count for $10.893 million against the salary cap through 2024-25.

Less than 24 hours later, the 22-year-old has joined the team at training camp in Paradise, Nfld., where he and general manager Kyle Dubas addressed the media for the first time since signing on the dotted line.

"I'm excited to be part of this team," Marner said Saturday, adding he knew throughout negotiations that he didn't want to miss any training camp. "I'm happy to be here, happy to be done all that process, and looking forward to helping this team."

Both Marner and Dubas acknowledged an integral in-person meeting they had together on Thursday, which Dubas said was "a real positive in the process" for both sides.

"I'm excited that we can know that we're all going to be in this together for an extended period and I think that should be exciting not only for our players and staff but also for our fanbase," Dubas said.

Marner's new deal means the drafted-and-developed core of Auston Matthews, William Nylander, and Marner, along with 2018 UFA prize John Tavares, remains intact until 2023-24, giving the young club a solid window of Stanley Cup contention.

"Now it's time to get to work and have fun with it," said Marner.

A few other members of the Maple Leafs spoke with the media earlier Saturday, clearly happy to be able to put the ongoing contract questions to rest.

"We're all fired up to have him and happy that it took — what was it, one practice day into training camp, so that's great," said William Nylander, whose own negotiations stretched right up to the Dec. 1 deadline last year.

Head coach Mike Babcock told reporters he hadn't spoken to Marner all summer so as to avoid potentially getting in the way of negotiations, drawing from the experience of watching last year's Nylander negotiations from the sidelines.

"I'm just glad it's all over. I look forward to giving him a big hug when I see him," Babcock told reporters Saturday. "When players are going through these negotiations, as a coach you just stay out of it. I haven't talked to Mitch in forever, because you just don't want to get involved or put any pressure on the guy."

"We're all happy for him, we're happy to have him back to kind of get this thing going," Auston Matthews said Saturday. "We have a goal in mind and we've got everybody on board now, so let's play hockey."

Auston Matthews on the #leafs young core being locked up: "Now we don't have to hear about it for awhile. Check back in in three, four or five years and do it all again."

— Chris Johnston (@reporterchris) September 14, 2019

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.15.2019
It’s a win for wingers who drive play.
It’s a win for primary assists and tap-ins and young superstars who’ve never actually been NHL all-stars but are now top-seven in average annual salary (and top two among wings).
It’s a win for lifelong winners who quarterback power plays and murder penalties and hug mascots and fling hockey sticks to kids and dodge checks like taxes.
It’s a win for the small kid who hustles every shift like his chance depends on it.
Zooming all the way out, it’s also a win for the enticing theory that offence wins championships, which is essentially what Kyle “We Can, We Will” Dubas is banking on here.
Damn the clichés. Long live red lams and 5-4 river hockey.

Barring a blockbuster trade, the Toronto Maple Leafs will be pouring $40.49 million of their precious salary cap into just four forwards—Auston Matthews, John Tavares, Marner and William Nylander—in each of the next five seasons.

There’s your window, Leaf Nation.

There’s your legacy, Mr. Dubas.

I’m exactly where I want to be, in front of the greatest hockey fans in the world, proudly continuing the tradition with the @MapleLeafs. See you soon.

— Mitchell Marner (@Marner93) September 14, 2019

The good news: They’re all young enough that it’s not only believable but probable that their best hockey games lie ahead.

A single Stanley Cup will make any agony Leafs fans feel over the lack of “hometown” discounts totally worth it. (Even the staunchest Raptors fans find it difficult to argue a grudge against Kawhi underneath their flat-brimmed 2019 NBA champions caps.) Plus, the salary ceiling is projected to go up, right? Right?! The bad—or, at least, sobering—news: Toronto’s defence during that window may never be as dynamic as it is today.

Dubas has boldly waded into uncharted waters here, banking his club’s success on three forwards raking in eight figures apiece.

It’s a first. But if it works, it may not be the last.

In a cap world, the slivers of pie left over for the blue-line must be sliced thin.

Morgan Rielly—a 25-year-old coming hot off a 20-goal, 72-point campaign—has rapidly become one of the league’s greatest bargains at $5 million for the next three seasons. (Take a bow, Lou Lamoriello.) But Rielly is the only roster defenceman under contract beyond this spring.

Think about that for a second.

If the Leafs are any good this year—and, boy, they better be—defencemen Cody Ceci, Jake Muzzin, Tyson Barrie, and Travis Dermott will all demand raises so large that it’ll be difficult retaining more than two of them.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliott Friedman and Jeff Marek.
The first thought for anyone with a vested stake in the Toronto Maple Leafs should be 'Thank God.'

Thank God Mitch Marner's contract stalemate ended before it went right off the rails. Thank God the 22-year-old winger will be able to join his teammates with plenty of time still left in training camp. Thank God the front office made good on Kyle Dubas's promise to keep all of the young stars in the fold.

Elsewhere, there will be plenty of barely-muffled complaints.

Not only does Marner's market-resetting $65.358-million, six-year extension instantly complicate life for other teams still negotiating with restricted free agents (hello Mikko Rantanen!), it marks the third straight major contract where Toronto stretched itself to the limit to get things done.

They've done it because they believe a core built around Marner, Auston Matthews, William Nylander, John Tavares and Morgan Rielly is good enough to compete for the Stanley Cup. The Leafs made the final push to sign Marner on Friday because this is clearly an all-or-nothing season and it didn't serve anyone's interests to have the standoff drag on any longer.

The compromise in the Marner contract came on the length of the agreement. The player's camp had wanted to keep it to a three-year deal, but wound up seeing him become the NHL's second-highest paid winger behind Artemi Panarin when it eventually accepted a six-year term instead.

That buys two seasons of unrestricted free agency and clearly establishes the window this organization has to compete for a championship with Matthews and Nylander due for new deals in 2024 and Marner and Tavares signed through 2025.

This year may be their best chance of all. Tyson Barrie, Jake Muzzin and Cody Ceci are all playing on expiring deals and will fill three of Toronto's top four spots on the blue line. They've got improved depth at every position.

"Let's be honest: I mean we're a good, good team in the National Hockey League," said Babcock. "It's taken some time to get here, but now we're a team that we feel like we have an opportunity each year."

"We didn't have an opportunity in the past."

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliott Friedman and Jeff Marek.

They've arrived here through a patient build that landed Nylander (No. 8 in 2014), Marner (No. 4 in 2015) and Matthews (No. 1 in 2016) with high picks in consecutive drafts. Now that each of those players has graduated from the entry-level contract system and is getting paid commensurate with his performance, the pressure shifts to management to find creative ways to keep building a competitive team around them.

The biggest challenge down the road will be properly staffing the blue line — the development of prospects Rasmus Sandin and Timothy Liljegren is more important than ever — while determining how to proceed when No. 1 goaltender Frederik Andersen's contract expires in 2021.

However, those are worries for another day.

The organization had once hoped their young stars might take a discount to stay together, but that never materialized. Still, part of president Brendan Shanahan's message from last October rings true today.

"What I hope they can look back on 20 years, 30 years down the road, what's going to be most important to them is whether or not they maxed out as an individual and as a team and have championships to look back on and remember forever," said Shanahan.

That's still possible.

The window isn't as wide as it might have been, but it's cranked open until further notice.
VICTORIA, B.C. — On rare occasions, when they are really fortunate, athletes get into the space they call ‘the zone.’ Everything slows down. There is clarity, awareness, simplicity.

Vancouver Canucks winger Sven Baertschi would seem to be a long way from the zone. After ‘living in a fog’ while missing most of last season with a concussion, the 26-year-old is trying to restart his National Hockey League career.

But after a summer of acquisitions by the Canucks, including a pair of wingers who now slot in ahead of Baertschi, the Swiss scorer will be scrambling this month for a place in coach Travis Green’s lineup while trying to prove to everyone that he can still take a hit and stay healthy.

That’s a difficult spot for a player who, until he got injured last Oct. 24 on an unpenalized hit-from-behind by Vegas Golden Knight Tomas Hyka, was a regular top-line partner for centre Bo Horvat.

Baertschi, however, told Sportsnet he is already in the zone — not only in hockey, but in life.

After missing 56 games last season and wondering at times if he’d ever play or just “feel like myself again,” Baertschi was not saved by neurologists or physiotherapists or Canucks doctors, although he is grateful for the help of all of these.

Baertschi was saved by meditation.

“I started feeling anxiety,” he explained after his first session here at Canucks training camp. “Not depression, anxiety. I’d never felt that before. I didn’t understand it. You fall down a dark hole, it’s hard to get out. I haven’t talked about this, but I started feeling better after I started this (meditation). Not just better, but great. It’s like healing yourself from within.

“What I started doing was mindfulness meditation. I had six weeks of training to get to know my body and how I can deal with certain situations. It was a crash course. Ever since that day, it’s become part of my routine every day. I started feeling better and better and it got me to the point where I felt really comfortable.”

Baertschi said the team put him in touch with a psychologist, who introduced him to mindfulness, which has its roots in Zen and Buddhism.

Many athletes, including basketball star Klay Thompson and Canadian tennis sensation Bianca Andreescu practise meditation.

When Baertschi’s concussion symptoms returned in February, 12 games into his comeback, he was desperate to understand why his head and body felt the way they did.

“Why do I get headaches, why is my neck sore?” Baertschi said. “A lot of those things can be connected to anxiety.

“It’s just understanding your body. It’s trying to be present. I think that’s the biggest thing. As humans, we spend so much time in the future and the past. We worry. We think ahead. We look backwards. But we’re never in the right now. We forget to enjoy the moment.”

Baertschi said his daily meditations can be 10 minutes or 45 minutes.

“You’ve got to be alert and you’ve got to be awake and be able to focus on just being there,” he said. “You go into a quiet room and go through certain body scans (visualizations) and just sit there and focus on breathing. That really puts you in that present moment, and that’s when your brain functions the best. In sports, people call it the zone. That’s what that really means — guys are in the here and now, they’re present. That’s what I’ve learned through mindfulness meditation.”

Baertschi said his symptoms began to abate as he meditated.

His recovery was further boosted on April 18, when his wife Laura delivered the couple’s first child, a boy named Callan.

“Playing hockey is still my passion,” Baertschi said. “But once my son was born, priorities changed. It was kind of like: Now I’m doing everything for you. My dream is for him to see me play hockey.”

That dream is complicated by an uncertain future with the Canucks.

In the 26 games he did play last season, Baertschi scored nine times and added four assists. When healthy, he has been a fairly consistent secondary scorer in the four seasons since his trade from the Calgary Flames.

But the Canucks traded for top-six winger J.T. Miller in June, then signed potential 20-goal scorer Micheal Ferland in July. Winger Tanner Pearson was acquired last February and scored nine goals in 19 games after replacing Baertschi on Horvat’s wing.

It’s unclear where Baertschi fits in this new landscape.

“It’s kind of wait and see for a lot of our guys to see where they fit in,” Green said. “Players from last year, they need to be better.

“I’m not saying Baertschi is going to get pushed aside, but some guys are going to get pushed aside as you get better. That’s just part of the progression of a team that’s trying to get better and improve and bring new guys in. Someone’s not going to make the team and someone’s going to be disappointed. That’s just the reality of where we’re at right now.”

Baertschi has two years remaining on his contract at an annual cap hit of $3.37 million. On a team that may have to contort to stay under the salary cap this season, that number does not help Baertschi if he falls into a depth role.

“That’s the part I’m trying to get away from — that worrying and overthinking things,” Baertschi said. “My head is feeling good, my body’s feeling great, and I’m coming into camp with confidence. I’m not worried about anything.

“Like we’ve talked about before, where I end up, who knows? Whatever it is, it’s the coach’s decision. All I can do is leave it all out there and make sure I let them know, ‘Hey, you know, I can still play.’

“J.T. coming in, he’s obviously a great player. Ferland, he’s a great player as well. But you know as well as I do, things happen throughout a season. I just want to be ready for any role I get. All I can do is put my stamp on it and make sure they haven’t forgotten how good a player I can be. That’s my job now — to let them know I’m still here and I’ll do anything I can to help this team.”

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.15.2019
But it was on Saturday that Julien talked about what Brook could bring to 2018.

The coach could have started with 28 of the 44 names on the camp roster, or even 23 if need be. Instead, he started with 28 names of the 44 he said he would bring into camp that we're trying to prepare for the start of the season, Julien said.

He mentioned that he could start with 28 names on the blue-line if he wanted because the Canadiens had several more established options to consider for a starting role on the right side of their third defence pairing.

Not to say it's been a complete shock things have turned out that way. Brook, the big righty who was chosen 56th overall by the Canadiens in 2017, joined the American Hockey League's Laval Rocket towards the end of last season and was able to get into seven of the team's games after putting up the highest point total (75) of any defenceman in the Western Hockey League. He was a member of the 2019 Canadian World Junior team and a player anyone would've circled as one who might get an opportunity to get his feet wet at the NHL level for a few games this season.

It's just that it was hard to see that happening as early as October given that the Canadiens had several more established options to consider for a starting role on the right side of their third defence pairing.

It became less difficult to envision Brook in the role when he stepped on the ice and took his first rushes next to Kulak at Friday's opening practice. And then Canadiens coach Claude Julien reduced the doubt quotient significantly with his comments later that afternoon.

"I think it's obvious when you look at what's going on right now in training camp that we're trying to prepare for the start of the season," Julien said. "We don't have 23 jobs available, we all know that. We're starting with lines (and pairings) that we think we might like. It doesn't mean it won't change before the start of the season, but we have an opportunity to work together and do these things. But at the same time, we'll give chances to several players who will be fighting for jobs and we'll deal with that eventually on a game-by-game basis."

For what it's worth, Brook didn't read too far into the coach's decision to pair him with Kulak to start. "I'm kind of just doing my thing," he said with a shrug of his shoulders following Saturday's practice, and it's probably best he approach this opportunity that way.

But there was no way for us to ignore what Julien's decision signified. The coach could have started with 28-year-old Christian Folin, who finished off last season on the right side of the third pair and played steadily enough there to earn himself a one-year, one-way, $800,000 contract this summer. He also could have opted for Mike Reilly, who played 57 games on the left side of the blue-line last season and recently, according to a report in the Athletic, offered to play on the right side if need be.

Even Cale Fleury, the 2017 third-rounder who cut his teeth in 57 games with the Rocket last season, appeared to have a leg up on Brook coming out of last week's rookie camp. And it was expected that Julien might defer to Noah Juulsen above all other options because the 22-year-old showed great promise before an eye injury suffered in November cut his 2018-19 season down to just 21 games with the Canadiens.

But it was on Saturday that Julien talked about what Brook could bring to the Canadiens as early as next month, and you'd have a hard time making a case that any of the other players in the competition for that job can offer what he does.

"We all know offensively he's a gifted player," Julien said. "He carries the puck well, he moves it well. I think he anticipates well, also."

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliott Friedman and Jeff Marek.

The coach added that he wants to give Brook an opportunity to show he can be reliable in his own end, too, and he cautioned that some more seasoning in the AHL might be in order when all is said and done.

But Julien's not just swapping Brook in for a look at some point; he's starting him in the position because he knows this player could immediately prove to be an upgrade on the others in the competition.

"I think he's really good," said 21-year-old Victor Mete, who's lined up with captain Shea Weber on the team's top-pairing. "Good shot, good feet, and he's making solid plays out there. Even though it's camp, he's still making really good plays. I think he's going to be able to push for a spot if he's going to get the opportunity. It looks like he is getting that opportunity."

"I think he can really turn some heads."

Kulak has been equally impressed.

"He plays the game with his head up and he can skate," the 25-year-old Edmonton native said. "Brooksy's got lots of tools. He can skate, pass, shoot. I think overall he's a really smart D-man and he plays hard."

With the Canadiens set to play four exhibition games this week, we're going to find out in a hurry how Brook plays against top end players at this level.

Obviously, getting to do that in practice is giving him a sense of what he's in for.

"These are the most skilled players I've ever played against," Brook said. "So it's learning on how to defend them and how to think and stay ahead of things."

If he can manage to do that over the coming days, there's a chance we'll see him make his NHL debut come October. It's something that's more foreseeable now than it was at the beginning of the week.
Q: What are you going to do about being so high above the salary cap to the organization will match their level of play. I think we all hope they contracts we sign, the players' production and output and what they bring to the organization will match their level of play. I think we all hope they

DUBAS: "I would like to thank Mitch, his family, his representation the work that they put in in the last number of days to have this matter come to a close. We signed him to a contract that was with Mitch committed to our team for an extended period of time. Now we can get back to business here and get back to work while we are here in training camp. People will make their own discussions or try to create other controversies, but I don't really think we have any at this point. We can all just be at our best as we get rolling through the year."

Q: What took so long?

DUBAS: "So long? We missed one day of camp. You're a little more antsy than me. These things take time (laughs) and we're just happy to be here. We've missed no games and that's really the objective. We had a situation last year that did take long and we're thrilled to be here. Obviously he wanted to be here and we got it done."

Q: Mitch, on that front, did you kind of look at Willie and give yourself your own little deadline, that you didn't want to go through what Willie did and maybe speed things up?

MARNER: "Mitch, did that conversation take place?

Q: Mitch, what did you say?

MARNER: "Not too much. Social media is a big thing nowadays, but not too much. Tried to stay off it, tried not to look at it. You know, like I said, it's a thing that can affect some people, but tried to stay off it. Want to just move forward. Like I said, happy to be here, happy to be done all that process and looking forward to helping this team."

Q: Kyle, after you signed John you made the statement that you were confident you could get Mitch and the other two guys signed. Can you talk about the process and what you've gone through the last 15 months?

DUBAS: "It's been interesting. Every single one of the players is different. They have different personalities. They have different backgrounds. They bring different things to the club. It was a very unique situation. You got young players who are extraordinarily talented and already some of the best at what they do. We all have room to grow. They would be the first to tell you they're not close to reaching their potential yet and it is our job to help them get there and their job to continue to get here. They have already accomplished great things in the league individually. I know, in speaking to all of them, it's important to them that now we are starting to grow as a team and starting to work towards greater team success. The key thing for me was that they all believe we are on the cusp of being able to do that. They see their own part and how it influences how far we can go as a group. It was an interesting process. I'm excited that we can know we are all going to be in this together for an extended period. I think that should be exciting not only for our players and staff but also our fan base."

Q: How much have you grown as a GM? Growing pains?

DUBAS: "Lots. I don't know that we'll ever be in that type of situation again, especially not jumping right into it. I've learned a lot. I'm open to say I screwed some things up and made some mistakes and tried to learn from them. I am not afraid to ever admit that. I think that's how you learn your most and your best. I am happy that we've got to the conclusion we have got to. You learn a lot in the process and what you would do differently the next time around. In the end, I am happy we were able to deliver all of the three guys that were impending and bring John in as well and try to continue to improve our team as we did so. We are excited about that."

Q: What did you screw up?

DUBAS: "Lots. I wish everything was done with all of them in one day. They all took long periods of time. With William, I think we've talked about that at length. I wish we would've been on it earlier and gone through it earlier. With Auston's case, I don't think there was anything. We had the information that we had and were projecting ahead where it would go with him, so we executed that one. In Mitch's case, we got it in and done before camp. You look back and always are looking to find ways to do things better and find ways you could've improved the process throughout to come to a conclusion sooner. The key thing is we are all here. Different things that I'll reflect back on after this has come and gone, I'll continue to adjust. I'm fortunate that we've got a great staff and when things are not looking the greatest, whether it's Brandon, Lawrence or Shanny on our staff, they do a good job of helping out so I'm fortunate that way."

Q: You spoke about the possibility of having a blunt discussion with Mitch, did that conversation take place?

DUBAS: "We had a sit-down on Thursday for quite a while and it was great for Mitch to explain to me how he felt and for me to explain to him the reasons why we were at where we were at and what we were proposing, and about how he fits into the team and how the team was going to move forward and everything of that nature. We had that opportunity Thursday. I don't want to speak for Mitch, but I think it was a real positive in the process."

Q: Mitch, what did you say?

MARNER: "I just expressed to Kyle that I don't want to miss any games. I want to make sure that I'm with team as soon as possible and I think from that moment on, the next day for so, everyone on both sides just bared down and realized that both parties want the same thing and we came to agreement. We're here, we've only missed a day or so and get to get on the ice tomorrow with all the guys and it's exciting."

Q: Kyle, you've got the core of this team together for the better part of the next decade, what does that mean to you?

DUBAS: "To our whole organization it means a lot. It was one of the things we looked at when we were going through the decisions you have to make with different players. I understand that people look at it and say no team has done it this way before. That said, we have these guys committed to us for an extended period. We will get into a stretch here where we can just come to the rink every day and play. We won't have any of this hovering above. People will make their own decisions or try to create other controversies, but I don't really think we have any at this point. We can just enjoy being together and have fun being together as a program and continue to grow as a program without having to worry about anyone going anywhere. To me, in my position, it means a lot. It was important for me to deliver that for our staff and our players so that they could just come to work every day and be at their best as well. So, that's the most exciting part for me."

Q: Kyle, what do you like about the deal? Why is it a fair deal from the team's perspective?

DUBAS: "I think we got a commitment from Mitch for six years and that should be as he enters his prime and then goes into his prime. I know everyone is not going to agree and Mitch would want more and we would want less, but it's something that we both agree on and can move ahead with it. The way we evaluate these things, we think that all of the contracts we sign, the players' production and output and what they bring to the organization will match their level of play. I think we all hope they exceed it and that sets them up well for their next contracts."

Q: What are you going to do about being so high above the salary cap?

DUBAS: "Well, I got a great person to handle that, his name's Brandon Pridham, he's in the back and that pressure will go to him. You got some tough questions, I like it, straight heat, the fastball. I like it."
Q: How will you handle the pressure of being such a highly-paid player? Will you get caught up in having to justify it?

MARNER: “I mean, I'm from Toronto, I live here and I play here as well so there's pressure in that always and you don't think about it, you just go out there and play hockey like you've done your whole life.”

Q: What was the role of your family and agent in this process?

MARNER: “My family’s been with me through everything that I've been through in my hockey career so they're definitely people I can always lean on and ask those hard questions and depend on and same with Darren (Ferris) he's been there a long time with me. All three of them kind of together with my brother as well they're just someone I can always depend on and ask those heavy questions and get their honest opinions out of it so they meant the world to me throughout this discussion and without them, who knows what would've happened but, like I said, just glad it's over. It's time to get to work and have fun with it.”

TSN.CA LOADED: 09.15.2019
The focus has to shift onto seeing how it pays dividends. He made mistakes in getting the team's core locked in to this point, but in four forwards. It's a big investment by Toronto, and even Dubas admits pact signed last December, the Leafs now have $40 million wrapped up in forwards. It's a big investment by Toronto, and even Dubas admits he made mistakes in getting the team's core locked in to this point, but now the focus has to shift onto seeing how it pays dividends.

Paradise, Newfoundland -- Mitch Marner only wanted to play hockey, and no contract stalemate was going to stand in his way.

That was the message a relieved Marner delivered hours after inking his massive six-year, $65.3 million deal with the Maple Leafs, rapidly moving from restricted free agent to rating to go.

"[Leafs' general manager Kyle Dubas and I] were talking before and I stressed to him that I didn't want to miss training camp, I didn't want to miss games," Marner explained on Saturday in a joint press conference with Dubas at Paradise Double Ice Complex. "That goes back to the middle of last year. In the last 48 hours or so, we sat down and talked [about that]. It's great it's over; I'm happy to be here."

Marner overshot his original goal by only a couple of days, joining teammates in Newfoundland during their second day of on-ice training camp activity, but having missed very little of the program. That's a vital accomplishment for the Leafs, who were desperate not to re-live the William Nylander debacle from last season, where an RFA standoff bled into the regular season and robbed both player and team of reaching their full potential.

At the same time, Toronto had to navigate a tricky negotiation with Marner's camp. According to TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger, Marner's side was looking for a shorter term deal of three to five years, while the Leafs were hoping for seven to eight. When push came to shove and the team was leaving for Newfoundland without Marner on board, the sides came back together ready to negotiate a deal.

"I think we get a commitment from Mitch for six years, and that should be as he enters his prime and then goes into his prime," Dubas said of why he favoured the contract. "I know not everybody is going to agree, and [say] Mitch would want more and we would want less, but it's something that we both agree on and move ahead with."

When the Leafs opened camp on Thursday, Dubas said that once a deal with Marner was struck, the two would likely have "a very blunt discussion about things" and leave any ill will from the negotiation process behind. The real honesty wound up coming out before Marner officially put pen to paper, but the conversation still served its intended purpose.

"We had a sit down for quite a while on Thursday," Dubas revealed. "It was great for Mitch to tell me how he felt and [for] me to explain the reasons [why] where we were at and what we were proposing, about how he fit into the team, how the team was going to move forward. It was a real positive in the process."

"I just expressed to Kyle that I don't want to miss any games and want to make sure I'm with the team as soon as possible," Marner reiterated. "From that moment on, the next day or so everyone on both sides just beared down and realized that both parties want the same thing and we came to an agreement."

The deal itself came out heavily front-loaded, and includes nearly $61 million in signing bonuses, to give Marner the second-highest cap hit of any winger in the NHL this season. He was also the last piece of Toronto's vaunted core to be locked in long-term, after Dubas successfully re-signed Nylander and Auston Matthews last winter to six and five year deals respectively. But having highly covetable talents has demanded top-tier compensation of Toronto, and CapFriendly details how the Leafs now own three of the NHL's top seven cap hits in Matthews (third at $11.634 million), John Tavares (sixth at $11 million) and Marner's $10.893 in seventh.

Factoring in the $6.9 million cap hit from Nylander's six-year, $45 million pact signed last December, the Leafs now have $40 million wrapped up in forwards. It's a big investment by Toronto, and even Dubas admits he made mistakes in getting the team's core locked in to this point, but now the focus has to shift onto seeing how it pays dividends.

"I'm open to say I've screwed some things up," Dubas said. "I wish everything was done with all of them in a day. I'm happy we've gotten to the conclusion we wanted to. I'm happy we're able to deliver all three of the [RFA] guys and bring John in as well. We think that all the contracts we've signed, the player's production and output and what they bring to the organization will match their level of pay."

The elated teammates anticipating Marner's arrival in Newfoundland know all too well his value on the ice, and that he wouldn't be able to stay away for long.

"We're very happy," Morgan Rielly said. "Mitch is a big part of this and he's obviously very close to [us] so we're happy to see that get done. He wants to be here, that was never a question. We're glad he's coming in and we're excited to see him."

Head coach Mike Babcock even said he'd be waiting with a "big hug" for Marner, pleased as he was to see the business side finally handled. Babcock had avoided speaking with Marner as the negotiations played out, but had no doubt it would resolve in a favourable outcome.

"You know he wants to be a Leaf for life," Babcock said. "I'm just glad it's over. I think it gives us a boost and we can get going. When players are going through these negotiations, as a coach, you just stay out of it, so now to get him back in here and get him feeling good about himself and get his swagger back [is great]."

Contract talks aside, the last few months have been difficult personally for Marner, specifically due to treatment he's received online. Marner told Dreger in an interview Saturday morning that while he could handle fans harassing him at the dog park over not signing, it was tougher seeing criticism thrown at those close to him.

"Just seeing all the stuff being said about my family on social media made me disappointed and mad," Marner said. "I saw a couple comments about my father that no one is going to like seeing or reading. Pretty disappointed to see some people express themselves about my family and my family name."

I'm exactly where I want to be, in front of the greatest hockey fans in the world, proudly continuing the tradition with the @MapleLeafs. See you soon.

— Mitchell Marner (@Marner93) September 14, 2019

The blowback didn't stop Marner from celebrating the new contract on social media though -- first in a Friday night tweet decreeing, "I'm exactly where I want to be!" and then with a video montage of his highlights posted to Instagram on Saturday, captioned simply "home".

That's what Toronto has always been for Marner, a native of Thornhill, Ont. And he knows all about the expectations awaiting him, new contract in hand, when the puck finally drops for real in October.

"I live here and I play here as well. There's pressure in that always," Marner said. "I know all too well his value on the ice, and that he wouldn't be able to stay away for long."

"We're very happy," Morgan Rielly said. "Mitch is a big part of this and he's obviously very close to [us] so we're happy to see that get done. He wants to be here, that was never a question. We're glad he's coming in and we're excited to see him."

Contract talks aside, the last few months have been difficult personally for Marner, specifically due to treatment he's received online. Marner told Dreger in an interview Saturday morning that while he could handle fans harassing him at the dog park over not signing, it was tougher seeing criticism thrown at those close to him.

"Just seeing all the stuff being said about my family on social media made me disappointed and mad," Marner said. "I saw a couple comments about my father that no one is going to like seeing or reading. Pretty disappointed to see some people express themselves about my family and my family name."

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— Mitchell Marner (@Marner93) September 14, 2019

The blowback didn't stop Marner from celebrating the new contract on social media though -- first in a Friday night tweet decreeing, "I'm exactly where I want to be!" and then with a video montage of his highlights posted to Instagram on Saturday, captioned simply "home".

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VICTORIA – While the wait continues for Brock Boeser and the weight continues to be an issue for Jake Virtanen, there were other stories to emerge on the first day of the Vancouver Canucks 2019 training camp.

As expected, the day ended with a grueling skate for all of the forwards and defencemen taking part in the workouts at Save-On Foods Memorial Centre. Pushing players to their limits to conclude the opening camp session has become a staple for head coach Travis Green in each of his three years on the job.

For newcomer Micheal Ferland, adapting to the operating procedures of a new coach is nothing new. The rugged winger is playing for his third organization in three years after getting dealt from Calgary (where he played under Glen Gulutzan) to Carolina (where he had Rod Brind’Amour behind the bench). Now as he adjusts to a new team and new teammates, Ferland has no concerns about adjusting to Green’s style of play in Vancouver.

“Honestly, a lot of the teams play a similar style now,” he explains. “Everyone wants to play fast. They all want the d-men to play up in your face. There are a few little changes (here) but nothing crazy.”

Sven Baertschi put in hours in the summer preparing for the rigors of the first day of camp fitness test. The veteran knew what was in store for players having been through it in the past two seasons with Green at the helm. For Baertschi, who was limited to just 26 games last season with a concussion and later lingering effects of that same head injury, it was important to push himself in the off-season to have peace of mind that he’d be up to the challenge of the opening day of camp.

“You can prepare for it. I did quite a few (heavy skates) throughout the summer to make sure that I was ready to go,” he says. “It just helps pushing toward that threshold and trying to get stronger legs and the way we want to play here has a lot to do with that. We want to play at a high pace and doing that consistently you have to get your skates in. I skated more this summer than ever before because I missed so much time. Obviously, you can’t really make it game-like throughout the summer but I was trying to push myself and missing that much time, I just wanted to make sure I felt comfortable on the ice again and getting into battles again and just knowing I could go out there and play.”

On the topic of players that lost time to injury last season, the Canucks hope veteran defenceman Chris Tanev can play more than the 55 games he was limited to last season. Tanev, who turns 30 in December, has plenty of incentive to stay in the lineup this season. The Toronto native is set to become an unrestricted free agent next July and needs to stay healthy to maximize his value in his next contract whether it’s with the Canucks or on the open market. To that end, the shot blocker and penalty killer enlisted the help of the Canucks’ equipment staff over the summer to modify the gear he’ll wear this season.

“The trainers made me a bunch of custom gear after last year and the year before going back-to-back broken legs,” said Tanev. “It’s fully new shin pads and they’re all decked out and some new gloves. There’s a lot more protection than there was so hopefully that help. I trusted them and wanted to find something that would protect me and I think they’ve done that – hopefully anyways. They look good and feel good right now and obviously we’ll see as the years go on. I’ve had them all summer. They’re definitely a lot more protective than my other ones so I’m happy about it.”

Tanev, who skated alongside rookie Quinn Hughes on Friday, has suited up for just 55, 42 and 53 games the past three seasons. His high-water mark for games played in any NHL season is 70 back in 2014-15. From a contract perspective, imagine the difference getting into 75 games this season could make to a pending UFA rather than dealing with the narrative that he’s injury prone and simply can’t stay healthy. It could easily be a difference of a few million dollars and a few extra years on his next deal.
USA TODAY / NHL suspends Capitals' Evgeny Kuznetsov for first three games following positive cocaine test

Chris Bumbaca

When the Washington Capitals open the 2019-20 regular season against the defending Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues in less than three weeks, Evgeny Kuznetsov will not be with them.

The center has been suspended for the first three games of the season for "inappropriate conduct." Kuznetsov tested positive for cocaine in May at the World Championships while representing the Russian national team. He and the league met Monday in New York with NHL Players' Association representatives, and Kuznetsov will not appeal the decision.

"The National Hockey League announced today that Washington Capitals forward Evgeny Kuznetsov has been suspended, without pay, for three regular-season games for inappropriate conduct," the league said in a statement.

The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) classifies cocaine as a prohibited drug and handed Kuznetsov a four-year ban from international competition.

"He's going to be better," teammate Alex Ovechkin said last week in Chicago during the NHL media tour. "When you make a mistake, you try to bounce back right away. I've been with him, and he's in great shape."

Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov will miss the first three games of the season.

In May, a since-deleted video posted to Twitter showed Kuznetsov next to a table that showed two white lines of powder. The Capitals became aware of it and discussed the situation with their 27-year-old star, saying, "While we are disappointed by his presence in the video, we accept his explanation and apology for putting himself in an unfortunate situation."

Kuznetsov was adamant he was not using drugs. But following the positive test, the NHL said he went through an education and counseling program and also acquiesced to a regular testing protocol.

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