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SPORT-SCAN, INC.  941-284-4129
IRVINE — Rickard Rakell didn’t enjoy playing in Randy Carlyle’s old-school offensive system. It was too predictable, too restrictive and led to a significant drop in the left wing’s production last season, when he scored only 18 goals after consecutive seasons of 30 or more.

The Ducks scored an NHL-low 199 goals, which helped to explain why they finished sixth in the eight-team Pacific Division and failed to advance to the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2012. It also helped to explain why Carlyle was fired as coach and replaced by Dallas Eakins.

Change has been good, according to Rakell.

“It’s a different energy around the whole team, getting this practice facility and all the seriousness about everything when it comes to food, sleep, recovery and practice,” Rakell said. “You can really notice the difference. They’ve given us all the tools. For us, everybody is just excited.

“We don’t have anything to lose.”

Eakins introduced new offensive schemes during the opening days of training camp and, so far, Rakell is pleased. Eakins has encouraged the Ducks to play to their strengths, to experiment and find out what works and what doesn’t. Creativity is welcomed rather than stifled under the previous regime.

“We have to try to score goals,” Rakell said, stating the obvious. “The first thing (Eakins) said was that we were last in shots on net and goals scored last season, so we’re going to have to make some changes to try to score goals.”

Rakell struggled during Carlyle’s final days, before his firing last Feb. 10.

“I think, because the season is so long, you’ve got to have trigger points for us,” Rakell said. “Athletes and hockey players have got to be able to go out and try new things and try to get better. That’s how you stay hungry for a whole year. It was getting to a point where, like, you’re not playing. Or you’re just thinking about what you can’t do out there. It wasn’t natural.

“You’re not being the player you can be. That’s not helping.”

Rakell knew things would be different when Eakins visited him in Sweden over the summer.

“For me, it just shows he cares,” Rakell said. “He cares about the opinions of the players on the team. Not only me, but he cares about the families as well. He had me and my fiancee come to dinner and asked what her view was on the family situation, so he understands.

“There’s a better vibe within this whole organization. From the first time you’re sitting down and talking to him, everything sounds great. It was almost too good to be true. It’s just that he feels part of our team. He just feels part of our team.”

Unlike past seasons, when the Ducks were simply expected to be among the NHL’s elite teams, the target the players have worn on their backs will be missing for 2019-20. The Ducks are no one’s idea of a Stanley Cup contender, and that opinion suits Rakell just fine.

“It’s different, but at the same time now it feels like we have all the tools to be great,” Rakell said. “If we’re not, it’s all up to us, the players. If you’re good at hockey, Dallas is going to let you do it. I think that’s how you get the most out of all the players you have on your team.

“Then there can’t be any excuses. Then you start keeping each other accountable within the team. I think that’s huge if you want to build a team. If you have a great trust and honesty in this team, you’re not scared to tell anybody if they’re doing something wrong.

“Or even if you made a mistake, but try it again because it’s good for our team. When you start getting that within the team, instead of someone saying, ‘No, I’m not allowed to do that.’ Then you’re not getting everything out of the players. We can’t think, ‘What can I not do on the ice?’ Instead, it should be, ‘What can we do to score a goal? Or what can we do to get the puck back?’

“Then we’ll work more as a unit.”
Max Pacioretty had a hat trick and an assist to help the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Arizona Coyotes 6-2 on Sunday in the NHL preseason opener.

Cody Eakin, Reilly Smith, and Brayden McNabb also scored for the Golden Knights. They had five straight goals after falling behind 2-1 midway through the first period. Smith and McNabb scored short-handed.

Ilya Lyubushkin and Vinnie Hinostroza scored for Arizona.

Malcolm Subban played the entire game in goal for Vegas, making 29 saves. Coyotes starter Adin Hill allowed four goals on 23 shots in the first two periods, and Erik Kallgren made eight saves on nine shots in the third.
Oliver Ekman-Larsson’s cryptic injury is latest in string of bad luck for Coyotes

Richard Morin, Arizona Republic

Published 4:35 p.m. MT Sept. 15, 2019 | Updated 10:33 p.m. MT Sept. 15, 2019

Are you superstitious?

It’s probably nothing, but the cryptic injury status of Coyotes defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson — announced on Friday the 13th — is the last thing Coyotes fans wanted to hear at the start of training camp.

Coyotes President of Hockey Operations and General Manager John Chayka pulled reporters aside on Friday — the club’s first organized skating day of training camp — and announced that Ekman-Larsson was day-to-day after undergoing an offseason procedure to repair a previous injury. The Coyotes, who finished third among NHL teams in man-games lost to injury last season, simply cannot afford to repeat that trend in 2019-20. And it doesn’t seem like they’re off to a very good start.

In typical NHL fashion, no further details surrounding Ekman-Larsson’s injury were disclosed, although he did skate on Friday. We also know Ekman-Larsson played through a knee injury last season, and was attacked by a family dog over the summer.

Unlucky, perhaps?

The strangest part, however, were Chayka’s cryptic comments relating to his captain’s status. When asked if the injury was directly related to last season’s knee ailment, Chayka offered this:

“In some ways, yes; in some ways, no,” Chayka said. “It’s just something that’s been nagging him for a number of years now. Just an opportunity for him to clean it up and get ready for the season, so he’s 100 percent healthy and strong, so he’s got no concerns heading into the season.”

A number of years? Yes and no? After a season in which the Coyotes experienced an unholy number of significant injuries, kicking off training camp with a nonspecific knee injury feels like a black cat crossing center ice at Gila River Arena.

The Coyotes were lauded for the center depth in training camp last year yet saw pivot after pivot fall to injury. Alex Galchenyuk, Christian Dvorak, Vinnie Hinostroza and Brad Richardson were among the centers who went down at some point in 2018-19.

At one juncture last season, Josh Archibald was playing the center position.

Chayka dealt two former first-round picks in Dylan Strome and Brendan Perlini to the Chicago Blackhawks (who else?) in exchange for center Nick Schmaltz, who excelled for 17 games before a knee injury ended his season, too.

Their defense was in disarray while Jason Demers, Ekman-Larsson’s reputable right-handed partner on the top pairing, missed most of the season with a blown-out knee in November.

And if it hadn’t been for Darcy Kuemper’s stellar play in relief of starting goaltender Antti Raanta — who also bit the dust with a knee injury — the Coyotes would not have come anywhere close to four points from a playoff spot when the regular season came to an end.

The Coyotes may have finished third in man-games lost, but the value lost from those injuries was more than any other club, according to a metric from Nathan Currier, who runs the popular “NHL Man-Games Lost” account on Twitter.

NHL top 5, points in standings lost due to injured players (Lost-ps metric, lost point shares due to injured players)

1 ARI 25.8 points lost
2 NJD 18.7

Currier’s data calculates points-in-standings lost due to players missing from the lineup. At the end of the season, Currier’s metric estimated that the Coyotes lost out on 25.8 points. The next team on the list was determined to have lost 18.7 points.

Not only did the Coyotes lose a great deal of players from the lineup last season, but they lost valuable players who make a profound impact on the ice.

Ekman-Larsson, who is entering his second season of captaincy and checks in with a team-record $8.25 million cap hit, would fall under that category.

For now, the Coyotes anticipate that Ekman-Larsson will be fine if eased into training camp. He is expected to participate in the later preseason games and be fully available for the Oct. 3 regular-season opener in Anaheim.

Still, for Coyotes fans still paying therapist bills from last season’s emotional rollercoaster, you may want to hold onto that rabbit’s foot.

Coyotes drop opener

Max Pacioretty netted a hat trick as the Vegas Golden Knights downed the Coyotes, 6-2, on Sunday at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

The Coyotes were an astounding 0 for 8 on the power play in their preseason opener. They also allowed two shorthanded goals.

Vinnie Hinostroza and Ilya Lyubushkin scored for the Coyotes in the first period. Pacioretty registered a game-high four points (3 goals, 1 assist).

Arizona Republic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Arizona Coyotes fall to Vegas Golden Knights in preseason opener

Staff Report
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UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 15, 2019 AT 8:48 PM

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Max Pacioretty had a hat trick and an assist to help the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Arizona Coyotes 6-2 on Sunday in the NHL preseason opener.

Cody Eakin, Reilly Smith, and Brayden McNabb also scored for the Golden Knights.

They had five straight goals after falling behind 2-1 midway through the first period.

Smith and McNabb scored short-handed.
Coaching the goalie and managing the goalie situation is one of the biggest challenges for a head coach. It's important to make the right decision at the right time. Schwab said, "I'm very happy with where they're at so we're just working to get ready for the plan that we have for the season."

"The skating feels good and there are no issues with that. I don't feel anything from the injury anymore, so now I just want to do the things that have been working for me the last few years. Obviously, you want to learn and add things with each year, but with being out so long, I just want to keep it simple."

Kuemper dealt with a lesser knee injury late last season, but with the Coyotes fighting for a playoff spot, he played through it. Kuemper said the knee was fine by the time he began training this summer. He entered camp fully healthy.

"For the most part, I did a lot of what I did the summer before, working on endurance and working on strength and making sure I was ready for a big workload," said Kuemper, who had played in 73 games one year and 72 games the next. "We've 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 is in there I'm going to be cheering him and the team on as well."

Like Raanta the season before, Kuemper learned how to manage his body through hydration, diet, sleep and recovery. In turn, he proved to himself that he could manage the workload of a No. 1 goalie over a significant stretch, at one point starting 22 consecutive games.

Schwab is not averse to a relatively even split of games by his goalies if they're going to play who gives us the best chance to win that night. We have a good situation here where we have two guys that we're very confident in and the team is very confident in, so number one, it's going to be based on their performance. The performance of each guy is going to dictate how much they're going to play.

"For the most part, I did a lot of what I did the summer before, working on endurance and working on strength and making sure I was ready for a big workload," said Kuemper, who had played in 73 games one year and 72 games the next. "We've 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 is in there I'm going to be cheering him and the team on as well."

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"Usually goalies are more critical of themselves anyhow. The other guy is the one saying, 'No, it wasn't that bad,' or 'There wasn't much you can do in that situation' so it's more about pumping the tires and giving good feedback. You know there will be tough times ahead of you at this position so you want to support the other guy to help him through his because you're going to need the support, too."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Pivotal payday for Bruins’ Charlie McAvoy

By Kevin Paul Dupont Globe Staff

Updated September 15, 2019, 10:31 p.m.

Life is moving fast for Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy, who signed a new three-year deal Sunday.

Life is moving fast for Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy, who signed a new three-year deal Sunday. (JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF)

He arrived three days late to the party, but Charlie McAvoy on Sunday finally cashed in at the market rate set last month when Columbus defenseman and fellow restricted free agent Zach Werenski signed for a total $15 million through 2021-22.

For the next three years, McAvoy, 21, will bank an average $4.9 million a season, and then springboard into his next deal, dead certain to be a whopper, in the summer of 2022 after being paid $7.3 million in only his fifth NHL season.

Life already was good for McAvoy, and from a pay standpoint, it’s only going to get better and better.

Now, said GM Don Sweeney, McAvoy can “really launch into the player we all believe he is.”

The next Bruin staged for liftoff is RFA defenseman Brandon Carlo, expected soon to agree either to a two-year deal, or one of four years or more. Sweeney noted last week that he will not sign RFAs to pacts that will deliver them to the front door of unrestricted free agency, which is precisely where Carlo currently is pegged to stand after the next three seasons, in the summer of 2022. So rule out a three-year pact for Boston’s other young RFA defenseman.

If Carlo signs for two years, look for his payout to be about $3 million, roughly a 40 percent discount off McAvoy’s number. If he pushes to four years — which would include a year of his UFA rights — then it’s possible his number also will approach the $5 million mark, a number that exceeds the $3.2 million in cap money Sweeney has left in the summer shopping kitty.

“Every negotiation,” Sweeney noted Sunday, happy and relieved to have McAvoy’s deal done, “has some timeline.”

In the larger picture, the McAvoy and Carlo deals are critical pieces in the evolution and transition happening on the Boston backline. Keep in mind, when McAvoy next goes through this financial taffy pull, his greybeard running mate, Zdeno Chara, will be 45 years old and very likely retired.

“Says who?” said coach Bruce Cassidy as Sunday’s presser when asked if Werenski’s contract served as the template for McAvoy’s new deal.

Werenski, in fact, was written all over the McAvoy deal, right down to year No. 3. Werenski’s pact has him making $7 million, while McAvoy is at $7.3 million. McAvoy may be earning $100,000 less on average, but he’ll take that slightly higher number into talks for his third contract.

An essential part of the payoff, from the Boston perspective, is that McAvoy’s deal came in 76 days before the Dec. 1 deadline that all RFAs face — either sign a new deal or sit out the season. In Toronto, the Leafs went right up to Dec. 1 last year before finally tying down Nylander, and both sides suffered for the delay.

No such protracted, angst-full wait for McAvoy, and it’s a good bet that Carlo’s deal will get done in short order. Then it’s back to trying to write a different ending to the 2018-19 script that fell one victory short of a Cup.

“We can’t go back and change anything now,” mused McAvoy, fresh from trebling his pay scale from the entry deal he signed here in the spring of 2017. “But we have the future here in front of us.”
Charlie McAvoy agrees to three-year contract with Bruins

By Frank Dell’Apa Globe Correspondent
September 15, 2019, 9:46 a.m.

Charlie McAvoy was a restricted free agent before agreeing to a three-year deal with the Bruins on Sunday.

After a summer of lingering in contract limbo and a three-day holdout from training camp, things started moving fast for Charlie McAvoy Sunday. The Bruins announced McAvoy’s signing in the morning and, by noon, McAvoy was being greeted by a stick tap from his teammates at Warrior Ice Arena.

“I didn’t want that [but] I thought something like that would happen,” McAvoy said. “I’m just thrilled to be back and, hopefully, tomorrow I don’t get a stick tap. I just want to be one of the guys again.”

McAvoy, who agreed to a three-year deal worth $14.7 million, worked out at near full speed during two-on-two drills for about a half hour. McAvoy’s status has not been determined for the Bruins’ visit to the New Jersey Devils in the preseason opener Monday.

“He missed a couple days but he’ll catch up,” Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. “He’s been skating with the guys and around the guys most of the summer.”

McAvoy, whose entry-level pact expired in the spring, will be on a contract similar to that signed by Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski. McAvoy will make $3.7 million in each of the first two seasons and $7.3 million in the final year.

“I looked at this nothing other than well beyond three years as to what Charlie is going to play for the Bruins,” Bruins general manager Don Sweeney said. “We’re excited we’ve got him back in the group here. He is an important part of the club this year, last year, and many years going forward.”

Next up for Sweeney is defenseman Brandon Carlo, also a restricted free agent, who is expected to be offered a deal worth about $3 million to $3.5 million.

“Every deal takes its time and that’s my intention to go back to work and get Brandon back in the fold, as well,” Sweeney said.

McAvoy, 21, has established himself in the Bruins’ lineup since leaving Boston University after his sophomore season. In 54 games last season, he had 7 goals and 21 assists with a plus-14 rating while leading the team with an average 22:10 of ice time per game.

“How do I see his game growing?” Cassidy said. “A matchup guy, he continues to be that with [Zdeno Chara] but I think he’ll continue to grow, get stronger, physically. He’s a strong guy but just because of his age he’ll get ‘man strong,’ so I think he’ll match up better. I think he’ll score more because I think he’ll develop more of an attack mentality, a shoot mentality. Those are two areas his game will grow. The rest, his composure, his compete, they’re there every night. Hockey sense, a lot of that doesn’t change. Those are a couple parts of his game I suspect will change.”

McAvoy said the Bruins are hoping to capture the Stanley Cup, a year after falling to the St. Louis Blues in Game 7 of last season’s final.

“I’m just really excited to get back, and now I get to focus on my conditioning, my execution, and getting back to being the best player I can be for the start of the season,” McAvoy said. “We have a lot of motivation this year, obviously, to win just one more game than last year. I don’t want to get too far ahead of myself but I think we are — I’m motivated and I know everyone is and I’m excited to get back.

“We have something really special with this group. I know it’s been said since from the moment I got here. Now I get to focus on integrating with whatever group I’m with for camp, and focusing on being the best player I can be.

“Myself and the younger group of guys we have, that experience, that unbelievable experience — some people play 20 years and they’re not fortunate enough to get there. I’m very grateful for it. We can’t go back and change anything now but we have the future here in front of us and we can do everything in my power — I know everybody’s going to be pulling the rope in the same direction. We’re a motivated group and I’m looking forward to just getting out there and making sure I do everything in my power to make sure I’m ready to go for game one of the season and get us off on a positive note.”

Chara scored the only goal in overtime after the Bruins played a 34-minute scrimmage, play halted only once for a faceoff. Goalties Kyle Keyser and Dan Vladar (White team) and Maxime Lagace (Black team) kept things scoreless. Chara scored on a backhander past Vladar off a Danton Heinen feed three minutes into overtime.

Boston Globe LOADED: 09.16.2019
And then there was one.

With Charlie McAvoy back on the ice and a new contract in his back pocket on Sunday, Brandon Carlo remains the last unsigned restricted free agent. GM Don Sweeney did not give any hints as to when he might get the lanky defenseman in Bruins camp.

"We've had a lot of communication on Charlie's deal and we'll continue to have the same thing with Brandon as well until a deal gets done," Sweeney said. "That's my intention, to get back to work and get Brandon back in the fold."

With the McAvoy signing, the B's have a little more than $3.2 million left under the salary cap with which to sign Carlo, according to capfriendly.com. Sweeney said he feels he's got enough space to sign Carlo without making another move. He also has some more wiggle room if he puts Kevan Miller and/or John Moore – neither of whom will be able to start the season – on long-term injured reserve if need be.

"It depends on the terms of the next deal. We obviously have the opportunity to do that if we need to," said Sweeney.

While the McAvoy negotiation was helped along by the Zach Werenski signing that was done last week, there may not be an easy comparable for Carlo. He produces very little offensively (8-24-32 in 230 NHL games) but he took a major step forward last season in solidifying his spot as a top four defenseman while paired with Torey Krug. He built on that with a strong playoff performance. We'll see how soon the two sides can come up with fair compensation with which they can both live.

If McAvoy and Sweeney were the two happiest people at the Bruins' facility on Sunday, count coach Bruce Cassidy as the third.

He sees a pretty high bar for the 21-year-old McAvoy.

"The last time I commented on him I think I said he was (Drew) Doughty-like and it caused a bit of a holdout here so I have to be careful on what I say," joked Cassidy. "How do I see his game going? A matchup guy. He continues to be that with (Zdeno Chara) but I think he'll grow in that area and get stronger physically. He's a strong guy, but just because of his age, he'll get man-strong so I think he'll match up better. I think he'll score more. He'll develop more of an attack mentality, a shot mentality. Those are the two areas where I think he'll grow. His composure, his compete are there every night."

One area in which McAvoy hasn't had much of a chance to flourish has been as a power-play quarterback because Krug runs the first unit and that group stays out on the ice for close to a minute and half – if it doesn't score. How much room for growth is there for McAvoy in that role?

"That's an interesting one," said Cassidy. "Torey gets the lion's share of that and rightfully so. He's earned it. Charlie gets the second group and we haven't developed as much chemistry for obvious reason. They don't get as much time on the ice, there are moving parts other than (David Krejci). I don't know how (he'll progress). Time will tell. He should be on it and is on it. How high the ceiling there is will depend on how (he progresses) with a shot mentality versus passing. I know Charlie makes those special types of plays but sometimes just getting it to the net, being a little more consistent with that part of it leads to more points and more goals. We'll see how it plays out."

After a scoreless scrimmage, Chara scored the game-winner in the 3-on-3 overtime. He broke the puck out himself and dished it to Danton Heinen on a 2-on-1. He took the return pass on his off wing and beat Daniel Vladar on his forehand. …

Patrice Bergeron (groin), Joakim Nordstrom (foot) and Matt Grzelcyk (undisclosed) were all given maintenance days. Cassidy expects all three to skate on Monday. …

The B's will release their roster for Monday's preseason game against the New Jersey Devils in Newark on Monday morning.
Charlie McAvoy signs three-year extension with Bruins

By STEVE CONROY | sconroy@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald

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His big payday is still three years away, presumably, but Charlie McAvoy did OK for himself.

McAvoy finalized a three-year deal with the Bruins that carries a $4.9 million average annual value. The pact is backloaded to guarantee him a $7.3 million qualifying offer at the end of the deal. He’ll have two years left of restricted free agency after this deal is done, but the feeling is that this will be a springboard to the longer term, megabucks that players of his ilk command.

“I look at this as nothing but well beyond three years that Charlie’s going to be playing for the Boston Bruins,” GM Don Sweeney said Sunday afternoon after the deal was signed.

TSN’s Bob McKenzie, who first reported the deal, also reported that McAvoy received signing bonus money (i.e. lockout protection) in the first two years of the deal. The first two years will pay him $3.7 million in base salary while he gets $2.5 million in signing bonus the first year and a $1 million bonus his second. The third year is $7.3 million base salary.

“We looked at a lot of different ways to try and get to where we came to,” said Sweeney. “I just think it was finding the common ground that everyone seeks to finalize a deal. It puts Charlie in a situation where he can take this platform and really launch himself to be the player he is and will become, both on and off the ice, incorporating leadership qualities that he exhibits as well. For us, it’s a good compromise, a middle ground, that allows him to take it wherever he’s capable of taking it. And the Bruins will be there when he does.”

There was some talk that McAvoy was seeking a longer term deal, but he expressed nothing but excitement in returning to the fold.

“We landed on where we are and I don’t really think about the hypothetical of ‘what if?’ I’m very happy with where we are right now. I know my family and myself, we all resonate the same thing, that we’re very happy with where we are, with me in front of you guys and me getting to skate today and getting this all behind me,” said McAvoy.

When Zach Werenski signed his three-year, $15 million deal with the Blue Jackets last Monday, it appeared as though the B’s and McAvoy had their template from which to work and that seems to be the case.

“Every player, every contract situation becomes a comparable and we’ll never run from those comparables,” said Sweeney. “When you get into those negotiations, you talk openly where players (compare) and the impact on your own team. It’s a framework that exist and you end up with a similar deal in time frame, but every player and every situation brings context to the discussions.”

McAvoy joined the second group in the B’s training camp practice at Warrior Arena on Sunday.

“I’m just really excited to get back now,” he said. “Not that haven’t been, but now I can focus on my conditioning, my execution and getting back to the best player I can be at the start of the season. We have a lot of motivation this year to win one more game than last year. I don’t want to get too far ahead of myself, but I think we are motivated and I’m just really excited to be back.”

McAvoy wound up missing just the first three days of camp, but it seemed a lot longer to him.

“It was something that was difficult for me,” said McAvoy. “When I see all my teammates here… we all split for the summer and you’re missing everybody and then they’re all back, I just wanted to be a part of it and back with everybody. We have something really special with this group. I missed everybody a lot.”

Since he was rushing into a battered Bruins blueline in the 2017 playoffs, McAvoy has looked very much like the future No. 1 defenseman he was projected to be when he was taken 14th overall in the 2016 draft. He had three assists in the six-game loss to Ottawa that first year, climbing from the third to second to first defense pair in the course of those half dozen games. He’s got 14-46-60 totals in 117 NHL regular season NHL games while being paired primarily with captain Zdeno Chara.

The only concern about McAvoy would be his health. He was limited to 63 games his rookie season because of a heart ailment and then 54 last year due to a concussion and then a foot infection.

“As Don stated, this is an opportunity for me to grow into the player that I can become,” said McAvoy. “Obviously I’ve had a little bit of bad luck as far as injuries go. Some things are out of your control. But I’ve always been fortunate to have the support of the organization through all that, which means a whole lot to me. My goal is to come out and be the best hockey player I can be, to grow into one of the best defensemen hopefully in the league. I feel like the sky’s the limit. I’m going to continue to push myself every single day to grow and be better and do everything I can for this team. I feel like this is a bit of a window here to go and do just that.”

Boston Herald LOADED: 09.16.2019
No Stanley Cup hangover, but perhaps trickle down effect on the way

By MARISA INGEMI | marisa.ingemi@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald
September 15, 2019 at 5:45 am

If imitation is the best form of flattery, the Blues winning the Stanley Cup could have a ripple effect.

One of the more physical clubs to win the title recently, the Blues banged around the Bruins, who weren’t a weak team in their own right.

The Bruins were built more on speed and skill with the ability to play tough. The Blues identity was their brawn, and that left a desire for the Bruins to match that.

“It’s somewhat of a copycat league, but I felt we had a good combination of that until some of our guys got banged up,” Bruins president Cam Neely said. “Especially Kevan (Miller) on the back end, I think that hurt us a little in the Columbus series and in the St. Louis series. You have to look at where you’re playing the bulk of your games and know what style is going to be good for you to get you into the playoffs. And then it’s almost a tale of two seasons where, we all know playoff hockey is just so much different than regular-season hockey.”

The Bruins bulked up a bit with the addition of Brett Ritchie in the offseason, if he earns a regular role on the wing, but only a few days into training camp there already is discussion of how the Bruins prepare to match that kind of physicality in the future.

“St. Louis wins, so does the pendulum swing back to the bigger, heavier teams now?” Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy mulled. “We’ve had that conversation. We like to think we’re a good balance. Will that affect how we structure our lineup? I guess we’ll see how the games play out. We always feel we can play that style of game but also be up-tempo and use our skill. We looked at that.”

The Bruins personnel mostly is the same from last season, aside from the departures of Marcus Johansson and Noel Acciari. The latter certainly brought that physical style, but Ritchie can as well with a higher scoring upside.

It seems, heading into this year’s camp, anyone willing to play with that edge might have an advantage to crack the lineup.

“We’ve added a Brett Ritchie who is a bigger body,” Cassidy said. “Does he push a smaller guy out of the lineup? Does that make us better? I think some of that plays itself out as the season goes along. I still think there will be both schools of thought. Just like there was for the last five years. Speed versus brawn and may the best style win. I think it’s gone both ways.”

The Bruins still have a lot of skill, with the top five forwards at least all bringing an offensive presence before physicality. The bottom six forwards always will be grittier, but it’s in that middle area where it remains to be seen how they lean.

It also has to do with building a team equipped to get through the regular season healthy before even worrying about what challenges the postseason brings, while also being prepared for the higher intensity.

“If you look at the teams that have won the last 10 years, I think they’re all very similar, except for Chicago,” Brad Marchand said. “LA, us, Washington, teams that are in the finals, St. Louis, Vegas, they’re all similar builds. You can have small skill guys throughout the group but come playoff time the refs start letting a lot more go and you can run teams.”

The Bruins were far from a “soft” team, and they outmuscled Columbus and Carolina to get as far as they did.

Even though they might be a team that relies on skill, as plenty of teams are in the league these days, St. Louis winning may have opened plenty of eyes on just how to approach team building.

“It’s a lot of a different game,” Marchand said. “That’s when you need big, strong veteran guys. And that’s the other thing, teams are getting experience, going younger, but they haven’t been through it before. It’s a lot tougher going through playoff time with a bunch of 20-year-olds versus 30-year-olds who have been through it before.”

Cassidy had challenges since the moment he was named interim head coach of the Bruins. He was replacing Claude Julien after a contentious run, and the Bruins were coming off of two straight seasons not making the playoffs.

The bar has raised a bit in past years, especially after making it all the way to the final day of the season in mid-June.

This is Cassidy’s first shortened offseason after such a deep run, and while there’s a group of veterans who have done it twice previously, the newly-extended bench boss has a young group to work with as well.

And, along with leading them, this is all new for him, so he’s leaning on those veteran players.

“Veteran guys, we’ve talked about a lot, I go through them a lot and allow them to police their room and kind of the message we want,” he said at his press conference to announce his extension on Wednesday. “If it gets skewed then we have to step in and take control. So that’s the way I’ve kind of done it, it’s only been a few years. I imagine how this term goes we’ll have to come up with some other things to keep their listening skills where they need to be. But I just think that honestly it’s a mutual respect and once you start losing that then you better reel it back in.”

If those guys are there to help delegate the room, leadership still comes from the top and the message is going to have to be different this season than in any in the past.

It’s a little different being bumped in the second round by Tampa and dropping Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final on home ice and getting back at it.

“The next part of the challenge is just getting back up and running,” said Cassidy. “… I just feel like listen we’ve got a bunch of great professionals in the room that are hockey players, and they’re not going to be worried about what happened last year, what’s going to happen next year. The focus is on now and I think they’ll be pretty good at that. So that will be the challenge, but I believe with those guys in the group and the character they have that we’ll be able to get through that.”

Boston Herald LOADED: 09.16.2019
Kevan Miller (kneecap) ruled out for the start of the season for Bruins

By Joe Haggerty
September 15, 2019 4:53 PM

BRIGHTON, Mass – The good news is that the Bruins have Charlie McAvoy back in the fold after he signed a three-year contract on Sunday morning.

The bad news is that the B’s also confirmed today that a second player won’t be ready to go on opening night as Kevan Miller (fractured kneecap) isn’t going to be ready for the Oct. 3 season opener against the Dallas Stars. Miller is coming off a pair of fractured kneecaps, among several injuries, that limited him to just 39 games played last season and kept him out of the entire run to the Stanley Cup Final for the Bruins.

The 31-year-old Miller joins fellow defenseman John Moore, who will also be out at the start of the regular season as he returns from summer shoulder surgery. Clearly that’s going to leave a couple of open spots on the back end even when the Bruins have both McAvoy and Brandon Carlo signed and playing, but the injuries will also enable the Bruins to use the cap space occupied by Miller ($2.5 million) and Moore ($2.75 million) while they are on long term injured reserve to start the season.

"It depends on the term of the next deal, but the opportunity to [use LTIR] is there if we need to," said Sweeney. "Moore isn’t going to start the season and [Kevan Miller] isn’t going to be ready to start the season. Miller’s timeline isn’t going to be opening day. He hasn’t even been on the ice yet. He’s got a test coming around [Sept.] 24 and that will determine his next step in rehab. We’re going to be very cautious with the next steps with Kevan for a healthy return."

That means the Bruins will be able to go beyond the $3.2 million they currently hold in salary cap space with the unsigned Carlo still waiting for his agreement.

Another Bruins health update that’s a little more positive: Patrice Bergeron is expected to join the main training camp practice group on Monday after sitting out the first on-ice weekend of training camp while recovering from a lingering groin issue this summer.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
Bruins sign Charlie McAvoy to a three-year deal that's extremely fair when all things are considered

By Joe Haggerty

September 15, 2019 10:27 AM

BRIGHTON, Mass – The pieces are starting to come into place for the Bruins with the Sunday morning news that B’s defenseman Charlie McAvoy has signed a contract for three years with an AAV of $4.9 million per season. This puts the 21-year-old defenseman in the exact same neighborhood as fellow RFA defenseman and future No. 1 guy Zach Werenski, who last week signed a three-year, $15 million contract with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Some may think it’s an amazing steal for the Bruins because they bought into the hype that McAvoy was going to get a 6-8 year deal paying him upwards of $7 million per season, but that was never realistic with the talented young blueliner. McAvoy has missed almost 50 games in his first two NHL seasons due to injury and illness, and as a less than full-fledged restricted free agent he wasn’t able to receive offer sheets due to his service time at the NHL.

McAvoy had very little leverage headed into the negotiations, and truth be told he’s fortunate to be getting a comparable contract to the more accomplished Werenski all things considered.

From the Bruins perspective, they’ve locked up their future franchise defenseman for the next three seasons on a bridge deal that will still leave him a couple of seasons shy of unrestricted free agency. For now it leaves the Bruins with enough cap space (roughly $3.2 million according to capfriendly.com) to sign fellow RFA defenseman Brandon Carlo with very little need to cut cap costs on the NHL roster.

The contract gives McAvoy a pretty healthy payday, of course, but it also leaves him with the chance to stay healthy and fully realize his potential over the next three seasons. McAvoy was excellent in the postseason for the Bruins while averaging 24:30 of ice time during the 24-game run and simply needs to stay healthy to develop into the future No. 1 D-man and heir apparent in Boston to Zdeno Chara.

He’s averaged just seven goals and 30 points over his first two NHL seasons and has battled some fairly uncommon health issues along the way, so the production on the ice just wasn’t there for a bigger deal either.

The Bruins will now have three years to make certain the 6-foot, 208-pound D-man just ran into a little bit of bad luck with the health stuff over his first two years.

If all goes according to plan, the Bruins are going to be paying McAvoy a much bigger deal three years down the line. But at that point they’ll have moved on from some of their current contracts, will have more cap space to negotiation and will happily pay their young D-man if he turns into the perennial Norris Trophy candidate he should become if can stay on the ice.
By the time Charlie McAvoy’s three-year, $14.7 million second contract expires in 2022, the defenseman will be 24. By then, the world will be in his hands.

McAvoy’s game will have advanced. He will have rights to arbitration and an offer sheet, two perks he was missing upon the expiration of his entry-level contract. At worst, McAvoy will earn $7.3 million, the sum he’s due in the final season of his extension, annually for the rest of his third contract.

McAvoy’s ceiling, on the ice and in his checking account, is limitless.

“I think the last time I commented on him at first, I remember saying he was Doughty-like. It caused a bit of a holdout, so I’ve got to be careful with what I say. I’ve been warned,” cracked Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy, referring to Drew Doughty, a former Norris Trophy winner and owner of an eight-year, $58 million contract. “How do I see his game growing? Matchup guy. He continues to be that with (Zdeno Chara). I think he’ll grow in that area. Get stronger physically. He’s a strong guy, but because of his age, he’ll get man-strong. I think he’ll match up better. I think he’ll score more, because I think he will develop more of an attack mentality, shooting mentality.”

McAvoy is already the Bruins’ No. 1 defenseman. He led the team with 22:10 of ice time per game last season. In 54 games, he scored seven goals and 21 assists for 28 points, second-most among defensemen behind Torey Krug (53). McAvoy averaged 1:35 of power-play time per game as the quarterback of the No. 2 unit.

All of this is to say that McAvoy is already an excellent defenseman. With experience, offensive polish and more opportunity, McAvoy could become one of the best blue liners in the league, if he is not already. A concussion, abnormal heart rhythm and knee sprain have, at times, stalled McAvoy’s growth curve.

“This is an opportunity for me to grow into the player that I (can) become,” McAvoy said. “I’ve had a little bit of bad luck as far as injuries go, little stuff like that. Some things are out of your control. But I’ve always been fortunate to have (the) support of the organization through all that, which means a whole lot to me. My goal is to go out and become the best hockey player I can be. To grow into one of the best defensemen, hopefully, in the league. I feel like the sky is the limit. I’m going to continue to push myself every single day to grow and be better and do everything I can for this team. This is an opportunity, a bit of a window here, to do just that.”

This offseason, McAvoy’s closest comparables were Ivan Provorov and Zach Werenski. In terms of contracts, McAvoy’s deal looks more like Werenski’s: a three-year, $15 million contract. Werenski’s final year spikes to $7 million, which will be the baseline for his next deal.

Provorov, by comparison, signed a six-year, $40.5 million extension. Neither McAvoy nor Werenski will enjoy as much term or dough as Provorov on their second deals. But they will get to their third contract earlier.

By then, NBC’s television deal with the league will have expired. Gambling on NHL outcomes could be legal. There should be more money available. McAvoy will have more bargaining power with which to demand it.

“It puts Charlie in a situation where he can take this platform and really launch himself into the player we all believe he is and will become, both on and off the ice, incorporating leadership qualities he exhibits as well,” said general manager Don Sweeney. “For us, I think it’s a good compromise, a middle ground. It allows him to take it where he’s capable of taking it. We’ll be there when he does.”

This time around, McAvoy had little alternative except to withhold services. He did so for physicals Thursday and two on-ice sessions Friday and Saturday. Because of McAvoy’s status as a 10.2 (c) player, the Bruins could have done as little as extend a one-year qualifying offer.

The Bruins, however, had no intention of playing hardball. McAvoy is their present and future. It would have done them no good to poison the relationship at the cost of one more bargain year.

With a $4.9 million average annual value for the next three seasons, the sides found a middle ground. The team assumes a very reasonable cap hit for three prime years. McAvoy sets himself up for a whopper of a third contract.

By then, it’s likely that Chara will be gone. It’s possible, albeit unlikely, that Krug will have priced himself out of Boston, opening up his power-play spot for McAvoy to assume.

“Every coach wants good players, especially when they’re young,” Cassidy said. “You have a chance to mold them the way you want them to play. We’re fortunate with Charlie. He’s got a good teacher as well in (Chara). He’s getting both sides. A coach on the ice who helps him with things I certainly can’t — the experience part in the league, matchup situations, certain players’ tendencies. Then we work on the rest of the parts of his game we feel need to grow individually. It’s good for a coach to have that. I’m not going to lie. He’s a big part of our team. He’s a big reason we have success. So is Brandon Carlo, so hopefully he’ll get done as well.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Charlie McAvoy’s new deal reinforces that the Bruins are the home of the team-friendly contract

By Joe McDonald
Sep 15, 2019

The NHL’s reigning General Manager of the Year did it again.

On Sunday, Don Sweeney announced that the Bruins and restricted free-agent defenseman Charlie McAvoy agreed on a three-year contract worth $14.7 million with an average annual value of $4.9 million.

The 21-year-old blueliner will earn a base salary of $1.2 million along with a $2.5 million signing bonus in this season. His base salary increases to $2.7 million with a $1 million signing bonus in 2020-21. In 2021-22, his base salary will be $7.3 million.

It’s an outstanding deal for the Bruins, and there’s still cap space left over to sign fellow defenseman Brandon Carlo, also a restricted free agent. The culture of taking a little less to win a Stanley Cup has become a theme in Boston, and Sweeney has spearheaded the operation.

In his fifth season as GM, Sweeney has been able to keep the veteran core intact while scouting, drafting, signing and developing players capable of winning a Stanley Cup. The ability to lock up elite players — including Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand, David Pastrnak and Torey Krug — to contracts with hometown discounts says a lot about the culture in Boston.

The Bruins have become the home of the “team-friendly” contracts.

In July 2013, Bergeron inked an eight-year deal worth $55 million. Krug accepted a pair of bridge deals before agreeing to a four-year deal worth $21 million in June 2016. Marchand agreed to an eight-year, $49 million extension in September 2016. In 2017, Pastrnak, the team’s 2014 first-rounder, agreed to a six-year, $40 million deal.

Sweeney has learned the art of negotiations.

"It’s a communication process, first and foremost," he said after signing McAvoy. "Everybody has the information to be able to digest, and you just have to communicate. It’s not about winning deals. This has nothing to do with winning deals. It’s just about finding a place where both parties feel good about moving forward.

"In my own situations over the years, I felt good when I signed my contracts, and that’s what you ultimately want the player to feel and that’s what you have to accept as a manager and a person trying to get to that point, to push and push and push until you find that common ground. You’re hopeful that you’re going to be able to do that and it takes time, but the communication has to be there and we were fortunate to be able to do that."

The methods remain the same, whether it’s with young players or older ones. The Bruins’ 42-year-old captain, Zdeno Chara, has stayed with the Bruins on consecutive one-year, incentive-laden, cap-friendly deals.

"I think Don is fair, measured and reasonable to deal with always offering good comparables to back up his position," said agent Matt Keator, who represents Chara. "I went through an arbitration battle with (Sweeney) years ago with Blake Wheeler, so I learned how very prepared he was for all of our conversations, showing a great understanding of the process and leverage points involved, and he has only gotten better since then."

Given the fact that McAvoy is the future face of the franchise, he could have held out for a longer and more lucrative contract, but he appeared satisfied with his new deal.

"There’s no place I’d rather be to be part of such an unbelievable group of men," McAvoy said.

Earlier in the week, the Columbus Blue Jackets signed restricted free agent defenseman Zach Werenski to a three-year deal worth $15 million, so many believed McAvoy would be close behind.

"Every player, every situation or contract, becomes a comparable," Sweeney said. "As an organization, we’ll never run from those comparables. When you get into negotiations, you talk openly about where players are slotting, it’s just about a comparison standpoint from your own team. It’s a framework that exists where you may end up with a similar deal over time, but every player, every situation certainly bring context to the discussion."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Buffalo Sabres

As preseason opens, Sabres will get lots of game action to test skills

By Mike Harrington
Published Sun, Sep 15, 2019|Updated Sun, Sep 15, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres are six practices over three days into the Ralph Krueger era and now they quickly transition to a different portion of their preseason with one main question: How does all this work translate to real game action?

The answers will come fast and furious this week with four games in the next six nights. The Sabres open Monday at Pegula Ice Arena on the campus of Penn State with a game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, followed by a trip to Columbus to meet the Blue Jackets on Tuesday.

After an off day Wednesday and two more practices on Thursday comes back-to-back games against the Toronto Maple Leafs. The teams meet Friday night in Scotiabank Arena and stage Buffalo's exhibition home opener Saturday night in KeyBank Center.

"We want to see the games settle the competition that we have but we have time," Krueger said after Sunday's two practices in the arena.

"We're going to use these four games well to assess the group. We only have really one full practice day (this week) but I think we've done enough practicing and guys are ready to play."

"Everybody is real excited," said C.J. Smith, who is battling for a spot on the wing. "He's simplified the game a lot to have guys trust their instincts and their hockey knowledge. It's giving guys confidence and letting them play with the puck instead of being forced to feel like you have to make a play in a certain system or have to be in a certain spot. Most guys in that locker room really enjoy playing to their instincts."

Making any sort of judgments based on drills is a risky proposition, but winger Victor Olofsson is one player who has looked particularly sharp in practices, with one example the way he froze goalie Linus Ullmark with a nifty leg fake before scoring in a shootout drill Sunday.

Olofsson collected 30 goals last year in Rochester and scored his first two NHL goals in a six-game run with the Sabres at the end of the season. He's a good bet to make the club and has been skating with veteran Marcus Johansson and center Rasmus Asplund.

"That's my goal, to make this team out of camp," said Olofsson. "It's the expectations I have on myself. That's my goal and what I've been working for all summer. I'm just really excited to be here and super excited for these couple games."

"I felt like I was ready last year, too, when I got here from Sweden. I felt like I had a chance to make the team right away and it didn't happen, but I think I grew over the first couple months last year and really developed my entire game."

It appears that Smith, a 28-goal scorer for the Amerks last year, has been given a huge show-us opportunity in camp by being put on a line with Casey Mittelstadt at center and Sam Reinhart on the right wing.

"To me, it shows they saw what I did last year and are willing to give me a big chance so I'm excited about that," Smith said. "I think after last year, I did earn an opportunity to play with guys like that, so I'm excited to go forward."

"With the puck, we believe we have a lot of skill," Krueger said. "There's a strength in possession for us and how we manage that. We've given them some tools. Above all, we want to begin with a defensive structure that limits our D-zone time and offensively, we'd like to be really strong at managing the puck and retaining possession."

Sabres-Pens lineup news

The Sabres announced their lineup for Monday's game on Sunday night and first-round draft pick Dylan Cozens is among the forwards listed.

He's joined by Jack Eichel, Jimmy Vesey, Johan Larsson, Curtis Lazar, Zemgus Girgensons, Conor Sheary, Andrew Oglevie, Jeff Skinner, Evan Rodrigues, Tage Thompson and Remi Elie.

The defense includes newcomers Colin Miller, Henri Jokiharju and John Gilmour along with Marco Scandella, Casey Nelson and Brandon Hickey. Carter Hutton and Jonas Johansson will split the game in goal, leaving Linus Ullmark and newly signed Andrew Hammond to play in Tuesday's game.

The Sabres will play a Pittsburgh lineup featuring almost exclusively AHL players. Among the missing Monday will be Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Kris Letang, Jake Guentzel, Patric Hornqvist, Brian Dumoulin and goalie Matt Murray. Casey DeSmith and Tristan Jarry will man the nets.

Monday's game will mark the Sabres' third visit to play in the Penn State arena that was funded as part of a $102 million donation from Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula. The Sabres played the Penguins there in 2017 and opened their exhibition slate there in 2016 against Minnesota.

On the air

The games Monday and Tuesday will be streamed on Sabres.com within the team's broadcast viewing area. The games against Toronto will be shown on MSG, using the Leafs' Sportsnet broadcast. All games during the preseason will be broadcast on WGR Radio.

Buffalo News LOADED: 09.16.2019
Andrew Mangiapane flew to Calgary on Saturday, hoping to put pen to paper and join the rest of the Calgary Flames for the 2019-20 National Hockey League training camp. By Sunday afternoon, they had a deal in place — a one-year, two-way contract worth US$715,000 this season — which meant the 23-year-old was able to join teammates and pick up where he left off.

Because, predictably, it was killing him to be missing out at this time of the year.

"To see all the guys (at training camp), you follow them on social media and the team on social media," said Mangiapane on Sunday evening after inking one of two remaining items on Flames general manager Brad Treliving’s to-do list. "I was talking to (Mark Giordano) Gio and some of the guys on the team and I think it was just smart for me to not miss too much camp. I didn’t want to miss any camp — you want to be here, you want to be here with the guys. I wanted to start the season on time, I think that was an important step for me in my career."

In the end, Mangiapane accepted the Flames’ original qualifying offer, which makes one wonder what the hold-up was.

Perhaps it was more money upon the advice of his agent Ritch Winter (a report said that his most recent ask was US$850,000, while the Flames, for good reason, wanted to keep the restricted free agent at the qualifying amount).

Perhaps it was the deal’s structure (a two-way versus a one-way).

Whatever it was, it’s over and he’s here and that’s, frankly, all either side cares about as the new week begins.

"It’s done," Treliving said. "He’s back where he should be and back with the group and getting ready for the season. It’s good to get it done. I have a good relationship with Mangy — to me, he’s a kid who finds a way, so far, to succeed at every level he’s played. He was starting to grab more in our league and with our team at the end of the year. It’s a feather in our cap for our development model and working with him and turning him into an NHL player."

Mangiapane is content with the way things shook down.

"I’m happy with my deal," said the Toronto native. "I think, throughout the whole summer, I was focusing on bettering myself as a player. Brad and my agent do the whole business side and I just let them discuss."

"I’m happy with my deal and I’m happy to be a Calgary Flame."

Mangiapane will report on Monday for physicals and fitness testing, while his teammates — who have been already skating at Scotiabank Saddledome since Friday morning — are divided between Victoria and Calgary for a split-squad game.

And, it’s all water under the bridge as far as both sides are concerned.

"My message to him was — the business is done," Treliving said. "This is part of the business. Sometimes we all wish it gets done quicker than sometimes it does. So, we park it. We give a big hug to each other. To me, don’t dip your toe in the water — you’re coming into the camp for the first time in your career, not only looking to be on the team but to grab more … this is a big year for him."

When his current deal expires next spring, Mangiapane, Calgary’s sixth-round (166th overall) selection of the 2015 draft, will have arbitration rights based on his age, which may give him some more power in conversations. But that is next spring.

And this year is another stage of development in Mangiapane’s progression as a pro.

Last season, he took a significant step. In 44 games, he scored eight goals and five assists and was a plus-11, and found himself on a hard-working fourth line at the end of the 2018-19 campaign.

More importantly, he believes he can be a regular contributor — and plans to prove it in 2019-20.

"I know I’m an everyday NHLer," Mangiapane said. "The later parts of the season, going into playoffs, I found my game and know I’m an NHL player and know I can contribute. I hope I’m a great NHL player one day.

“You obviously have to go into camp working hard and earn your spot at the same time. You can’t let your foot off the gas, whether your a first year or a 10-year guy at this job. Everybody is competing for spots and you have to go in and earn yours."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Calgary Flames prospect Phillips pumped for Victoria homecoming party

Kristen Anderson, Postmedia

September 15, 2019 4:53 PM MDT

This is a business trip for Matthew Phillips.

But returning to Victoria’s Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre on Monday, as part of the Calgary Flames split-squad games against the Vancouver Canucks, will certainly be meaningful for the 21-year-old, who played three full Western Hockey League campaigns for the Victoria Royals.

The last time he was there was in the springtime of 2018 when he was answering questions as the team captain when the Royals were eliminated from the playoffs.

“It is really cool,” Phillips said on Sunday, when the Calgary Flames held their third ice time of main training camp. “The game is the priority, but it’s a really unique opportunity. I probably had the three best years of my life there. I have no bad things to say about that place. To be playing for my hometown team in Victoria, it’s a really unique opportunity and it’s exciting.”

The homecoming, too, will be special for billets Todd Higdon and Kelly Lazaro and their daughters Abby and Bella, along with some of Phillips’ pals.

And, not to brag, but Phillips was kind of a big deal on 1925 Blanshard Street — so, despite the Vancouver Canucks supporters that will likely hop on the Tsawwassen to Swartz Bay B.C. Ferries express, many fans are apt to bring out their Phillips jerseys for the occasion.

Phillips chuckled.

“It’s a really cool market because we’re the biggest thing on the island — there’s no bigger sports team,” Phillips said. “The fans there are really loyal and they know their stuff. I think I connected pretty well with them. So, I’m sure I’ll recognize a lot of people and they’ll be really excited.”

After Phillips left Victoria last spring, he turned professional in the fall. Although he was impressive in Calgary’s training camp, the team thought it was best for his development if he had a year of seasoning in the American Hockey League with the Stockton Heat. There, he scored 13 goals and 25 assists in 65 games playing alongside Glenn Gawdin and, for some of the season, Dillon Dube.

Technically, he was still considered a prospect coming into this fall’s training camp, so he has already logged two rookie games under his belt.

Monday’s game in Victoria — which features half of the training camp roster in Calgary playing the Canucks at Scotiabank Saddledome — will be the first clash of the team’s exhibition season.

But according to Phillips, who is trying to make an impression, the more ice time, the better. And even better still, to do it in a place he knows all too well.

“I think rookie camp is kind of an advantage in this situation because you kind of get your nerves and game legs under you,” he said. “Now we’ve been skating for over a week, so I’m just looking to build off that and get some confidence. It’ll obviously be a higher pace (Monday) but I’m looking forward to it.”

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Andrew Mangiapane gets his contract from the Flames, leaving only Matthew Tkachuk in the wind

By Scott Cruickshank
Sep 15, 2019

Brad Treliving, with a stroke of his pen Sunday afternoon, halved the number of everyday left wingers he needs to sign. Andrew Mangiapane is now committed, agreeing to play for his $715,000 qualifying offer, which leaves only Matthew Tkachuk unthitched.

"Picking away at it, picking away at it," Treliving, the general manager of the Calgary Flames, said of negotiations with Tkachuk’s agents. "Nothing new to report. We’re working on it."

The Flames’ remaining cap space, according to CapFriendly.com, is $6.34 million. (Worth noting: That figure includes Alan Quine’s $735,000 salary and doesn’t reflect the relief that Juuso Valimaki’s long-term injury will bring.) Given the monster contract the Toronto Maple Leafs handed restricted free agent Mitch Marner this weekend — a six-year cap hit of $10.89 million — Treliving has some dickering to do.

At least he can focus solely on Tkachuk now that, less than three weeks before the season opener, Mangiapane’s deal is firm up.

"Good to get him back where he needs to be, which is back with the group," Treliving said. "I’m excited to have him done, and I look forward to seeing him out with the guys."

Mangiapane — who flew from Toronto to Calgary on Saturday night — goes through fitness testing Monday (when the Flames play split-squad friendlies against the Vancouver Canucks in Victoria and at the Saddledome). He’ll skate on his own Tuesday, a scheduled day off for the rest of the campers.

Wednesday, the 23-year-old will jump into team sessions. The Flames face the visiting San Jose Sharks that night.

"I’m excited — and excited to get going and get on the ice with all the guys," said Mangiapane, who is represented by Ritch Winter. "It’s tough being away from all the guys. You see it on social media, they’re all together. You want to be there."

On social media, too, are the benchmarks leading to a new season — news about the golf tournament, the rookies reporting, the main-camp invitations.

For Mangiapane, they were hard to avoid.

"You try not to look at all that stuff," he said. "But even Calgary tweeting out (information) about the prospects games, you know, ‘OK, camp is ramping up,’ so you want to get there and be a part of the team."

Staying at home and skating daily with his old junior club, the OHL Barrie Colts, while his employers moved briskly toward the NHL preseason schedule carried a certain risk for Mangiapane, who had been about to sacrifice his well-earned depth-chart foothold.

After all, there is value to him in being present and (relatively) punctual. The young and talented likes of Dillon Dube and Austin Czarnik were actually on the premises. And hungry wingers such as Tobias Rieder, Devante Smith-Pelly, Zac Rinaldo are determined to make the most of their professional tryout agreements.

So forward spots were going to be nailed down whether No. 88 was aboard or not.

Now Mangiapane is in a position to create his own camp battles. With plans for a heady dose of experimentation in the coming weeks, these had been the lines Sunday morning:

Johnny Gaudreau-Sean Monahan-Elias Lindholm
Sam Bennett-Mikael Backlund-Michael Frolik
Milan Lucic-Derek Ryan-Austin Czarnik
Dillon Dube-Mark Jankowski-Tobias Rieder

Zac Rinaldo-Alan Quine-Devante Smith-Pelly

With Tkachuk still off-campus, it is Mangiapane who perhaps stands the most to gain, deployment-wise.

His boss wants to see him push.

"That’s what we talked about (Sunday) — Now there’s no dipping your toe in the water," Treliving said. "There’s an opportunity for him to grab more."

Treliving went further, noting that when he hears people wondering how the Flames will improve this season, Mangiapane is one of the names he always mentions.

"Everyone thinks you get better because you bring in all different guys," said Treliving, who, in the aftermath of the postseason’s pratfall, had left his roster relatively intact. "You get better when your young guys progress. So here’s a guy who, two years ago, got a little cup of coffee. Last year, up and down a little bit, then got some stability and was grabbing some more.

"So you get all these young guys … the internal improvement, that’s how you grow as a team."

Indeed, Mangiapane, especially late in the campaign, built considerable career momentum. On a line with Derek Ryan and Garnet Hathaway, he proved he could contribute regularly.

Summoned in December, he rustled up a single assist in his first 14 dates — then 12 points in his next 30 appearances. Modest totals, but certainly trending in the right direction.

“When I got called up, I wanted to stay,” Mangiapane said. “I think I’m an everyday player.”

And in the playoffs against the Colorado Avalanche, he had been one of the few Flames not snooked by the stakes. In fact, Mangiapane authored the Flames’ lone winning goal of the postseason.

“He’s a good player, a totally good player,” Treliving said. “He’s a great example of a guy working his rear end off to make himself a player. He’s succeeded at every level. He’s put the work into his development.

“It’s a feather in the cap of our development staff and our development model.”

The Mangiapane story is a cool one. How the kid, not drafted into the OHL, walked on in Barrie and cracked the Colts. Passed over in his first year of NHL Draft eligibility, he was taken in the sixth round, 166th overall, by the Flames the following year, 2015. In the meantime, he posted 104- and 106-point seasons for Barrie.

As an AHL freshman, without a sniff of NHL time, Mangiapane collected 41 points in 66 games. Then, over parts of two winters, he gathered 63 points in his 54 outings for Stockton.

“By the time he leaves the American League, he’s a top player in that league," Treliving said. "Then you saw him last year … by the end, he was earning more, right? He wasn’t just a guy filling a (spot)."

Said Mangiapane: "That’s my goal this year. To play more. To produce more. To be a better player, in general. I think I have that in me."

To maximize his slender 5-foot-10 frame, Mangiapane spent his second summer working with conditioning guru Andy O’Brien, who’s trained everyone from Sidney Crosby to Nathan MacKinnon, from John Tavares to Hayley Wickenheiser.

“Every year, I feel I’m getting stronger, faster, quicker,” Mangiapane said. “That’s what you want."

And now he says he’s prepared to squeeze the most out of the upcoming season.

“This is a prove-myself kind of year. I think I have what it takes to be a great player in this league,” said Mangiapane, who, for the time being, is bunking with his old Barrie teammate Rasmus Andersson. “Just taking that one-year deal and moving forward from there, I think it was the right play … just to get back to camp.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Hurricanes‘ top lines are intact early in training camp. Will they stay that way?

BY CHIP ALEXANDER
SEPTEMBER 15, 2019 04:29 PM

RALEIGH

Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind‘Amour, all but wagging a finger, says not to read too much into the line combinations early in training camp.

“Not unless you want to get a headache,” he joked.

But in truth, the top four lines have been intact through the first three days of camp. And Brind‘Amour said some of the lines could be used when the Canes play their first preseason exhibition games in a few days—at Tampa Bay on Tuesday, then at PNC Arena on Wednesday against the Lightning.

Brind‘Amour has had Sebastian Aho centering Nino Niederreiter and Ryan Dzingel. That has given Dzingel a look with the Canes‘ best offensive center and a veteran winger who was acquired in January from the Minnesota Wild and a big part of the Canes‘ Stanley Cup playoff push.

“I‘m sure they‘ll mix it whenever, when the season starts, but right now it’s easy to be slotted with those two guys,” Dzingel said Sunday in an N&O interview. “It’s easy getting them the puck.”

Jordan Staal has been centering Teuvo Teravainen and Andrei Svechnikov, and Brind‘Amour has had Erik Haula at center with Warren Foegele and Martin Necas. The fourth center, Lucas Wallmark, has had Brock McGinn and Jordan Martinook on the wings.

“We just throw guys together at this point of the year,” Brind‘Amour said to the media. “We want to make sure our new guys are getting up to speed, so a lot of times you want to make sure they’re with someone who’s been around.”

Dzingel and Haula are two new guys. Dzingel started the 2018-19 season with the Ottawa Senators and ended it with the Columbus Blue Jackets after a trade. He then signed a two-year deal with the Canes as a free agent.

“I‘m used to playing with a lot of different guys,” Dzingel said. “We mixed it up a lot last year, kind of put it in the blender.”

Haula, 28, played just 15 games last season for the Vegas Golden Knights after a serious knee injury. He was medically cleared to return for the second round of the playoffs but there was a hitch—the Golden Knights were bounced in the opening round by the San Jose Sharks in a seven-game series.

The Canes traded for Haula in late June, sending center Nicolas Roy and a draft pick to Vegas.

“I‘ve had a lot of time on my hands, rehabbing, thinking and stuff,” Haula said to the media as camp began. “I‘m done thinking. I want to get going and play hockey again.

“I‘m not trying to come in here and stir anything up. They have a good thing going. Just try to add to the success and help out.”

Dzingel, 27, brings more speed to the lineup, and Haula is a strong skater with some size at 6-0 and 193 pounds. Both have proven they are scoring threats, Dzingel with a 15 percent shooting figure in 268 career regular-season games and 26 goals last season, and Haula a 29-goal scorer in 2017-18 with the expansion Golden Knights.

Haula has been flanked by two of the Canes‘ speedier guys in Foegele and Necas, although Necas went crashing into the PNC Arena boards Sunday at a high rate of speed during a drill. He left the ice for treatment and soon returned, but was experiencing some soreness after the practice session.

Wallmark, 24, has become one of the Canes‘ more versatile players. He came into camp a year ago with the simple goal of making the NHL roster and ended up playing 81 games—not 11 for the Canes in 2017-18—and the 15 playoff games.

A few weeks ago, Brind‘Amour was asked about his top four centers for this season and quickly replied Aho, Staal, Haula and Wallmark. That’s how far the Swede, a fourth-round draft pick by Carolina in 2014, has come.

Wallmark got his chance last season when a good friend and fellow Swede, center Victor Rask, cut his fingers in a kitchen accident just before camp began. Wallmark took advantage of the next-man-up opportunity, establishing himself in the lineup, while Rask later would be traded for Niederreiter.

“I want to take another step and find a way to be better,” Wallmark said Sunday. “Last year was my first full year so you’re learning new things, with great help from the coaches, every day. Sometimes, small tips and sometimes bigger things. You have to prepare yourself and be ready every night.”

For now, Wallmark centering Martinook and McGinn would give Brind‘Amour an aggressive checking and energy line.

“With a line, sometimes it’s three guys thinking the same way and sometimes thinking a different way but it still works,” Wallmark said. “I think it would be a good line, working hard while trying to create some offensive side.”

Odds are, Brind‘Amour will have different combinations come Oct. 3 and the season opener against the Montreal Canadiens. But it’s training camp. It’s fun to guess what they will be.
Alex Nylander makes a good impression during the Blackhawks scrimmage, but he has a long way to go

By JIMMY GREENFIELD
CHICAGO TRIBUNE
SEP 15, 2019 | 3:58 PM

Alex Nylander wasn’t sure if he had skated on the United Center ice before Sunday’s intrasquad scrimmage.

Then again, he was just three 3 years old when his dad, Michael, played the last of this four seasons for the Hawks.

“Probably skated on this ice,” Alex said after Sunday’s scrimmage. “But I can’t remember that.”

If Nylander makes the Hawks and becomes a contributor this season, he’ll remember this scrimmage for giving him his start. Nylander flourished playing on a line with Jonathan Toews and Anton Wedin, scoring a goal on a penalty shot and putting his offensive skills on display. Wedin also scored, beating goalie Robin Lehner with a wrist shot in the first period.

“Today was a fun day,” Nylander said. “Crazy fans out there, it was awesome to see them, and I was just trying to play my game, get ready for training camp and find chemistry with my linemates.”

It’s far too early to draw any conclusions from Sunday’s scrimmage, which Hawks coach Jeremy Colliton watched from high above the United Center rather than behind one of the benches.

But Colliton said he liked what he saw from Nylander as well as Wedin, a Swedish winger signed in the offseason also in the mix for one of the final roster spots.

“(Wedin) was good,” Colliton said. “That Toews line, they were fantastic. They had the puck it seemed like the whole night. Thought (Wedin) was a smart player, an up-and-down player. He does have some skill, but he’ll take it north-south, which we want, and he made some plays and he scored, so a good showing from him.”

Much more is riding on Nylander proving he can play in the NHL. The Hawks acquired him from the Sabres for defenseman Henri Jokiharju in the offseason and drew criticism for trading a promising young player for one who had failed to live up to being the No. 8 pick in the 2016 draft.

Nylander had just two goals in 19 games with the Sabres over three seasons. Last season with the Sabres’ AHL affiliate in Rochester, he scored a modest 12 goals in 49 games. If Nylander is going to make the Hawks, it likely will be because they believe his high-end talent will fit on one of the top two lines.

But showing he can elevate his game playing with Toews, Patrick Kane, Alex DeBrincat or Dylan Strome won’t be enough.

“It’s one way he can show his value,” Colliton said. “He can make a lot of plays and he can see the ice as offensive players do. He’s got a great shot, great release. Having said that, the more versatile he can show that he can be, it gives us more options and different places to fit him into the lineup.

“It’s a lot easier to make the team. So he’ll probably move around here as we go through preseason and see if there’s a fit.”

The Hawks play five preseason games — including three in three days this week beginning Monday — before leaving for Europe on Sept. 26. Colliton said the plan is to bring a couple of extra bodies overseas to give them more time to decide who will win roster spots.

“We want to see some separation of guys,” he said. “We’re not going to read too much into it as far as who was good and who wasn’t, but the guys start to build a body of work that we’ll look to when we try to make decisions.”

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 09.16.2019
The United Center’s massive new scoreboard — ‘it’s huge’ — makes its debut at the Blackhawks’ Training Camp Festival scrimmage

By JIMMY GREENFIELD
CHICAGO TRIBUNE
SEP 15, 2019 | 2:56 PM

The United Center’s new scoreboard, with over 8,600-square feet of screen display giving it the most high-definition space of any NHL or NBA arena, made its debut Sunday during the Blackhawks’ annual Training Camp Festival scrimmage.

The video boards are nearly four times as large as that of the old scoreboard, which was in place since 2005 and seemed perfectly fine to forward Dylan Strome.

“I don’t think there was anything wrong with the scoreboard before compared to some rinks but now it’s huge,” Strome said. “You notice in some rinks the picture’s not as clear, but our last one was great and this one’s probably a couple times better than last one. I’m sure the fans like it.”

Not all aspects of the scoreboard were operational during the scrimmage. Players and fans in the seats closest to the ice will be able to see video screens that are located underneath the scoreboard.

Defensive man Carl Dahlstrom had a difficult time making out the four screens on the sides that were clearly visible to all fans in the 100 level and above.

“1 wanted to see that under screen,” Dahlstrom said. “I kept waiting for that to open. I think it was harder to actually see the larger screen but that smaller one is definitely going to help.”
Full coverage of the 2019 Blackhawks training camp and preseason

Contributors: Ben Pope

The Blackhawks will cut an initial 55-man roster down to roughly 22 players within a three-week training camp.

Over the course of seven preseason games and numerous practices, the Hawks will get set for their 2019-20 season, beginning Oct. 4 against the Flyers in Prague, Czech Republic.
Get a first look at the United Center’s new giant scoreboard

By Ben Pope@BenPopeCST

Sep 15, 2019, 10:26am CDT

Fans attending Blackhawks and Bulls games this season at the United Center will be able to follow the action on a much bigger scoreboard.

Much, much bigger.

The new jumbotron, with 8,600 square feet of displays, debuted Sunday at the Blackhawks’ training camp festival scrimmage, captivating the general admission crowd. Stretching beyond the two blue lines, it’s four times larger than the outdated scoreboard that it replaced.

Although its much-advertised drop-down technology was not used in the scrimmage — the scoreboard panels will supposedly lower when the Hawks score, once that feature is up and running — the rest was fully functional.

The main screens showing the live camera feed and replays during stoppages are significantly larger and higher-quality than before, and the actual scoreboard portion no longer looks straight out of a 1970s suburban rink.

Still, many fans on social media mocked the undeniably plentiful percentage of the display used for advertisements.

During the pregame introduction, the wraparound panels above and below the main screen were integrated into the video presentation, but during play, they merely displayed sponsors’ logos. The white background behind those ads was so bright and similarly shaded to the white ice on the live camera feed that it did prove aesthetically frustrating at times.

The vivid brightness didn’t distract Hawks coach Jeremy Colliton, though, who afterwards said he was impressed by the new mammoth that’ll hang above him.

“No distraction, it’s good for everybody,” he said. “It’s nice to see what’s going on, [especially if] it’s on replay obviously. If you’re a fan, I can’t see a downside to it and obviously, again, they do things the highest end they can.”

The rest of Sunday’s game presentation — from the jersey-stitching pregame intro video to REO Speedwagon’s “Ridin’ the Storm Out” before the third period — was the same as in 2018-19 regular-season contests. Changes in those categories will likely debut at the Oct. 10 true season opener.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 09.16.2019
All young, promising hockey players know there's only so much time to prove themselves. Waste too many chances and your career will end in a hurry.

That said, Chicago Blackhawks coach Jeremy Colliton had to like what he saw out of Alex Nylander during the team's intrasquad scrimmage Sunday at the United Center.

Paired with Jonathan Toews and Anton Wedin, the 21-year-old Nylander scored on a penalty shot during his team's 3-1 victory and helped his line control play much of the afternoon.

"He's got a great shot, great release and I thought that line was really good," Colliton said.

The Hawks took a big chance in acquiring Nylander from Buffalo this past off-season for defenseman Henri Jokiharju, so they figure to give the 6-foot-1, 192-pound forward every chance to make the team.

Colliton wants to see the obvious stuff such as a willingness to compete for pucks and the ability to play up and down the lineup -- but he also wants Nylander to understand what it takes to play without the puck as well.

"He can fly," Colliton said. "You can see when he's hunting … he can really skate. We're going to want him to show us that persistence away from the puck to try and get it back."

Nylander was the eighth overall pick of the Sabres in 2016, but he has played in only 19 NHL games.

"I've had a great summer training," he said. "(I) had a little bit of injuries last year, but all that's really good now and I feel really good on the ice."

Some other observations from Sunday's scrimmage:

Offensive Olli: Olli Maatta has always been known as a stay-at-home defenseman, but he showed off his passing skills late in the first period by finding a wide-open Brandon Saad in front of the net.

Saad had an easy tap-in to give Team Red a 1-0 lead.

Afterward, Colliton raved about Maatta, whom the Hawks acquired in exchange for Dominik Kahun and a fifth-round pick in June.

"Of course everyone likes to chip in, but I think he really influences play positively with the puck," Colliton said. "He does a lot of good things, whether it's on retrievals or just being clean with it."

"He defended well tonight, too. Moved well, closed on guys, was able to transition us from defending to going the other way. It was good to see."

Stunning scoreboard: The first thing most fans must have noticed upon entering the United Center was the size of the new scoreboard. It has 8,600 square feet of 4 mm pixel pitch display and has nearly four times more LED screen display than the old scoreboard.

"I don't think there was anything wrong with the scoreboard before compared to some rinks," forward Dylan Strome said. "Now it's just huge. … I'm sure the fans like it."

Players figure to as well. They will be able to watch replays and check out their stats on the bottom when it is activated for the first preseason game against Detroit on Wednesday.

Tap-ins: Duncan Keith and Andrew Shaw were definitely playing like this was more than a scrimmage. Keith was battling hard in corners, while Shaw decked Anton Wedin just after Wedin fired a first-period shot that found its way past goalie Robin Lehner.
Blackhawks Talk Podcast: Takeaways from first three days of Blackhawks training camp

By Charlie Roumeliotis

September 15, 2019 4:30 PM

On the latest Blackhawks Talk Podcast, Pat Boyle and Charlie Roumeliotis break down the first three days of training camp.

Which players have stood out so far and how will the injuries to Kirby Dach and Calvin de Haan impact the final roster?

The guys also discuss Jonathan Toews being motivated by an NHL Network snub and their feelings about the relationship between Corey Crawford and Robin Lehner.

0:45 - Fan support at Training Camp Festival
1:45 - Impressions of Wedin-Toews-Nylander line
2:35 - Olli Maatta getting offensive
4:00 - Aleksi Saarela impact
5:00 - Andrew Shaw at center
6:00 - Will Kris Versteeg get another spin with Blackhawks?
7:45 - Optimism at camp
10:15 - Kirby Dach injury
12:00 - What are Dach’s chances of making the team?
14:00 - Will Calvin de Haan be ready for season opener?
17:15 - Jeremy Colliton teaching D-zone
19:00 - Adam Boqvist chances of making the team?
20:15 - Jonathan Toews motivated by snub
24:15 - Crawford-Lehner relationship
28:45 - Importance of three preseason games in three days

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
'I had no idea what was going on': Oral history of Patrick Kane's 2010 Stanley Cup-clinching goal

By Scott Powers
Sep 15, 2019

Jonathan Toews took one look at the Patrick Kane bobblehead and laughed.

"Look at the hands," Toews said. "That's funny."

The bobblehead, which was to be given out at the Blackhawks training camp festival Sunday, captured a memorable instant in Kane's celebration after he had scored the Blackhawks' Stanley Cup-clinching goal in overtime of Game 6 against the Philadelphia Flyers in 2010. It is a perfect representation of Kane's reaction after scoring that historic goal, from the hands and the placement of his mouthguard.

The mood shifted from tension to confusion to celebration within the span of a few minutes, as Kane's goal was as tough to see as it was to stop. But when he scored, it ended a drought that almost reached a half-century.

"Well, fittingly it was the most mysterious ending not just to a game, but to a final's game that determined who would get the Stanley Cup," Blackhawks president John McDonough recently said. "It was shrouded in mystery."

The Blackhawks led the best-of-seven series 3-2 with Game 6 in Philadelphia. Andrew Ladd put the Blackhawks ahead 3-2 in the second period of, but the Flyers answered with a goal by Scott Hartnell at 16:01 of the third period and forced overtime. Four minutes into overtime, neither team had scored, and the Blackhawks had the puck in their offensive zone.

Patrick Sharp, Blackhawks forward: First of all, overtime was pretty crazy. I think that line that was out there on the ice -- Kaner, myself and Andrew Ladd -- I think that was put together the game before. Game 5, and Joel (Quenneville) saw something there, and we ended up playing as a second line and we scored a ton of goals in that two games. I think we already had two in the game as a line. We felt like we were the line that was going to get it in overtime. I remember all three of us talking about it.

Brian Campbell, Blackhawks defenseman: I remember (the puck) being rimmed around to me, so just trying to make a good play on it like that. … I still kind of remember that puck was spinning so much coming off the wall. A lot of times when it's spinning like that, you got to be really, really careful. You just hit the puck once and it can just move and take off easy like that. For me, it was almost to get the puck settled down and get the puck stop spinning as much as it was. (That) was the biggest thing.

Patrick Kane, Blackhawks forward: Just kind of remember, it looked like Soup was about to shoot it and I was calling for it, so he passed it to me.

Campbell: We all know I'm not much of a shooter. So, just kind of walking the line, what I've done a million times in practice and whatever else. Obviously for me, you want to put it into a good player's hands. I think when you see Patrick Kane on a half wall, you feel pretty comfortable obviously giving him the puck and making a play from there.

Kane: I was really precious standing still, made a couple head fakes (on defenseman Kimmo Timonen), pulled the puck to my forehand and just kind of pushed it down the wall with one hand, put two hands on the stick and just fired it on net, hoping for a rebound or anything to happen.

Sharp: Usually when he had the puck on the outside that season, I would just try to find an area in the high slot or back door, and Kaner would usually put it on my tape. That's what I was focusing on. Before I really had a chance to square up and get ready to get in that position, I saw Kaner just fire a low, hard shot from a bad angle.

Michael Leighton, Flyers goaltender: I see (Kane) coming down the wall and I see him start cutting towards the net. The way he was holding the puck I thought he was just going to either keep carrying it to the net or pass it up to the front to someone driving to the net. I was holding my post, waiting to push off it and he just took a quick shot, like caught me off guard and put it at the net, real quick at my feet.

It went right underneath me and got stuck underneath the pad of the net. I turned around and I saw it in the net, but nobody else did. I knew as soon as it went underneath me, it went in.

Kane: I saw it go in. I saw it hit the pad. It was stuck underneath and there was no reaction. Even Timonen was still skating with me after the puck was in the net, and I was like trying to skate to get away from him, so I could celebrate. … The celebration is kind of a blur. I was just trying to sell that the puck was actually in the net, you know. I think that's why I celebrated like that.

Sharp: I was in a great position to see the whole side of the net. I was square right in the slot looking down toward the blue crease area. I knew the puck was underneath the pad or caught in somewhere. But I didn't see the net move. I just saw the back, white pad bulge a little bit. I knew it was going to be a crazy celebration with Kaner scoring because he would always do something special during that time of his career, even to this day he does. I wanted to get to him quick and have a great celebration. … It's not a surprise to me that Kaner was the guy getting that goal in the huge moment because he wants it more than anybody really. He wants that bright lights and the big stage. Time and time again he's going to come up in those big moments.

Campbell: I always say the first thing I did when he shot the puck was I looked in the netting for the ripple in the netting behind the goal. I thought it might have hit Leight's stick and gone up in the netting. I think that was my first reaction, just trying to find where the puck had rippled into the net and hit. All of a sudden, you look down and he's celebrating. It's just a weird situation from then. Like my mind, I remember kind of looking at the bench you see guys are celebrating, a few guys wondering if they should celebrate, I know for me, the reason I kept my gloves on for so long was I didn't want to do it again and be picking my gloves up off the ice and having to play more hockey. The biggest thing for me was, look at me, I'm going to be picking up my gloves, how embarrassing is that and having to play more hockey. But that's what I also say, foolish on me, foolish on anybody else, that maybe the greatest player in Blackhawks' history or may be one day, I didn't trust him at that point.

Kris Versteeg, Blackhawks forward: I remember I was sitting like at the end of the bench, kind of catching my wind and I looked up and he shot the puck and it made a "dunk" kind of noise. It's hard to explain. I thought it hit the paddle of his stick and went into the netting. I remember looking into the netting and then looking back down and then hearing someone yell it might be in. I looked back up and Kaner at that point was kind of coming by me and throwing his stuff. That's when I was like, OK, I jumped on the ice and started chucking my stuff off.

Jonathan Toews, Blackhawks captain: The same story I always tell is I had no idea what was going on. Guys were just kind of on the fence too, not sure if they should yell or throw their stuff off. We just kind of all had to believe Kaner that he knew what was going on. No one saw it. I was one of the last ones down the pile, kind of looking back. Eventually they took the net off the mooring and saw it sitting there. I'm like it has to be over, Kaner knows what he's talking about. But there was also part of me that maybe this is too good to be true. I didn't want to completely let go yet. It wasn't until the Cup came out, they gave us the Cup we lifted it and that's when I could let go.

Marian Hossa, Blackhawks forward: You saw all the young guys jumping over like it's happening every year. But I was a little more careful because I'd been there two times in a row, this was my third time. Obviously I knew Kaner wouldn't be celebrating out of nothing. I knew he knew exactly he had scored a goal, but until the ref pointed at the net, we didn't have 100 percentage guarantee.

Troy Parchman, Blackhawks head equipment manager: The main thing I remember is not knowing if it actually went in and sort of trying to, not that I could do it, but thinking I had to control things that we didn't start celebrating prematurely. Like I'm looking around and the coaches are half like, yeah, it's in, and then just everybody, let's see how this plays out.

Brandon Faber, Blackhawks senior director of media relations: We're sitting there in the (coaches' office) watching it in overtime. Of course right away, we didn't know it went in. But it's like, something's up. They were showing the replay and (video coach) Brad Aldrich said right away, it's in, he said over the speaker to Torch (assistant coach John Torchetti) or I don't know who was on the headset with him, but he said it was a
good goal. So we went out to the bench. I'm thinking about it, I don't know if he's right, I don't know if he's right. We went out to the bench, and the coaches are just standing there, so they didn't even think it was in yet.

Kane: I remember even, there was a celebration down by the net and then they were waiting for the confirmation for the goal and there was another celebration at center ice. And I was kind of skating around looking at my family, and I looked up and my buddies were in the last row of the building, I look up at my buddies and they're fighting Philly fans. I'm like, here I am, I just scored the game-winning goal to win the Stanley Cup, and my buddies are standing there and they're in a fight with the Philly fans. It was funny. When they came down to the ice like five or 10 minutes later, I was like what the hell was going on up there. They said they were chirping them and they chirped them back and just got into it.

Everyone was confused about the goal, from the players on the bench to the fans in the stands to reporters on the scene.

Scott Burnside, ESPN reporter: No one in the stands, no one in the stadium had any sense what happened. As Kane gets closer to the net, that moment is where you're almost sure what was going on and then it's over.

Adam Jahns, Chicago Sun-Times reporter: I remember standing up and packing my things to go down to the media work area which was like in a dingy hall in the stadium there in Philadelphia. You're thinking, "Oh, I got to go down. It could be a late night. I don't know what's going to happen." I remember the shot. I was standing and Barry Rozner from the Chicago Tribune, the Chicago Herald was right next to me. And I see the shot and then I see Patrick Kane skate around and start with like a dancing dead sprint straight at Antti Niemi. I'm like, "What the heck just happened?" I visibly remember going to Barry Rozner, "Holy shit, I think they just won." Then the benches clear, there's equipment everywhere, Antti Niemi, everybody joined him on ice. I still remember players looking back at it, like at the goal, and Michael Leighton looking for the puck, and there was some disbelief, everybody's looking around.

Stan Bowman, Blackhawks general manager: I remember sitting in the box, (director of amateur scouting) Mark Kelley was there, Chevy (assistant general manager Kevin Chevaldayoff) was there, those are the two I remember. (Director of player development) Norm (Maciver) might have been there as well. The puck went in we thought and (Kane) started celebrating and there was silence in the building. Nobody knew what was going on. We were looking at each other like, "Is that a goal?" I remember Chevy going, "I think it went in." I then said, "You wouldn't celebrate like that if the puck didn't go in." But there was this big delay, right? They were skating up and down the ice and we're in the press box. We're trying to decide should we go down because we were up high, and we needed to get to the elevator and go down. There was confusion I guess is the best way to put it because I wasn't positive it went in. But goal scorers, they don't react like that. They're never wrong. I was thinking it was a goal, but I didn't want to be the fool to run to the elevator and get downstairs to find out the game was still going on.

McDonough: I remember saying to Rocky (Wirtz), and I can't remember who else was in the suite with, "Kane just threw his gloves off. ... He just threw his fucking gloves off. ... We had all been in overtimes. I was in extra innings and overtimes, and you know it can go anyway, any fluky, anything can happen. But in retrospect 10 years later, it's virtually comprehensible to think a 49-year drought ended like that. Hesitation, the celebration, nobody sure, all of a sudden one of our players, just one, is disrobing and celebrating. People on the bench aren't sure why he's celebrating.

Leighton's body language didn't necessarily dictate the puck went in. I think Timonen was one of the defensemen, and I think I saw him shrug his shoulders and kind of stop. That gave me an indication that it went in. But there was maybe a 90-second delay and Rocky and I are looking on the replay and you see it go in, but even then, you weren't sure. Again, it was shrouded in mystery because it wasn't your conventional he beats him, obviously it's in, there's no goalie interference, there's no question about it. There were a lot of questions. Something almost supernatally just happened.

Nearly all of the radio and television broadcasters calling the game were in a similar boat.

Troy Murray, Blackhawks radio color analyst: It was kind of unique because where broadcast position was in Philadelphia because visiting radio takes the lowest priority amongst all the broadcasters. There was an NHL broadcast, a Canadian broadcast. There was some other TV, Swedish TV, whatever, so all the booths were full. We were picked down to the Blackhawks and where there were no comments. We happened right down in front of us. I remember when Kane went out to the point, got a little pass, then he went back down and attacked the net. John's (Wiederman) calling the game. Kane shoots and I saw the puck go in. If you listen to the original call, John and all the other broadcasters were trying to figure it out. Like Doc Emrick, "As it rattles around the boards." The Canadian guy was trying to find out where it was. I started yelling behind John, "It's in, it's in." And then John realized the puck went in.

John Wiederman, Blackhawks radio play-by-play broadcaster: Because of our angle to the net, I couldn't see the puck go in initially. Like where did it go? I remember saying that it went through the goal crease, that Michael Leighton who was the goaltender had gotten enough of it to knock it wide. I couldn't see it because his body was in the way. He was down in the goal crease and he moved in some way and I saw it behind him. It was underneath the apron of the net. You could only see the back of the puck under the apron of the net. And then I heard Troy say it's in. I knew because I saw it too. That's when I changed my call. That's the only time I really knew.

Mike "Doc" Emrick, NBC television play-by-play broadcaster: Whenever I end up talking to journalism classes, I tell them this is the nature of it. I'll never forget that Al Michaels when he spoke at the Sports Emmys on the night he was given the lifetime achievement award. He said the one thing about this, this is not Hollywood. You don't get 25 takes. You get one. It was never more prevalent in my mind than that night because whenever I speak to journalism classes I will often tell them about that particular play. And it doesn't make any difference that any others didn't get it. We're all paid to see those, but we didn't. The fact the referee didn't see it doesn't excuse any of us. It would have been nice if we could have gotten it, especially since it was the last goal of the year. I got two-fifths of it. I got a "s" and "c" out of it and I didn't get 100 percent of it and you're supposed to get 100 percent of it. I'm happy for Patrick and I'm happy for the Blackhawks that they won. I wish I would have gotten it. It's one of those things you can't have back. As Al said, you get only one crack at it. That one remains through my 46 years as the one I'd like to have back the most.

The goal was reviewed by video and confirmed on the ice about a minute after Kane's shot went in.

Bowman: And then we couldn't wait to get down there quick enough. We got down to the elevator and ran down to the ice. That was a pretty special feeling thinking back on it. I don't have any specific recollection other than a sense of, not relief, it was more excitement. I think some of the other Cups was more relief. In 2015, that was such a grind it felt like. This one didn't seem like a grind because we hadn't been through it before. It was more giddiness when you get down to the ice. The initial moment when it went in, it was confusion like everyone else.

Hossa: When the ref got the phone call from the video referee and they point at the net and said yes it was a goal, a regular goal, obviously the dream came true. I always wanted to win a Cup with a team. It happened right away in my first year in Chicago. That was my third Stanley Cup Final in a row. I was really beat up, psychically, mentally and just the relief and everything, all of the emotions start hitting me. That's what I remember on the moment. It was the best hockey moment in my life.

Parchment: We were all sort of in shock because that was for most of us like the first time. It's kind of making me choke up right now. It's sort of like you dream about that kind of thing. You probably don't quite realize, like you don't know how to react. Like this is all surreal because that's all you sort of think about. I'm Canadian, so that's you play street hockey to win the Stanley and all that other stuff. Never in my life did I dream I'd be part of something like that. It's sort of crazy.

The Blackhawks collected nearly memorable item after the celebration and brought them home to Chicago. There were a few things that went missing.

Kane: I remember asking the equipment guys afterward, "Was anything taken from the celebration in the locker room? There must have been a bunch of stuff stolen." "Like actually, just (Adam) Burish and (Colin) Fraser's helmets." I was thinking to myself, after the celebration my buddies are walking out with Burish and Fogarty's helmets on. They're only two things stolen, my buddies took them, and my buddies ended up getting in a fight with Philly fans. … Actually pretty funny story, my buddy mailed back Fraser's helmet to him. He was excited when he got it.
Parchman: Good thing (Kane) said that. I didn’t want to rat him out. We knew those things were gone and we actually knew those guys took them. It wasn’t such a big deal. After that, the other two times I don’t think we lose anything.

But the game-winning puck still hasn’t been found. ESPN’s Wayne Drehs did an investigative piece on the missing puck in April 2011, tabbing NHL linesman Steve Miller as the likely culprit. Months later, the Chicago Tribune used its photos to confirm that Miller grabbed the puck, but he denied having it. The saga continues.

Faber: It’s funny I’ve thought about it many times. Nobody ever said where’s the puck. There was so much confusion how it happened. I think there’s obviously theories out there where the puck might be or rumors of who has it. I’m sure it’ll turn up one day.

Kane: (I’m not that curious about it), not really. I don’t know. It’s almost like a foregone conclusion. Who knows if you find it if it’s really the right one? I don’t know. I guess that’s the way it is. Who knows if it’ll show up one day? If not, it’s pretty cool story.

McDonough: I think the league has tried to solve it. But it would be something that would be very valuable to the organization if it was legitimate. It’s hard to believe with the advancement of technology and cameras that someone had to take that puck out of the (net).

Sharp: I figure somebody has it and they’re hanging onto it; a small group of people know where it is. I guess the other option is it just discarded, and it just blended in with another puck and somebody has it and they don’t even realize they do. I got a feeling somebody has it and we’re going to see it sooner or later.

Leighton was a Blackhawk goalie from 2014-16 and became teammates with Kane.

Leighton: I made a quick comment to him why he shot that puck, laughing. That was about it. We didn’t get into it. He knows what happened and I know what happened. Obviously it worked out for him, it didn’t work out for me. … There’s now a technique called the RVH that now if I was in that situation I’d already be down before he even shot the puck. Either way, if he shoots it on the ice, it hits my pad. If he passes it up front, I just push off my post out to the one-timer.

Dave Bolland, Blackhawks forward: Maybe (that’s the case). I don’t know, Kaner’s a pretty snipe shooter. I think he still puts it past him.

The Blackhawks will be celebrating the 10-year anniversary of that 2009-10 season throughout this season. While it’s been a decade, people involved in that game are reminded of that season and that game seemingly every day.

McDonough: It set the tempo for the rest of the organization. It provided a lot of confidence for everybody.

Leighton: (That replay is) everywhere. It’s not hard to see. If you Google my name, it’s the first thing that pops up. It’s always on highlights and everything with the Blackhawks they’re showing it. It’s hard to avoid it.

Kane: I have that stick. It’s at my place, kind of standing up against the wall. I’m sure someday I’ll do something with it. Yeah, sometimes it’s one of those things you’re in a slump or something you go look at some of the sticks that were important to you or milestones for you. That’s always one of them. It’s a little bit longer than the one I have now. I use the wide, white tape now and I used to use a skinny, white tape, just different things. Always fun to pick that one up. I say I’d pick it up four, five times a year just to look at it. Not for any reason, like it’s just up against the wall. It’s not like I’m going, “I remember I scored the goal; I’m going to go look at my stick.” I could be getting changed or something and walk past it and it’s right here and I kind of pick it up in the moment.

Hossa: It just shows how time goes fast. I want to enjoy every moment because the life just going so fast. It’s hard to believe it’s already 10 years. We’re looking forward to coming to Chicago to celebrate a special night. I think it’s going to be great memories for everybody.

Toews: Actually, this summer I watched a lot of highlights. It’s like you get emotional watching it again. You’re so far removed from the memory and all of a sudden it’s like it’s sometimes hard to believe it actually happened, all three of them really. It’s kind of like a dream almost.
Avalanche right-catching goalie Pavel Francouz is a star in shootouts.

By MIKE CHAMBERS | mchambers@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

Avalanche coach Jared Bednar suggested that goalie Philipp Grubauer will get about 55 starts this season, leaving some 27 for backup Pavel Francouz.

In games that go into a shootout, the Avs might have more success with the backup, given that Francouz is one of those rare right-catching goalies who forces shooters to think twice about what move to make.

"He's lights-out in shootouts," said Avs forward Sheldon Dries, who played with Francouz with the Colorado Eagles of the American Hockey League last season.

Most NHL goalies catch with their left hand and hold the stick with the right. The Czechoslovakia-born Francouz does the opposite and is believed to be the Avalanche's first right-catching goalie since Jose Theodore (2006-08).

The shortlist of hockey's best all-time right-catching goalies begins with Tony Esposito and Grant Fuhr.

The 6-foot Francouz throws, catches and plays golf right-handed but said he writes and eats soup with his left — while holding a knife with his right.

"If I go to play badminton or squash, I can use both hands, so I can (be ambidextrous)," he said after Day 3 of Avalanche training camp Sunday.

In 14 shootout attempts last season with the Eagles, Francouz allowed just two goals. He was named an AHL all-star but didn't participate in the game because of injury.

"Some guys, they don't like that I'm the opposite. But I don't think there is any advantage on my side, the (shooter's) side (in non-shootouts)," he said. "In the shootout it can make a difference because most of the players practice against the left-handed goalies and they have their moves prepared. That could make a difference."

Dries said it makes a big difference. He likes to shoot five-hole (between the legs) but says right-catching goalies take that away from guys who shoot left because of where the goalie's stick is positioned.

"As lefties against a normal-stance goalie, coming in on the left side the five-hole is open. Against (Francouz), it's not," Dries said. "So you have to kind of change up your tactics. He's lights-out in shootouts. It's not easy to beat him."

Francouz, 29, is beginning his second season in North America. He signed a one-year, $690,000 contract with the Avs as an undrafted free agent before the 2018-19 season. He was playing in Russia's Kontinental Hockey League.

Francouz, who goes by "Frankie" in the locker room, signed another one-year deal with Colorado in May ($950,000). He replaces Semyon Varlamov, who signed a four-year, $20 million deal with the New York Islanders on July 1.

Francouz is enjoying his second NHL training camp — particularly because he knows the team expects him to be with the Avs all season. He played in just two games with the Avs last year.

"It's been good. It's fun. It's hockey," Francouz said of the camp. "Good practices, good skates. It's been a great time. Even last year I was happy I was here, but this year is better."

Footnotes. Avs defenseman Nikita Zadorov was injured in Sunday's second on-ice session. Bednar was not aware of the severity of the injury. … Free-agent addition Valeri Nichushkin joined the on-ice portion of camp and wore No. 13. The Russian was late to report because of visa issues. … Colorado has its fourth and final two-group camp sessions Monday before making cuts and reassignments ahead of Tuesday's preseason opener against the visiting Vegas Golden Knights. The Avs are carrying 57 players (32 forwards, 20 defensemen and five goalies), with the majority of those players destined to become Eagles or reassigned to their major-junior teams.
Chambers: Mikko Rantanen’s agents might have him locked up and gagged during contract negotiations

By MIKE CHAMBERS | mchambers@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

September 15, 2019 at 11:23 am

Gabe Landeskog said what I was thinking. The Avalanche captain knows Mikko Rantanen far better than any reporter, but to know Rantanen at any level means you might not know a more pleasant person.

Which is why, as his friend, Landeskog would never allow Rantanen to negotiate his next contract on his own.

"As much as he’d like to be here, he can’t go out and sign an eight-year deal at $1 million a year just to be nice," Landeskog told me.

Rantanen, 22, has missed the first three days of Avalanche training camp, including Friday and Saturday’s on-ice sessions, because he doesn’t have a contract as a restricted free agent coming out of the three-year, entry-level deal. But he’s the last guy who would ever disrupt the Avs’ locker room over a salary dispute.

Which is why Rantanen’s absence is not a distraction. Because of who he is, his teammates know it’s killing him not being in camp.

"Mikko is the ultimate team player," Landeskog said. "I’ve known Mikko for three-plus years and he’s a quality person, a quality teammate. You couldn’t ask for a better guy to have in the locker room and have as one of your top players. He shows up with a smile on his face every single day and works his absolute hardest."

Rantanen, who was still in his native Finland as of Monday, is destined to be the Avs’ top-paid player — likely in the $10.5 million range. He’ll enjoy the money but I’m willing to bet he’d rather not have that label.

Rantanen returned from his first All-Star Game appearance in January with the hat he was given during the weekend festivities in San Jose, Calif. He really liked the black-and-white hat, but he didn’t like the white “All-Star” lettering on the back. So he took a permanent black marker to the hat, erasing any mention that he was something special.

Rantanen doesn’t want the attention. But for himself, his family, his future family and his peers, he needs to get what he’s worth. The NHL Players Association and his agents don’t want him to take a “nice-guy” discount. His teammates are probably rooting for Rantanen among themselves.

"At the end of the day — and I want people to know — we love Mikko and Mikko loves this team, this organization," Landeskog said.

This is not 2012 when Ryan O’Reilly wanted big money coming out of his ELC and went on to miss much of that lockout-shortened season of 2012-13. O’Reilly wanted far more money than star center Matt Duchene — who had signed a modest two-year “bridge” deal worth $3.5 million annually on June 23, 2012 — and the Avs’ brass at the time wanted O’Reilly to fall in line behind Duchene.

O’Reilly was coming off a modest 18-goal, 55-point season of 2011-12. In comparison, Rantanen produced 31 goals and 87 points last season at the same age.

Today’s market suggests Rantanen is worth at least $10.5 million annually — particularly because his best same-age RFA comparison, Mitch Marner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, signed a six-year deal worth nearly $10.9 million annually Friday. The first domino has fallen. Landeskog hopes Rantanen, his linemate, is next.

"Hopefully that means that our big Moose (Rantanen) is coming back as well," Landeskog said of Mamer’s contract. "But we’ll see. I’m not at the negotiation table. I don’t what their conversation is like. But hopefully, he’s back soon."

Denver Post: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Tyson Jost has found more support and has big plans for himself, the Avs

By MIKE CHAMBERS | mchambers@denverpost.com | The Denver Post
September 15, 2019 at 11:22 am

Tyson Jost is a member of what is regarded as the Avalanche’s second line. The third-year pro, 21, was again the left-winger with newcomers Nazem Kadri and Joonas Donskoi in Day 2 of training camp Saturday.

It’s a position Jost found himself in a year ago, when he began his second full NHL season with high hopes of becoming one of Colorado’s top scorers.

That didn’t pan out. Jost, the club’s 2016 first-round selection (10th overall), was demoted to the third line, and then the fourth, and had an eight-game stint with the Colorado Eagles of the American Hockey League in what was said to be a conditioning assignment when he was returning from the injury list.

Jost began the Avs’ playoff run last spring with just 7:57 of ice time against Calgary in Game 1 of that series. But he scored goals in Colorado’s final three playoff games — Games 5, 6 and 7 against the San Jose Sharks.

"I finished really strong and was happy with how I was playing," Jost said from training camp. "Last year was definitely an up-and-down season, highs and lows, but I learned from it and used it as fuel. I had a really good summer. I’m excited where I’m slotted right now. But so much can change. This is where I started here (the second line) last season and I wasn’t consistent. That’s what I’m going to work on this year — (consistency)."

Jost is armed this season with more support. He used to talk to his sports psychologist in Penticton, British Columbia, a couple of times per week. Now the conversations are more regular, if not daily, and he is also working with other professionals in Denver.

When Avs coach Jared Bednar spoke about Jost on Thursday when veterans reported for physicals and testing at the Pepsi Center, the coach said the player’s biggest challenge is to overcome himself — to put less pressure on himself. Bednar thinks Jost thinks too much.

"I’ve done it throughout my whole career," Jost said of self-inflicted pressure. "I just expect a lot from myself. It’s just my mentality. I want to be the best player on the ice every single time I go out there. It’s just how I was raised. It’s just who I am. That’s just the type of person I am and it’s just the competitive atmosphere that I have.

“There’s a balance, though, and that’s something I’m learning about, for sure. I’m talking to different people. It’s all personal stuff but part of being a pro hockey player, and something I’m adding in my every-day life, for sure. I’m looking for that ‘right’ pressure, I guess you could say.”

Jost loves playing with Kadri and Donskoi. He and Kadri participated in the Sidney Crosby-led training camp in Vail this month, along with Avs star Nathan MacKinnon. The additions of four key forwards — Kadri, Donskoi, Andre Burakovsky and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare — and other additions have Jost and everyone else thinking big.

“We’re not afraid to say it right now: I think the Stanley Cup is the end-goal," Jost said. "Kadri, Donskoi, Burakovsky, Bellemare — we got some great additions. We’re looking like a really solid team. It’s going to be an exciting year for us.”

Footnotes. The Avs have their third training camp on-ice session Sunday from 8:45 a.m. to about noon. Their fourth and final session is Monday and they open the preseason Tuesday against the visiting Vegas Golden Knights. … Bednar said former elite prospect Valeri Nichushkin reported to training camp and went through physicals and testing Saturday. Signed last month to a one-year deal as a free agent, Nichushkin, 24, is expected to join the team for drills Sunday.
After the dust settled from the Stanley Cup final, bookmakers were very quick to post their odds for the 2020 Stanley Cup. Tampa Bay … duh, Boston … makes sense, Toronto … sure, Vegas … OK, Colorado … wait, what? A team that lost more games than they won the year prior is now a top five Cup favourite? I’m not convinced.

The hype is very real for the Avalanche after dispatching the top-seeded Flames with ease in the opening round, and coming oh-so-close to beating a veteran Sharks team in the second round. With a strong off-season, one of the best lines in hockey, an elite starting goaltender, and a strong prospect pool I can see the argument being made, but it feels like we need to calm down. Playoff performance tends to cloud people’s judgement and over-hype teams more than necessary – we all remember how Edmonton’s turn as the next great Western power shook out just a few seasons ago.

The Avalanche are not Edmonton – there’s much more to like here in this situation than that one before the 2017-18 season. This is a likely playoff team next season, but a lot of things still have to go right for them to be more than that in an uber-competitive Central Division.

On average, Colorado earns 93.9 points and makes the playoffs 63 percent of the time. That’s not bad, but not nearly as high as the current hype lies with some expecting the team to finish around 100 points. That’s far from impossible, but not the most likely outcome with the team reaching or eclipsing that mark in one quarter of simulations. The team misses the playoffs entirely more often than that.

Expectations need to be tempered here. Colorado wins the Stanley Cup in three percent of simulations here which, again, isn’t bad, but a far cry from the 15-to-1 odds or better currently being given out. This is not a Stanley Cup contender in its current iteration. Not yet anyways. The team has the potential to be that after an impressive showing in the playoffs, no doubt, but the Avalanche haven’t earned it just yet.

While that two round showcase is still fresh on everyone’s mind, it’s important not to ignore a mediocre regular season, a season that would’ve had the Avalanche outside the playoffs entirely in other years and conferences. It took an insane goaltending run down the stretch – one where the team saw 93 percent of its shots against get stopped, third in the league – to get there too.

The Central is one of the tougher divisions and while Colorado has an exciting young team ready to take the next step, making the playoffs again isn’t a given, even if it feels like it with a stronger team on paper after making the postseason in back-to-back years. The Avalanche have a great team with high upside, but this is the NHL where anything and everything can go wrong. Development isn’t linear.

Other teams around them are improving too. While the Avalanche have done well this off-season to fortify their depth, there still appear to be some issues that can hold the team back from taking the next step many expect them to.

For many teams looking to take the next step, putting in place a strong supporting cast around the core group is critical. Over the past two seasons that’s what has separated the Avalanche from true contending teams as they were often a one line show. The team tried splitting up the big three to modest success last season, but the quest for balance meant sacrificing high end performance very few teams could stack up against. When you have arguably the second best line in hockey, it’s usually worth keeping together – especially if the options to replace one of the cogs have the potential to severely limit its upside.

The Avalanche have done a lot to address that over the summer and the forward group looks much more fortified as a result, where separating the big three in search of balance wouldn’t hurt as much. During the off-season Colorado added not one, not two, but three top six calibre forwards in Nazem Kadri, Joonas Donskoi and Andre Burakovky, a trio expected to be worth 3.7 wins of combined value.

Kadri is the marquee addition here as a player with 50-point upside who can be the missing piece on a stacked Colorado power play. He also provides two-way value, plays against opposing top lines, and looks to be the capable second line center behind Nathan MacKinnon that the team has been missing since trading away Matt Duchene. He’s a good player that flew under-the-radar last season having to slot behind both John Tavares and Auston Matthews on the depth chart. He fits much better as a top six center. Over the last three seasons, his 1.84 points-per-60 at 5-on-5 ranks 111th, which is solidly second line territory.

Kadri has long been an excellent offensive driver who is something illuminated by his tracking stats where he is elite at creating shots for himself and his teammates. In both shots and shot assists, he’s above the 90th percentile and is in the 98th percentile for shot contributions as a whole. His work at entering and exiting the zone is also strong.

Those skillsets were a common theme in the Avalanche’s summer acquisitions (and on the team in general) as both Donskoi and Burakovksy look excellent when viewed through that lens. Both players have extremely strong transition profiles across the board, excelling at shot contributions, entries and exits to a degree few might suspect from two unassuming forwards. NHL teams have better access to those metrics and from what I’ve heard from some teams is that it’s enough reason to be even more bullish on their value than my model’s already keen projection for the duo. As a lover of all things data (especially those specific tracked numbers), it makes me very curious about the inner machinations leading to those valuations. I would bet it’s why a data savvy team went after these two players in particular and it’s one reason the Avalanche may be better than what’s projected of them here.

Even when looking at regular advanced stats Donskoi looks extremely underrated as he’s been both a strong play-driver and secondary scorer over the last two seasons, where he has a 58 percent expected goals rate and a 1.9 points-per-60. That latter figure is higher than seven of Gabriel Landeskog’s eight seasons, for the record. Burakovksy used to be an analytics darling, but his value has tapered off in that time frame. His play-driving impacts have dropped, but he’s still scoring at a second line rate.

The rub with both is their usage, where it’s no certainty that either can translate what they’ve done in low minutes with more responsibility. Both have had the easiest burdens on the team and did their damage playing 14 minutes or less for the majority of their careers. My model assumes both will be just fine sliding into a middle or top six role and that much of that factor is over-blown – both players deserve more minutes – but it is worth mentioning as a possible caveat to their expected value.

While those additions should bring the Avalanche a lot of value, what has to be factored is what the team has lost this off-season as well. Donskoi was signed in free agency and Burakovksy was traded for nothing of note, but it took giving up the underrated Alex Kerfoot and puck-mover and power play quarterback Tyson Barrie on the back-end. Kadri is an upgrade over Kerfoot, but the difference might not be as large as most think, and while Barrie can easily be replaced internally, his loss still makes the defense thinner. There was also the cap-cleaning trade of Carl Soderberg for Kevin Connauton and a third that became a net loss in on-ice value that needs to be considered, especially as Connauton now grades out as the team’s weakest player with a significant negative contribution to the bottom line.

Soderberg might be missed more than some believe as he was a capable middle six forward for the Avalanche. The hope is that internal improvement bridges the gap and given some of the options, it’s certainly not a bad plan – but from my model’s perspective, they’ll need to actually prove they can provide that value before it’s penciled in. When it comes to the team’s forward depth, a fair amount is riding on Tyson Jost, 21, and J.T. Compher, 24, to take the next step. A breakout season from one or both would certainly bolster the team’s supporting cast, on top of the new additions.

Neither player is a GSVI favourite with both being valued as low-end third line options or worse. That may not be so surprising for Jost who hasn’t really put it all together yet at the NHL level, but might well be for Compher who scored at a 40-point pace last season. While both were moderately efficient scorers last season at 5-on-5 with a points-per-60 that was second line calibre, the fact they were at a fourth line rate or worse prior to 2018-19 means the model remains a bit more skeptical about their production, even after adjusting for age. Neither player has very strong shot or shot assist numbers. Both struggling to individually contribute on the power play also hurts their assessment.
The bigger issue though is their inability to drive play with both being among Colorado's weakest possessions last season, earning a 47 percent expected goals rate while being weak with the puck. That needs to improve and it's where the new additions might help. In that vein though, it'll depend on whether Kadri, Burakovsky and Donskoi (and Colin Wilson) can lift these two up in the middle six, or if these two continue to struggle and drag the two lines down.

The fourth line added Pierre-Edouard Bellemare to the mix and he's come a long way from his much-maligned days in Philadelphia to become one of the most dependable fourth line centers in the league. He can drive play there, especially on defense (though he worth noting he played some extremely soft minutes), and join Matts Calvert and Nieto to form quite the stingy trio. The latter two did well last year earning a sterling 58 percent expected goal share together, partially built off the strength of their ability with the puck in transition, which at this point seems like a clear organizational philosophy. That was in a third line role and they should be even better sliding down the depth chart.

The depth looks much better than it has in year's past, though the team's strongest asset is still of course the top line, worth 9.2 combined wins anchored by one of the best players on earth.

This is MacKinnon's team and once he took a leap, so too did the rest of the group. They go as far as he goes and he's turned in two incredible seasons back-to-back, earning a spot among the league's elite. My model considers him the league's ninth most valuable player and that may still be too harsh. After back-to-back seasons finishing just shy of 100 points, it's only a matter of time before he breaks the barrier. He should be a perennial 40-goal and 100-point threat through most of his prime. As one of the game's fastest players and most gifted puck-handlers, he is of course the poster child for the team's mandate of making the puck up ice with control. He ranks in the 99th percentile or higher for shot contributions, entries and exits and is one of the game's best players as a result. The sheer difficulty in stopping him also contributes to him leading the league in penalty differential last season.

Couple that with Mikko Rantanen's vision and Landeskog's defensive acumen and you get one of the best line's in hockey. For this trio though, what they do go Beyond expected goals is which are quality finishers in their own right, projected to score 27 goals more than expected combined. Last year the line only earned a 51 percent expected goals share, but a 61 percent goals share, completely built up the strength of their offence. For most lines that's a bad sign; for this line it's a signal to how much their talent can drive results. All three are modest play-drivers, but very strong goal-drivers – and in the end that's all that matters isn't it?

All three are also key facets to a power play that's ranked eighth over the last two seasons with MacKinnon and Rantanen earning 69 and 68 points over the last two seasons with the man advantage, good for fifth and sixth in the league. Adding Kadri to that unit makes it even scarier. If there’s one issue though, it's the very wide gap between the first and second halves for every member of the top line. In the first half, the trio was torching the league playing at point paces of 127 (Rantanen), 121 (MacKinnon) and 92 (Landeskog). That was partially influenced by a high on-ice shooting percentage and all three predictably regressed to point-per-game pace or worse. Rantanen was hit hardest scoring just 25 points in his final 34 games. None of the three are as bad as the second half, but they were never as good as that strong first half either. The true answer was somewhere in the middle, but it shows the wide variance of performance for even the team's best players. The key will be surviving a stretch where the top line isn't producing as much, something the Avalanche are much better equipped to do this season. On the back-end there's plenty of upside, but things are much less rosy overall and that's probably the biggest reason for the current tempered expectations. While the depth at forward has been addressed, there's still a dearth of talent for now on the back-end and no clear-cut number one leading the way ...

Yet.

A lot of the team's hopes this season are riding on rookie Cale Makar's shoulders and for good reason. The former fourth overall pick was lights out at college and the immediately translated to the NHL last season in the playoffs. There, he looked terrific on nearly every shift scoring six points in 10 games while earning a stunning 61 percent goals share (with his competition quality ramped up against San Jose to boot). Doing that against two top teams in the West is very impressive and he was a major catalyst in the Avalanche looking so dominant in the playoffs. Their 68 percent expected goals share (against Calgary and San Jose!) there is likely a major driver of the hype machine and it all started with the arrival of Makar.

That Makar was so good during the playoffs (and that the team also drafted Bowen Byram fourth overall in the draft) is likely what made Barrie expendable as there's a good chance he can replace the underwhelming cost of Barrie's value. My model expects Makar to be worth 1.7 wins which would be the highest on Colorado's blue line and right on the cusp of being a number one defender. If he can prove he's that in year one, it's another way to Avalanche can exceed their projection, but that is a very lofty goal. It's extremely rare for a defender to step in to provide that kind of value in his rookie season, but Makar is a special player and should have every opportunity to do so.

The rest of the group isn't much to behold though and that's where my model struggles to see the contender that many are ready to anoint. Colorado as, Samuel Girard is the best of the bunch here of course, and at 21 already holds top pairing value with the potential for more. He's an absolutely elite puck-mover that's already been challenged by tough minutes, but his ability to drive play isn't there yet. He looked terrific with Makar in the playoffs, but surprisingly has had the team's weakest offensive impact by expected goals in his first two seasons. He can hold his own defensively, but generating chances looks to be an issue with him on the ice, leading to a 47 percent expected goals rate over the last two seasons – the worst mark on the team. He does a lot individually and can put up points, but for whatever reason it's not showing up in his on-ice results.

The lack of offence is common trait among the Avalanche defense that's not only on Girard. All five players in the top 90 in on-ice shooting percentage – Erik Johnson, Nikita Zadorov, and Ian Cole (who's injured now, but part of the main six when healthy) – struggle to drive play offensively, but are solid defensively. Johnson gets a pass as the defender with the heaviest usage burden every season, but even after factoring for that he still only looks like an average top four option. The other two aren't even that. Like Girard, Johnson also excels at moving the puck, making it very curious as to why the Avalanche aren't generating as many offensive chances as they should with that pair on the ice.

In that vein, trading away Barrie might cause some headaches on the back-end as he was easily the team's strongest offensive defender. While Makar should replace that, the team will likely see a status quo defense rather than an improved one as the other five might still struggle to help generate offence, leaving a big burden for Makar. That can’t all be on the forwards and thought there seems likely to improve, the same can’t be said for the rest of the group.

That all appear defensively sound should help the goal tendning though which looks to be the team's biggest strength outside of the top line buoyed by an extremely optimistic projection for Philipp Grubauer. He’s still never started more than 40 NHL games in a single season, but has performed extremely well in those he has. That dominant goaltending down the stretch that got the Avalanche into the playoffs last? That was Grubauer stealing the starting job from Semyon Varlamov with a vengeance, posting a stunning .948 save percentage in his final 15 games of the season. That ranked second to only Ben Bishop leading to a 9-3-2 record. He was stellar in the playoffs too, posting a .925 save percentage.

Grubauer won’t be that good again, obviously, but he has the potential to go on heaters like that, ones where the team looks unstoppable. As the first half showed though, he also has the potential to play poorly and cost his team games. It's the nature of goalies.

He does look like one of the league’s best though, which may come as a bit of a surprise to some. His projected 2.8 wins ranks third in the league behind only John Gibson and Sergei Bobrovsky and comes off the strength of him saving 32 goals above expected over the past three seasons, which is nearly the same as his former mentor Braden Holtby, only in half the minutes. His save percentage above expected is top five over that span and he has more experience (and projected starts this season) than the two goalies ahead of him.

Last year was his toughest year though – he only saved two goals above expected – and the transition from Washington’s system to Colorado’s might be to blame. It certainly was to start the season and leaves some risk for what he’s capable of over a starter’s workload. If Grubauer falters, the Avalanche will struggle to live up the massive expectations set at their feet, especially since the safety net is the unproven Pavel Francouz.

He’s a wildcard with sterling AHL and KHL numbers over the last few seasons, but there’s no guarantee that translates to the NHL. In any
sense, he'll still likely be better than replacement level as a back-up (goalies without NHL work are the only players without projections) and that's where the team can find some extra value that bumps this projection up closer to what some fans would hope.

Change one letter from hope and you get hype, and the two are very related concepts when it comes to Colorado's upcoming season. The hype surrounding this team stems from the hope that a number of players look primed for a breakout. Makar should lead the blue line, Girard should continue to ascend, Jost and Compher should take the next step up front, Donskoi and Burakovsky should prove to be capable top six forwards, and Grubauer should cement himself as one of the league's better starters.

It's a lot of should, and not a lot of will and the reason the Avalanche aren't graded higher is because being that high depends on those things being more certain rather than unproven. It would be no surprise if everything worked out as some foresee, and adding that to one of the best lines in hockey certainly would make Colorado a team to beat come playoff time, but the fact it hasn't happened yet means it's better to reserve caution with their forecast, rather then weight the team down with mighty expectations.

Soon, you'll get better Avalanche fans, that's a promise. With a very strong prospect pool and an elite core, it's only a matter of time before Colorado is at or near the top of the league – it might even be this season. But I'm not ready to crown them as a contender just yet.

Market Expectations
Colorado Avalanche: 97.5 points

As alluded to many times above, the Avalanche come into this season with huge expectations with a market price of 97.5 points, a one-point drop from where it opened at 98.5 points. The money is on the under here and for good reason as the current odds are a little overblown at the moment.

What Fans Predict
Public Sample: 1,337
Fan Sample: 122

Everyone only sees upside whether that's the team's own fans or optimistic outsiders – almost no one is picturing this Avalanche season going anything but smoothly. I guess that means my model is on its own island. We'll see who's wrong come April, and considering how exciting this team looks on paper, I'd be more than thrilled if it was my model.

What The Athletic Insider Thinks
Ryan S. Clark: The thought around the Colorado Avalanche from those within the organization is cautious optimism. It is a franchise that has come a long way since the 48-point campaign in 2016-17. One that Vegas considers to have strong odds to win the Western Conference along with the Stanley Cup. But there are still questions.

Getting Andre Burakovsky and Nazem Kadri should fix all the problems on the second line but that answer will not be known until later. The same goes for defense until Ian Cole returns. Avalanche coach Jared Bednar has a number of potential options – including Bowen Byram – who could challenge for that spot in training camp. Another area where there are questions are goaltending. Most of that talk is around Philipp Grubauer but there is a curiosity to see how Pavel Francouz does as a full-time NHL backup. General manager Joe Sakic has built one of the most promising young teams that could be starting their Stanley Cup contender window right now. What separates the Avalanche from other teams, at the moment, is seeing how certain questions in key areas are solved.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
"I want to be better": Joonas Donskoi hoping he and Avs take next step together

BY EVAN RAWAL
SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

Like all of the players, Joonas Donskoi found himself huffing and puffing after the annual conditioning testing on Friday morning. Being one of the Avs new additions, and one who has made many trips to the Pepsi Center on the opposing team, I had to ask: Is the altitude effect a real thing?

"It's real," Donskoi said after the third day of camp. "Colorado is a tough place to play in when you're a visiting. It's tough."

That's something the 27-year-old Finn won't have to worry about anymore. After signing a four-year contract with the Avalanche in the summer, he decided it would be best to show up early in Colorado and get as used to the altitude as quickly he could.

"Now I'm fine," he told BSN Denver on Sunday. "The first couple of weeks it was tough getting used to the altitude. I'm used to it now."

Coming off the best season of his career in San Jose, the Avs were eager to snag the winger in free agency, making him their top priority and first acquisition of unrestricted free agency. With 14 goals and 37 points last season in San Jose, Donskoi would have finished sixth amongst Avs forwards in scoring.

Still, part of the reason why he chose Denver is that he thinks he has another level he can reach. At an annual cap hit of $3.9M per year, the Avs are banking on that.

"I'm looking to take the next step in my career," Donskoi made clear on Sunday. "I haven't showed my best the four years I've been in the league. This is kind of a fresh start for myself. I want to be better."

Donskoi has wasted no time fitting in with his new teammates. He was one of the better skaters through the first two days of training camp. On Sunday, he opened the scoring in the scrimmage on just his first shift, skating effortlessly through the neutral zone before crossing the blue line and beating Pavel Francouz with a wrister.

Although he looks to have fit in seamlessly with his new teammates, that doesn't mean Donskoi wasn't on edge before camp started, having known only Matt Nieto before joining.

"To be honest, I was pretty nervous," he said. "I was super excited to come, but this is the first time for me switching a team. I played for the Sharks for four years, and before that, I was in the Finnish league always with the same team. It's new talent for me and I couldn't wait to get going."

The hype around this Avalanche team is growing, and players around the league are taking notice. That's been a constant theme the new acquisitions have pointed out this weekend, and Donskoi was no different.

"I really liked the Avs team last year," Donskoi stated. "The organization is heading in the right direction. There's a lot of good young guys who have become great players in the NHL, and I feel like the game style fits my style here too. I really like the team."

The Avalanche are looking to take off and join the NHL’s elite, and if the first few days of camp are any indication, Donskoi’s career may take off with them.

BSN DENVER LOADED: 09.16.2019
Avalanche Training Camp Observations: Scrimmages open door for competition

BY AJ HAIFELE
SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

After two days of mostly systems installation work, the Avalanche got into some real competitive situations today with small-team scrimmages.

The two sessions ran as normal so the scrimmages weren’t too deep with each team only having a couple defensive pairings and lines each but it provided some of the younger guys real opportunities to shine against NHL competition.

As always, a few players stepped up and stood out. A few didn’t.

Today, we’re starting at the very top.

MacKinnon sets the tone

Nathan MacKinnon has long been demonstrative at practices in the past. I’ll never forget him firing a stick about 12 rows up in T-Mobile Arena last year during a morning skate. When he gets frustrated, he isn’t afraid to let it out.

He showed that again yesterday when a drill wasn’t going well and he slammed his stick on the ice and shouted some adult language at nobody in particular. He did it again today when his line wasn’t executing the way he expects it to.

There are two ways to look at this: your star player is so locked in on winning a Stanley Cup that he’s setting the tone for what he expects from himself and his teammates on a daily basis. If you’re a member of the Colorado Avalanche this season, you’re coming to work. Every. Single. Day.

The other way to look at it is that the notoriously combustible on-ice personality of MacKinnon is experiencing a blow-up a little bit earlier than normal and he needs to relax some. Getting this way at camp sets up for how strong they were again today.

The major emphasis from the coaching staff today was players firing passes at NHL speed. Nothing soft just to get the drill done. Bednar wanted crisp, hard passes tape to tape and both Rosen and Byram were able to do that with ease.

To be honest, they both look like NHL players right now. Rosen, 25, should be that way after playing huge minutes with the Toronto Marlies last year in the AHL but Byram’s polish has been damn impressive given he’s a teenager.

The longer Erik Johnson takes to get on the ice, the more these guys should get looks together.

Other notes

Igor Shvyrev made a number of very nice plays, including helping setup a Luka Burzan goal during the scrimmage. He’s building off a strong showing in Anaheim.

Pavel Francouz looks awesome. I don’t put much stock into training camp performances by goaltenders because very few game situations are involved but the man they call “Frankie” looks locked in already.

Nikita Zadorov left the scrimmage and wasn’t seen again. Bednar aren’t involved but the man they call “Frankie” looks locked in already.

The centers weren’t the only guys who I liked today.

Martin Kaut showed during scrimmages the skillset that is going to make him such an effective NHL player someday. He is the master of all the little things: stick lifts, the extra pass, waiting the extra second for a passing lane to open, all of that.

I say this all the time but it bears repeating: Kaut isn’t a flashy player but when you watch him closely, you see he consistently finds ways to help his linemates. He made several nice plays today that I saw. He’ll need that to translate to the NHL if he wants to see a promotion this year.

Speaking of promotions, most of us had left A.J. Greer’s NHL career for dead after a disappointing summer that included an arrest in New York and Colorado acquiring enough forward depth where him finding a spot seemed very unlikely.

He just might be carving out that job, however. He’s been very good the last two days while playing alongside Bellemare and Colin Wilson’s lingering injury issues have opened the door for him to get looks with players he may not otherwise have gotten. So far, he’s taking advantage. As usual with Greer, however, we’ll see.

Byram-Rosen pairing shines again

I mentioned these two guys yesterday but wanted to follow-up and mention how strong they were again today.

A major emphasis from the coaching staff today was players firing passes at NHL speed. Nothing soft just to get the drill done. Bednar wanted crisp, hard passes tape to tape and both Rosen and Byram were able to do that with ease.

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Nikita Zadorov left the scrimmage and wasn’t seen again. Bednar didn’t have much of an update on him and said more would be known tomorrow.

Valeri Nichushkin was on the ice for the first time today and him being two days behind really showed. He just got into town late Friday, did physical/medical testing Saturday, and was thrown into the fire today. He struggled but what else did you expect in that situation.

BSN DENVER LOADED: 09.16.2019
Friday night, Toronto Maple Leaf forward Mitch Marner signed a six-year contract extension worth $65.4 million. His cap hit of $10.9 million now ranks seventh in the league, and he’s now the second-highest paid winger in the NHL.

Why does this matter to the Avs? Because Mitch Marner was drafted the same year as Mikko Rantanen. He’s coming off his ELC, just like Rantanen. He plays wing next to an elite centerman, just like Rantanen. He’s put up 224 points (67G/157A) in 241 games (0.93 pts/GP), which is very similar to Rantanen’s 209 points (80G/129A) in 239 games (0.87 pts/GP).

The biggest difference? Mitch Marner now has a contract for the 2019-20 season. Mikko Rantanen does not.

Resetting the RFA Market

There is no doubt that Marner sets the market for the remaining unsigned restricted free agents. As of this writing, Kyle Connor (67G/61A/128Pts in 178GP, 0.72pts/GP) and Patrik Laine (110G/74A/184Pts in 237GP, 0.78pts/GP) of Winnipeg, Matthew Tkachuk (71G/103A/174Pts in 224GP, 0.78pts/GP) of Calgary, Brock Boeser (59G/57A/116Pts in 140GP, 0.83pts/GP) of Vancouver, and Brayden Point (91G/107A/198Pts in 229GP, 0.86pts/GP) of Tampa Bay join Rantanen as high-end young forwards still waiting for a contract.

Now, it’s easy to say that Marner’s contract is an outlier, an overpay. Every year, Luke and Josh Younggren of Evolving Hockey use market trends to project free agent salaries that summer. For Marner, they expected him to receive an 8-year deal at $9.6 per year.

Not only was the actual deal two years shorter to allow Marner to hit unrestricted free agency closer to his prime at age 28 rather than age 30, but it also came in $1.2 mil more per year. They calculated what a six-year deal would look like as well, and pegged $8.9 mil as the expected cap hit. Marner’s actual numbers cleared that by a full $2 million.

Of course, there’s the Toronto factor to consider. According to Forbes’ annual valuation of NHL teams, Toronto ranks only behind the New York Rangers in total value, and third behind NYR and the Montreal Canadiens in revenue. They’re not shy about throwing that money around either.

The decision to sign John Tavares to a seven-year, $77 million deal ($11 mil cap hit) in the summer of 2018 set the internal comparable for Marner much higher than anywhere else in the league. Marner’s similarly-aged teammate, Auston Matthews (111G/94A/205Pts in 212GP, 0.97pts/GP) also inked a five-year deal worth $11.6 million per season in February.

There’s no doubt that this context is critical to understanding how Marner managed to land this contract. However, it’s justifiable in a broader sense as well, even if it does purposely upset the norms and correct a market inefficiency.

Young players begin their NHL careers on extremely cheap three-year, entry-level contracts (ELCs) that are set by the league. After that, their original team retains exclusive negotiating rights (the “restricted” part of Restricted Free Agent (RFA)) until they’re 27 or have 7 NHL seasons under their belt.

However, NHL players – especially elite ones – hit their prime between age 22-25. Under the current system, the best players during their best years have extremely limited negotiating power and are usually highly underpaid for the amount of value they bring to their teams.

Yet once those players have ’paid their dues’ and hit the magic age of 27, teams pay up. Artemi Panarin became the highest-paid wing in the league this summer when he signed a seven-year deal worth $11.6 million per. However, he’ll be 34 when his contract ends. The Rangers are hoping they get a few highly productive years out of him before they’ll likely sharply overpay for declining play into his 30s.

Compare this to Marner who will only be 28 and still in the tail end of his prime years when his deal is done. Which would you rather pay for over the course of those deals?

Marner is good now. Toronto’s good now. While that’s a team that doesn’t have to worry about cash flow, it’s probably going to hit a peak while Marner’s in his prime and fans want to pay up to see exciting players on the ice.

For smaller markets (more on this in a minute), it makes sense to pay good players while they’ll still be good over the course of the full contract. It aligns expenditures with revenue and helps avoid trying to make star players whole when they’re old and bad and the team is slipping into a rebuild.

Ever since the salary cap made finding market inefficiencies more important, the NHL has been trending younger and younger. When RFA aged players bring more value at a similar price than veterans, it makes sense to play them instead. The fact junior development leagues have been producing more pro-ready talent at a younger age than ever before helps as well. Teenagers in the NHL are not the rarity they used to be.

Unfortunately, the league is still largely operating under old-school thinking of when it’s time to pay your players. Six of the top 10 scorers last year were in their RFA years, and more than half of the top 20 could say the same. Some have netted paydays, but most were comparatively underpaid versus their UFA counterparts.

Marner’s contract breaks this paradigm and forces Toronto to pay for his value while he’s generating it. And we know he will – he scored 94 points last season as a 21-year-old. Dom Luszczyszyn at the Athletic projects that Marner will be a top 15 player in the league over the next six years and has a 74% chance of providing positive value on this contract.

While it’s easy to look at this from the team side and panic a bit because it puts a greater squeeze on the cap, it also forces clubs to pay their players more equitably and in a time frame more in line with their revenue. In the long run, this is not a bad thing for the health of the league.

It also may even drive down the amount of money teams have to spend on ill-advised UFA salaries, saving GMs from some truly awful contracts. Players deserve to get paid for their services, but doing so while they’re most likely to be good is far less risky than trying to do so after the fact.

Marner’s contract provides a much higher comparable contract for RFA negotiations both this summer and into the future. While the “Toronto factor” and team payroll context likely pushes his pay quite a bit higher than other RFAs will receive, it should considerably bump their salaries as well.

The demographics of the league has changed. It’s high time the pay scale does as well.

Impact on Rantanen & The Avs

So what does this mean for the Avs? With the Marner contract now on the books, Toronto has the most money slated to be paid this year. Colorado has the least. The Avs currently have approximately $15.6 million left in cap space, and while Rantanen will take up some of that, there’s plenty of room for everyone without the cap loophole tomfoolery we’re about to see from the Leafs.

However, the Avs are not the Leafs. They play in a much smaller market and have a much smaller cash flow, which in some cases could make supporting a large, long-term contract difficult. Forbes valued the Avs at $430 million last December, a lowly 24th on their list.

However, the Kroenke family owns not just the Avs, but the arena, ticketing, merchandise, broadcast, and other non-hockey professional teams that often pool resources. Where Forbes draws the lines between the Avs and the rest of the empire is hazy at best, so there’s little doubt the club is more profitable than they appear.

They’re also a team on the up and ups. The NHL is a gate-driven league, so much more in the seats means more money in the bank. The Avs saw the largest increase in attendance (9.9%) between the ’17-18 and ’18-19 season, yet were still below capacity. With the projected trajectory of the team, increasing gate revenue is unlikely to be an issue.
Furthermore, NHL players aren’t paid for the playoffs. When they do receive checks, it’s for the amount they’re contracted for in the regular season. Anything above and beyond that (i.e., the postseason) by and large goes into the team’s coffers. The same goes for special events, such as the outdoor game in Colorado Springs this year. It’s unlikely the Avs will operate at a loss in the years to come.

And unlike other small-market teams, the Avs have successfully fielded extremely expensive rosters. The $60.8 they paid in salary during the 2002-03 season equates to $86.9 million in today’s dollars, which is $5.4 over the current salary cap. Joe Sakic earned a (non-adjusted) $15 million signing bonus in 1997, and his salaries in the years leading up to the lockout were in the 9.8 million range. By 1999-00, Peter Forsberg was making $9 to $11 million per season. Patrick Roy was making $7.5-8.5.

No matter what Rantanen asks, this ownership and this market can easily support it. The Avs are stable with almost zero risk of relocation and play in a city that owns one of the NHL’s longest sellout streaks. They’re also primed to be very successful over the next few years with Rantanen as a big driver behind it.

They may not be the Leafs, but revenue should not be an issue in Colorado over the duration of Rantanen’s next contract.

Another limiting factor is the other players on the team. The highest internal comp-contract-wise is Nathan MacKinnon’s $6.3 mil for the next four years. While you don’t want to anger your star player by paying his linemate significantly more than him, Rantanen’s back-to-back 80+ point seasons finishing out his ELC are a bit more impressive than MacKinnon’s 38 and 52. When MacKinnon’s seven-year deal is up in 2023, there’s very little doubt that he’ll be made whole, but in the meantime, paying Rantanen market rate shouldn’t cause a problem.

The only problem with Rantanen earning Marner-type money starts to arise when said new MacKinnon contract hits in four years. Or the new Kadri contract hits in three years. Or the new Landeskog and Makar contracts hit in three. The Avs have built a promising young team that will earn a lot of money, but figuring out how to proportionally divide that among so many good players, fill out the rest of the roster, and maintain cap compliance is going to be a challenge.

Fortunately, Seattle will be joining the league in two seasons and bringing $650 million in expansion fees with it. The US broadcast rights also expire in 2022 and are expected to bring another huge influx of cash. The salary cap is expected to steadily rise over the next few years at least.

The Avs also have maintained an impressive amount of roster flexibility. Sam Girard is the only player signed past the MacKinnon summer of 2023, and the majority of the Avs projected players – especially depth players – are scheduled to expire this summer. GM Joe Sakic has been careful about minimizing contract terms.

Even though Donskoi and Compher each received unusual four-year deals this summer, the team seems cognizant of the raises that are coming for their main players. While they can’t go too crazy with Rantanen’s deal, they have flexibility elsewhere. If Sakic remains diligent, building around a $9 or $10 million dollar a year contract shouldn’t be a problem.

Paradigm Shift

In the end, the NHL is a balance between the owners and the players. Without the owners, there’d be nowhere to play, no one to sell tickets or broadcast rights, no one to figure out travel arrangements and pay for hotel rooms. But without players, there would be no revenue. Fans pay to see the players skate on the ice, not the mechanisms that keep everything running smoothly beyond it.

Marner’s contract may seem like a wrench in this balance, but it’s not. It’s merely correcting a market inefficiency and paying players for what they’ll help the team bring in, not underpaying them during their best years and compensating on the tail end.

Marner did what he had to do to get this deal. He negotiated publicly through his agent and agent-friendly media personalities. He faced backlash and outrage and fans taking it extremely personally that a boy from Toronto wasn’t taking what the club was offering no questions asked. Since the Leafs had backed themselves into a very problematic cap situation, the fact he was asking for above the going market price instead of taking a team-friendly deal (requiring an earnings sacrifice that Tavares and Matthews were not asked to make) was scorned.

But in the end, Marner’s victory is good not just for him, but for the league. Young players deserve to earn a wage proportionate to the money they bring in. They deserve to exert the limited leverage they possess in the RFA negotiation proceedings. They deserve to set themselves up financially while they can instead of banking on a long career in an injury-prone sport. And they deserve to be paid when the team can afford it instead of when declining play on the ice means they can’t.

Team concerns shouldn’t be the only ones weighted when discussing RFA contracts. Marner’s contract is a win for the players and should help more fairly distribute revenue to those that are actually responsible for earning it across the league. It’s a healthier way to pay players, both for them and their club’s financials.

And yes, this applies to Rantanen. And in a few years, Cale Makar. And Bowen Byram. And all the other young stars the Avs will ice in the future. “Paying your dues” based strictly on age needs to be – and now finally may be – a thing of the past. If you have the numbers, if you’re an established core member of a team, choosing between long-term security and making bank on your first non-ELC contract shouldn’t be an either/or.

In short, Marner’s new contract is good for Rantanen, good for a league that struggles to proportionately compensate young stars while severely overpaying for aging ones, and isn’t going to critically hamper the Avs cap, profit, or internal team dynamics moving forward.

It’s a paradigm shift and one that may feel like it’s hurting the Avs in the short term. But Mitch Marner will be the first of many young stars campaigning for more equitable pay. The NHL is younger than ever before. With any luck, this brave new world of RFA deals will make it healthier as well.
The NHL landscape at the start of the summer featured a glut of high-end restricted free agents. There was a thought then that general managers were reticent to make the first move for fear of setting the market with a “bad” contract. Agents are afflicted with a similar brand of group-think.

There were, and are, other forces at play.

Representatives for league owners and the players’ association have for a week been ensconced in Toronto, trying to hammer out details for a new collective bargaining agreement. They are negotiating with one eye toward a new television contract. All of this stuff is intertwined with the way player agents are negotiating contracts and general managers are managing salary caps.

As training camps get underway, the glut of restricted free agents is loosening. It might have been the signing of Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski that got things moving. Werenski signed a three-year contract on Monday worth $15 million. Two days later, the Philadelphia Flyers signed defenseman Ivan Provorov to a six-year deal worth $40.5 million.

On Friday, a big one dropped in Toronto. The Maple Leafs signed right winger Mitch Marner to a six-year, $65.36 million deal. The contract has an average annual value of roughly $10.9 million. Yowza.

The Leafs now have three players — Auston Matthews, John Tavares and Marner — with salary-cap hits at or close to $11 million. They have another player, William Nylander, who held out for two months last fall, with a cap hit close to $7 million. Those four young players eat up about half of the Leafs’ cap, which has a ceiling of $81.5 million.

One reason the Big Three are paid so well is they are among the best players in the league. Marner’s contract is something of a departure because it is the richest second contract ever awarded to a non-center.

Generally speaking, Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas is defining a new trend by paying elite players while in their prime, rather than waiting to “reward” players as they decline.

Werenski, 22, wanted a bridge deal, and that is what he got. The third and final year is loaded up at $7 million, which gives him some leverage if he decides to go the arbitration route in the summer of 2022. He has that feature, and the Jackets have a budding star of a defenseman at a reasonable price for three more years.

If you are a Jackets fan, you probably would have preferred to see Werenski locked up for a longer term, a la Provorov. Yet, for most of the summer, the word on the street was that Werenski was going to do a three-year bridge. It is a sign that Werenski is confident he will line himself up for a much bigger payday when he signs his third contract. He is banking on being a prized player in his prime when a better market develops.

Both the owners and players want a new collective bargaining agreement done sooner rather than later. The players have some issues they want addressed — most prominently, they want an adjustment to the current escrow system, which puts the onus of balancing the books on union members.

The players have a chance to opt out of the final year (2020-21) of the current agreement. It’s a good bet, but not a lock, that they will not. Why give the owners a chance to reconstitute their list of demands? A new agreement, and labor peace, will be important for a looming negotiation that is more critical for everyone involved:

The league will be negotiating a new American media-rights deal before the 2021-22 season, and it will dwarf NBC’s current deal ($2 billion over 10 years.) Cord-cutting and streaming will bring in more players, ESPN-plus among them. The potential windfall will redefine annual revenues, reset the cap and make second contracts such as Marner’s more common.
Joonas Korpisalo ready to seize opportunity with Columbus Blue Jackets

Adam Jardy The Columbus Dispatch @AdamJardy
Sep 15, 2019 at 5:30 AM

To pretend that this training camp bears any resemblance to the prior four with the Blue Jackets would be folly for Joonas Korpisalo.

Now 25 years old, Korpisalo is the closest thing to a proven NHL commodity that the Jackets have in goal. In four seasons, he has started 81 games, played in 90 and served as Sergei Bobrovsky’s faithful, capable backup. It was often a thankless task, particularly when he would go weeks without playing.

That’s a thing of the past. With Bobrovsky now with the Florida Panthers, this is Korpisalo’s first legitimate chance to become ‘the’ goaltender for the Jackets, and it’s an opportunity that isn’t lost on him. He had to bring a new mindset into camp this year.

“It’s a different situation, obviously, and my mindset is I’m going to grab the first goalie spot there,” he said Saturday. “That’s the only mindset I had (this offseason).”

Korpisalo has never played more than 31 games in a season. That came as a rookie, when he went 16-11-4 with a .920 save percentage and 2.60 goals-against average. It marks his best season totals, and it’s not coincidental that they came when Korpisalo saw his most consistent playing time while Bobrovsky was injured.

Both coach John Tortorella and general manager Jarmo Kekalainen made mention of that during media day Wednesday.

“Korpi played his best hockey when he got an opportunity to play a lot of games in a row,” Kekalainen said. “We have two very talented young goalies who haven’t really gotten their opportunity to show (themselves),”

That other contender is Elvis Merzlikins, a 25-year-old Latvian who is Korpisalo’s primary challenger. During the first scrimmage portion of this year’s camp, Korpisalo and Merzlikins were in net across from each other. Both put together a scoreless 20-minute period, with Korpisalo robbing Boone Jenner on a breakaway, Emil Bemstrom from the doorstep and Nick Foligno on a wrist shot from the slot.

It was Korpisalo’s only period of action as the teams rotated through games, workouts and practices.

“I’m trying to play as I said: Making things easy and helping the team a lot,” he said. “Just be myself in there. I think when I play on my level, it’s going to be good enough to win games.”

For his career, Korpisalo is 41-31-9 with a .907 save percentage and 2.89 goals-against average. He played in 27 games last season, including 21 starts, with an .897 save percentage and 2.95 GAA.

But the numbers don’t tell the full story of what he’s gone through while waiting — sometimes impatiently — behind the most decorated goalie in Blue Jackets history, who won the Vezina Trophy twice.

It was goalies coach Manny Legace, who played in the NHL for 11 years, who helped calm him down, Korpisalo said.

“It’s hard sometimes,” he said. “I’ve been frustrated here and then. The last couple years I’ve started to learn how to be patient, working day in and day out. That’s how you keep your touch to the game really good. You have to keep the aim on the long run.”

That came full circle when the 2018-19 season ended and Bobrovsky departed. Korpisalo said his reaction to the news was simple.

“I was excited, of course,” he said. “I want to play too, you know? That’s the bottom point. It’s my chance now. I’m going to make the most of it. That’s what I thought.”
Riley Nash hopes for bounce-back season with Columbus Blue Jackets

Henry Palattella The Columbus Dispatch @hellapalatella
Sep 15, 2019 at 5:30 AM

In the 2016-2017 season, Riley Nash managed only 17 points in 81 games in his first season with the Boston Bruins with a minus-1 rating. The next season, he bounced back with 41 points in 76 games with a plus-16 rating.

This season, the Blue Jackets will count on Nash's ability to rebound in year two.

Nash, a 30-year-old center who signed a three-year, $8.25 million contract last offseason, had a disappointing first season with the Jackets, finishing with 12 points in 78 games and often playing on the fourth line.

"I definitely feel more comfortable this year," Nash said. "I think knowing everyone is part of it, along with knowing the game plan and what the coaching staff is looking for. I'm not trying to find my place. There are no real surprises."

Despite his struggles, Nash found a way to finish relatively strong, recording a goal in two of the final six regular-season games before contributing three points in the playoffs. A shoulder injury ended his season in Game 3 of a second-round series against the Bruins.

"I thought I had a good end to the season, so I think it ended where I was trending in the right direction," Nash said. "Hopefully this year I can kind of carry on with that."

Nash scored a goal in one of the Blue Jackets' scrimmages on Saturday at the Ice Haus.

Hockey is back, kind of

The Blue Jackets staged two scrimmages, working through three groups, with each consisting of 20- to 25-minute periods on a running clock.

Joonas Korpisalo and Elvis Merzlikins started in goal for the first scrimmage, then Veini Vehvilainen and Merzlikins were in goal for the second. Merzlikins allowed one goal in the 43 minutes he played.

Both games ended in ties that resulted in impromptu shootouts. The White and Blue teams played to a scoreless first half in the first scrimmage before Calvin Thurkauf, Nash, Cam Atkinson and Sonny Milano scored in the second half. Atkinson won the game in the shootout.

In Game 2, the Blue and Gray teams played to a 3-3 tie on goals from Trey Fix-Wolansky, Kevin Stenlund, Oliver Bjorkstrand, Alexander Wennberg, Kole Sherwood and Milano. Gus Nyquist ended the game with a shootout goal.

Protect the net

With the loss of longtime starting goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, it's understandable if fans paid more attention than usual to the competition among goalies. In addition to Korpisalo, Merzlikins and Vehvilainen, Brad Thiessen and Hayden Stewart saw time in net.

Korpisalo finished with a 10-7-3 record in 27 games last season and will likely be the starter on opening night. Merzlikin's strong showing should go a long way toward calming the fears about him adapting to the NHL after playing six years in Switzerland.

Full strength

Forward Markus Hannikainen practiced for the first time after dealing with an immigration issue.

The native of Finland signed a one-year, $735,000 contract in the offseason. He arrived in the country Friday night.

"Now I'm here, it's done," Hannikainen said, beaming a smile. "I'm happy."
Kole Sherwood has caught John Tortorella’s eye, and an NHL job is within reach

By Aaron Portzline
Sep 15, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Soon enough, it’ll happen. Kole Sherwood, a Blue Jackets prospect, and Kiefer Sherwood, an Anaheim Ducks prospect, will play against each other in an NHL game, a storybook scene for the New Albany brothers and another milestone moment for the central Ohio hockey community.

For now, though, Kole Sherwood has arrived at his fifth training camp with the Blue Jackets with a much simpler goal — carving out a spot on the NHL roster.

“You’re always figuring things out at this level, I don’t care who you are,” Sherwood said. “But my confidence is really good. I feel like I belong here. I know I belong here, it’s not just a thought anymore.

“I’m ready to go. I feel like the stars are aligning and I’m ready to go.”

Sherwood still faces a steep climb to make the Blue Jackets out of training camp, but he’s made remarkable progress on the organization’s depth chart over the last 12 months. At this point a year ago, Sherwood could only be called a “prospect” in the loosest sense of the word. He was under contract, sure, but his game was under major construction, too.

An early-season demotion toECHL Jacksonville was explained by the Blue Jackets organization as the result of a glut of forwards on the AHL Cleveland roster. But it served as a wake-up call, too.

Sherwood began working extensively after minor-league practices with AHL Cleveland coach Trent Vogelhuber — also a Columbus hockey product — to improve his play away from the puck. Once it began to click, Sherwood’s game became more consistent, and then it elevated.

“A little bit of adversity early on (in my pro career), but I thought I bounced back and I handled it,” Sherwood said. “I grew a lot as a player, and I ended up moving up the lineup, getting rewarded and eventually I ended up here in Columbus.”

Sherwood had 16-9-25 with a plus-1 rating and 71 penalty minutes in 56 games with Cleveland. In mid-February, he was called up to play two games with the Blue Jackets.

Now Sherwood finds himself among the Blue Jackets’ “depth” forwards, a cluster of players who have an outside shot to make the roster out of training camp, but, failing that, will be on a shortlist for a recall as the 2019-20 season moves along.

The Blue Jackets have 1o players on one-way contracts, one surefire roster player on his entry-level deal (Pierre-Luc Dubois) and a rookie who is almost certain to make the grade (Alexandre Texier).

That likely leaves one roster spot for an extra forward, putting Sherwood in heavy competition with players like Emil Bemstrom, Marko Dano, Eric Robinson and Sonny Milano to earn the final spot.

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella has taken notice. He’s “watching the kids” closely in the early camp scrimmages, he said.

“I don’t know a lot about him,” Tortorella said. “I love his skating. You know how fast the league is. It certainly gives him an opportunity to get looked at because of his skating.

“I saw him before camp started. He looks to be in great shape. He’s looked great in the testing. You’ve got him and Robinson and all these guys who can skate. It’s going to be interesting.”

Sherwood’s most noticeable moment in camp came Saturday when he crashed into Blue Jackets stay-at-home defenseman David Savard while in pursuit of the puck. It was Savard who ended up on his backside, which rarely happens.

Always a physical specimen, Sherwood is now up to 214 pounds on a 6-foot-2 frame. He gained 13 pounds and allowed his body fat to creep from 6 percent to 9 percent.

“I like feeling a little heavier,” he said. “I feel like I’m more powerful.”

Sherwood said he spoke with one of his best friends, Toronto’s Mitch Marner, on Saturday, congratulating the Maple Leafs star forward on his new six-year contract. The two met in 2015-16 when they played for the OHL’s London Knights.

At the end of the conversation, they looked forward to a face-to-face meeting Oct. 4, when the Blue Jackets open the season by hosting Toronto in Nationwide Arena.

Wishful thinking on Sherwood’s part, perhaps. But no longer out of the question.

“I don’t say I’m comfortable,” Sherwood said. “I say confident. I know what it takes now.”

• Markus Nutivaara missed part of Saturday’s scrimmages and all of Sunday’s activities due to illness.

• One of the bright spots early in camp has been center Alexander Wennberg, who is trying to bounce back in 2019-20 after two subpar seasons. On Saturday, Wennberg scored a goal that brought a loud cheer from a packed crowd in IceHaus. It was not a Bronx cheer; it felt like the crowd was trying to help lift Wennberg, who turns 25 next week.

• Tortorella on the Wennberg cheer, a rookie who is trying to bounce back in 2019-20 after two subpar seasons. On Saturday, Wennberg scored a goal that brought a loud cheer from a packed crowd in IceHaus. It was not a Bronx cheer; it felt like the crowd was trying to help lift Wennberg, who turns 25 next week.

• Tortorella on the Wennberg cheer, and his play: “Absolutely. They’re pulling for him. They’re pulling for him and they’re pissed at me because they think I’m screwing him. I don’t care what people think, all I want … I thought he had a terrific scrimmage. You can see where his concentration is, in keeping the puck. I thought he played really well. Really, in both scrimmages, that line (Gustav Nyquist, Wennberg, Oliver Bjorkstran) played well. It could be a huge thing for this organization — huge! — if he can find his way.”

• Goaltender Elvis Merzlikins snuffed an odd-man rush to preserve a 4-4 tie in the closing seconds of the first scrimmage Sunday, then stopped Bjorkstrand in the first round of the shootout to clinch a 5-4 win. There was quite a celebration with his new teammates, but, alas, no hugs.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
FRISCO, Texas — Lines change. Frequently.

Throughout the season, Dallas Stars coach Jim Montgomery will often juggle his combinations. He makes alterations during the course of games. It’s a mentality he developed early in his coaching career: If I’m making changes early in the season, it won’t be seen as a panic move by my players if I do it in the playoffs.

For that reason, it can be dangerous to read deeply into training camp combinations. But there certainly is something brewing with Denis Gurianov and his top-six chances after spending all three days of training camp on a line with Jamie Benn and Joe Pavelski.

Gurianov played 21 games with Dallas last season and scored his first NHL goal on a deflection against the Nashville Predators last November. But he failed to establish himself as an NHL forward option at the end of the season when playoff roster spots were being won and lost.

That’s something he obviously wants to change this season, and he isn’t shy about his goals for training camp, which he discussed with Stars general manager Jim Nill at the end of last season and with Dallas coach Jim Montgomery a few weeks ago. For now, he says that’s about where he skates. He’s more concerned about being on the opening night roster.

“First goal, I’m going to make the team,” Gurianov said. “If I make the team, I’m going to get as many points as I can, and I want to help my team to win and make the playoffs and go as far as we can. But first, make the team, looking forward to the preseason games and playing my game that way.”

Based on his positioning in camp, things are looking good for Gurianov to do more than just that. He’s going to be given an extended look in preseason games to prove he can establish himself as an NHL forward option at the end of the season. That starts on Monday night against the St. Louis Blues, when he’s likely going to be slotted on a line with Pavelski.

“I see a more confident person as far as playing with Jamie and Pavs. He’s just the same skillset and power, and the ability is there,” Montgomery said. “Now it’s gotta transfer to the games and we’re excited to see what he can add to our lineup on a nightly basis.”

“Monty, he wants to play fast, and you know he wants to play hard on the forecheck. I feel like this is my game,” Gurianov added. “I can play fast, so, yeah, it’s comfortable to me.”

Gurianov said he also learned quite a bit watching the path that Roope Hintz took last season. While Gurianov and Hintz both had opportunities last season, Hintz really took advantage of them and found a level of consistency that Gurianov struggled to establish in the NHL.

Now, it could be Gurianov’s turn. This is his fourth NHL training camp. He doesn’t just seem comfortable, but he’s also thriving in his environment early on. It’s especially noticeable when you think back to 2016, when he couldn’t even handle an interview in English and needed a translator.

I asked Gurianov if he remembered those conversations.

“Yes, I remember, I had no English, I couldn’t even order food in a restaurant,” Gurianov said. “Now I’m not bad.”

It’s actually quite good for a player who never spoke English growing up.

“I had two, three years of English class, and it helped me a lot,” Gurianov said. “Speaking English, it made me feel more comfortable here and in Texas (with the AHL team). I don’t feel like an outsider.”

Understanding the forecheck

The Stars worked heavily on the forecheck and neutral-zone forecheck during the first three days of training camp.

That’s long been a hallmark of Montgomery’s system. If Dallas is going to be the relentless team he’s hoping for, they’re going to find success when it comes to pressuring the puck.

If you were watching at the Comerica Center, you saw a major focus on this during Saturday’s session. Here’s an idea — poorly drawn — of what Montgomery was looking for when it came to disrupting opposing breakouts.

Here’s where we are starting. The circles are the opposition. The circle at the top left is the opposition’s right defenseman in his own zone.

The key to this forecheck starts with the first forward, labeled as F1, who is supposed to attack the defender at an angle that takes away the defense-to-defense flat pass. The second forward, F2, moves to the space where opposing forward is going to be likely receiving a pass, while the third forward, F3, cuts to the middle to fill for F1 and takes away a stretch pass.

The goal here is to trap and create a turnover or force a dump-in from the opposing forward near center ice in the area I’ve highlighted below.

This isn’t the only look Dallas will give on the forecheck this season — far from it — but it’s one of the approaches they’ll utilize, and it was important for Montgomery to start installing this mindset early in training camp.

Harley impressing early

Thomas Harley has climbed the ladder quite a bit in the past two weeks, and he’ll take another step Monday night in the Stars’ first preseason game.

Two weeks ago, Harley was in OHL training camp with the Mississauga Steelheads, where he was the best player on the ice and a key figure in the team’s plans for the season. From there he went to Traverse City, where he struggled a bit in his first game before finding a nice groove that impressed scouts from both inside and outside the Stars organization. Our own Corey Pronman ranked him as the team’s top prospect.

Training camp has been even quicker for the 18-year-old first-round pick.

“The pace is a little faster than I’m used to, and I’m getting used to it every day,” Harley said. “Everything it’s physically faster than in the (OHL), which I’m used to. But also the speed of which you make the decisions, the way you make plays — it’s all faster.”

The money quote on Harley came from Montgomery, who said on Sunday afternoon that Harley “looked like Miro out there.”

“And I’m being serious,” Montgomery expanded. “He covers ice really well, his instincts offensively and defensively have been really impressive.”

The skating is what stands out to Montgomery, and he said that Stars veterans like Jamie Benn, Ben Bishop and John Klingberg have all come up to the coach to mention how impressed they are with the 18-year-old.

“He’s a beautiful skater,” Montgomery said. “He covers a lot of ice, makes a lot of good decisions. I mean, wow, we’re excited about him.”

Scottie Upshall was in the right place at the right time. That’s how he ended up with PTO invite to Dallas Stars training camp.

It turns out that place was Kelowna, British Columbia, where Upshall was working out with local NHLers, including Stars winger Blake Comeau.

“I’ve known Scott for quite a while,” Comeau said. “He’s a hardworking guy that plays an honest game and brings a lot of energy. He’s a great person off the ice. I haven’t played with him, but I know him off the ice, and he’s a great guy. I was excited to see that he was coming here, and I’m expecting big things from him.”

Upshall also looked good to Kelowna Rockets assistant coach Vern Fiddler.

Fiddler spent last season as a special assistant on the Stars coaching staff, working with players on an individual level and acting as the eye-in-the-sky coach for home games. Fiddler told Upshall he should reach out to the Stars and general manager Jim Nill. He made the call and soon had an invite to try and resurrect his NHL career.

“That vote of confidence right there through him and through my agent was great,” Upshall said. They spoke to Jim (Nill), and he and Monty liked the idea. Here I am, and I feel great. The young kids kept up with
me in practice, and it was fun. It’s nice to be back out there and competing again.”

Upshall missed all of last season with a knee injury discovered while he was on a PTO with the Edmonton Oilers. His year away stung for several reasons. He missed out on a chance to make his hometown team, while the team he spent most of his career with, the St. Louis Blues, went on and won the Stanley Cup.

“As January, February and March started to come along, I had the urge to put skates back on again and go play, so I worked with a skating coach in Newport Beach. Watching playoff hockey really did something for my hunger for trying to get back and have a chance to win the Stanley Cup,” Upshall said. “To feel like, ‘Geez, if I get healthy, there’s still a chance to win that thing and be a part of something special,’ is great. I’m here now and closer to that goal.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Steve Yzerman joked it was one of his better quotes. He is at his first training camp as general manager of the Detroit Red Wings, 36 years after his first one as a top prospect. On June 8, 1983, when the Wings drafted Yzerman at fourth overall, he was asked about making the team and replied: "They're rebuilding. I think I have a chance.

It's an answer that resonates today as Yzerman now sits as the judge of an organization that numbers several top prospects on the verge of joining the rebuild anchored by Dylan Larkin.

In the coming weeks, Yzerman will see which of his young players have a chance to make the Wings roster.

[Who will get the 'C'? What Yzerman wants from the next Wings captain ]

Forward Joe Veleno is a speedy playmaker with a nice release on his shot. Forward Filip Zadina is a shifty scorer. Defensemen Dennis Cholowski and Oliwer Kaski both have a knack for making offensive plays. Forward Taro Hirose has a high hockey IQ. For a team that needs an influx of young players in order to regain competitiveness, that's encouraging.

"They definitely have a chance," Yzerman said. "There's spots on the roster available. There's ice time available even if you're on the roster. Guys are fighting for spots on the roster and they're fighting for spots on the power play and penalty kill. That goes for kids and veterans. But for the younger players, whether they are graduating from junior hockey or playing one year in the American (Hockey League) or two years, they're pushing to make the team. There's an opportunity for someone to make it. Several of them."

The four days spent in Traverse City mostly are about skating and doing drills. A better canvas for judging begins with Tuesday's start of exhibition season. Coach Jeff Blashill already has defenseman Moritz Seider, this summer's first-round draft pick, penciled in to play Wednesday at Chicago, which likely will offer an opportunity to see how he fares against star forwards Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane. The nine-game slate will facilitate giving prospects lots of looks.

Yzerman has stressed how every player has to earn his job, regardless of status. Larkin, Anthony Mantha, Tyler Bertuzzi and Andreas Athanasiou have earned top-six jobs; Mike Green, Danny DeKeyser, Patrik Nemeth and Filip Hronek have earned the top four spots on defense. Otherwise, skaters had better sharpen their edges.

Moritz Seider poses for a portrait after being selected sixth overall by the Detroit Red Wings during the first round of the NHL draft at Rogers Arena on June 21, 2019 in Vancouver, Canada.

"What I'm trying to do is put the most skilled, the most competitive, the most driven, the most intelligent hockey players on the ice," he said.

"We're trying to amass as many of those players as we can regardless of their age or where they come from, and ultimately be a good team."

The Wings aren't likely to be a good team as soon as this season. They don't have a star defenseman in his prime, they don't have a game-changing forward who can sneak a timely goal. Yet.

What they do have are prospects who down the road may fill those spots, and whose adjustments to the NHL grind could begin soon. Veleno, 19, and Zadina, 19, intrigue with their puck skills. Zadina has good instincts for getting open, and this season he should have a skilled center who can get him the puck, whether he starts in Detroit or Grand Rapids.

"He needs to get physically stronger and gain experience and with that, he'll get more adjusted," Yzerman said. "He has a good attitude. I think he's projecting in the right direction."

Michigan Rasmussen, 20, is 6-foot-6 and could develop into a reliable net-front presence. Cholowski, 21, is a gifted skater.

Seider, 18, has potential to become a No. 1 defenseman. He's a mobile, two-way player already used to playing against men (as opposed to teenagers) after spending last season in Germany's top hockey league.

Seider logged heavy minutes playing in all situations during the prospects tournament, showing off his aggressive side and making an impression on the guy who drafted him.

"You watch the guys who do well in this tournament generally turn out to be pretty good players in the NHL," Yzerman said. "He's 6-foot-3, he shows good hockey sense, most importantly, and he showed good skill. What we really were impressed with, because 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, but overall I was really pleased with how he performed."

Yzerman sounded excited about the challenge in front of him. It took 14 years for him to win a Cup as a player, and that was expedited when, management headed up by Jimmy Devellano, hit the mother lode in the 1989 draft with Nicklas Lidstrom, Sergei Fedorov and Vladimir Konstantinov. It will take patience, and luck, to restore the Wings, but there's a buzz at this camp and it's coming from the young guys.

"We need more, but I'm encouraged," Yzerman said. "There's a good group of young players that are prospects that have potential. We're going to try to add to that group but with that group, we're trying to create an environment that allows them to go from prospects to good NHL players, and that's the big step."

"I came in '83, we went through it to eventually win a Stanley Cup was very gratifying. I'm hoping we can again do that at some point in the future."
Oliwer Kaski sports ability to provide Red Wings new dimension on defense

Traverse City — The Red Wings could use some offensive skill out of their defensemen. They barely got any last season. Oliwer Kaski might be able to change that.

If not immediately, maybe shortly down the line, if early indications are accurate.

The Wings signed the undrafted European free agent in May and Kaski, 24, has been impressive in early workouts.

Sunday, in the Red-White intrasquad scrimmage, Kaski scored a goal when the teams were 3-on-3, one-timing a pass from Adam Erne.

Throughout the scrimmage, Kaski showed the ability to initiate offense and consistently attack.

"One of the things that could separate him is his offensive ability," coach Jeff Blashill said. "He can really pass and shoot (the puck). He has to learn to move his feet more consistently defensively.

"But the goal today, when you one-time the puck, you have a way better chance of scoring than when you stop and shoot it.

"He showed what a big part of his skill set is. I'm real intrigued with his skill set. Now, he has to show he can defend on a regular basis."

Kaski, from Finland, was named the top defenseman in the Finnish pro league last season when he had 51 points (19 goals, 32 assists) in 59 games with Lahti.

Jiri Fischer, the Wings' associate director of player personnel, identified Kaski early while scouting Europe.

"Jiri Fischer had me watch on tape before we got him," Blashill said. "He's (Kaski) got some real weapons. I got to see him play at the world championships and he can really shoot it. He has a good offensive mind."

Kaski spent the 2015-16 season at Western Michigan, so he's familiar with the state and the Wings' organization.

When the Wings showed interest last season, Kaski was receptive.

"I feel like they really wanted me here and I really liked that," Kaski said. "They really understood my style of game, and in the end, it was an easy decision to make.

"Every European player liked the Red Wings because they had a lot of Europeans and they liked the style of game they played. I always looked up to those guys, the Swedish guys they had here. I always liked to watch them play. (Valtteri) Filppula was here, too."

Filppula skated with Kaski during the summer, getting ready for this season.

"He has a lot of skill," Filppula said. "He can make plays, shoot. I feel like I'm saying the same thing about a lot of players (in Wings' camp), now everybody skates well. They have a lot of skill and can make plays.

"I'm really excited to see how camp goes for him."

Defenseman Patrik Nemeth may not have been a big, bold headline type of acquisition, but Nemeth could help the Wings substantially.

Nemeth signed a two-year, $6 million contract on July 1, leaving the Colorado Avalanche. The Wings were aggressive in acquiring Nemeth for his defensive, and penalty killing, ability.

At 6-foot-2, 220-pounds, the Wings' appreciate Nemeth's physical stature, too.

"He's strong as an box, he is strong, strong, strong," Blashill said. "He wins puck battles, wins net-front battles. We haven't been good enough in front of our net. We haven't been good enough at getting pucks out on the power play, creating stalls in the defensive zone.

"He does all those things."

Ice chips

Dylan Larkin, Mike Green and Darren Helm didn't participate in the scrimmage, all bothered by "minor little tweaks," Blashill said.

"Common with training camp," Blashill said. "We have a bunch of guys with little tweaks and what-not, the normal stuff with going 100 miles-per-hour into training camp. We'll have to adjust our practice accordingly."

Andreas Athanasiou, who scored a goal in the scrimmage — the Red team ultimately won 2-1, in a shootout — left the ice in the second half (they played two separate halves, rather than three periods) because of a "tweak," Blashill said.

The Wings end the training camp portion of the schedule Monday at Centre Ice Arena, and head home to face Chicago Tuesday at Little Caesars Arena in the first of nine exhibition games.

...Taro Hirose (Michigan State) already has played 10 NHL games, signing with and then joining the Wings last March. But this is Hirose's first NHL training camp. The experience gives Hirose a bit of an edge of other rookies. "Being familiar with the systems and the way Blash likes guys to play, (it) gives me a little step over some of the guys who haven't played at that level before," Hirose said. "At the same time, with the new general manager and a lot of new management, new faces, you have to prove yourself every day."
TRAVERSE CITY – Goals were hard to come by during the Detroit Red Wings’ lone intrasquad scrimmage of training camp.

The Red/White game Sunday at Centre I.C.E. was tied 1-1 after 50 minutes of regulation before ending on shootout goals from Frans Nielsen and Anthony Mantha for the White team.

‘I thought the intensity of the scrimmage was excellent,’” coach Jeff Blashill said.

Andreas Athanasiou drove through traffic to tuck a backhand shot past Jimmy Howard for the Red team. Oliwer Kaski blasted a one-timer from Adam Erne past Jonathan Bernier for the White team.

Kaski, the MVP of the Finnish league signed as a free agent, hopes his offensive ability earns him a job on defense. Blashill said the 6-3, 187-pound right-handed shooter will get power play time in the preseason.

“One of the things that can really separate him is his offensive ability,” Blashill said. “He can really pass; he can really shoot. He’s got to learn to move his feet a little more consistently defensively.

“If you one-time pucks, you have a way better chance of scoring than if you stop and shoot it. I’m really intrigued with his skill-set. Now he’s got to show he can defend on a regular basis.”

Filip Larsson, the organization’s top goaltending prospect, stopped all nine shots he faced in 25 minutes before allowing the shootout goals.

Larsson, coming off outstanding seasons in college (University of Denver) and the USHL (Tri-City) will be competing with veteran Calvin Pickard in Grand Rapids.

“He’s got to stay healthy. That’s been something he hasn’t done,” Blashill said of Larsson. “Then he’s going to see a high, high level of shooter in the American Hockey League that he’s got to prove that on a consistent basis he can stop in that high 90-92 (miles per hour) range. But he looks like a good goalie so far.”

Veteran D healthy

Defensemen Mike Green, Trevor Daley and Jonathan Ericsson all missed extensive time last season due to injuries. Each heads into the final year of his contract in good health.

“Green has had no ill effect from last year’s virus so I think that’s a great thing for him,” Blashill said of Larsson. “Then he’s going to see a high, high level of shooter in the American Hockey League that he’s got to prove that on a consistent basis he can stop in that high 90-92 (miles per hour) range. But he looks like a good goalie so far.”

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Veterans nicked up

Dylan Larkin, Darren Helm and Green didn’t play in Sunday’s scrimmage. Athanasiou left after the first period. It’s nothing significant, Blashill said.

“Just little tweaks that come with training camp,” Blashill said.

“I don’t know if (Athanasiou) will skate (Monday), but I don’t think it’s anything long-term.”

First cuts

The Red Wings released forwards Mathieu Bizier, Thomas Casey, Cody Morgan, Owen Robinson and Chad Yetman, defensemen Marc-Olivier Duquette and Owen Lalonde and goaltenders Anthony Popovich and Sean Romeo from their amateur tryouts.
TRAVERSE CITY – Filip Zadina figures to score most of his goals by creating space and unleashing his tremendous shot, but the Detroit Red Wings also want him to go to the net and generate opportunities from inside.

“I think to get to the big numbers in goals, you got to get right around that net,” coach Jeff Blashill said. “You got to pick up what you’d term dirty goals. It’s something we’ve talked to him about and it’s something he’s continuing to work on.”

Zadina crashed the net on one sequence during Sunday’s Red/White game at training camp. He didn’t convert, but it’s all about building habits.

“I saw the puck, so I wanted to go to the net and create some chances,” Zadina said after the scrimmage at Centre I.C.E. “Probably it’s going to be my game, go more to the net and I’ll be more productive in front of the net.

“It’s not easy goals. It’s still hard goals, the same way when you shoot the puck. There are some more places where you can score goals around the net than the other. If I’ll be there more, I’ll probably get more goals.”

Zadina wasn’t the dangerous offensive player many were expecting from the sixth overall selection in 2018-19, spending all but a brief stretch of his first pro season in the AHL. He produced 16 goals and 35 points in 59 games with the Grand Rapids Griffins and a goal and two assists during a late-season nine-game stint with Detroit.

“It’s part of the hockey life, right?” Zadina said. “No one has an easy way to the NHL. I think I was glad I could spend one year in the AHL. It opened my eyes to what I got to do better. Now I work the whole summer and I’m a better player now. I feel awesome on the ice.”

The Red Wings have an opening on their second line, likely centered by Valtteri Filppula and featuring 30-goal scorer Andreas Athanasiou. Taro Hirose appears to have the inside track, following an impressive late-season 10-game stint (goal, six assists) with the Red Wings, who signed him out of Michigan State. It’s a combination that has practiced together in camp.

Zadina must excel during the preseason to earn that spot. He has been skating with Frans Nielsen and Adam Erne in camp.

General manager Steve Yzerman said Zadina was dangerous and had numerous great scoring chances during the four games of the Prospects Tournament last week despite not scoring a goal (he had five assists).

“He can really shoot the puck, he’s got an instinct for getting open,” Yzerman said. “He’s only 19, was eligible to play junior last year. He did very well in the American Hockey League, it’s just adjusting to the pro game. He’ll continue to get physically stronger and gain experience. With that strength and experience he’ll get more accustomed to the speed of the pro game.

“Not knowing him very well but talking with a lot of people on the staff that know him, he’s got a good attitude, he’s open-minded and wants to improve, and with a good attitude and open mind and work ethic, he will improve. I think he’s projecting in the right direction. I was really encouraged by the week he had.”

Zadina’s primary role is to shoot and score, but he is glad to contribute as a playmaker, too.

“I think anytime you get to where you’re one-dimensional, it’s hard. You want to provide more than that,” Blashill said. “When I watched Filip Zadina in juniors, he made plays. That’s what I liked when I saw him on tape, that it was more than just the pure scoring.”

Said Zadina: “The game is going to be a little bit slower for me this year because I know what it’s going to be like. It’s about the space, but it’s also about the patience. Then if you get a puck, you just got to skate. Be smart and a good skater and I think the game will be easier.”

Blashill stressed the need for Zadina to play a 200-foot game while being dangerous offensively, calling it a hard thing that takes a little time.

“He can’t get frustrated when he doesn’t score, he’s just got to keep playing,” Blashill said. “Part of this process of becoming an NHL player and getting to the top of the pyramid is mental toughness and you have to find a way to keep your own confidence when things aren’t going great.”

Michigan Live LOADED: 09.16.2019
Six thoughts from the first two days of Red Wings training camp

By Max Bultman
Sep 15, 2019

TRAVISCE CITY, Mich. — The long run up to NHL training camp can trick you into expecting huge revelations right away, once the players have returned from their summers in the gym and the narratives are ready to begin.

Then, the players hit the ice, and ... it's mostly just hockey practice.

There are some scrimmages, and practice can still prove valuable for observational purposes, but most of what you learn before the preseason games begin actually comes when the players and coaches get off the ice. That's when you hear what they're thinking, and learn how all the puzzle pieces that make up a team might fit together. And so now, two days into camp, we're starting to learn some things.

Here's what has stuck with me the most through two days.

1. "C" or no "C," Dylan Larkin is leading this team in every way

I don't think I'm the only person who had that takeaway from Larkin's Day 1 news conference, when he said he wasn't disappointed by the team's substantial step forward last season. Mind you, he's coming off a year in which he nearly scored a point per game, played in some of the toughest situations and generally established himself as a top-line center.

He started by talking about how he can grow as a player, teammate and leader, as well as in the community. More captain-ly talk. But then:

"On the ice, I want to be more dominant," he said. "I think I showed it at times, in stretches, through the season last year. But I believe in myself that I can dominate for long periods of time. I can take over games and win games for our team. And ultimately that's the next step in my career, is to win games, and be a winner and play like a winner."

This is what makes Larkin, Larkin. It's not just the desire to want to be a great player, but the ability to know there's more in the tank even after another substantial step forward last season.

Can he "take over games" and propel this team to wins? That's its own question. So is what dominating for long periods of time entails. Can he be a winner and play like a winner? That's its own question.

2. Patrik Nemeth might have been a low-key savvy addition to the roster

It's not to say he's going to be a first-pair beast or single-handedly turn around this blueline, but Nemeth checks a ton of boxes for what this roster is missing.

Let's hear it from Jeff Blashill first, and then go from there.

"Man, he's strong as an ox, boy — he's strong, strong, strong," Blashill said. "He wins puck battles, he wins net-front battles. We haven't been good enough in front of our net. We haven't been good enough at getting pucks out on the power play, we haven't been good enough creating stalls in the d-zone. He does all those things. He knows how to defend. He's got a good shot offensively, but he knows what he is. He's a really good defender."

"(When) we went into the free agency, my take was let's get 200-foot players. He's a 200-foot player. And then we needed to become a better penalty-killing team, and the best way to do that is to add great penalty killers. He blocks shots for fun. So, I think he's going to be a real good addition. I think he's a lot of what we didn't have, and he's a big man."

Already, that's quite the checklist. If all Nemeth did was help correct Detroit's 28th-ranked penalty kill, that might be enough to justify the signing. And certainly the ox-strength and blocking shots for fun comments point toward a player who the coaches think will do that. But getting a player who can clear out the net will help the Red Wings at all strengths, in an area of the ice that yields so many goals.

If there was a criticism of the signing at the time, it might have been what it would mean for younger prospects trying to make the roster. But I'm not buying that one in this case. Nemeth is going to play in Detroit's top four, and if a prospect is left off the team, he's not going to be at fault.

There are at least three other players between Nemeth and the roster bubble, anyway.

The ability to defend gets overlooked (including by me at times) because it's really hard to effectively measure. But there's so much value to being able to win a battle in your own end and exit the zone, or clear out danger before it becomes a problem. That's what Nemeth is going to be asked to do.

And if you're not sold on that, here's another wrinkle. At Nemeth's last stop, in Colorado, he saw up close as the Avalanche went from the bottom of the league to one of its hottest risers. He has seen what it takes to turn that corner. Now he brings that perspective to Detroit.

"When I got in, I think they had 40-something points, really low points, the year before," Nemeth said. "It was just trying to build a different mindset. And that's what I'm talking about with Steve coming in, what him and Jeff (are) trying to do is have that mindset switched so you're expecting to win. And that's something that you have to change in order to turn this thing around. And that's where I think it's appealing. It's interesting. It's a fun thing to be a part of."

Patrik Nemeth gives the Red Wings a physical defensive presence they've been lacking. (Ron Chenoy / USA Today)

3. The Red Wings are taking their time picking a spot for Moritz Seider, and that's for the best

Clearly, Detroit likes its sixth-overall pick from the most recent draft.

He had a strong opening showing to the prospect tournament, made good impressions on the front office with his smarts and physicality, and he has drawn good reviews for his presence and maturity. Those are all good signs. Blashill called him a "real prospect, for sure."

At the same time, the guesswork of where he'll spend the season is, at this point, still very much just that.

Seider even backpedaled a bit on previous comments about staying in North America by saying, "I don't know. I think it all depends where I can play the most, I think, and 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. I don't know what's coming after camp. I can't tell it now."

Blashill said Friday he thought Seider would make his preseason debut against the Blackhawks, and it would be great to see him against top NHL talent like Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews as a measuring stick.

It would still be preseason hockey, of course, but at least then it might be a little easier to say where his skill set is best suited.

"I think I could make a strong argument for any place for him to play, to be dead honest with you," Blashill said. "So certainly there's arguments to play in North America; I think you could make arguments to play in Europe. Let's just watch him play in exhibition, see where he best fits in."

In most ways, it's pretty harmless to get excited about a promising new prospect, and that includes wanting him to start out nearby in the AHL.

But the Red Wings might be right to pump the breaks on declaring what level the defenseman is best suited for right now, for Seider's sake. He's still 18, and is going to make some 18-year-old mistakes this year. Taking their time to make an honest assessment of where he should be spending his year is their best course of action.

4. It's going to be interesting to see how the Red Wings use Adam Erne

It's going to be hard to get a great read until the games are underway (or at least the Red and White game Sunday) but it sounds like the Red Wings think Erne can develop into a solid role player after trading a fourth-round pick to acquire him this summer.
Yzerman obviously had familiarity with Erne dating back to drafting him in Tampa Bay, and now he brings him into a roster where space is more readily available higher in the lineup.

"I think Adam has a chance to be a top-nine forward in the NHL," Yzerman said. "Spent the better part of three seasons in the minors after being drafted. Last year being his first full season in the NHL, I think he's got good puck skills, I think he's got a good shot, he's worked extremely hard. His skating is good, he's a very powerful, strong guy. Difficult to play against because he's thick and he's hard. And he's got pretty good hockey sense.

"For us to acquire a player that I think one day can play in the top nine — he has that potential, we'll see if he can fulfill it — that's (24) years of age, he fits in with our group of players and the (younger) players coming up."

There was that little hedge with "one day," but I'm curious if Erne might get his shot to play in the top nine reasonably early this season. He certainly played on an excellent team last season, part of the reason he was blocked from moving higher up the lineup, but he grades out very well defensively based on HockeyViz.com's heat maps.

That -10.4 percent overall threat level is relative to the league average, and that big blue circle at the net (where most goals are scored) means he's better than league average at suppressing shots there in particular. It's a promising snapshot.

If Erne can reliably keep that up in Detroit, while chipping in with his shot, physicality and hockey sense, he could be a valuable piece opposite one of the Red Wings' scoring wingers — if he's deemed ready for those minutes.

5. Having a defined top line will serve the Red Wings well

The season is long, and tweaks to the lineup are inevitable, but the chemistry of the Bertuzzi-Larkin-Mantha line down the stretch last year has allowed that line to come into camp already locked in atop the lineup.

Blashill has made clear what he likes about the grouping: how Bertuzzi's tough but smart game fits with Larkin's motor and Mantha's ability as a power forward. It should certainly help him as a coach to have a sort of "go-to" line.

What'll be interesting, though, is if it helps set a tone for the other lines, too. Even in talking about Erne above, you wonder if he might get the chance to be a Bertuzzi-type presence on another top-nine line, engaging in tough puck battles and using his shot to finish rebounds around the net.

Line chemistry is hard to come by, and the Red Wings don't need to just try and copy and paste the same formula all the way down their lineup, but there will be role-based lessons every line can learn watching the way that top group can play off one another.

And that's to say nothing about how they'll help each other.

"When all three of us are moving and connecting, it's a lot of fun, and you saw what that could be like the last stretch there last season," Larkin said. "So, for us, our mentality, our conversation is we want to hit the ground running. ... We're going to try and hit the ground running as a line and hope to carry our team."

If they manage to stay together, and healthy, for the bulk of the year, they might just be in for a big season between the three of them.

6. Zadina's chances at the NHL roster depend on what's best for his development

One thing we definitely know is that Blashill likes the top prospect's taste in footwear. The coach was asked after Saturday's skates if he thought Zadina had made any kind of argument to cement himself as a full-time NHLer this year, right as Zadina was walking by the media area.

"How about those shoes? Check those out," Blashill said.

"You like them, huh?" Zadina called back.

But after the brief moment of levity, Blashill gave the dose of reality: No one has really made any arguments for anything two days into camp.

"Let's watch the exhibition games and see how he does," Blashill said.

"We're going to do what's best for Filip Zadina more than anything else. Even if I wanted to keep Filip, and it wasn't necessarily best for him long-term, boy, that would be a hard argument with management to be able to do that. It's gotta make the most sense for our team, and it's gotta make the most sense for him. And I think one thing that gets mistaken is just putting a kid on an NHL roster is — a lot of times (it) doesn't necessarily mean it's the best thing for their development. So we want Filip Zadina in the long-term to be a really good player in this league, and we'll do what's best based on how he plays."

I followed up to ask what, specifically, Zadina could do in the preseason to show that the NHL would be seen as the best option for his development:

"He's gotta score," Blashill said. "He's a goal scorer. Now, he can't do it cheating. If you cheat for offense you don't have any chance to win, so you've gotta be able to score without cheating. But, to say that — and I don't want to put undue pressure on him — you don't have to score every game, but you've gotta have opportunities to score in every game and ultimately you've gotta score. That's what he does best, you know? He'll have to do that while balancing being a complete player."

"If I were to say to him what would drive his performance: 40 percent of the NHL goals get scored in that little square we've been drawing on the ice. I think he can score (from farther away) but he needs to get to the 40 percent (zone) in order to really score. I talked about that with Mantha a couple years ago with net-front power play. That's where the easy goals are. Get to that area, whether it's by dragging it in yourself or most likely getting there on rebounds and stuff like that — while still being a complete player."

Honestly, that's a pretty clear (and fair) ask.

For Zadina to be the player everyone wants him to be, he can't just shoot from the outside and trust that his (still quite good) shot is going to be enough. Sometimes it will be. Other times it will make him more susceptible to streakiness.

So, there you more-or-less have it. The Red Wings are being conscious of not putting excess pressure on Zadina, but the reality is they need to see him getting to the prime scoring areas and creating chances (while still defending) for him to have a shot at the NHL. And to at least some degree, he'll need to finish those chances.

Maybe he's ready to do that, or maybe he needs a bit more time. But it's not a question that can be answered until the exhibitions get rolling.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Tyler Benson will be given every opportunity to earn a spot on the Edmonton Oilers’ roster and had a strong first scrimmage of the season.

Benson had two assists playing on a line with Colby Cave and Patrick Russell, and is expected to see a lot of ice time during the pre-season starting Monday against the Winnipeg Jets.

"I've kind of been feeling better as it's gone on," Benson said. "I'm feeling more comfortable with the guys here, the practices have been pretty intense, and going into this game, it was an intense game and guys were battling hard.

"I'm putting pressure on myself to work hard every day and try to earn that spot. I've been working hard every day and been trying to get better every day to earn that.""

There is a spot to be won for Benson, who is coming off a strong season in the AHL with the Bakersfield Condors, leading the team in scoring with 15 goals and 66 points. The local product added a goal and six assists in 10 playoff games.

"It was definitely a jump from junior, but I felt good out there last year," Benson said. "It was a bit of an adjustment, but just as the year went on I gained confidence and I just tried to evolve my game and keep getting better.

Benson is expected to be in the lineup when the Oilers host the Jets at Rogers Place (7 p.m.) on Monday. The Oilers have four pre-season games this upcoming week and another three the following week. They’ll open the regular season on Oct. 2 hosting the Vancouver Canucks.

"He’s one of those guys that is a bubble guy for me right now," Oilers head coach Dave Tippett said. "We have a list of nine or 10 guys that, every day, we’re evaluating how they do. I thought his two rookie games were just alright, I thought the whole team was just alright, but that line was pretty good (Saturday) with Colby Cave and Russell. So we’ll see. I think he’s going to play (Monday) night and the next step for him is the exhibition games and we’ll see how it goes."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Evan Bouchard stands out in Edmonton Oilers first scrimmage

Derek Van Diest
September 15, 2019 8:39 PM MDT

According to Edmonton Oilers general manager Ken Holland, defenceman Evan Bouchard needs to impress at training camp to keep from starting the season in the American Hockey League with the Bakersfield Condors.

Well, Bouchard was extremely impressive in the Oilers’ first official scrimmage Saturday, with two goals and two assists for Team White in a 7-1 victory over Blue at the Downtown Community Arena.

Bouchard stood out among mainly minor-leaguers featuring players on the bubble or those destined for the AHL.

“That’s what he does, it’s amazing, he finds ways to create opportunities, not just for himself but for teammates,” said Oilers head coach Dave Tippett. “He had four points (Saturday) and was pretty solid defensively, so we’ll see what happens. The next step for him is to get into some exhibition games and we’ll look at that (Monday) night.”

The Oilers begin their pre-season schedule Monday against the Winnipeg Jets (7 p.m.) at Rogers Place. Bouchard is expected to get a long look during the remainder of training camp to try and win a top-six spot on the blue line.

Bouchard was head and shoulders the best player in a scrimmage also featuring Brandon Manning, Dmitri Samorukov, Joel Persson, Ethan Bear, Caleb Jones and William Lagesson.

“I felt good out there,” Bouchard said. “I think coming off those rookie games I wanted to improve my game coming into this. I think I did that and I think as team as a whole, we had a good game all around.”

Selected 10th overall by the Oilers in the 2018 NHL Entry Draft, Bouchard, 19, has done everything asked of him by the organization to this point.

Bouchard played well enough during a seven-game stretch with the Oilers last season to warrant serious discussion within Oilers upper management whether he should stay for the entire year. The NHL experience proved pivotal for Bouchard heading into training camp this year.

“It was huge, you got the taste of pro experience, what it was like to be a pro in Edmonton and that really helped me finishing the year in London and getting some more action in Bakersfield,” Bouchard said. “That really helped me going into the summer keeping the right mindset and things like that.

“I really focused hard on training, eating the right way, really trying to be a pro in the summer time. Working on quickness is something that I definitely concentrated on this summer.”

“Everyone here is fighting for a job; they’ve really harped on that if you want to stay here you have to have someone’s job.”

The decision was made to send the Oakville, Ont., product back to the London Knights of the Ontario Hockey League last season where he was dominant, scoring 16 goals and collecting 53 points in 45 games.

Bouchard also played for Team Canada at the World Junior championships and finished the year in Bakersfield, scoring three goals and collecting eight points in eight playoff games.

“Everyone here is fighting for a job; they’ve really harped on that if you want to stay here you have to have someone’s job,” Bouchard said.

“That’s the mindset going into camp. If you can focus on what you can control when you play, I think it’ll go fine.”

Known for preferring to develop young players in the minors, Holland said Bouchard has to earn a top-six spot with the Oilers to start the year in the NHL. Bouchard will not be the No. 7 defenceman on the roster, as Holland would prefer the six-foot-three, 194-pound, right-shot defenceman to play top-pairing minutes in the AHL than sporadically in the NHL.

“I don’t think anyone here wants to hear that. I think everyone wants to be with the NHL group,” Bouchard said. “But all you can do is focus on how you play and let them make the decisions. Everyone is fighting for a job here, so you really have to do the little things off the ice that, hopefully, get you ahead of everyone else. I want to show that I can do stuff on both ends of the ice.”

Bouchard is looking to force Holland’s hand and make the Oilers keep him following training camp. He took an important first step in that direction Saturday. Holland and Tippett could not help but be impressed with the outing in the scrimmage, which by design did not feature NHL regulars.

“You saw it Saturday, Bouchard stood out, (Colby) Cave stood out, that next level of guys that pushed themselves ahead of the other guys and that’s what you’re looking for, that’s how you evaluate them,” Tippett said. “Now they have to go for that next step and see how far they can push with the NHL guys.”

Whether Bouchard can stick with the Oilers might come down to how he performs in his own end of the ice. It is important he not be a liability defensively when the games start to count for real.

“He’s a player that part of his defending is the way he moves the puck,” Tippett said. “When he moves the puck, he defends less, so that’s part of his defending. There is some time where he’s a young player that has to learn how to defend stronger. You just hope he continues to improve in those areas because it’s different than junior hockey.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Neal envisions a harvest of goals on the Oilers power play

Robert Tychkowski
September 15, 2019 5:29 PM MDT

Mangiapane, Flames reach one-year deal after brief contract impasse

Being on any power play is fun, but joining one that boasts Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is pretty much any goal scorer's dream.

“They're a different level of skill,” said Oilers winger James Neal, who skated on the first unit in practice Sunday. “They have that ability to draw guys in and dish pucks out when you're all alone.

“You know when you're on the power play that (the PK) focus is trying to get the puck out of their hands, so there are going to be a lot of opportunities for open ice.

“For me, that's a great thing. Being able to get open and put the puck in the net is one of my best attributes.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Nuge and Neal hoping to light it up for the Edmonton Oilers

Robert Tychkowski

September 15, 2019 5:27 PM MDT

Mangiapane, Flames reach one-year deal after brief contract impasse

So what do you get when you take a player who’s coming off a career high and pair him up with a player coming off a career low?

Dave Tippett is hoping it translates into a chemical reaction that lifts both players to new offensive heights and transforms the landscape of the Edmonton Oilers.

In teaming Ryan Nugent-Hopkins with James Neal, the Oilers believe (and so do the two players) that it’s a perfect solution to any number of troubling issues.

Neal’s ghastly slump of last season? Surely Nuge can help with that.

Lack of a regular, offensive gifted linemate for the longest serving Oiler? Neal can be that guy.

A more potent second line? That’s the plan.

“It’s nice to be able to play with a high end centre like that,” said Neal, who plans on having a major rebound from the seven-goal season that spelled the end of his time with the Calgary Flames.

“He had a great year last year, so he should be coming in with tons of confidence. He’s a guy who can put the puck in the net and he can pass it, so he’s dangerous. It’s really exciting for me.”

Nugent-Hopkins has always been a consistent two-way player. If they can get Neal to be what he’s always been — 10 straight seasons of 20 or more goals before the Calgary sag — the Oilers could be on to something big.

You know he’s got more in him.

“He’s made a career out of forging chemistry with elite linemates, like Mike Modano, Brad Richards and Evgeni Malkin, and sees enormous potential in this pairing.

They’ve already started on the process.

“As we get into some exhibition games we’ll have a better feel, but we’ve talked a lot, trying to get to know each other’s tendencies,” said Neal

“And we’ll sit down and go over game tape. A lot goes into it.”

As a winger, Neal sees it as his responsibility to be the chameleon in this equation.

“You have to adapt to the centre. There are different ways that guys play and it’s my job to learn how Nuge plays, to see his tendencies and see what he likes to do and adapt to him.”

Tippett has a good feeling about this.

“(Neal) is a very motivated player,” said the coach. “The players see that in the dressing room. He’s got lots to prove, lots to give still and I think he’s going to be a very good player for us.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 09.16.2019
During the first few days of an NHL training camp, when teams have 50-plus players involved in groups, a significant number of head coaches prefer to sit in the stands.

Not Dave Tippett.

"I like it down there," said the native of Moosomin, Saskatchewan who played a total of 721 games with Hartford, Washington, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia before becoming a coach.

"I like being as close as I can be to a player. I've always been on the ice," he said.

If nothing else, it's the best place to get a read on whether they're buying what you are selling.

"When you have change like this, the coaching staff has to come in and really dictate how you want things to go, the mentality of your team and the identity of your team.

"I've talked to most of our core players. They're on the same page as we are. When you have a whole new staff in place you have to set the tone early."

It's early days. They haven't lost a game yet. But there has been buy-in.

"The first impressions are pretty good actually," said the former NHL Coach of the Year who has delivered very detailed, demanding high-paced practices designed to install an identity from the get-go.

"After that first day, I came off the ice and told the coaches that I was really enthused just by the spirit, the emotion and the speed of some players. There are a lot of players in there who want to win. There's a real synergy with what we're doing here right now.

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"When you look at some things in the summer and put the players names on the whiteboard, it's one thing. But it's something else to get out there on the ice with them and see their reactions to things in different situations.

"It's different than on the video. It kind of brings it front and centre for you. You get to know players and what they do and how they react in certain situations. It's getting to know people the best you can before making decisions on them. That's a big part of my job right now."

Many people picture Tippett as being a defence-first, work ethic type of coach and he's definitely going to start there because the Oilers are going to miss the playoffs again unless they can dramatically reduce their goals against.

But it's not like he's putting the whip to their backs with them chained to the oars.

Defenceman Adam Larsson is probably the perfect example of that.

"I watched him play in Edmonton and I watched him play at the World Championships. I told him 'I want the World Championships guy.' It was the first time it looked like he had a smile on his face. It looked like he was having fun."

The Edmonton Larsson, he said, never looked like he was having fun.

"And you can see it right now. He's smiling and he's enjoying it. He looks relaxed with the puck."

Tippett said there are aspects of this training camp that remind him of his first.

"My first year at training camp as a head coach I was awfully excited. I had a real veteran team there in Dallas.

"You want to set a tone in training camp and that part is the same."
Camp Quenneville, Day 3: Henrik Borgstrom settling in as Panthers’ third-line center

By Erin Brown
Sep 15, 2019

CORAL SPRINGS, Fla. — Henrik Borgstrom has a pretty good idea of how the Florida Panthers intend to use his talents this season.

The challenge now is finding him wingers to gel with.

“I want to be better than I was last year,” Borgstrom said. “I hope I can play more with the puck and create more offense.”

For three days, Borgstrom has centered what is believed to be a third-line combination. He played four games with goal scorer Mike Hoffman, three with speedster Denis Malgin and one with prospect Aleks Heponiemi.

While Florida’s top two lines have clicked quickly, production has been a little slower out of the Finn’s trio.

“They’re different players,” Borgstrom said. “Hoff can shoot. He’s really skillful. Malgin is fast, skill as well. It’s still a little bit tough to find each other at times. But it’s getting better all the time.”

Looking for a spark, the Cats shifted Malgin off the line and brought on Heponiemi, who up to this point found himself in fourth-line situations.

“It’s cool to play with Borgstrom and Hoffman, but I’ll just try to be my best on the ice and do what the game needs,” Heponiemi said.

Borgstrom showed a bit of chemistry with Heponiemi on Friday when they spent some playing time together as their team changed lines. They got an extended look Sunday.

“(We) had some good passing here and there, but I think I’ve got to be way better and get used to the pace,” Heponiemi said.

Borgstrom said part of the process is feeling out each other’s tendencies, whether it be on breakouts, entering the zone or attacking the net.

“If it’s a two-on-two, like, well, what are you going to do about it? You know, pretty basic stuff,” Borgstrom said. “But yeah, we’re talking about those things.”

Florida experimented with Borgstrom in several situations last season, including occasional stints as a wing or as a checking-line center.

He appreciated the opportunity to play outside of his comfort zone, saying he “learned a lot.” But it didn’t always tap into the playmaking and scoring skills the Panthers originally saw in him.

“I didn’t mind it too much, but I don’t think my player type is that,” Borgstrom said. “I can’t really play that way, at least yet. It was pretty tough for me last year, and I didn’t think I was good enough.

“I talked a lot with (former assistant coach Paul) McFarland during the season and with (former coach Bob) Boughner, too,” he added. “(They) just tried to tell me (to) stick to the basics and try not to overthink it.”

Borgstrom said knowing what to expect in his second year of training camp has been to his advantage.

“It’s way easier to come here for your second year,” he said. “Just knowing the guys better and what they’re like on the ice and off the ice, as well, I feel more comfortable.”

Florida Panthers forward Paul Thompson fights with Will Lochead during a scrimmage Sunday at Panthers Ice Den in Coral Springs, Fla.

Forward Paul Thompson fights with Will Lochead during a scrimmage Sunday. (Erin Brown / The Athletic)

Tempers finally flare

The Panthers have been playing at an intense pace since camp opened, though most players kept the physical side of the game in check.

That changed Sunday as chippy play, body checks and a fight highlighted the action.

Early in the first scrimmage, MacKenzie Weegar hit Jayce Hawryluk in the head, dropping the winger to the ice. Hawryluk left the ice under his own power but had words for his teammate and the referee who did not call a penalty. He threw his helmet upon returning to the bench.

Later, Paul Thompson took issue with the play of rookie Will Lochead. The Springfield Thunderbirds captain grabbed him by the collar and lectured him before the two dropped the gloves to fight. Thompson delivered a couple of blows before the two toppled to the ice.

Scrappy play continued in the second scrimmage, highlighted by Frank Vatrano putting Jake Massie hard into the boards. The two separated without incident.

“Training camps are competitive,” coach Joel Quenneville said. “You got guys fighting for an opportunity to play at this level or playing (at the AHL) level. Everybody’s got a different kind of game and (fights) could happen. There’s a few solid hits, there was a little bit more physicality in today’s game. And we’ve just got to make sure that our pace is going to be faster.”

Rookie mistake

Sam Montembeault may have the edge in the battle for the job as Florida’s backup goaltender, but he showed there’s still work to be done on his game. Particularly on reading plays.

On one play Sunday, with the Cats’ top line of Jonathan Huberdeau, Sasha Barkov and Evgeni Dadonov pressing, Montembeault overcommitted to his right. That left Barkov alone on the other side of the net. By the time the rookie realized where the puck was going, the Panthers captain had slid it in from a sharp angle.

Montembeault allowed one more goal — off a breakdown in which prospect Matt Wedman got behind the defense and crashed the net — before being replaced by Ryan Bednard for the second half.

Sergei Bobrovsky played the entirety of the first scrimmage, allowing two goals.

Power play to debut

Florida has focused on five-on-five play during scrimmages, leaving a lot of curiosity as to whether its prolific power play will carry over from last season.

Monday will mark the first opportunity to see what new coaches Derek McKenzie and Andrew Brunette have planned on the man advantage. McFarland, who coached the power play last season, is no longer with the team.

Quenneville suggested there may not be much change, but several players will get looks depending on the lineup.

“I love the power play. There’s a lot of great weapons on it,” Quenneville said. “Some great personnel, and the way they moved it, the way they are operating it, you don’t want to deviate too much from that.”

Last season, the Panthers ranked second in the league with the man advantage, converting 26.8 percent of their opportunities.

Florida Panthers goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky allowed two goals during a 50-minute scrimmage on Sunday at Panthers Ice Den in Coral Springs, Fla.

Goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky allowed two goals during a 50-minute scrimmage on Sunday. (Erin Brown / The Athletic)

Catnips

— Florida now leaves for its first road trip of four games in four days.

The Panthers will play their annual doubleheader against the Predators on Monday, with the first contest at 4:30 p.m. ET and the second at 8 p.m.

The teams started the series in 2011, but for Quenneville it will be a first.

“I know that it’s different,” Quenneville said. “You get to see 40 guys in one day, and it’s a totally different kind of day. But I look forward to it.”

Florida will practice in Nashville on Tuesday before heading to Bathurst, New Brunswick, to face the Montreal Canadiens at 7 p.m. ET on
Wednesday. The Panthers play the Canadiens again at the Bell Centre at 7 p.m. ET the following night.

All games will have a live audio stream available via the NHL mobile app. Florida’s game in Montreal will be aired on 560 WQAM.

— Moving Malgin off Florida’s third line may be the first sign of a shift in the depth chart.

The 22-year-old, who was a healthy scratch in 31 games last season, found himself on a line alongside Noel Acciari and Patrick Bajkov.

At times, Malgin struggled to get deep in the zone with the puck. He had two penalty shot opportunities over four games but converted neither.

— Florida made its first roster cuts on Sunday afternoon.

Forwards Matt Marcinew, Greg Meireles, Liam Pecararo and Wedman along with defensemen Gustav Bouramman and Dylan MacPherson have been loaned to Springfield. All are expected to take part in the Thunderbirds’ training camp.

Forwards Cole Schwindt and Henrik Rybinski and defensemen Vladislav Kolyachonok and John Ludvig were returned to their respective junior clubs.

— Before training camp started, Hawryluk joked that he had worked on his slap shot during the summer, putting about 30 mph on it.

Maybe he wasn’t joking.

Just two minutes into practice, the winger unleashed a slapper which shattered a pane of glass behind the net.

In typical Quenneville fashion, a fast-paced practice continued — no minutes wasted — even as more shots continued to hit the broken pane.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
LADUE CLOSER TO JOINING MAIN GROUPS; DOUGHTY, BROWN ON ACCOUNTABILITY

JON ROSENS
EPTEMBER 15, 2019

AUDIO PRACTICE "NOTES PRACTICE: QUOTES
INSIDERS. Good afternoon to you from El Segundo, where the marine layer has already burned off. There’s a ton to get to, including a chat with Drew Doughty that made the rounds on Friday that you’ve likely heard pieces of by now. Helena, killing the lede, wrote a column on the first day of camp that’s worth your time. Some notebook-type comings and goings:

— I spoke with Paul LaDue (knee), who has been skating with Group C but is on the verge of rejoining a main camp group. LaDue, who spent most of the summer in Minneapolis, said that his injury was the result of natural wear over time. I was told he took the ice during Group C’s early skate this morning, but the timeline as shared prior to camp still appears to check out.

— As shared, I still have quite a bit of Drew content that I’m sitting on at the moment, and while it was casual profundity that got the most play on Friday, I was more interested in hearing him expand upon the belief that “guys don’t get on young guys like they used to in the past,” a difference from his earliest days in the league. We’ll get to that. Forgive the audio splicing as I stitched together a pair of audio files that had been separated by a media question, but this was near the beginning of his conversation with reporters and broadcasters:

Drew Doughty, on whether Matt Greene offered that “tough love”:

Yeah, he’d get on everyone. And obviously I knew he loved me, he brought me in. He was like my dad for many years. But if I had a bad period, he’d come ion and let me know with a ‘what the hell are you doing, we need you’-type thing, and 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. I think our veterans need to get on each other and on the young guys and on everyone.

Doughty, on Darryl Sutter working for Anaheim:

He’s just getting paid — trying to get a job. He misses the game. I don’t blame him at all. He’s obviously going to know how — 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. I guess they have a little bit of an advantage there, but we look forward to playing the Anaheim Ducks every game, and we want to win the season series. [Reporter: Knowing him, I bet you’re not surprised at all that he’s back in the game.] No, he loves the game of hockey. He’s a great hockey mind, a great coach. As much as at the end things kind of went south — we were getting into arguments and stuff like that — I loved Darryl from the bottom of my heart. He’s a great coach, a great person, a great family, and he cared about his players and their families. I loved Darryl even though sometimes we’d butt heads. [ Reporter: Is it going to sting a little bit if you see Chris wearing a Ducks jersey?] Maybe a little bit. I mean, he was around all the time, so we loved hanging out with him. I actually miss having him around. But I don’t know if he’ll switch. I think he’s still a Kings fan, but we’ll see. He’s probably going to follow his dad, so that’ll hurt a bit.

— Austin Wagner is always an interesting conversation. The 2015 fourth rounder was thrust into an unexpected role a season ago, and perhaps it was a good thing that the reality of his situation had so little time to sink in, given that he generated three breakaways in his NHL debut. But the 2018-19 season was a trial-by-fire for Wagner, who didn’t turn 22 until late June. There was both the pinch-a-me story that he was living his NHL dream — as well as the cold, hard realism that accompanies a 30th-place slog.

This wasn’t the ideal environment for a player who debuted with 50 games of AHL experience, but if there were any challenges in finding a rhythm between the coaching change and his regular assignments to and from Ontario, it didn’t show. He vastly outperformed expectations and finished with 12 goals and 21 points in 62 games, as well as an individual 1.32 GF/60, the 13th best rate in the league.

Speaking with Wagner yesterday, it felt like he had time to digest his Cinderella rookie season. He was a 21-year-old a year ago, and as a young player on a veteran team that failed to meet its marks, there might have been some place friendlier — like beautiful downtown Grozny, to quote Krusty. And that’s not to place blame on such veterans, many of whom had won twice together and for the first time in their career dealt with the aftermarket of a player subtracted, rather than added, near the trade deadline. It was simply a difficult time with a jagged jigsaw mix of youth, experience and coaching, one that didn’t offer the same relationship as, say, Tyler Toffoli and Tanner Pearson experienced over 26 games in the spring of 2014. But those weren’t the cards Wagner was dealt, and instead, he had to find his place on the fly, as a 21-year-old, amidst difficult circumstances.

I’ll chat again with Wagner several times during the preseason. I’m interested to hear what he learned last year, what he processed, how he’s grown after immediately being thrust into such a situation and largely thriving. What he showed on the ice can be measured — and the measurements were positive. But that internal growth towards maturity, towards the intangible, towards being an accountable, every-day player isn’t as easily measured, and I’m interested to hear how he’s gauged his development independently from the time spent on the ice. He’s a great kid who has been willing to learn, and one of the stories I’m interested to invest in is whether the team has re-evaluated his ceiling, and how he’s grown as an individual from Year One to Year Two. More to come on that front.

— While there was a lot of stopping and starting over the first two days of camp, Sunday was much heavier on instruction. There was more teaching on Sunday than the previous two days, and while McLellan spoke of stopping drills to commend players on Saturday — “we’ve got to catch them doing it right more than wrong, which can be really valuable,” he said — there was more urgency in his communication Sunday. The ice was cut in the middle of each session, allowing the group to reconvene and hold meetings in the dressing room; their on-ice session after the ice cut was almost entirely devoted to instruction. This was not an uncommon sight:

— Ilya Kovalchuk had a good retort on Friday when a member of the media noticed some additional gray in his hair. “No, it’s just the light, actually,” he shared.

It was a disarming start to the conversation, one that demonstrated a good rapport with the media.

Obviously, it’s not his relationship with the media that will draw focus this season. Coming off a campaign in which his relationship with (and diminished usage under) Willie Desjardins was representative of a season gone awry, he’s returned with an open mind and an insinuation that he got all he wanted out of his off-season.

“Yeah, knock on wood, I’m good. Summer went well. I trained a lot, I’ve done all that I wanted to.”

It’s not as if he’ll break down into hysterics upon being questioned about his best hopes for this team, but he’s entering the year with a positive team-wide mindset even with a collection of younger players vying for roster spots amidst the system changes. “I believe we’ve still got it,” he said.

“In this league, you never know. You saw the St. Louis Blues won the Stanley Cup, they were the last team in the whole league by January 6 or something. So, you just have to work hard, and … we can’t just be a bunch of individuals. We’ve got to work as a team, and the best team will win. Yeah, we have some new guys coming, but we have a core that knows how to win, so that’s the most important thing.”

— I’ll have more from Cal Petersen later this week, but on Friday he spoke about what he’s looking to adjust, saying that he’s gradually trying to improve his reads while understanding the game at a higher level, knowing when you can attack the puck, knowing when you have to be a little more patient, and I’m always trying to arrive to shots on my feet and put myself in the best position if there is a second or third opportunity. It’s just kind of continuous improvement.”

— And, finally, some leftover quotes from Dustin Brown’s Friday scrum:

Dustin Brown, on his first impressions of Todd McLellan:
Really good communicator. I mean, it’s only been one practice, but we’ve had a few meetings. We’re changing some things, so it’s important that we have that communication and understand what we need to do as players. It’s been, like I said, one day, so it’s been good.

Brown, on Drew Doughty’s assertion that older players need to get on younger guys more:

I think you can take the age part out of it. Everyone should be harder on each other. Young guys, old guys should be hard on everybody, especially after the last couple years. [Reporter: How do you do that with the young guys – whether it’s Anderson-Dolan or Walker – these younger guys breaking into the team, just trying to earn their spots?] Part of it’s setting the example of how things are supposed to be done, and the other part is holding each other accountable. It’s pretty easy if Kopi and Dewey, myself, if guys like that are being held accountable, then it makes it a lot easier to hold the line elsewhere.

Brown, on the mood around the team:

I mean, it’s hard to tell right now. We’ve got 60 guys in here or whatever it is. I mean, every training camp kind of has the same feel. I kind of think that training camp really starts – this is like the training camp to the training camp because there are just so many guys. There are going to be guys that play in junior this year that are out there today. When we kind of whittle it down a little more, that’s when you kind of get a feel for what kind of group you have.

Brown, on whether there are more “uncertainties” this year than in previous years:

I think there’s more opportunity for new players to push some other players out of the way. That’s the nature of the business we’re in. No one’s going to say, ‘I don’t want to play, you guys can have the spot.’ I think that’s a good thing for the makeup of the team and for the organization as a whole – if you don’t have younger guys pushing for spots, then you’re stuck. That’s what you want, the competitive nature, and then as an older guy, at least for me, it’s ‘come and take it if you can.’

Brown, on the references to “entitlement” at the end of last season and how that can change:

I think there’s just a big chunk of guys that have won here. That’s great, but that was a long time ago now. Coming into this year, we’ve one playoff game since the last time we won. There was too much of that in our group last year – both young, old. I mean, everyone likes to separate young guys and old guys, and I think it’s a poor way to look at a team. Because all it is, when you come in this room, whether you’re a 19-year-old or a 38-year-old, you’re a part of the team, and it’s about finding ways to put the best pieces together, and part of that is getting guys that are hungry.

Brown, on whether he set any personal goals this season:

I don’t think about that, especially on day one. I’ve done my homework, per se, in the off season, just like any other year. Just get yourself ready, prepared. Seasons are funny. You have highs, lows, for me it’s just about finding a consistency in my game, and again, with the makeup we have, it’s trying to help young guys because I remember what it was like for me as a young guy. I try to focus on those little things, and stuff on the ice – goals, points – I’ve had stretches where I’ve played awful hockey and had tons of points, and vice versa. Those things kind of sort themselves out. [Reporter: And you’re 100% healthy coming in?] Yeah.

Brown, on whether he expects to start the season on a line with Anze Kopitar:

As it stands now, I’m assuming, just based off of years past and how we lined up today. [Reporter: So you and Todd haven’t talked about that?] He said that he wants me with Kopi, but lots of things change.

Brown, on whether he spoke with Ilya Kovalchuk over the off-season:

I didn’t really talk to him much, but that’s a pretty good question for him. I don’t know what he’s thinking. He’s always prepared. I’m guessing he had good testing. I’m assuming after last season he’s excited for a fresh start, as well.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 09.16.2019
Ryan Donato has lined up at center most of his life, but when he broke into the NHL with the Bruins, he did so at left wing because that’s the position Boston needed filled.

Since then, Donato has been regarded as a winger. It’s where the Wild put him after the team acquired him in the Charlie Coyle trade with the Bruins.

But Donato could be getting back to his roots this season.

After debuting up the middle between veteran wingers Zach Parise and Mats Zuccarello on Friday during the first practice of training camp, Donato was still in that spot Sunday at TRIA Rink. It continued an audition that — if successful — could ease one of the logjams currently headlining the Wild’s roster.

“When you’re doing these lines in the summer, it sure looked like it might work,” coach Bruce Boudreau said. “Doing it on the ice and on paper are two different things. But we’ll see how it works out.”

The idea to try out Donato at center came to Boudreau after Donato’s dad, Ted, who played for Boudreau in the American Hockey League, mentioned to Boudreau his son’s history at the position.

With Parise, Jason Zucker, Jordan Greenway and Marcus Foligno all looking like fits on their natural left side and since lefty Kevin Fiala is poised to slot on the right like he did at times last season, center and right wing seem to be the only options for Donato.

By putting Donato at center, that frees up one of the few right shots (Luke Kunin) to play on the right.

“It’s a tough league to be put in at a young age and play center,” Donato said. “But now that I’ve seen what you need to do and being a guy who’s a natural centerman, I think I can do it for sure.”

What stood out about Donato last season was his release; in 22 games, he registered 64 shots and tallied 16 points.

Despite a position change, and the potential to work with two veteran wingers, Donato isn’t planning to tweak his approach.

“I will try to get it off as much as I can,” he said.

And the 23-year-old, who signed a two-year, $3.8 million contract this summer, recognizes he’s getting a terrific opportunity to make this case with Parise and Zuccarello as his linemates.

“It doesn’t get much better than that,” Donato said. “You’ve got a guy that can play any facet of the game, a guy that’s super experienced with Zach and score goals and really do anything you need him to do. And he’s a teacher, too. He can teach you. I just gotta try to be a sponge around him.

“Zuccs can find you in any space, and he’s one of the most skilled guys I’ve seen. Being able to play with those two guys, I want to make sure I keep up.”

Busy week

Boudreau is expecting “two solid NHL lines” and 13 regulars to suit up for the Wild’s first preseason game Tuesday against the Stars at Xcel Energy Center.

Backup Alex Stalock is scheduled to be in goal. Kaapo Kahkonen and Mat Robson will take Wednesday’s game in Winnipeg.

Captain Mikko Koivu is slated to scrimmage Monday after being eased into camp as he continues to recover from a torn ACL and meniscus. His first preseason action likely will be next weekend.

The camp roster also will start to shrink drastically this week. Boudreau anticipates only 26 players will make the trip to Colorado ahead of the Wild’s preseason game vs. the Avalanche next Sunday.
Wild's Luke Kunin healthy, ready finally to start producing

By DANE MIZUTANI

PUBLISHED: September 15, 2019 at 5:40 pm
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It wasn't long ago when 21-year-old center Luke Kunin was considered one of the top prospects in the Wild farm system. And as a first-round draft pick in 2016, he shouldered some lofty expectations from the moment he signed his entry-level contract.

And now it's time for Kunin live up to the hype.

While not many outsiders are expecting much from the Wild this season, they could surprise some people, especially if Kunin, a former University of Wisconsin star, finds a way to realize his potential. He is coming off a full summer of training, something he didn't have heading into last season, working tirelessly to recover from a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

"It was nice to work on the things I wanted to work on and not have to worry about going to rehab every day," he said. "It's good to turn the page and start fresh. I'm very excited to get this thing rolling."

There's reason to believe Kunin could be in line to take the next step. Aside from him being completely healthy, of course, Kunin finished last season very strong in the NHL, and dominated in the American Hockey League as the Iowa Wild made a brief playoff run.

"I liked where my game was at," he said. "I thought I improved as I was playing a little bit longer there. I did a lot of things this summer. Just working on the areas of my game that I thought I needed to improve upon. I wanted to get better in a lot of areas, and I think I did that."

For the time being, it looks like Kunin (6 feet, 195 pounds) will play alongside Mikko Koivu (6-3, 220) and opposite good friend Jordan Greenway (6-6, 225). That trio boasts a ton of size, and if coach Bruce Boudreau uses that as his shutdown line, it could make life tough on opposing teams.

Not that Kunin wants to be known solely as a defensive stopper. He was a prolific offensive contributor in college and thinks he can get to that point again.

As does Boudreau.

"He's 100 percent healthy, and he's got a little bit of experience behind him, and he's got a great release and a great work ethic," the Wild coach said. "To me, those things add up to scoring some goals. I'm not saying prolific and 30- or 40-goal scorer. I would just be disappointed if he didn't contribute offensively."

In a perfect world, Kunin would chip in offensively when needed and remain solid defensively. He believes he can do that.

"I feel really good," Kunin said. "I want to take that next step and really produce and do a lot more than I have before."
Keith Kinkaid got his first taste of what it’s like to play for the Canadiens at the Bell Centre during Sunday afternoon’s annual Red vs. White scrimmage with the arena filled close to capacity.

The Canadiens’ new backup goalie — signed to a one-year, US$1.75-million contract as a free agent this summer — played the second half of the scrimmage, allowing two goals as his Red team beat the White team 5-4 on a shootout goal by Paul Byron. Alex Belzile, Jesperi Kotkaniemi (on a penalty shot), Mike Reilly and Jeff Petry also scored for the Red team, while Max Domi, Josh Brook, Nate Thompson and Jordan Weal scored for the White team.

“It’s definitely fun to play in front of a packed crowd for just the Red vs. White game,” Kinkaid said. “The fans are crazy about their hockey. It’s awesome. I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else right now.”

Kinkaid struggled last season with the New Jersey Devils, posting a 15-18-6 record with a 3.36 goals-against average and a .891 save percentage before being dealt to the Columbus Blue Jackets at the NHL trade deadline on Feb. 25. He never played a game with the Blue Jackets. The 30-year-old is now looking to regain the form he had the previous season when he was 26-10-3 with a 2.77 goals-against average and a .913 save percentage with the Devils.

After the Farmingville, N.Y., native was traded to Columbus, his girlfriend, Jaclyn Phillips, joined him for the eight-hour drive from New Jersey to provide support. Phillips is from Saint John, N.B., and is now living with him in a downtown Montreal condo. She’s a master fitness trainer, fitness model, online coach, yoga teacher, movement expert and stunt woman who used to also be a bodybuilder. They met last September through a Devils equipment manager, who is from Saint John.

“He hooked us up and the rest is history,” Kinkaid said with a smile. “She definitely helped me out this summer. It’s good to get a plan and stay with it. She likes to take control of her body, too, so it’s definitely been very helpful for me. She’s very lucky because she works out of Toronto and she’s from Saint John, so (Montreal’s) dead in the middle. And she’s Canadian, so it’s good that she’s here because she doesn’t have to worry about the number of days (spent) in the U.S.”

Phillips lived in Montreal for three months once before as part of an exchange, learned to speak some French and is now teaching her boyfriend.

“Yeah, she’s trying to help me,” Kinkaid said. “I keep pronouncing everything wrong. I got bonjour.”

Not long after signing with the Canadiens on July 1, Kinkaid came to Montreal to find a place to live and get settled in with his girlfriend. They now have a new addition to the household — a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel puppy named Guinness. Kinkaid has never had a dog before.

“Oh, man … it’s like a kid,” he said with a laugh. “He’s five months old and doesn’t know how to go to the bathroom outside yet. That and they’re building another building right across from me, so 7 a.m. sharp for some construction.”

Welcome to Montreal — and look out for those orange cones.

“It’s a little dog with long ears,” Kinkaid said about his puppy. “He’s like 15 pounds right now. He doesn’t get much bigger. He doesn’t really want to go for long walks right now, so we’re trying to drag him down the street and we sit on the patio with him. It’s new, so it’s definitely eye-opening and definitely a big responsibility. But he’s awesome. He follows us around everywhere.”

The Canadiens play their first pre-season game Monday against Kinkaid’s old team when the Devils visit the Bell Centre (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).
Kotkaniemi also learned the importance of taking care of himself off the ice last season. "I think that will be big for me," he said. "Last year, there was big guys who were just throwing me around in the corners. So now I just go do the battles and stuff," said Kotkaniemi, who turned 19 on July 6. "I think I'm a little bit more comfortable out there quick and get it off fast it's harder to read for a goalie. Even faraway shot — you want to be on your backhand. But for me, I kind of switch it up."

When asked why more players don’t use a slapshot on penalty shots, Kotkaniemi said: "I think that doesn’t work too often, but I think that was my only option. I think (Price) just gave me that one, but I’m happy he did that."

Forward Nick Suzuki, one of the top prospects at this year’s training camp, had an interesting answer when asked about Kotkaniemi’s decision to use a slapshot on a penalty shot.

“My goalie coach in Owen Sound always told me to do slapshots on breakaways and penalty shots, but not many guys try it," he said. "I don’t think too many guys are confident in it. I think (Kotkaniemi) was just kind of gassed from his shift on the one before, so he just let it rip."

When asked why so many players go to their backhand — the weakest shot — on penalty shots, Suzuki said: "I feel like if you can get it over there quick and get it off fast it’s harder to read for a goalie. Even faraway backhands are tough to get a read on for goalies. I feel like there’s just a lot of moves that end up you want to be on your backhand. But for me, I kind of switch it up."

Will Kotkaniemi try the slapshot again on future penalty shots? "I can’t tell," he said with a smile. "Other goalies are watching this."

Alex Belzile, Mike Reilly and Jeff Petry also scored for the Red team, while Max Domi, Josh Brook, Nate Thompson and Jordan Weal scored for the White team.

Le but gagnant en tirs de barrage, signé Paul Byron.

Bigger is better

Kotkaniemi is now listed at 6-foot-2 and 198 pounds, 14 pound heavier than he was at the start of his rookie season last year. "I’m a little bit bigger and a little bit stronger, so I feel it on the ice when I go do the battles and stuff," said Kotkaniemi, who turned 19 on July 6. "I think I’m a little bit more comfortable out there. I think I can battle better with the bigger guys and I think I feel stronger, I guess." Kotkaniemi posted 11-23-34 totals in 79 games last season and, not surprisingly, faded a bit down the stretch with coach Claude Julien making the teenager a healthy scratch for three games. Kotkaniemi believes the added weight will help him better survive the NHL’s 82-game marathon.

“I think that will be big for me," he said. "Last year, there was big guys who were just throwing me around in the corners. So now I just try to stay up more, so I still have legs to play the last period.”

Kotkaniemi also learned the importance of taking care of himself off the ice last season.

"There’s many games, so I think it’s important that you don’t do like stupid stuff too much," he said. "Just the little things, try to be smart where you go and where you don’t go. So I think that will help you keep going.”

Kotkaniemi is also feeling more comfortable in the locker room now than he did at this time last year.

“I know the guys better from last year," he said. "It’s a little bit easier for me to come in. I don’t know what’s the word, but I feel comfortable when I come to the rink every morning. Like I said, I didn’t know all the guys before so I think that helps me a lot.”

Kotkaniemi said he was stopped on the streets of Montreal “pretty often” by fans last season, but he doesn’t mind that. " I think it’s part of the job," he said. "The hockey career is not that long, so I will do that and I like doing that.”

Who says it’s only a scrimmage?

After Thompson scored for the White team to tie the score 3-3, the Red team’s Paul Byron broke his stick over the crossbar in frustration after being beaten for a lose puck in the crease.

“I think that’s good,” Kotkaniemi said with a smile. “First game of the year and we’re playing a scrimmage with each other. It’s good to see some attitude over there.”

Kotkaniemi played on a line with Byron and Joel Armia.

"It’s fun, you know," Kotkaniemi said about having the speedy Byron on his line. "I can just stand over there and chip the pucks in and he will get them. He’s faster than anyone over there.”

Red vs. White scrimmage. Sold out. Thank you Habs fans! You guys are truly the best. First pre season game tmw! See you there.

Suzuki spent time with four different teams last season: the Canadiens during training camp, the Owen Sound Attack and Guelph Storm during the OHL season and Team Canada at the world junior tournament. Suzuki has also in the past attended training camp with the Vegas Golden Knights, who traded him to the Canadiens last summer as part of the Max Pacioretty deal.

While Suzuki hasn’t had a one-on-one sitdown yet at training camp with Julien, the coach has spoken with the forward prospect on the ice about certain system things in the defensive zone and off the rush. But Suzuki said most hockey teams these days basically use the same system, something Julien has also said in the past.

“lt’s basically all the same,” Suzuki said. “A lot of teams nowadays play the exact same type of system. You go from place to place, it’s pretty much the same thing, just different terminologies.”

Young fans enjoying #Habs Red vs White scrimmage at Bell Centre Stu Cowan (@StuCowan1)

Welcome to Montreal

Defenceman Ben Chiarot got to play at the Bell Centre for the first time Sunday in a Canadiens jersey after signing as a free agent this summer following five seasons with the Winnipeg Jets.

“A training-camp scrimmage with 20,000 people, it’s what makes Montreal a special place to play,” Chiarot said. “The intensity of the scrimmage was great. Good pace, good up and down the ice, which is a good tuneup for the pre-season. Gets some of those summer habits out of you. I thought it was perfect.”

Chiarot said he arrived in Montreal a week before camp started to get comfortable in his new surroundings.

“I got to know some of the guys early on, so it’s not like you show up the first day of camp you don’t know one person," he said. "I know some of the guys now, spent some time with them, so I’m pretty comfortable with the guys for the most part. Just getting used to my surroundings is the biggest part now. This is my first time in the Bell Centre room, so just getting comfortable.”

What’s next?
The Canadiens will have a morning skate at 10:30 a.m. Monday in Brossard before facing the New Jersey Devils in their first pre-season game Monday night at the Bell Centre (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

The Canadiens will 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 and will meet the Panthers again Thursday night at the Bell Centre (7 p.m., TSN2, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).

The Canadiens will wrap up the week when they travel to Ottawa to face the Senators on Saturday (7:30 p.m., TSN5, RDS, TSN 690 Radio).
Replacing what Andrew Shaw brought to the Canadiens won't be easy

STU COWAN,
Updated: September 15, 2019

One of the big questions for the Canadiens heading into this season is who will be able to fill Andrew Shaw's role — both on and off the ice.

On the ice, Shaw was a pesky, hard-working forward who could also produce, posting a career high 47 points in only 63 games last season with 19 goals and 28 assists, along with a plus-17. He could play on any of the four lines, kill penalties, be used on the power play and get under the other team's skin. Off the ice, Shaw was probably the most popular guy in the locker room, a jokester and fun guy to be around who also played the big-brother role last season for rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi.

Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin traded the injury-prone Shaw to the Blackhawks on June 30 in exchange for draft picks, while also clearing up $3.9 million in salary-cap space in each of the next three seasons.

So, who can fill Shaw's role?

It was suggested to Max Domi after practice Friday in Brossard that veteran Nate Thompson — acquired from the Los Angeles Kings at least season's NHL trade deadline — might be a candidate.

"You can't really look at it that way," Domi said. "Obviously, Shawzy's a guy that ... I mean, he's one of a kind, right? No one can be Andrew Shaw both on and off the ice. He's a special, special dude and one of my closest buddies. So it's tough to see a guy like that go. Nate is a guy that can easily play anywhere in your lineup ... a very reliable guy, great faceoffs, can skate great. It's the best he's felt in a long time, from what I've been told by him. He's a huge part of this hockey team and right now I think he's been the first star of the last two skates of training camp. He looks outstanding and we're very lucky to have him and super excited for how good he does this year."

It was then suggested to Domi that Nick Cousins, signed as a free agent by the Canadiens on July 5, might be able to fill Shaw's role.

"Like I said, there's no Andrew Shaw, right?" Domi said. "So you're not going to start comparing. What I can tell you is I have played with Cousy (with the Arizona Coyotes) and he brings a lot to the table. He's a guy that practises hard, plays hard, he's an unbelievable locker-room guy, a glue guy for this group. He keeps everyone together. He's absolutely hilarious and he's got a lot of skill, too."

Cousins played 81 games with the Coyotes last season, posting 7-20-27 totals and was minus-8.

"I played against him in junior and I wanted to absolutely kill him a lot of the time," Domi said about Cousins. "He doesn't chirp you, but he plays hard and he knows how to get under the skin of other players and he backs it up with his play and he can play throughout your entire lineup. Of course, that's not our job, that's the coaches to figure out where he plays and I'm really confident that he's going to be a huge boost to our team this year and we're very lucky to have him as well."

It was suggested to Brendan Gallagher on Thursday that Thompson might be able to fill some of Shaw's role.

"Tommy definitely plays an important role for our group, for sure," Gallagher said. "He brings with him a lot of experience, played in a lot of locker rooms, he's played with some very good players. He's earned the right to speak and guys will listen. I think that's something that you're looking for from your veteran players. For him, we know what he does on the ice, we know the role he plays. Obviously, he takes a lot of draws, his defensive assignments are always up to par and for him to bring that little bit of leadership to our group I think is important."

The reality is — as Domi noted — there's only one Andrew Shaw and the Canadiens will miss him both on and off the ice.
On pelinluku, a Finnish word that perfectly encapsulates why the Canadiens’ future is so bright

By Arpon Basu  
Sep 15, 2019

A little more than 90 seconds were left in what was a simple scrimmage, if any scrimmage played in front of more than 15,000 people on a Sunday afternoon at the Bell Centre can be called simple.

But it was a scrimmage. Except a scrimmage is a scrimmage only if a player is just getting tuned up for the season, if his position on the team is secure and his primary concern is not getting hurt. Then there are those who are fighting for jobs, those who feel like they have the eyes of an entire city on them, those who want desperately to make their professional hockey debuts in the NHL.

To them, having a little more than 90 seconds left in what’s a one-goal game means something. This is what happened in that moment, involving three guys to whom that moment meant a lot.

Phil Varone, fighting to stay in the NHL, enters the offensive zone with the puck, his team up a goal. Ryan Poehling follows his linemate into the zone, and rather than driving the net or doing something you would expect of a kid hoping to crack the Canadiens in his first professional season, he does something different. He fades out to the far circle and opens up for a one-timer, recognizing the defence had essentially taken away the more conventional options and giving his AHL veteran linemate a viable out if he can’t make something happen himself.

It showed awareness.

Coming back on defence is Nick Suzuki, and he, too, is aware of what is happening. He sees what Poehling does and watches the way Varone passively attacks the defence to quickly determine where the imminent threat is located.

The imminent threat is Poehling.

“I was just backchecking and I saw Poehls open up, so I knew I was the third guy, so I had to take the far guy,” Suzuki said. “So I just kind of stopped, slowed down and drifted out with him.”

The pass from Varone went to Poehling, just as Suzuki anticipated, and as he let go of his one-timer, Suzuki dropped and blocked the shot.

This was a simple scrimmage for some. It wasn’t for others.

“Well, we were losing so … I missed a block before, and they scored on it,” Suzuki said. “When I saw it, I just dropped. Thank god it didn’t hit me too hard.”

The shot struck Suzuki in the hand. He shook it off.

But the shot block is not even the point. The point is the ability to read the play and make the right decision, not just for Suzuki but also for Poehling.

Poehling and Suzuki went head to head relatively often in this Red-White scrimmage, and shift after shift, each displayed the extent to which they understand the game, how they can consistently wind up exactly where they are supposed to be, whether that’s offensively or defensively.

Nick Cousins is ramping up speed with the puck in the neutral zone? Here comes Poehling, out of nowhere, to lift the puck off his stick and take it back the other way.

Charles Hudon is driving the net to create a great scoring chance? Following his path is Suzuki, just as the rebound gets kicked out to an area where he is also arriving at the perfect moment to create a second great scoring chance.

A year ago, the focus of the Red-White game was Suzuki, who had been acquired from the Vegas Golden Knights a few days earlier, and also Jesperi Kotkaniemi, the No. 3 overall draft pick who began laying the foundation for breaking camp with the Canadiens in that scrimmage.

Kotkaniemi did so by displaying the same innate abilities Poehling and Suzuki showed Sunday afternoon at the Bell Centre. It is something these three players have in common. The Canadiens’ future is better for it.

When asked what word he would use to describe the ability, the skill, that allows him to arrive in an area of the ice and have the puck magically appear there, Kotkaniemi paused.

“I wish I could use a word in Finnish,” he said. Oh, man, please do.

After a bit of goading, Kotkaniemi finally came up with one.

“Pelinluku,” he said, before turning, walking away and loudly applauding with his hands above his head.

The literal translation of pelinluku is “game reading.” In North American hockey terms, it is hockey IQ.

“In the game, there’s, like, many things that repeat many times, so you get familiar with those different. … what’s the word?” Kotkaniemi said to explain his knack for doing this, for showing up somewhere at the same time as the puck.

I suggest that the word he seeks is “patterns,” but he disagrees. Then I suggest “routines.”

“I think ‘routines’ is a good word,” he said. “You get your routines, and you get that with your linemates where they know where you’re going and where they should put the puck. So you just go there and assume the puck is coming.”

Pelinluku.

It could well become the identity of the Canadiens in the coming years.

Jordan Weal has been playing on Suzuki’s right wing since the start of training camp, giving him a shotgun seat to watch the rookie work.

“Tons of skill,” Weal said. “He’s got skill out the ying-yang.”

Then he laughed a bit, as if the level of skill he was describing seemed a bit ridiculous.

“You can just tell right away when he touches the puck, he’s going to be a special player,” Weal said. “It’s been fun playing with him.”

I wanted to see if this knack Suzuki has, this pelinluku, was actually a thing. So I asked Weal, who could probably answer better than most.

“I don’t think you’re off, but that’s just what makes good offensive players good,” Weal said. “If you’re having an off night or whatever, you can always have good timing out there. That’s one of the things that’s in your control in the game of hockey; there’s so many bounces, so many things that can go your way or don’t go your way in the course of a game. So the one thing you can control is your timing and when you arrive in areas in anticipation of the play.

“So if at a young age he can figure that out and carry that through into the pro game, it’s going to be good for him. Because especially from junior, it gets a lot tighter and the chances get limited, so you have to make a lot of chances for yourself without the puck. If you can do that at a high level, you see the best guys in this league, that’s what they do the best.”

What does Suzuki think of this knack of his? Is he even aware of it? Does he know just how much pelinluku he has been blessed with?

Absolutely.

“Anticipation, probably? Just reading the play,” Suzuki said when asked to pick a word to describe that knack. “I think it’s just being ahead of the game. I feel like I know where the puck’s going to end up based on what guys are doing, based on the shots coming in for rebounds, I think I can read where it’s going to be before it gets there.”

Poehling appears to share that gift. He never appears to be out of position, never appears to be quickly shifting course because the puck has gone somewhere unexpected. Yes, it was a scrimmage, but it’s still a scrimmage with NHL players. And we can already determine from his lone NHL game that Poehling did not exactly look out of place.

“Just hockey sense, I think,” Poehling said. “That’s really what it is. The good players go to where the puck is, and the great players know where the puck’s going to be, so that’s the way I like to describe it.”
It is way too early to say whether Kotkaniemi, Suzuki or Poehling will be great. It is not too early to say they have this one thing that makes players great.

And that alone is an excellent sign for the Canadiens, who hope to one day ride elite pelinluku to Stanley Cup contention.
The Devils will open their preseason slate with a pair of split-squad games on Monday, with one home game against the Boston Bruins at Prudential Center, plus a road tilt against the Montreal Canadiens at Bell Centre in Montreal.

The home roster will feature all of the Devils’ major offseason additions. Jack Hughes, P.K. Subban, Nikita Gusev and Wayne Simmonds are all listed on the roster for the home contest against the Bruins, meaning all should make their debuts at The Rock.

Here are the full rosters for both games. Taylor Hall, as planned, will not play in either game.

ROSTER VS. BRUINS
35. CORY SCHNEIDER, G
31. GILLES SENN, G
5. CONNOR CARRICK, D
6. ANDY GREENE, D
14. JOEY ANDERSON, RW
17. WAYNE SIMMONDS, RW
19. TRAVIS ZAJAC, C
24. TY SMITH, D
40. JOSH JACOBS, D
44. MILES WOOD, LW
45. SAMI VATANEN, D
47. JULIAN MELCHIORI, D
53. YEGOR SHARANGOVICH, C/LW
63. JESPER BRATT, LW/RW
73. MIKHAIL MALTSEV, C
76. P.K. SUBBAN, D
86. JACK HUGHES, C
90. JESPER BOOVIIST, LW
92. GRAEME CLARKE, RW
97. NIKITA GUSEV, LW

ROSTER VS. CANADIENS
29. MACKENZIE BLACKWOOD, G
50. EVAN CORMIER, G
65. BRIAN McADAM, G
2. COLTON WHITE, D
7. MATT TENNYSON, D
8. WILL BUTCHER, D
13. NICO HISCHIER, C
15. JOHN HAYDEN, RW
16. KEVIN ROONEY, C
20. BLAKE COLEMAN, C/W
21. KYLE PALMIERI, RW
25. MIRCO MUELLER, D
28. DAMON SEVERSON, D
32. DAKOTA MERMIS, D
34. BRANDON Baddock, LW
36. BEN STREET, C/LW
41. MICHAEL McLEOD, C
42. NATHAN BASTIAN, RW
43. BRETT SENEY, LW/C
46. BLAKE SPEERS, C/RW
51. BRANDON GIGNAC, C/LW
62. XAVIER BERNARD, D
When Taylor Hall arrived at training camp, he expected to see no difference between a typical four-month offseason layoff and the much longer one he experienced this year.

During his first practice at Devils training camp on Saturday, he proved himself slightly wrong.

"When I'm coming back from something after so long, it's interesting," Hall said. "I told people whether you're off for four months or nine months, it ends up being the same thing, but I definitely felt the nine months today."

Saturday marked Hall's first on-ice activity with the Devils since a knee injury ended his 2018-19 season last December. But while he may have had a little more rust than usual to shake off, the session went exactly as planned.

Hall started his day by participating in a scrimmage, where he skated on a line with Nico Hischier and Kyle Palmieri, giving him some instant familiarity for his return. He then logged a full 50-minute practice later in the morning after the 30-minute game.

"It felt fine. Definitely rusty and definitely not where you want to be, but that's what training camp is for," Hall said. "To get the rust out, to push yourself a little bit, get familiar with the players and the battles, and put yourself in uncomfortable spots physically and mentally and see how you respond."

Hall was back on the ice for the team's first practice session Sunday morning, and he will play in one more scrimmage later Sunday morning. Hall has already been ruled out from playing in Monday's split-squad games to open the preseason schedule as the team aims to ease him into action. He'll likely play two or three games toward the end of camp.

Though it was Hall's first time back on the ice with his team, his teammates were left impressed. Jesper Boqvist was wowed in his first ever playing time against Hall in the scrimmage, and Jesper Bratt saw the speed and skill that Hall always brought to the lineup.

Hall's focus for the preseason will be fine-tuning his game for the season opener on Oct. 4, which is the same approach he takes at every training camp.

"For me, the start of the season, I always feel my timing is one thing that I have to get back, whether it's reading off of players, jumping into holes at the right time," Hall said. "There's a lot of players here at camp that you're not familiar with and you don't really know how to read them. Some of the games can get a little scrambly at times, but you try to push yourself to be you best and have the puck as much as possible."
Jack Hughes got his first crack at a Devils scrimmage on Sunday, and we got a look at who his line mates could be early in the preseason.

Hughes centered Nikita Gusev and Wayne Simmonds for Group C in the scrimmage, giving him two veteran playmakers to spend time with in a game situation.

Hughes didn't account for any points, but he did set up Gusev for a dangerous shot during the first period of the scrimmage. Hughes chased down a pass in the left circle, giving his team a small window at a 2-on-1 at the net. Hughes slid a pass over to Gusev, whose one-timer went wide of the right post.

Rosters for Monday's split-squad games haven't been released yet, but it would be a good bet to see Hughes playing with Simmonds and Gusev in one of the contests.

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Here are some other notes from the scrimmage and day two of practices:

- Prospect Nikita Popugaev scored the lone goal of the scrimmage, giving Group C the 1-0 victory. His tally came with about nine minutes left in the second period (the scrimmage consisted of two 15-minute periods), when he drove down the inside of the left circle and buried a backhander past Gilles Senn.

- P.K. Subban was partnered with Sami Vatanen on his left side, confirming what John Hynes said about possibly pairing the two together.

- Defenseman Ty Smith did not practice or participate in the scrimmage due to illness.

- Pavel Zacha was absent from the ice again while he continues to sort out his visa paperwork, which was a bit tougher to finish because it's the weekend. He should be fully cleared to participate early in the week.

- Cory Schneider and Mackenzie Blackwood played the first period of the scrimmage for their respective groups, with neither allowing a goal.

- Michael McLeod had another strong showing playing in the scrimmage for the second straight day. He scored Saturday, burying a Nathan Bastian pass in the slot, and Sunday he continued to drive play while looking confident with the puck on his stick. McLeod's speed has always been there, but he's been prone to over-skating at the pro level. He looks a lot calmer so far, allowing him to be in position to make more plays.
NEWARK - John had Jersey on his mind.

It wasn't necessarily intentional, but on the second day of the NHL Draft in June, the 24-year-old Greenwich, Connecticut, native John Hayden watched one of his best friends, Steven Santini, get traded out of New Jersey. About 20 minutes later, the Chicago Blackhawks traded the forward to the New Jersey Devils in exchange for John Quenneville.

John Hayden #40 of the Chicago Blackhawks controls the puck against the Detroit Red Wings at the United Center on February 10, 2019 in Chicago, Illinois. Hayden was traded to the Devils on Saturday, June 22, 2019.

"I was talking to a friend and I said Steven had been traded. My friend asked me if that could happen to me and I said it's a possibility," Hayden said this weekend at Prudential Center during training camp. "A few minutes later I was traded here. So I missed Steven by just a few minutes."

A week later, his former college teammate at Yale, local Flanders product Kenny Agostino, left the Devils for a free agent deal with the Toronto Maple Leafs. So Hayden is no stranger to the organization.

Devils fans were first introduced to Hayden when his friend Santini briefly turned into a foe in late 2017. Santini, the mild-mannered defenseman, engaged in his first NHL fight with Hayden. It was an entertaining skirmish that resulted in Hayden throwing Santini down to the ice. It came just months after Hayden stood by Santini's side as a groomsman.

Santini is now in Nashville battling it out for P.K. Subban's former roster spot and Hayden is trying to crack a loaded forward group in Newark after playing 113 NHL games for the Blackhawks with eight goals and 14 assists.

"Johnny was a really great acquisition for us," coach John Hynes said. "He's a really smart player. He brings toughness. He's got good hands, good hockey sense. He's a very good player and I think he's going to fit in well with how we want to be able to do things. It's going to be up to him to earn where he plays and when he plays."

He's still looking for a breakout season. He knows management likes him because they gave up a former first-round pick they had long been high on and management says they like his size (6-foot-3, 215 pounds) and physicality.

Hayden himself likes the opportunity to show what he learned from a veteran group in Chicago.

"I learned how to be a pro from guys who have won a couple Cups and guys who have been in the league for a while," he said. "I've been a part of three 1,000 game celebrations and there were other guys who were very close to that milestone which shows how much experience was there."

There’s no clear answer as to who exactly fits on the fourth line so Hayden could be useful. The Devils suddenly have a few too many top-six wingers, which isn’t a bad problem to have, but they won’t carry someone like Jesper Boqvist just to sit him and what they’re missing is someone like Hayden who can play physical, be forceful and bring some energy on the back end.

"My game is straightforward," he said. "I want to play a hard-nosed game. I want to be relied on in all situations so that’s a combination of playing physical and chipping in offensively. Both of those things come from keeping it simple for me. If I play hard I think the rest of my game catches up and it takes care of itself."

His best friend may not be here anymore but Hayden is happy to have his shot in New Jersey.
NEWARK — Summer skates are over. The New Jersey Devils are just three days into training camp which means everyone is feeling some rust.

For the second day in a row, the Devils held a scrimmage in between practices at RWJBarnabas Health Hockey House. Sunday’s format was the same as the day prior, with the day consisting of practices for three groups and scrimmage between two of them with two officiated 15-minute halves.

A few observations and notes on the day:

- Nikita Popugaev had the lone goal in the scrimmage. He scored on Gilles Senn in the second half. Senn may want that one back, but it was an encouraging moment for Popugaev nonetheless. You may remember Popugaev as the player the Devils briefly lost track of last season. When they finally found him playing in the KHL in a small Russian town near China, the forward was unhappy with his role and the Devils badly needed bodies in on their American Hockey League team. The timing was right for both parties and they quickly came to an agreement to get Popugaev to Binghamton. Expect him in Binghamton for another year of development.

- Nico Hischier once again centered Taylor Hall and Kyle Palmieri. But if you think it’s easy enough to just pick up right where they left off, think again.

Feb 19, 2019; Newark, NJ, USA; New Jersey Devils center Nico Hischier (13) skates with the puck during the second period of their game against the Pittsburgh Penguins at Prudential Center.

“Hallsy hasn’t played in a couple months so we just need some time,” Hischier said. “I try to do my job back there and feed them and create something. But we’re probably not where we want to be right now, but that’s what this is for.”

Hall said he felt his nine-month layoff from the game after Saturday’s scrimmage but he’s not the only player trying to get his skating legs back underneath him. Sure, summer skates can get intense, especially when you’re playing with a big group, but it’s nothing compared to the intensity of a game. It’s mostly skill work and conditioning, so it’s natural to need some time to ease back into the grind.

“Beginning of training camp, you’re a little bit rusty,” Hischier said. “You haven’t played in six months and the whole process is to get you ready for Game 1 of the regular season so you’re not there where you want to be.”

- As for preseason games, Hischier said he’ll play in as he can. He might be a third-year pro but he’s still not enough of a veteran to play the minimum.

- Jack Hughes consistently played on a line with Nikita Gusev and Wayne Simmonds. Ray Shero hinted at the possibility of Simmonds playing with Hughes a few months ago when they signed the veteran right winger.

Mar 2, 2019; Boston, MA, USA; New Jersey Devils center Michael McLeod (41) checks Boston Bruins defenseman Matt Grzelcyk (48) into the boards during the first period at TD Garden.

- Michael McLeod has made it known that he’s pushing hard for a roster spot. New Jersey’s first-round pick in 2016 played 21 games last season and hit his stride toward the end. He realized he needed to use his speed more effectively and he was missing out on scoring opportunities by over-skating and getting out of position. He used the offseason to work with a skating coach to refine his technical skills and learn how to put on the breaks. McLeod thinks he’s now better equipped to get to the net for scoring chances.
Islanders eager to play first preseason game Monday against Flyers

By Andrew Gross
Updated September 15, 2019 6:51 PM

Three days of high-paced practices at Islanders’ training camp has already given coach Barry Trotz a good sense of how hard his players are willing to work and compete. But he needs to see his players in game action for more detailed evaluation purposes.

“What practice doesn’t show you is your game hockey IQ,” Trotz said Sunday in East Meadow. “You just can’t replicate it enough.”

The Islanders open their seven-game preseason schedule on Monday night in Philadelphia and also face the Flyers on Tuesday night at NYCB Live’s Nassau Coliseum. Trotz said he might pare his 70-man training camp roster by an unspecified number after the first two games.

The Islanders did not announce which players would be in Monday’s lineup but Trotz did say he expects his two NHL goalies, Semyon Varlamov and Thomas Greiss, to get a “majority” of the preseason action even with seven goalies in camp. However, Trotz added neither of the veterans will play a full game immediately.

The regular-season opener is Oct. 4 against the Capitals at the Coliseum.

“There’s nothing like a game,” captain Anders Lee said. “No matter what, it’s still going to be quicker than practice. The speed of the game, the intensity level, it’s different in different spots. Here, in practice, guys are going really hard and playing really well. But when you’re going up against a different team in a game, it’s just different. That’s why it’s always nice to have those preseason games to get those bearings.”

“A lot of times in the summer, you’re skating and playing games but it’s beer hockey,” right wing Jordan Eberle added. “No one is really swinging or touching you. You need to get back into the habits of stopping, starting, competing. You just need to get into game shape and the only way to do that is to play in games.”

Neither Cal Clutterbuck, recovering from offseason back surgery, nor first-round pick Simon Holmstrom, coming off ankle soreness, will play on Monday night – Tuesday night is probably out for both as well – but both were encouraged on Sunday.

Holmstrom, the 23rd overall pick in June, joined practice for the first time in training camp after missing last week’s rookie camp with an ankle injury.

Clutterbuck made it through three grueling practices since Friday without any issues.

He believes he’ll be able to see some game time in the preseason as he is on target to be available for the start of the season.

“Just given the way I’ve been able to feel, three consecutive days, it’s a higher load that I’ve had since the end of last year,” Clutterbuck said. “I’ve felt better every day. So that’s an encouraging sign. I think another four, five days of practicing and getting moving and getting to the pace and I should be prepared to get into a couple before the end of preseason.”

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Rookie Simon Holmstrom practices for first time with Islanders

By Andrew Gross

Updated September 15, 2019 8:33 PM

Simon Holmstrom stepped onto the ice with his teammates on Sunday and felt a surge of emotion.

"Just happiness," Holmstrom said. "Really happy to be back and play and do what I love."

The Islanders’ first-round pick (23rd overall) this June rejoined his teammates for the third day of training camp in East Meadow after missing the first two practices and all of last week’s rookie camp because of a sore ankle.

Holmstrom blocked a shot while practicing with HV 71 of the Swedish Hockey League five days before he returned to the U.S. The right wing played one game apiece with the club in each of the last two seasons while battling hip and thumb injuries.

"Yeah, of course, it has been frustrating," Holmstrom said. "I’ve been ready to get back and play. I got a shot on my ankle. Unlucky."

Holmstrom had been skating on his own prior to Sunday and was held out of Saturday’s practice for an extra day as a precaution.

"I listen to them and they listen to me as well," Holmstrom said. "We had a good conversation about it."

Now, Holmstrom can formally begin his push to earn a roster spot. There is fierce competition to make the opening-night roster with 14 forwards back from last season and Oliver Wahlstrom, the 11th overall pick in 2018, vying for a job as well.

The soft-spoken Holmstrom is confident in his game, though.

"Just show how I play, what my game looks like and I hope to make it a bit hard for them," Holmstrom said. "I think (I can) and I hope so."

Isles files

Forward Tom Kuhnhackl remained off the ice for a third straight day with an unspecified issue that coach Barry Trotz has termed “day to day” . . . Sunday’s practices ended with Trotz and the coaching staff doing push-ups on the ice along with the players. "They gave me a number and I did that number plus 50 percent," Trotz said. "I was feeling pretty good. The guys have been doing extra so I did some extra. We had some fun out there today… " Defenseman Mitch Vande Sompel has his left arm in a sling after going down hard in the crease on Friday.
Alexandar Georgiev’s mindset with hyped Rangers goalie lurking

By Brett Cyrgalis

September 15, 2019 | 10:43PM

Alexandar Georgiev is well aware things might change for him this season, as the Rangers’ goaltending situation enters the very early stages of transition. But that doesn’t mean he’s approaching things any differently.

“I’m just looking at it like it’s the same preseason as last year — focus on my game, playing good and showing that I’m a great goalie,” Georgiev told The Post as he is set to be the presumptive backup to 37-year-old Henrik Lundqvist for the second straight season.

Barring a trade of Georgiev — which, if it happens, is more likely to happen later in the season — that would start hyped 23-year-old Russian Igor Shesterkin in AHL Hartford as he adjusts to his first year in North America after leaving the KHL.

“I want to have a really good camp,” Georgiev said, “and better start of the season than last year. That’s my focus.”

Georgiev, 23, came on at the end of last season, when he became the de facto starter soon after the trade deadline. He finished the year with a 2.91 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in 33 games (30 starts). The affable Bulgarian then spent most of the summer in Finland training with two of the best offensive players in the game — Patrik Laine and Mikko Rantanen.

Now, with Shesterkin here, it would be natural to feel some pressure. But that’s not what Georgiev is thinking.

“It’s a long season. You can’t be thinking about what’s going to happen,” Georgiev said. “I can push myself pretty well on my own.”

Shesterkin had a rough practice, first getting barreled over by Connor Brickley, and then, less than a minute later, taking a bit of a shot to the head from Brendan Lemieux — which also seemed to tweak something in Shesterkin’s left leg.

After being slow to get up, Shesterkin shook it off and stayed in.

“He’s well protected, a lot of equipment on, so I wasn’t too worried,” coach David Quinn said.

Defenseman Matt Robertson, a second-round pick (No. 49 overall), tweaked his groin in practice on Saturday and stayed off the ice Sunday. The 18-year-old is considered day-to-day.

Tony DeAngelo missed another day of training camp as the restricted free agent defenseman’s holdout for a new contract continued.
Why maturing Filip Chytil has look of Rangers’ second-line center

By Brett Cyrgalis
September 15, 2019 | 6:33PM

David Quinn saw the change in Filip Chytil right away this summer, something that helps make the 20-year-old a clear-cut favorite to be the Rangers’ second-line center on opening night.

After all the splashy additions this offseason — the signing of Artemi Panarin, the trades for Jacob Trouba and Adam Fox, the pick of Kaapo Kakko with the No. 2-overall selection in June’s draft — it seems like Chytil went somewhat overshadowed. But as training camp continued with three group practices on Sunday at the team’s facility in Tarrytown, the maturation of Chytil now with one season under his belt was unmistakable.

“He looks different this year,” said Quinn, the Rangers’ coach. “He just looks different. He looks a little bit more mature, he looks more confident. There was an awful lot going on for him last year. He’s just carrying himself differently. I think he thinks he belongs.

“If you’re going to be a great player in this league, you’ve got to have some swagger.”

Chytil was always affable as a rookie, but the big Czech smile is now backed up with a far better handle of English. He said he got stronger, adding some bulk to his 6-foot-2, 200-pound frame. That will certainly help during the grind of an 82-game regular season, which wore him down this last year — as it would most 19-year-olds.

“Fil isn’t different [from] a lot of 19-year-olds,” Quinn said. “When you get in this league, I think there is a little bit of trepidation and a little bit of uncertainty. And I think he’s over that.”

Chytil went home for almost all of the summer and returned about a month ago, working with renowned trainer Ben Prentiss in Stamford, Conn. He came into camp knowing that there is an opportunity for him to get more ice time and play in more situations — and he hopes to grab the chance.

“I know when I [got] to the offseason what I had to improve,” Chytil said. “I’m here right now and trying to prove that I can play better than last year, and I’ll be better after the summer.”

In his first year, Chytil bounced from center to wing as Quinn tried to get him on the ice any way he could — other than those times when he was stapled to the bench for learning purposes. But things are now open down the middle behind true No. 1 pivot — and possibly new captain — Mika Zibanejad. And so a lot of the young players are going back to their natural positions at center, including Chytil.

“Center is my natural position, so I like to fight for that spot,” he said. “I’m going to try to be in that spot and play second[-line] center and create a position in the team, play more minutes and be on the ice for important things.”

SEE ALSO

What David Quinn 2.0 must look like for Rangers

Also vying for that spot is Lias Andersson, who was taken at No. 7 in the 2017 draft — 14 spots ahead of Chytil — but spent most of the past year working on his game down at AHL Hartford. Brett Howden, an integral piece in the trade that sent J.T. Miller and Ryan McDonagh to the Lightning, also played 66 games at center for the Rangers last season and will be returning. It seems to have pushed Ryan Strome — going into the final year of his contract — to the wing and leaves little room for Boo Nieves, at least to start.

But at this point in training camp, any sense of a depth chart is still a work in progress.

“I’d like to give these guys some stability and put them in a position,” Quinn said. “But when you look at the league, and you have high-end players, when they get into the league at a young age, they’re all centers.
Jacob Trouba introduces himself to Rangers teammates with hard hits on the ice

By Colin Stephenson
Updated September 15, 2019 8:32 PM

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — On his first day of practice as a Ranger on Saturday, Jacob Trouba introduced himself to a couple of his new teammates on the ice. First, he said hello to Filip Chytil, by dropping him to the ice in a 3-on-3, cross-ice scrimmage. Later, in another drill, he greeted Kaapo Kakko, ushering him heavily into the side boards.

"He comes as advertised," Rangers coach David Quinn said of Trouba Sunday. "He can shoot it; he can pass it; he's got a mean streak to him, and there's really no nonsense to his game. It's no mystery why he's had success in this league."

"I had a long summer and you just don't do that kind of stuff over the summer," Trouba said Sunday of his early physical play. "I don't want to wait till the last week (of training camp) to try to find that part of my game. I want to do it now, and have it. Is that something I'm going to do every day, run around? No. I mean, it comes when it comes. But I kind of like to play hockey in, I guess, a hard fashion."

At the end of last season, when the Rangers finished 20 points out of a playoff spot, Quinn said the biggest thing the team needed to improve was its defensive play. The defense improved immensely when general manager Jeff Gorton traded for Trouba in June, sending defenseman Neal Pionk to Winnipeg in exchange, and returning to the Jets the first-round pick Winnipeg had sent to Broadway in February in the Kevin Hayes deal. The Rangers then signed Trouba, a restricted free agent, to a seven-year, $56 million contract.

"What he's going to do for us — I think all of our 'D' corps in general, is going to feel a little bit better about themselves, because now people are going to be put in position to have success," Quinn said of Trouba's effect on the team. "Whereas, maybe last year we were asking (some defensive) guys to do a little bit too much, now, I think what Trouba gives us is an opportunity to put people in position to succeed. It's amazing what one guy can do for that position."

Trouba, 25, a 6-foot-3, 202-pound, right-handed-shooting defenseman from Rochester, Michigan, scored eight goals, with 42 assists in 82 games for the Jets last season. But he doesn't consider himself an "offensive" defenseman.

"I wouldn't label myself as an offensive guy," he said. "I play what I think is the right way to play defense; the proper way. I don't try to sacrifice any defense for some offense. I'm a defenseman first. I take a lot of pride in my own zone and being hard to play against. And the offensive side, when you get into a play, that just comes along naturally."

Notes & quotes: Rookie goalie Igor Shesterkin got run over on consecutive plays in a full ice, 1-on-1 drill in the middle practice session, first by Connor Brickley, and then by Brendan Lemieux. Shesterkin seemed to take an extra moment to gather himself after the second wipeout, but finished the session. "I like the fact that they're going to the net," Quinn said when asked about it … Brickley, 27, is in camp on a professional tryout (PTO) after finishing last season with the Rangers following a midseason minor league trade in which he came over to Hartford from Nashville's AHL affiliate in Milwaukee. He was called up from Hartford Feb. 15 and played 14 games for the Rangers, scoring one goal with three assists … The players will be split into two groups Monday, with one group practicing in the morning and the other group scrimmaging in the afternoon.
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.”
Three years of modest AHL success later, Ebert tried his hand in the KHL. And then with Orebro in Sweden last year, where he led the club in scoring with 11 goals and 22 assists. “One of the reasons I decided to come here is they were preaching there were a lot of opportunities. There are certainly a lot of spots up for grabs.”

THE RODEWALD AHEAD: Jack Rodewald knows better than to read too much into training camp lines, but he says being placed on a unit with Chris Tierney and Rudolfs Balcers gives him some confidence. “It shows that they trust me with guys like that,” he said. “Tierney has been in the league for awhile and Balcers had a good run last year. I feel like I’m at the same calibre.”

Rodewald, who rather quietly scored 23 goals and 24 assists for Belleville last season — second in points behind Batherson — is battling for a fourth line spot … Neither Filip Chlapik nor Mikkel Boedker will be available for Tuesday’s game due to injuries. Both are expected to be back skating in the next few days. Chlapik left the ice early Saturday and Boedker hasn’t skated yet in training camp due to a hip flexor injury. “He’s certainly behind with the amount of skating and the work the guys put in,” said coach D.J. Smith. “We’re going to have to get him out there and really work him.”

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 09.16.2019

Chabot contract thoughts, Batherson’s bigger body, Ebert returns to North America

Ken Warren
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The Thomas Chabot signing watch could go on for another 12 months, running all the way into next training camp, but at least there’s a couple of new defenceman contract comparables to consider.

Both Charlie McAvoy of the Boston Bruins and Ivan Provorov of the Philadelphia Flyers ended their restricted free agent stalemates in the past few days — imagine that, there were other RFAs other than Mitch Marner — giving fans an idea of what a future Chabot deal could look like.

Or not.

McAvoy ended up signing a three-year contract worth $14.9 million, including $7.3 million in 2021-22. What’s interesting here is that the contract includes a $2.5 million signing bonus for this season and $1 million for next season. McAvoy will also be an RFA again in 2022-23.

The Flyers, on the other hand, bought off some of Provorov’s unrestricted free agent years by inking him to a six-year, $40.5 million contract. The deal includes $12 million in signing bonuses.

If Chabot continues his progression into becoming one of the NHL’s elite defencemen, he would no doubt be in line for a much higher salary cap hit than the $6.75 million to Provorov when he becomes an RFA next summer. Chabot could even be in the $9 million-$10 million ballpark on an extended deal.

However, the bigger issue may be the matter of the signing bonuses, an area where the Senators haven’t been willing to go in recent years.

SIZING UP BATHERSON: It’s safe to say Drake Batherson is growing into the NHL. After adding an inch and 16 pounds in the summer and now standing 6-3 and 2016 pounds, he joked, “I’m probably in a 17-year-old body, but I’m 21.”

Batherson, who is currently auditioning for a second line/third line role, playing with Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Anthony Duclair, was 5-5 and 145 pounds when he was drafted into the QMJHL as a 16-year-old.

NILSSON FOR NFLD? The rosters have yet to be posted, but it appears likely that Anders Nilsson will start in goal for the Senators in Tuesday’s pre-season opener against Toronto in St. John’s. Craig Anderson will start in the Wednesday rematch at Canadian Tire Centre.

Senators coach D.J. Smith says he’s leaving the netminding decisions in the hands of goaltending coach Pierre Groulx, but the expectation is both Nilsson and Anderson will each play two periods.

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: Francois Beauchemin, Michael Brodzinski, Jack Dougherty, Christopher Clapperton and Nathan Todd were assigned to training camp with Belleville of the AHL late Sunday. Adam Capannelli, Maxim Trepanier and Conner McDonald were also released by the Senators.

THE LONG ROAD BACK: The hockey life has given 25-year-old defenceman Nick Ebert quite the global adventure in ups and downs. After discovering a scoring touch in the past two seasons overseas — in Russia in 2017-18 and Sweden last season — he signed a guaranteed $300,000 as an organizational depth defenceman with the Senators.
(He’ll make $700,000 if he plays in the NHL).

Way back in 2010-11, Ebert had an outstanding rookie season with Windsor of the OHL, playing alongside Ryan Ellis. Heading into the 2011-12 season, he was projected as a potential top 10 pick. But when the 2012 draft arrived, he was the 211th and final player chosen, going to the Los Angeles Kings. “I struggled a bit in my draft year and when there are such big expectations and you don’t meet them, people are on you. But I finished out my junior career by winning the OHL title with Guelph (in 2014).”
A rookie no more: As he turns 20, Tkachuk takes on bigger responsibilities

Ken Warren
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Before firmly establishing himself in the NHL last season, Brady Tkachuk needed to take some baby steps, feeling his way through his first training camp.

Not so much this time around.
Tkachuk, who turns 20 Monday, is hoping to become a leader himself.

"I definitely feel better, faster, stronger on my skates and I can create more power," Tkachuk said after putting the finishing touches on Sunday's intrasquad game by scoring on a nifty shootout attempt.

"Last year, there were a bunch of older guys and they helped me out a lot. I was a little bit nervous last year, (about) where I had to be and I didn't want to overstep. I'm a little less nervous this year, but it's still another year to prove yourself."

Tkachuk ended up with 22 goals and 23 assists in 71 games and finished fifth in voting for the Calder Trophy as top NHL rookie. Keep in mind, however, that Tkachuk spent most of the year on a line with Mark Stone, who has a track record of making everyone he plays with pile up the points.

Now it's Tkachuk who will be asked to make those around him better.

"He has big time skill, he holds on to the puck, he's mean, he's just going to get better and better as the season goes on," said coach D.J. Smith.

"He's so competitive and he's so big and strong. We've just got to work on the little things in his game."

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Senators fight now to fend off fatigue later

Ken Warren
Published: September 15, 2019
Updated: September 15, 2019 5:36 PM EDT

Wherever the Ottawa Senators end up in the standings this season, they’re aiming to avoid fading at the finish.

Last season, the Senators allowed 102 goals against in the third period, second worst in the league behind the Florida Panthers. After stage one of training camp, the players believe they’re headed in the right direction to improve those numbers.

“It’s really up-tempo at the practices,” said centre Colin White, who completed a third consecutive day Sunday with Brady Tkachuk and Connor Brown on his wings. “There’s not a lot of time spent on the boards. It’s just grab water and get going again. If we do that all year, we’re going to be a really well-conditioned team.”

Monday will be a welcome day of rest before the Senators hit the exhibition schedule running, with back-to-back games against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The first will be played in St. John’s, Nfld., Tuesday, followed by a rematch Wednesday at the Canadian Tire Centre.

The club reduced its original 63-player roster to 52 late Sunday, but there were no surprises. Goaltenders Mads Sogard (Medicine Hat), Kevin Mandolese (Cape Breton) and forward Jonathan Gruden (London) were sent back to their junior teams.

While the pre-season games will provide a much better indication of who might stay and who might go the rest of the way, coach D.J. Smith says he has already seen a few players stand out with their determination and skill.

Winger Vitaly Abramov, who has played primarily on a line with Alex Formenton and Josh Norris, has been his own energy source. He scored yet again in Sunday’s intrasquad scrimmage, off a pretty feed from the speedy Formenton, raising the most important eyebrows as he battles among the bubble forwards for a spot on the NHL roster.

“He scores every time I watch him play,” said Smith. “He was arguably one of the best, or the best player at the rookie tournament and he just continues to score.

“He works and he works and he works. He’s certainly one of the guys who has put himself in the mix. He works too hard (not to be noticed), he just continues to go, go on. He is one of the guys we talked about going into the year. It’s just a matter of ‘is it now or is it later?’ We’ll see how he does in the exhibition games.”

Abramov, 21, and a former Gatineau Olympiques star, came to the Senators along with Jonathan Davidsson from the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Matt Duchene trade last February.

Ottawa Senators Erik Brannstrom (left) and Ron Hainsey. Wayne Cuddington

One of the other intriguing moves Sunday was the defence pairing of 38-year-old Ron Hainsey and 20-year-old rookie Erik Brannstrom. In the opening two days of camp, Hainsey played on the left side. Sunday, he was on the right side.

“(Hainsey) has played the right with (Toronto’s) Morgan Rielly and Brannstrom has a ton of skill,” said Smith. “You want to give him the more options to jump up in the rush and you can move it better on the left side, in my opinion, so I like him better on that side.”

Funny how things change. It was only a couple of years ago that the Senators enjoyed great success by using their left side defencemen in a more defensive capacity. Under Guy Boucher, left side defencemen, led by Mark Borowiecki, forced the play by stepping up into the neutral zone, freeing up on ice on the right side.
Flyers-sponsored Warriors overcome military disabilities to show their stuff on the ice

by Sam Carchidi,

Give the Flyers credit for sponsoring the Warriors hockey team, which is composed of players who suffered disabilities while in the military.

And give the Warriors credit for participating despite those disabilities—some physical, some emotional.

The Warriors, coached by Brad Marsh, a former Flyer who is the NHL team’s director of community development and president of the alumni association, have a minimum of a 10 percent disability from their days in the military.

"We have several guys who are 80, 90, and 100 percent disabled," said Jim Young, the Warriors’ captain and a Bucks County native who played hockey at Central Bucks East High and Kutztown. "Most of the disabilities we have on the team are more internal than external, but there are plenty of external ones as well. … So if someone is hurting during practice—we have a lot of knee issues, a lot of back issues—we (say), 'Go have a seat. Sit down and take care of it.'"

The Warriors practice every Sunday at the Pennsauken Skate Zone; they are in their first training camp, which is held in Voorhees, and the team will have an exhibition game against the Pittsburgh Warriors at the Wells Fargo Center on Monday at 2:30 p.m.

The team got a jump-start last February when the Flyers and the NHL jointly presented it with a $50,000 check to defray the cost of equipment and ice time.

At a news conference Saturday, Flyers icon Bob Clarke presented Young with his captain’s jersey.

Clarke, the captain of the Flyers’ Stanley Cup champions in 1974 and 1975, looked over the Warriors as he posed with them during a team photo.

"You guys are a lot better looking than the Flyers’ alumni," Clarke cracked.

Young said some of the Warriors are currently playing on the college ranks, and others are just learning the game and have never stepped on the ice before. We really wanted to build ourselves around the idea of inclusion … and teaching them how to play hockey and be ready to play in a game situation.”

Marsh thanked the players for their military service and for “embracing this opportunity” to play hockey. “It’s been wonderful to work with you guys, and the Philadelphia Flyers hockey team is very proud to be associated with you guys.”

Young, whose team will compete in the USA Warrior Classic in Las Vegas from Oct. 3-6, said things have gone full circle for him, noting that the military took him away from hockey, “and now it’s brought me back to the game.”

Kevin Hayes, Frost Line on display as Flyers open exhibition season Monday at home

When the Flyers open their preseason schedule Monday night against the New York Islanders at the new-look Wells Fargo Center, it will be the first time for fans to see center Kevin Hayes – the team’s biggest off-season addition – in orange and black.

There are several questions about the Flyers heading into the opener:

· Will Hayes and linemates James van Riemsdyk and Jake Voracek develop some quick chemistry? This could be the Flyers’ No. 2 line when the season opens Oct. 4 in Prague against Chicago.

· How will the all-rookie Frost Line (Morgan Frost centering Isaac Ratcliffe and Joel Farabee) look against some NHL players? This line was together in rookie camp, but until Sunday’s session at main camp, Farabee had been on the top unit with Sean Couturier and Claude Giroux. Couturier and Giroux will probably sit out the first two exhibition games, new coach Alain Vigneault said.

· Can forwards German Rubtsov and Chris Stewart make good early impressions in an effort to make the team? Rubtsov will center Oskar Lindblom and Stewart. Lindblom had been on right wing early in camp but was shifted back to the left side during Sunday’s practice session in Voorhees.

· How will veteran goalie Brian Elliott look after missing a majority of last season with injuries? He says he is totally healthy. Elliott and Alex Lyon will divide the time Monday. Elliott will start.

· Will Shayne Gostisbehere and newcomer Justin Braun show they work well together as a defensive pairing? The hope is that Braun, a stay-at-home defender acquired from San Jose, will stabilize Gostisbehere’s erratic defensive game.

Vigneault liked the look of the van Riemsdyk-Hayes-Voracek line Sunday.

“I’ve got three guys who have great puck protection and skills,” he said. “I’ve got three guys who have good speed, even though some might say JVR is not the quickest. I would say to you that he skates a lot better than people think.

“I’m really anxious to see how those three are going to do together.”

“Hopefully we get [chemistry] right from the start,” Hayes said.

Van Riemsdyk lauded the way the 6-foot-5 Hayes uses his lengthy reach and hangs onto the puck for a long time, enabling his linemates to get open for a pass in a scoring area.

“He can hold onto the puck for what seems like as long as he wants to before he needs to make a play; he’s hard to get the puck from,” van Riemsdyk said.

As for his expectations in the exhibition opener (NBCSP, WPEN-FM 97.5), Vigneault said he wanted to “see them applying some of the different things we’ve been working on. Today we worked a little bit more on breakouts and a few backchecking drills. Those are all things I expect to see [Monday]. We’ve been working on them with a purpose.”

Breakaways

Vigneault said there was a “strong possibility” Farabee would get a chance to play on a line with Giroux and Couturier in some preseason contests. … Lindblom will move to right wing in some preseason games. … Injured center Nolan Patrick skated before the camp sessions and was at the team’s meeting. He’s also watching video and learning the team’s drills. “He is behind, but he’s not as far behind as someone who’s not physically here at this time,” said Vigneault, a not-too-veiled reference to unsigned right winger Travis Konecny. … The Flyers will spend 25 minutes working on their power play at Monday’s morning
The Flyers' three top prospects are also back together. The trio was impressive during rookie camp and the prospects game.

Shayne Gostisbehere, Justin Braun, Philippe Myers and Samuel Morin are the notable defensemen suiting up Monday. Brian Elliott will start the game in net and be relieved by Alex Lyon.

1. Patrick? Present!

Nolan Patrick missed the first three days of training camp with an upper-body injury. He's considered week to week but it's uncertain when he'll return to practice or if he'll be ready for the regular season.

Patrick, however, has been skating and getting in work before the Flyers take the ice, which the 20-year-old center did again Sunday morning.

Nolan Patrick, still out with upper-body injury and considered week to week, getting work in. pic.twitter.com/P0x1iH54vG8

— Jordan Hall (@JHallNBCS) September 15, 2019

It's never good to miss the beginning of camp or preseason, especially when there's a new head coach implementing systematic changes and competition is ripe for spots.

But Vigneault said Patrick has been very involved, essentially doing everything he can without actually practicing.

"It's unfortunate, but at the same time, he's in all the meetings, he's doing extra on the ice with our skill coach," Vigneault said. "Hopefully this upper-body injury will leave and he'll be back with us. But I think the fact that he's here and he's capable to see the video that we're showing and he knows all the drills that we're doing, he is behind, but he is not as far behind as someone that's not physically here at this time."

Another message to Travis Konecny?

2. Lineup stuff

Here's how the Flyers' forwards will look Monday night:

James van Riemsdyk-Kevin Hayes-Jakub Voracek

Morgan Frost-Gregor Moore-Jean-Sébastien De Carle

Mikhail Vorobyev-Gene�Rubtsov-Chris Stewart

Kyle Criscuolo-Mikhail Vorobyev-Maksim Sushko

The Flyers' top line could be the second unit in the season opener. It has size mixed with skill and playmaking. Hayes (6-5/216) and van Riemsdyk (6-3/212) were with each throughout the first three days of camp, while Voracek (6-2/217) joined them Sunday.

"You've got three guys with great puck protection skills, three guys that have got some good speed," Vigneault said. "Some might say that JVR is not the quickest, I would say to you he skates a lot better than people think.

"Once they're in the offensive zone and they have the puck, it's going to be tough for the other team to get it back. I'm really anxious to see how those three are going to do together."

The Flyers' three top prospects are also back together. The trio was impressive during rookie camp and the prospects game.

Shayne Gostisbehere, Justin Braun, Philippe Myers and Samuel Morin are the notable defensemen suiting up Monday. Brian Elliott will start the game in net and be relieved by Alex Lyon.

3. Giroux-Couturier-Farabee

Vigneault doesn't expect to play Claude Giroux or Sean Couturier in Tuesday's second preseason game, either.

So what will happen with the Giroux-Couturier-Farabee dream line that has had everyone abuzz?

"There's a definite strong possibility after [Tuesday], we will see that young man with those two players," Vigneault said. "They had a real good first couple of days. We decided with management that this is the group we want to go with [Monday]. Then they'll watch the game and probably make other decisions for the next day."

It's good to hear those three will likely get a game together. They were that good during the first two days of camp and the Flyers need to get the best read they can on Farabee during the exhibition slate. Playing him with talent will help.

4. The Konecny situation

The Konecny hiatus will now linger into the preseason schedule. And even if Konecny and the Flyers agree to a contract sometime this week, it would be difficult to throw him into a preseason game with little to no practice.

Which means the 22-year-old could very well miss more than half the preseason given the Flyers play four of their seven exhibition games this upcoming week.

Hard to believe.

With the unknown surrounding Patrick and Konecny, those are two first-round picks, two young forwards that can legitimately make or break the team's depth in 2019-20.

The Flyers, prone to slow starts in years past, are already facing some challenges.

5. That's nuts

Moments after a drill, Carter Hart went down on one knee and was shaken up.

The beloved 21-year-old goalie didn't miss any drills and was able to finish practice.

Phew.

Everything fine?

"I got it right in the nuts," Hart said. "It didn't feel very good."

Ouch.

"I thought maybe they crawled up into my stomach after that," he said.

At least he's OK.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
Flyers, Warriors team up for beautiful salute, beautiful cause

By Jordan Hall September 15, 2019 12:57 PM

VOORHEES, N.J. — It started with a phone call from Rick Stabeno.

"The call was very simple: ‘I'm a Flyers fan, I'm a veteran, I'm a hockey player. I would like to start a team in the Philadelphia area. Can you guys help me?’" former Flyer Brad Marsh said.

It has blossomed into the Flyers Warriors hockey team, dedicated to U.S. Military Veterans with disabilities and a passion to play the sport.

"Dream come true," captain Jim Young said after Flyers legend Bobby Clarke handed him his Warriors jersey Saturday at Skate Zone.

(Jordan Hall/NBC Sports Philadelphia)

Just like the big club, the Warriors are at the practice facility competing in their own training camp, featuring 33 veterans and sponsored by Toyota. Marsh, also the director of Flyers alumni and community development, coaches the team.

Prior to the Flyers' preseason game Monday against the Islanders, the Flyers Warriors will play the Pittsburgh Warriors in an exhibition contest at the Wells Fargo Center, free for all fans to attend. Puck drop is set for 2:30 p.m. and Flyers PA announcer Lou Nolan will announce the game. The Warriors will then compete in the USA Hockey Warrior Classic in Las Vegas, Nevada, next month.

"Thank you for your service and thank you for embracing this opportunity," Marsh said to the Warriors team at Saturday's press conference. "It's been wonderful to work with you guys and the Philadelphia Flyers hockey team is very proud to be associated with you guys."

And Marsh added:

"Rick, thank you for making that first phone call — awesome."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
Erik Gudbranson stands out in just about any room.
After all, at 6-foot-5, he stands above just about anyone else.

But beyond his dimensions, his genial, chatty demeanor stands out in a sport full of cliches.

Gudbranson doesn’t offer “we need to execute better” or “we’ve got to get pucks deep” too often.
If nothing else, he’ll hang back in the Pittsburgh Penguins’ dressing room in Cranberry and chat with reporters while his teammates scurry to the various corners of their training facility to watch a Pittsburgh Steelers game.

“We really liked what he’s brought to our team since he’s been here,” coach Mike Sullivan said. “He’s a high-character kid. He’s a fun guy to be around. He brings a certain swagger to our dressing room that we really like.”

Gudbranson really has liked life in Pittsburgh after arriving at last season’s trade deadline in a deal with the Canucks.

In 19 games with the Penguins, he recorded only two points while primarily being used on a third pairing, but he saw his playing time increase to an average of 18 minutes, 58 seconds per game, nearly a full minute more than what he got in 57 games with the Canucks (17:59).

“I think it was almost a benefit that I didn’t have to think too much when I came in last year and just kind of got thrown into the fire,” said Gudbranson, 27. “Hey, we need points now so you better play well.”

Not that there was much company for this designation, but Gudbranson was also one of the team’s steadiest players during their humiliating sweep at the hands of the New York Islanders in last season’s playoffs.

He scored one of the six goals the Penguins scored against New York goaltender Robin Lehner.

It was a far cry from his three underwhelming seasons with the Vancouver Canucks. After being traded to the Penguins on Feb. 25, Gudbranson was blunt in assessing his existence in Vancouver.

“Honestly, I’m not too proud of it,” he told a TSN radio affiliate. “I don’t think I played very well.”

So what clicked for him in Pittsburgh better than in Vancouver?

“I have no idea,” he said. “It’s really hard to pinpoint. I left what happened in Vancouver in the past and just moved on and tried to be as positive as I could and gain that little bit of confidence every single day, and I ended up feeling really good all season last year, for the last part of it.”

One asset Gudbranson has available to him with the Penguins that he didn’t have in his stops with the Canucks and Panthers is assistant coach Sergei Gonchar, who works on the finer points of the game with the team’s defensemen. Gonchar has helped Gudbranson refine his lengthy reach, a skill coaches in Vancouver did not stress as much.

“(Gonchar is) really, really good,” Gudbranson said. “He takes a very good approach to working with us, any tidbit of information. He was so good (as a player) for so many years. He was never an overly physical guy when it comes to hits and all that kind of stuff. The way he used physicality was very intricate, and I learned quite a few tricks from him. I’m very excited to get a full year with him.”

At his height and weight (217 pounds), it’s easy to assume Gudbranson isn’t quick enough for today’s streamlined NHL. He rejects that contention.

“I think I can skate,” he said. “I think I can move pretty well. It might not look like I’m going too fast because my stride is a bit longer than most guys. But I can definitely get up the ice. It’s a skating man’s game. Every single day here if’s, you’ve got to be able to skate, you’ve got to be able to turn quick and (do a 180-degree turn) and get up the ice and keep up with the play.

“I feel like I can do that. On my end, I’m a little bit more defensive-minded in the sense that I really need to find my space and time to do it. But it’s demanded from us here.”

The demands on Gudbranson, who carries a cap hit of $4 million, might be greater with the benefit of a training camp.

“He’s more familiar with our team. He’s more familiar with his teammates, the coaching staff, with how we’re trying to play,” Sullivan said. “Having spent some time here now and coming to training camp and starting the season with this group will only help.”
Penguins announce lineup for preseason opener

SETH RORABAUGH | Sunday, September 15, 2019 5:08 p.m.

The Pittsburgh Penguins announced their lineup for their preseason opener Monday at Pegula Ice Arena in University Park:

Forwards: Andrew Agozzino, Zach Aston-Reese, Teddy Blueger, Ryan Haggerty, Adam Johnson, Sam Lafferty, Nathan Legare, Sam Miletic, Oula Palve, Samuel Poulin, Bryan Rust, Dominik Simon.

Defensemen: Calen Addison, Kevin Czuczman, Jack Johnson, Pierre-Olivier Joseph, John Marino, Juuso Rikkola, Chad Ruhwedel.

Goaltenders: Casey DeSmith, Tristan Jarry.

The Sabres’ lineup will include:


Defensemen: Rasmus Dahlin, John Gilmour, Brandon Hickey, Henri Jokiharju, Colin Miller, Casey Nelson, Marco Scandella.

Goaltenders: Carter Hutton, Jonas Johansson.

The game is scheduled for 7 p.m. The Penguins will broadcast a video stream of the game on their website within the Pittsburgh television market.

Tribune Review LOADED: 09.16.2019
The Pittsburgh Penguins could enter the season with only three right-handed forwards on their NHL roster.

Nick Bjugstad, Patric Hornqvist and Bryan Rust compose that trio, and through three days of training camp in Cranberry, Bjugstad has been on a line with Hornqvist as well as lefty Jared McCann. Rust has been skating with Teddy Blueger and Adam Johnson.

With the departure of Phil Kessel and the additions of Brandon Tanev and Dominik Kahun, the NHL roster is bloated with southpaws. Of the 32 forwards in camp, only nine are right-handed.

There’s little, if any, concern from management.

"We have guys that are familiar with playing their off sides," coach Mike Sullivan said. "I actually think in today’s game, there's a benefit at both ends of the rink to playing your off side. It's always been conventional wisdom in hockey that if you play your strong side on playing the wing, it helps you in the defensive zone as far as receiving passes and coming out. But if you think about how the game is being played today and how aggressively defensemen pinch down the wall and the pressure on the puck, there’s a lot of wrapped pucks, there’s a lot of rims. So your ability to pull the puck off the boards and be able to make that next play is critically important to your team’s ability to break out of their end.

"A lot of times, you've got to go back and sideways before you can get out because of how aggressively teams pinch. So when wings play on their off side, they're taking that puck on their forehand, not their backhand. I’m trying to best understand how the game is being played and some of the evolutions of the game, and I think that’s one of them. So I do think there is an advantage to playing your offside on both ends of the rink."

Hornqvist led his team to a 4-1 win in Sunday’s scrimmage with two goals, including an empty-netter. His squad also got scores from Oula Palve and Dominik Simon. The losing team’s lone goal was scored by Anthony Angello.
Sidney Crosby on Penguins’ championship window: ‘I don’t think any of us can predict that’

Mike DeFabio:

Trying to define and quantify the Penguins’ “championship window” has been a popular pastime lately, as the players in the core group begin to approach middle age.

Unprompted, Evgeni Malkin, 33, brought up the finite nature of his profession on the first day of Penguins’ training camp and mentioned that, “We have a couple, maybe two, three, four chances to win again.”

Patric Hornqvist, 32, told the Post-Gazette, “I think the window starts for sure to slide a little bit. We’re starting to get older. But at the same time, we still have at least three, four good years in us.”

And coach Mike Sullivan addressed the aging elephant in the room by saying, “They’re older, but they’re certainly not old. That’s a big difference.”

Okay, so we can put that storyline to bed now, right?

Eh, maybe not. On Sunday, following the Penguins’ third training camp practice, Sidney Crosby took his turn addressing the question.

“I don’t think any of us can predict that, you know?” Crosby said. “Every year, there’s so much that happens. Anything can happen through the course of a year. We probably weren’t talking about a championship team in December of ’16, but we found a way to win, right?”

“I think you just approach it a year at a time and you prepare to be at your best. As a team, you want to win the ultimate prize every year, no matter how old you are. I think you approach every year the same. It’s up to everyone else to decide what the window is and speculate on that.”

Get younger. Get faster. Get tougher to play against.

Those were the three main goals when the Penguins began their long offseason.

It remains to be seen how well the Penguins accomplished these goals by acquiring, most notably, Alex Galchenyuk, Brandon Tanev and Dominik Kahun.

But early on in camp it looks like the Penguins also did something especially up front.

Kahun got his first crack at playing on Crosby’s right wing. But he can play every forward position and can play up and down the lineup, like he did in Chicago.

Tanev, a left-handed shooter who signed as a free agent, is playing on his off wing on Malkin’s right. But he can add value as a top-six player or a bottom-six player in a variety of different positions. Galchenyuk played center earlier in his career and is lining up on Malkin’s left wing.

The additions have knocked a handful of veterans down a few lines, including Zach Aston-Reese, Brian Rust and Jared McCann, which only adds to the depth and versatility of the Penguins’ roster.

“I think a lot of guys can play in a lot of different roles, different positions,” Crosby said. “You’ve got guys who played a lot of both center and wing. You know that throughout the year a lot can happen. It’s important to have comfort levels at different positions.”

Travel roster announced

The Penguins announced their travel roster for Monday’s exhibition game at Buffalo. Crosby’s line and Malkin’s line will both be staying in Pittsburgh. The players who will be attending are:

Forwards: Andrew Agozzino, Zach Aston-Reese, Teddy Blueger, Ryan Haggerty, Adam Johnson, Sam Lafferty, Nathan Legare, Sam Miletic, Oula Palve, Samuel Poulin, Brian Rust, Dominik Simon.

Defensemen: Calen Addison, Kevin Czuczman, Jack Johnson, Pierre-Olivier Joseph, John Marino, Juuso Riikola, Chad Ruhwedel.

We are… [playing at] Penn State

Chase Berger was probably at least a little bit disappointed when he learned that he won’t be one of the Penguins prospects traveling to Penn State on Monday.

Berger set a PSU record during his four-year career by playing in 154 games without missing a single one. He has some great memories of playing in State College, but nothing tops his first game as a freshman.

“I remember standing on the blue line and looking up,” Berger said. “They’ve got the student section called the Roar Zone. You’re doing the National Anthem. They’ve all got their jerseys on, American flags. It’s a sight that I have glued in the back of my mind. It’s honestly overwhelming.”

Penn State’s ice hockey program has taken off in just a few short years.

Terrence Pegula, a billionaire hockey fan and PSU alum, donated more than $100 million to build the new ice arena and jump-start the program.

The university subsequently elevated ice hockey from a club sport to a Division I program before the 2012 season and joined the Big Ten Conference before the 2013-14 season.

By the 2016-17 season, the Nittany Lions were ranked No. 1 nationally for the first time in program history, a precipitous climb to the top for a new program.

“Even when I got on campus, I didn’t know how good we’d be,” Berger said. “I think that the culture there is really competitive. Kind of a never-back-down, never intimidated by anyone mentality. I think that’s the reason we’ve come so far, so quick. Now it seems like it’s a hot spot for high school prospects.”

After his four-year career with PSU, during which he racked up 118 points (51 goals and 67 assists), Berger signed with the Penguins as a free agent. The 6-foot, 194-pound center played in six games with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton last year and is likely to begin the season with the AHL club again.

Even though he’s a longshot to make the team, he said he’s approaching this camp with the same mentality he learned in State College.

“I like to play with a chip on my shoulder,” Berger said. “Obviously, there are some unbelievable players that I’m playing against now. I’m just trying to control what I can. I’m not intimidated by anyone, but respect everyone as well.”

Post Gazette LOADED: 09.16.2019
Local kid Sam Lafferty is close to making his Penguins dream come true.

Much more so than a year ago, Sam Lafferty believes he belongs here during his second Penguins training camp, a feeling shared by most young pros. The difference between Lafferty and the other guys, though, is that they didn’t grow up 90 minutes east of PPG Paints Arena and during their formative years as a player cheer for Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the Penguins. So, yeah, it’s understandable the Hollidaysburg native felt a little out of place last September when he first hit the ice with some of his favorite players. This year, Lafferty is still doing some stargazing, watching Crosby the closest. But he is significantly less in awe. And that’s a good thing, because the Penguins could call upon the speedy 24-year-old this season, maybe even right away.

“That would be awesome,” he said. “Since I was a kid, I’ve wanted to play for the Penguins. So it would be a dream come true. But I’ve still got a lot of work left. I’m just going to keep chipping away and the rest will take care of itself.”

That’s what Lafferty has done since joining the American Hockey League club late in the 2017-18 season, just days after he wrapped up a productive college career at Brown. He got a taste of pro hockey that spring. Then, after pinching himself after his first Penguins camp last summer, made his mark in the AHL.

Lafferty, whose primary position is center, settled in as the season went along. The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton coaching staff, then led by Clark Donatelli, put him on the power play and asked him to kill penalties. And in the final few weeks, Lafferty and linemates Sam Miletic and Ryan Haggerty peppered opposing goalies. Lafferty led the AHL club with 14 multi-point games. He finished with 49 points, second on the team. And his 36 assists ranked fourth among AHL rookies.

“I just tried to have a good attitude and work as hard as I can. Fortunately, they gave me some opportunities,” he said. “And I was able to take advantage.”

Well, he didn’t take advantage of them all, something he lamented Sunday.

“I had a lot of chances last year and I wish I would have converted more of those, produced some more goals,” said Lafferty, who tallied 13 in 70 games.

Improving his shot was an emphasis this offseason, along with winning more faceoffs. Training in Arizona, which he has done for a few summers now, he fired puck after puck after puck five days a week. He was shooting for a quicker trigger. He also wanted the release of the puck off his blade to be more deceptive.

Lafferty, a 2014 fourth-round pick, only scored eight goals in his final season at Brown and only hit double digits once. So he may not have as high of a ceiling as Pittsburgh’s top forward prospects. But his role at the annual Prospect Challenge in Buffalo this month said a lot about what the Penguins think about him.

He skated between Samuel Poulin and Nathan Legare on the first line, worked on the top power play and killed penalties, using his wheels to hustle up the ice for an unassisted shorthanded goal. Someone sewed a “C” on his sweater, too.

Now the Penguins are keeping a close eye on Lafferty at training camp.

“He plays with tremendous speed. Has good skill level. Really competes. We like his overall game,” assistant GM Jason Karmanos said last week. “He’ll certainly be trying to earn a spot on the Penguins and we feel like he’s close. If he doesn’t make it, I’d be shocked if he isn’t among the first names for call-ups.”

And if he does make the big club at some point, it will be one heck of a story.

Lafferty was 5 when Mario Lemieux came out of retirement and led the Penguins to the Eastern Conference finals in 2000-01. That high-scoring squad captured his attention. Around the same time, an ice rink was being built down the road.

He got on the ice, got hooked and later starred at Hollidaysburg Area High School. In 2011, Lafferty headed to Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts. The Penguins picked the local kid after he put up 55 points during his final year there.

At Brown, he kept tabs on the Penguins as Crosby and Co. chased Cups.

Now he’s trying to convince them he’s ready to help with that endeavor.

“This year, I’m just a lot more confident,” the 6-foot-1 righty said. “It’s just really fun, honestly, to be around some of these guys. Just watching them, especially Sid and the way he goes about things, I feel like you get so much better.”
Jim Rutherford says Penguins will ‘go through camp’ to pick backup goalie

By Rob Rossi Sep 15, 2019

Casey DeSmith is a classic battler of a goaltender.

Undersized but athletic, he battles to make saves when between the pipes. He also battled his way from Wheeling through Wilkes-Barre/Scranton and into Pittsburgh, where he has started 42 games for the Penguins over the past two seasons.

Battlers aren’t the guys who get to have their cake and eat it, too.

Even at their own wedding.

“I don’t know what it tasted like,” DeSmith said of the cake served at his wedding over the summer.

Too bad, what he described sounded good.

Maybe not “Bryan Rust’s wedding cake good,” which Matt Murray described “as the greatest cake ever.” Still, the DeSmith cakes — there were four versions, including chocolate with raspberry mouse and orange with cream cheese — surely didn’t disappoint.

Alas, DeSmith was too busy on wedding day to have his cake. A piece was frozen for him and his wife to enjoy on their first anniversary.

Sort of fitting, actually.

DeSmith did wait until he was 27 to become a regular in the NHL. A year wait for wedding cake shouldn’t seem too long, right?

A more pressing question is whether DeSmith will make it another few weeks with the Penguins.

Though DeSmith signed a three-year extension — at an agreeable-for-a-backup $1.25 million cap hit — just this past January, general manager Jim Rutherford suggested the Penguins are not locked into anybody for the role of Murray’s backup, a job DeSmith appeared to make his for the foreseeable future last season.

“I think we have to go through camp and see who it is,” Rutherford said at the Lemieux Sports Complex on Saturday afternoon.

That answer had more to do with the Penguins’ salary-cap situation than an organizational assessment of DeSmith, who performed to a .916 save percentage and 2.75 goals-against average in 36 appearances last season. He has stopped 91.7 percent of shots faced over the last two seasons.

The competition to second behind Murray is about only one number, though: $49,125.

That is how much the Penguins are over the NHL’s cap, as tabulated by website Puck Pedia.

Rutherford has said a few times recently that the Penguins “don’t need to make a move” to become cap compliant. He meant a trade, and he is right.

They would slide under — by $625,875, which qualifies as just barely in the NHL — by opening the season with Tristan Jarry as the backup goalie, not DeSmith. That calculation takes into account the Penguins keeping defenseman Juuso Riikola on the 23-man roster, Rutherford said.

Thirteen forwards. Eight defensemen. Two goalies. Do the math.

As they did a few of years ago in the AHL, DeSmith and Jarry are battling for the same spot. Then, it was the No. 1 job with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton. Now, it is a future with the organization.

“If I don’t make a trade, one of them will go on waivers,” Rutherford said of DeSmith or Jarry.

Rutherford said that “possibly” either of those goalies could clear waivers and remain with the Penguins “because of how many free-agent goalies there were this summer, and teams possibly would be set at goalie.” He had no plans to hold his breath, however.

“Based on the calls I’m getting now and the interest I’m getting, I think it would be hard to get one through,” Rutherford said.

Keeping DeSmith and Jarry probably wouldn’t be in the best interest of either goalie. The Penguins are keen on finding starts for Emil Larmi, who is projected to be the backup goalie for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

At the points they are in their respective careers, neither DeSmith nor Jarry would benefit from mentoring Larmi. Rutherford, a longtime NHL goalie before he became a Hockey Hall of Fame GM, would not expect either to excel at the assignment — especially with their history of having competed for spots with the Penguins.

Not that the Penguins would mind keeping either DeSmith or Jarry as a third option at the sport’s most important position. Murray has never played in more than 50 games in a regular season. Also, Games 1 of series on the 2016 and 2017 Cup runs had this breakdown: Murray (4 starts), Marc-Andre Fleury (3 starts) and Jeff Zatkoff (1 start).

Those were the days, eh?

These days, the Penguins are cap strapped. While Rutherford has never been shy about trading one of his better prospects to help improve his club, he finds himself in the position of needing to potentially weaken a position of organizational strength to get the Penguins below the cap.

Not ideal.

Not the only tough cap-related decision he is likely to face over the next year, either.

But unless he does the unexpected — a trade during camp of either defenseman Jack Johnson or forwards Nick Bjugstad or Bryan Rust would certainly qualify — Rutherford faces the likelihood of life without one of the following:

• DeSmith, an emerging backup who is trusted by Sullivan.
• Jarry, a talented prospect only six years removed from being the 44th overall pick in the 2013 NHL draft.

The Penguins open their exhibition schedule Monday night at Penn State University. In that game and the others, all eyes will be on DeSmith or Jarry when either occupies the crease.

Only one can ride the bench behind Murray in Pittsburgh.

That fact in and of itself is nothing new to either goalie. This win-or-go (elsewhere) reality is new to their rivalry.

“They have a significant body of work with the Penguins. We’re all very, very familiar with their respective games,” Sullivan said of DeSmith and Jarry, the latter of whom has started 26 games for the Penguins over the last three seasons.

“But obviously, this is a very important training cap for those guys.”

Cap math favors Jarry. “It’s not really my decision,” he said. “My ultimate goal has always been to be in Pittsburgh.”

As for DeSmith, he said his “mindset is no different, let’s just put it that way.”

At least he holds the security of that contract from last January.

Otherwise, not getting a honeymoon as the Penguins’ backup goalie after not getting a piece of his own wedding cake would be a lot to digest.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Sharks camp: Pete DeBoer says Aaron Dell “needs to deliver”

By CURTIS PASHELKA | PUBLISHED: September 15, 2019 at 2:45 pm | UPDATED: September 15, 2019 at 3:17 PM

SAN JOSE — Sharks goalie Aaron Dell is still projected at the moment to be the backup to Martin Jones this season. There’s little question, though, that Dell needs a return to form after a disappointing year in 2018-19.

Dell, 30, had a 10-8-4 record and a .886 save percentage last season, a considerable drop-off from the numbers he posted the year before when he was 15-5-4 with a .914 save percentage.

Some of that, of course, had to do with the skaters around him and the more wide-open style the Sharks were incorporating. Still, Dell, now in the final year of a two-year contract extension he signed in Feb. 2018, posted consecutive wins in starts just twice all season.

Asked Sunday after the Sharks’ scrimmage if Dell is fighting for a job, coach Pete DeBoer said, “Aaron’s built up enough credibility with me that I know what he can do. Having said that, he needs to deliver. I’m going to give him every opportunity to show that he can get his game back to where I think it belongs. But, like everybody, that leash is only so long.”

DeBoer said the Sharks investigated all aspects of their game in the offseason, as goalie coach Johan Hedberg spent time with both Dell and Jones. Jones’ regular season numbers, as well, dropped off from the year before, although he largely shined in three playoff rounds.

DeBoer said he doesn’t know just yet how much action Jones and Dell will get early in the preseason. The Sharks host Anaheim on Tuesday and fly to Calgary on Wednesday — a good time, it would seem, to get 2018-19 Barracuda goalies Antoine Bibeau and Josef Korenar some work.

DeBoer said the Sharks’ priority is getting Jones ready for the regular season opener Oct. 2 in Las Vegas, and will look to get Dell ready after that. Dell played one half in Sunday’s intra-squad scrimmage, allowing two goals but coming up with a nifty save on a Kevin Labanc shot from close range.

“Last year, one of the disappointing parts for me was I thought there was opportunity for Dell, like he had in the past, to really grab some momentum back for us,” DeBoer said. “Maybe the team was struggling, maybe Jonesy had an off week and in the past, Deller’s always kind of grabbed those opportunities and really run with them.”

“I thought last year that he didn’t seize those opportunities as much. We’ve got to get him ready and be fair to him. But for me, I’m hopeful that he can play quite a few games there because I like the idea of having two fresh guys.”

Big collision

Brenden Dillon added a bit of spice to Sunday’s scrimmage when, just before the first half ended, stood up fellow defensemen Ryan Merkley at the blue line.

Merkley, the Sharks’ first round draft choice in 2018, was at the end of a shift when he carried the puck through the neutral zone and toward the offensive zone. Dillon saw that Merkley’s head was down and, well, instincts just sort of took over.

“For me, no matter who I’m playing with, physicality is going to be one of my things,” Dillon said. “I’m a bigger guy. I think it’s going to help me and Erik (Karlsson) have a little more space for things. At the same time, I pride myself on being able to skate and do some things, and Merkley kind of had his head down there.

“It’s camp for everybody, it doesn’t matter if you’re a first round pick, first camp, whatever it might be.”

Credit to Merkley, though, he still made the pass to Joachim Blichfeld to set up a scoring chance.

“I didn’t even know who it was in the beginning,” Merkley said. “luckily I hit Blichy there. But yeah, it was fun. I enjoy that stuff. It was good.”
Sharks alternate captains' job just as important as Logan Couture's

SAN JOSE - Fans might have been scratching their heads when it was announced ahead of training camp that the Sharks will have four alternate captains this season.

But as head coach Peter DeBoer explained when camp opened up, each player wearing an “A” -- Joe Thornton, Tomas Hertl, Brent Burns, and Erik Karlsson -- brings something different to the table. And their jobs will be just as important as that of newly-appointed captain Logan Couture.

“For me, it's always about the people around the guy wearing the 'C,'” DeBoer said. “They're just as important, and we've got two former captains in there in Jumbo (Joe Thornton) and Erik Karlsson.”

He has a point. San Jose's “A-team” boasts a resume of players with extensive leadership backgrounds. From Thornton's and Karlsson's experiences as being captains to Burns' run as being one of the loudest voices in the Sharks' dressing room. Couture himself said having a group like that around him is a plus.

"I'm lucky here in San Jose," Couture said on Friday, the first day of training camp. "There are a lot of guys who are leaders and a few guys who have been captains in the past. So we've got a great leadership group."

The one alternate captain selection that has garnered the most attention thus far has been Tomas Hertl, who is wearing a letter for the first time in his professional career. Of course, anyone who has kept tabs on the Czech forward during his tenure in teal knows he has developed into a leader over the last couple of seasons, particularly last season when he took rookies Lukas Radil and Radim Simek -- both of whom are older than Hertl -- under his wing.

"I know we've got a lot of leaders here on the team and I'm really happy Pete picked me," Hertl said on Friday, adding that he wants to continue elevating his game after a successful 2018-19 campaign. "I want to prove it, you know? I think I proved it last year but now, it can't just be one year and then I slow down. I want to push myself harder and harder and help the other young guys coming in."

"He's elevated his game and his confidence in demanding and making other people around him better," DeBoer said of Hertl. "That's grown over the four years that I've been here. He was a young kid that was coming off a couple of really tough injuries when I first got here. His development and growth have just been off the charts."

DeBoer also mentioned that San Jose's contingent of leaders backing up Couture expands beyond the four players wearing "A"s.

"We've got a lot of other guys, even (more) than the group who are wearing the letters," DeBoer said, "who are going to be part of our leadership group, including Martin Jones and Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Evander Kane and other guys.

"I feel very fortunate here as a coach with what I've inherited in this organization. I think all of those guys will support Logan in his job."
There aren't a whole lot of mysteries about the Blues in training camp this season, but one of the biggest ones will start to get an answer when the Blues play their first preseason game on Monday in Dallas.

The Blues are wasting no time in getting a look at forward Robby Fabbri, who hasn't played much in the past two seasons because of two knee surgeries. While most of the team's top players will get the night off -- the team's top two offensive lines, top two defensive pairings and top two goalies aren't on the trip -- but it will be the first chance for the team's younger forwards to state their cases.

Other forwards making the trip will be Oskar Sundqvist, Ivan Barbashev, Sammy Blais, Jordan Nolan, Klim Kostin, Mackenzie MacEachern and then some lesser-known names: Michael Vecchione, Mathias Laferriere, Nathan Walker, Ryan Olsen and Austin Poganski.

Joel Edmundson and Robert Bortuzzo will head the defense, along with Derrick Pouliot and Niko Mikkola, two candidates to be the team's eighth defensemen, and and Andreas Borgman, Jake Christensen and Jake Dotchin. Ville Husso and Alex Wilcox, the two goalies ticketed for San Antonio, will share the goaltending duties.

BACK TO JUNIORS

The Blues did their first reduction on the numbers in camp by sending five players back to juniors: goaltender Colten Ellis (Rimouski, QMJHL), defenseman Tyler Tucker (Barrie, OHL) and forwards Nikita Alexandrov (Charlottetown, QMJHL), Jeremy Michel (Val-d'Or, QMJHL), Keenan Washkurak (Mississauga, OHL).

INJURY UPDATE

Forward Jordan Kyrou missed his second day of practice on Sunday as he continued his recovery from offseason surgery on his knee cap but coach Craig Berube said he was expected to return to practice on Monday.

Forward Robert Thomas, recovering from offseason wrist surgery, will join the full team in practice on Monday. He had been working with a small third group that had been working after the majority of the team had practiced.

Alexandrov, who missed the first day of practice with a shoulder injury, practiced again in the third group.
Replacing the Big Rig: Maroon’s impact was felt off the ice as well as on it.

By Jim Thomas St. Louis Post-Dispatch 14 hrs ago 0

Longtime NFL fans might remember the Joe Montana story in Super Bowl XXIII against the Cincinnati Bengals. Montana’s San Francisco 49ers were trailing 16-13 and backed up deep in their territory late in the game.

It was a tense moment and Montana could sense it in the huddle. But then Montana blurted out: “Isn’t that John Candy?”

He had spotted the actor/comedian, now deceased, in the stands. His teammates smiled, relaxed and went on a game-winning touchdown drive.

Well, for Blues rookie Robert Thomas last season, forward Pat Maroon was his Joe Montana. No, Maroon couldn’t throw perfect spirals. But he had a knack for keeping Thomas loose on the ice.

“I guess he found out I played better when I had fun and laughed out there,” Thomas said Saturday as the Blues wrapped up Day 2 of camp. “That was the biggest thing for me. Every time we’d go for a faceoff or something he’d point something out or make a joke.”

Like seeing a spectator in the stands?

“If there was someone wearing something goofy or whatever,” Thomas said. “He’s a big joker. He always had something funny going on. For how old he is, he’s pretty immature.”

Alas, the Maroon comedy show closed after a highly successful Stanley Cup championship run in St. Louis. The player known as the Big Rig has taken his act and his gritty style of play to Tampa Bay after signing a one-year free-agent contract with the Lightning in late August.

“We know what he meant to the city, right?” Blues captain Alex Pietrangelo asked. “Any time you’re the hometown kid playing for your team, playing the way that he did, and scoring the goals that he did for us, and winning. It’s pretty special.”

Like any professional sport in this age of free agency, players come and go. It’s just that this Blues season, Maroon is the only player who left among the 23 who appeared in at least one playoff game.

Maroon forever will be remembered for his double-overtime goal to win Game 7 of the Western Conference semifinals against Dallas. He had a modest 10 goals in the regular season and three in the playoffs. But as his relationship with Thomas attests, Maroon had an impact in many ways on and off the ice.

On a team that in the past could be almost too serious, he provided comic relief at times.

“Yeah, he’s pretty irreplaceable in the room with his antics, and you know, keeping it light,” center Tyler Bozak said. “Every day he puts a smile on your face, makes you laugh.

“It’s a long season. You’re gonna have bad days. There’s days where you’re not gonna want to be at the rink too long. You see him and he gets everyone’s spirits up. Makes you laugh and puts that smile back on your face. You definitely need guys like that.”

Bozak said there are other Blues who can fill that role. But who?

“I’m sure we’ll start spreading it around,” forward Alexander Steen said.

Can the usually intense Steen try his hand at the lighter side?

“Yeah, I’ll try,” he said, smiling.

Then he teased a reporter: “We’ll bring you in a couple times. Work on some jokes.”

Maroon could be a playful agitator on the ice, heckling opponents with the best of them. In turn, opponents were known to call Maroon “Fatty Patty.”

OK, he doesn’t have the, uh, perfect athlete’s physique. But he’s able to poke fun at himself. Maroon’s official athletic brand — BigR7G — even features a “Chubby But Effective” T-shirt.

“I got a few of those,” Bozak said. “I’ve got all his swag. I’ll wear some this year in his honor.”

Besides playing on the same line, Bozak’s locker stall was near Maroon’s, and by season’s end they had become fast friends.

“Every year, it’s just inevitable you’re gonna lose guys,” Bozak said. “You’re gonna lose friends. You’re gonna lose great teammates. That’s just the business side of it. It’s happened to all of us throughout our careers. So you gotta move forward. Obviously, we’re gonna miss him dearly. He’s a really good friend of mine. I got really close to him. I still keep in touch with him all the time.”

The Blues opened camp with the same lines employed in the Cup final against Boston. Just about everything looks the same, except for the Bozak line. There’s no Maroon. And no Thomas at this point as he continues his recovery/rehab from offseason wrist surgery.

The Blues’ 58-man camp roster is divided into three practice groups and Thomas currently is skating with a smaller third group (13 players) that includes mainly players headed back to juniors or ticketed for San Antonio after camp. For now, Bozak’s line includes Sammy Blais and Robby Fabbri.

Eventually Thomas will be back, but the help-wanted sign is out for Maroon’s replacement.

“But we have guys like Fabbs, and then Blais-er and Sanny (Zach Sanford) — many guys that are hungry that there’s a spot open right now,” David Perron said. “And they’re looking forward to be the one that’s stepping up to the plate.”

One last thing. Beyond the comic relief, Maroon also had a more serious side to him when it came to saying what needed to be said. Whether it’s an individual or a shared responsibility, someone has to fill that void as well.

“He was a guy that was always there, saying something,” Ryan O’Reilly said. “Which was huge for our group especially at times when things weren’t going well. So I know definitely I can elevate that part of my game as well and be more vocal.”

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 09.16.2019
Talented Thomas could be Blues' breakout star

2 hrs ago

Benjamin Hochman

Robert Thomas

His name is Robert Thomas. He is the future, earmarked to be the best player on the Blues in, say, 2023. Even though, really, the future was part of the past – he was a key player on last season’s Stanley Cup run. But the future is also the present, and the future is now.

Robert Thomas is no longer a rookie or a teenager or, if this was ever said in any sort of negative tone, just a third-liner. Robert Thomas is the Blues player who will take the biggest strides in this coming season.

“I’ve been pretty lucky my whole career to see some really good young players,” said veteran Tyler Bozak, who centered Thomas’ line last postseason. “In Toronto with (Auston) Matthews and (Mitch) Marner and with Thommer here. It’s fun to see how good these kids are at such a young age.

“And even watching him skate out here now, he even looks like he took another step.”

The Blues returned to practice this weekend, and there was No. 18, no longer 19. Thomas turned 20 in July, though he shared Saturday that guys in the locker room still call him “kid.” Though in hockey terms, he is a kid, considering he might again be the youngest player on St. Louis and because he cannot drink. Well, we know he physically can drink – he famously paraded around the parade with a celebratory beverage brewed locally.

“I think I got a little bit of a pass that day,” he said with his toothy grin. “I’m not going to lie, I was trying to get one of (the police officers) to funnel one in my mouth, but that (idea) got shut down pretty quickly. It was just such an exciting day. It was the coolest thing ever.”

Some people might’ve forgotten about Thomas because he was injured and missed much of the Cup Final against Boston. But for stretches of other series, notably against Dallas, Thomas was perhaps the Blues’ best offensive player. Bozak was the center, but Thomas spearheaded that third line, swerving and maneuvering, making plays and sometimes making plays out of nothing. He was a toe-dragging defenseman-derker. He was, at times, a young Vladimir Tarasenko out there.

And he made one of the biggest plays in Blues history.

Or – he made one of the biggest plays in Blues history happen.

He did the heavy lifting on the famous Patrick Maroon goal. It was the hometown hero who tapped in the Game 7 double-overtime winner in the second round against Dallas, but it was Thomas who orchestrated the whole thing. After Bozak won the face-off from the right dot in the Dallas zone, Thomas controlled the puck from near the half boards. Thomas looked like Isaiah, unleashing the equivalent to a basketball crossover move on John Klingberg. With created space and released a wrister that blistered past goalie Ben Bishop and hit his post. The puck bounced off Bishop’s back and before the goalie could turn around, Maroon had whacked it into the net, sending the Blues into the next round.

“His head for the game is so above and beyond his years,” said Ryan O’Reilly, the postseason hero who won the Conn Smythe Trophy, given to the MVP of the playoffs. “The plays that he makes out there are incredible. He just has a gift for it. And he’s only going to get better from here. It’s crazy too – for him to come in and find a way to make an impact and give us a spark, it’s really amazing to see.”

After his famed wrister, Thomas soon hurt his wrist. He missed much of the Cup Final and had surgery this offseason. He said Saturday that he was able to get to lifting weights quicker than anticipated. He’s currently skating at practice, but Blues officials said they’re taking it easy as they ease him back in games. The Blues have eight – yes, eight – preseason games, before the season-opener on October 2.

“It’s pretty much a day-to-day thing,” Thomas said. “It’s just about making sure everything is healed up before jumping back in there. Obviously I’d love to be fully participating, but that’s the way it goes, and I’ll be good to go soon.”

For the regular season, right?

“You know, you never know,” he said, cautiously. “The way we’re looking at it is just day-to-day. And every day I’m feeling a ton better and we’re going to keep that progress going.”

It’s possible that the winger Thomas will play some center this season. O’Reilly had made that transition in his career – seemed to have worked out – and said that “it’s not as big an adjustment as people think.”

O’Reilly said Thomas’ intellect will be in effect at that position – if Thomas is indeed put in that position. That’s what camp is for. With Maroon now with Tampa Bay, coach Craig Berube will have to decide if he wants to just slip in, say, a Sammy Blais in Maroon’s spot? Or maybe move Thomas to another line … or position.

“That whole line – him, Bozy and Maroon – was just outstanding,” defenseman Carl Gunnarsson said. “They dominated a couple of the series there, a couple of the games. And how he grew during the season, too – it was kind of amazing. For me last year, I watched a lot from the side, and you could just see smaller things that you might not see when you’re on the ice with a guy. He was taking steps all the time, great to see. He minimized all those junior (hockey) mistakes – less turnovers.

“And obviously the way he handles the puck, he was great with that from the start, but he just made the right decisions ALL the time. Down low in the O-zone, how he protected the puck. He’s not the tallest guy, he’s not the biggest guy, but he’s great at twisting and turning and using his body to his advantage – and just coming out with the puck. And – still having that speed.”

Thomas is a hockey rock star. And this summer, he brought the Stanley Cup to meet another rock star.

The Blues’ 20-year-old met the Matchbox 20 lead singer on stage at Stifel Theatre earlier this month.

His name is Robert Thomas.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 09.16.2019
For much of last season, defenseman Carl Gunnarsson might have been the least likely Blue to return for this season. He was a 32-year-old defenseman who was going to be an unrestricted free agent, who played in only 25 games because of a series of wrist injuries and played for a team already deep in defensemen, with some promising youngsters coming up.

"If we look back like six months, I was not in a good spot to sign a new deal and things happened at the end of the season and in the playoffs and that kind of changed the whole mindset of it, Gunnarsson said Saturday. "I didn't expect anything, I was hoping to come back and here we are, two more years, and super excited about it."

What worked is that when Gunnarsson was healthy, he made a good pairing with Alex Pietrangelo — one defenseman who gets into the offense, another that stays at home. He also had one of the big goals of the Stanley Cup Final for the Blues, his overtime tally in Game 2 that evened the series that the Blues won in seven games.

Gunnarsson and the Blues didn't talk about a new contract until the end of the season, and on June 27 — just before the free-agency period was about to begin, he signed a two-year deal, at a salary of $1.75 million per year, down from the $2.9 million he made in his previous three-year contract.

The situation in St. Louis was an incentive to come back.

"We won, we've still got a great team, almost everyone's back, everything, so that's No. 1," he said on the second day of Blues training camp at Centene Community Ice Center in Maryland Heights. "No. 2, I love it in the city. My family likes it here. I don't know. In my head, that was the No. 1 option. First you go and explore that and if it doesn't work out, you move on. I'm just happy it worked out."

NEW LOOK

The Blues, like the rest of the NHL, didn’t have a third jersey last season after the league changed uniform providers. The team unveiled this year’s version on Saturday, a throwback to the ones worn on the road in the 1994-95 and 1997-98 seasons, with a large diagonal red band at the bottom of the jersey and patches with trumpets on each shoulder. It wasn’t universally loved in the day, with red figuring so prominently in the jersey of a team called the Blues.

"Anybody who says he likes the old uniforms is colorblind," Brett Hull said when their replacements were unveiled. "Or they like going to the circus."

But you still see some worn at Blues’ games and retro is in.

The team will wear them on two Thursdays, Nov. 21 vs. Calgary and Feb. 27 vs. the Islanders, and a Tuesday, March 31 vs. Detroit.

"It looks really good," forward David Perron said. "The old school look is awesome."

FOLEY THOUGHTS

Perron was sidelined for 13 months early in his NHL career because of a concussion, so he knows what forward Erik Foley is going through. Foley suffered a concussion last September and still hasn’t been cleared to play.

"It’s extremely hard to hear that," Perron said. "I hope (he gets) well. It doesn’t even matter about hockey. I can get emotional pretty quickly when I talk about head issues. I just wish him well. . . . I know personally when I go through something like that I get in my head and overthink a lot. That’s just hard by itself because you always think about it. How can I get better? Why am I not getting better? It hurts to see that. (He has to) listen to himself. If he’s not feeling good, he’s not feeling good."

NOTES

Jordan Kyrou, recovering from surgery to fix a kneecap injury, didn’t skate on Saturday but Nikita Alexandrov, the team’s first draft pick in
11 observations from the first weekend of the Blues’ training camp

By Jeremy Rutherford Sep 15, 2019

The early impressions of the Blues’ training camp, their first time back on the ice since winning the Stanley Cup in June, have been positive in Craig Berube’s eyes.

“Our pace has been really good for all three practices,” the Blues coach said. “I think we’ve got some good work in. The guys look pretty good.”

But ask Berube about the areas or the players who have stood out, and he’ll tell you to wait until the Blues begin their preseason schedule.

“Yeah, it’s early, you’ve got to look in the games,” he said. “It will be important for a lot of the guys. It’s going to be competitive … see where their competitive level is.”

Well, we don’t have to wait long. After just three days of practice, the club will play its first exhibition game at 7:30 p.m. Monday in Dallas.

In the meantime, The Athletic jotted down our own observations from the first weekend of training camp:

1. Berube making sure Blues don’t get cocky

By now, many fans have probably seen the video that goalie Jordan Binnington posted on Twitter recently of a fan getting out of his car in traffic to meet the goalie.

“I can’t really fly under the radar here, so it’s something to get used to and it comes with the territory,” Binnington said. “You can tell the influence this team has had on the city is very positive and it’s fun to be a part of.”

Binnington isn’t the only Blue who has been the toast of the town, as Vladimir Tarasenko noted having his restaurant tabs paid by strangers this offseason.

“The people are paying for dinners and lunches and they never show up, so we never know who it was,” Tarasenko said. “It’s nice of them to treat us like this.”

Berube doesn’t mind the club feeling appreciated, but on the eve of training camp last Thursday, his message to the players was that it was time to put the Stanley Cup in the past.

“Basically, we’ve got a lot of work to do, that’s the bottom line,” Berube said. “We’ve got to move on from last year. You’ve got to put the work in, and you’ve got to get back going. We can’t sit there, ‘Oh, we’re Stanley Cup champions!’ It’s a tough league. It’s tough to make the playoffs. We’ve got to be ready to go.”

At the very least, the players are saying the right things.

“You’ve got to put it in the rearview mirror,” Alexander Steen said. “From Day 1, we’ve got to start over. We’ve got to redo everything again — build the same structure, the same team camaraderie and all of those selfless things that we were doing last year. The whole group had a genuine happiness for other guys and their success, and how that creates team success, and as we started winning, you could tell that the general joy of coming to the rink and being on the plane together was just enhanced. Before you might not have really known what it’s like to win, but you were really hungry to find out. And now that we’ve done it once, it’s an addictive feeling. You want it again and again and again.”

Said Tarasenko: “Before we won, I think if we won one, it will be enough. But we just want to win again. One is not enough. We will keep doing whatever helps the team to win more Cups. It’s on us, the older players, to tell the guys it’s not done yet.”

Told of Tarasenko’s comment — “one is not enough” — Berube seemed glad to see the point has gotten across.

“Yeah, I think there’s good character and leadership here,” he said. “They’re hungry.”

2. Pietrangelo, Schenn contracts not a distraction — yet

The 2019-20 season is the last on the current contracts of Alex Pietrangelo and Brayden Schenn, and that has been a big storyline at the start of camp.

“I talked to both the players personally about our desire, we’d love to have them here,” Blues general manager Doug Armstrong said. “Both players, you guys will have to confirm it, but I think they want to be here. The way I look at this, to get a deal done, both sides have to be ‘comfortably uncomfortable.’ If only one of us is comfortable and the other one is uncomfortable, the deal won’t get done. But I don’t get too hung up on it. The league moves on. Both those guys are going to be playing in the NHL next year, and the St. Louis Blues are going to have a team next year. Hopefully, we’re all together, but we’ll just let that play itself out.”

Pietrangelo and Schenn confirmed they’d like to be back, but neither wanted to say much about their situations.

“It’s good to hear (about the desire to re-sign them) from the manager or the coaches,” Pietrangelo said. “But my goal is to get ready for the start of the season. The rest of it hopefully takes care of itself.”

The Blues have about $59 million committed to 15 players for the 2020-21 season, according to CapFriendly.com, leaving them with more than $20 million in salary-cap space, depending on where next season’s cap ends up. Is that enough to pay Pietrangelo as much as $8 million-plus per season, and Schenn perhaps $7 million? And will the Blues want to pony up for a 30-year-old Pietrangelo when they have Colton Parayko waiting in the wings?

That will likely weigh more on Pietrangelo — who was drafted by the Blues, married a St. Louisan with whom he has triplet toddlers and is entering his fourth season as the team’s captain — than it will Schenn, who has been traded twice. It’s not a distraction yet for the defenseman, but it could be if the negotiations drag out during the season.

“It’s a situation we’ve both kind of never been in before,” Schenn said. “Whether it gets done tomorrow or July or whatever it may be, I think I’m comfortable with whatever situation moving forward. I don’t want to be a distraction for the team, and I know Petro doesn’t want to be. We enjoy playing here, but we’ll see how it shakes out.”

3. Tarasenko and Thomas OK, but Kyrou still sore

The Blues hope that three players who had offseason surgery will be ready for the start of the regular season, but one of them may not be: Vladimir Tarasenko (knee) and Robert Thomas (wrist) have participated in each of the team’s three practices, but Jordan Kyrou (knee), after skating on the first day of camp, has sat out the past two days.

“Everything’s good,” said Tarasenko, who also suffered a shoulder injury in the playoffs. Thomas is recovering from surgery to repair a torn tendon in his left wrist. He’s been working with the Blues’ third practice group the first few days, but his progress could see him promoted to one of the two regular practice groups Monday.

“I thought he was really good out there today,” Berube said. “That’s the plan (Monday) for him. We’ll see how it goes.”

Kyrou’s status, however, is uncertain after his setback.

“He was a little sore the other day, so hopefully (Monday) he’ll be back on the ice,” Berube said. “But we’ll see how he feels.”

“We think they’ll both be ready for the start of the season; that’s the plan one of them may not be.”

4. Line combinations looking familiar

The Blues allowed Pat Maroon to leave via free agency this season but will return 13 of their top 14 forwards. Through the first few days of camp, the top four lines are almost identical to the way they finished in the Stanley Cup final.

The first, second and fourth lines are the same. The only alteration is Robby Fabbri taking Maroon’s spot on the left side of the third line, and Sammy Blais sliding over to Thomas’ spot.

“I think I go back to Game 7 … there’s really no reason to change the lines right now,” Berube said.
Sanford, who had the Blues’ fourth goal in their 4-1 win over Boston in Game 7, seems to have a hold on a line with Ryan O’Reilly and David Perron.

“I thought that early on in the playoffs, he looked a little bit overwhelmed,” Berube said. “But later on, I thought he was strong, competitive hard, big-body guy. He’s got really good hands, can make plays. He’s a smart player.”

The Blues, though, like what they’ve seen from Fabbri — “He came in great shape,” Berube said — so once Thomas is healthy, there could be a battle among Sanford, Fabbri and Blais for a pair of spots in the lineup.

The fourth line of Ivan Barbashev, Oskar Sundqvist and Steen is back, but don’t forget that MacKenzie MacEachern signed a one-way, $750,000 contract, so he’ll be in the mix, too. He was called up from the American Hockey League last January and played 29 NHL games, but none after March 17.

“It’s an unbelievable lineup again,” MacEachern said. “I don’t want to spend too much time trying to see where I fit in. I just want to go out there and be the best version of myself, and the rest will take care of itself.”

“We’ve got to see how it plays out,” Berube said. “We’ve got some good young players that are probably going to push for more ice time, which is good, they should. We hope that they develop and they earn those spots.

5. O’Reilly still his same old self Neither a Stanley Cup nor a Conn Smythe Trophy nor a Selke Trophy can change O’Reilly’s practice habits.

On Sunday, after an hourlong session, O’Reilly went to an adjacent rink and did a few drills with a group of four camp invitees — Jake Christiansen, Cameron Darcy, Zach Nastasiuk and Evan Polei.

“It was amazing,” said Christiansen, a 20-year-old defenseman, who played the past four seasons with the Everett Silvertips of the Western Hockey League. “I would be doing a shooting drill and he would say, ‘Maybe push the puck this way or pull it in this way’, and then he’d tell me I did a good job. The guys were saying, ‘Oh, that’s so cool that you got to do that.’”

O’Reilly worked with them for about 20 minutes before finally heading to the locker room.

“He’s a really good leader that way,” Berube said. “He doesn’t say a whole lot, but he leads by example.”

6. An extra exhibition game changes things THE PRESEASON BEGINS MONDAY AT 7:30 P.M. IN DALLAS! HERE’S THE ROSTER WE’RE TAKING TO FACE THE STARS. HTTPS://T.CO/PKOEWAMY7F #STLBLUES

—— ST. LOUIS BLUES (@STLOUISBLUES) SEPTEMBER 15, 2019

The Blues’ preseason schedule typically features seven exhibition games, but they have eight on their slate this year.

This extra game will lead to two things: The club will wait longer than usual to make a significant number of cuts, and because of the long Stanley Cup run, the team will monitor the ice time for regulars more closely than in the past.

“That’s something that Craig and I have talked about,” Armstrong said. “We want to make sure that the players are ready for opening night. We’ll have a big camp longer than previous years just because we’re going to want to make sure we have enough bodies to get through those games without taxing guys. I don’t see us cutting down that quick just because of the extra games. But we have to get ready for opening night. It’s coming very quickly and Craig will work with his staff and talk to the veteran players on the number of games they feel are necessary.”

Pietrangelo is entering his 10th full season in the NHL and doesn’t recall the team playing eight preseason games.

“We’ll see how we get through camp here and see how we feel before we decide how many games really we want to play,” he said. “We have a number in mind, but sometimes you feel like you need to play more or play less, just based on how you feel maybe the first game or how you progress through camp.”

The 2018-19 season was a disastrous one for Blues goalie prospect Ville Husso, who struggled early in the year with San Antonio, then suffered a pair of high ankle sprains. The team’s fourth-round pick in 2014 was limited to just 28 games in the AHL.

“Two injuries, I was out for two months, came back and played like four or five games, and injury again and two months out,” said Husso, who eventually joined the Blues as their third goalie for the playoff run. “The last three months when I was up here, that was a good experience for me.”

That gave Husso a bird’s-eye view of Binnington’s magical run. It’s a bit of a stretch, but if Husso, who began the season ahead of Binnington on the depth chart, had played better in the AHL and not gotten injured, that might have been him.

“You always hope that you can be the first guy and get the first NHL game and get the chance, but you need to be happy for other guys, too,” Husso said. “Binner had been here for five or six years, and he got the chance last year and he was outstanding. I’m happy for him; it was a solid year. I think it’s given me more of a boost and I’m hungry right now. I saw that everything is possible.”

Husso is one of two Blues goalies in the lineup Monday against Dallas.

“He’s a good goalie,” Berube said. “I’ve known ‘Hoos’ for quite some time, coached him in Chicago, and he was a real good goalie for us. He’s going to get an opportunity to see how he looks. That’s the plan, he’s going to play games.”

8. New practice facility is spectacular 1ST SESSION DOWN! PIC.TWITTER.COM/ZL7QMT3JAE

—— CENTENE COMMUNITY ICE CENTER (@STLCIC) SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

The Blues’ training camp is taking place at the new Centene Community Ice Center, an $82 million facility in Maryland Heights, Mo. The first practice marked the first time at the rink for some of the players.

“Outstanding!” O’Reilly said. “State of the art, tons of space, great lighting and the ice is awesome. To have two sheets, yeah, I think it’s great for us, we have access to everything we need here.”

The CCIC will have a total of four sheets of ice, including one for the alumni and one outdoors, and it has a built-in training and rehabilitation clinic.

“It’s pretty impressive,” Pietrangelo said. “It speaks volumes from an organization standpoint, taking care of the players and what they want to achieve. This is probably one of the better (NHL practice rinks), so it’s something to be proud of.”

Armstrong said it should also help the Blues attract more free agents.

“When I first got here, the recruiting period, you’d be nervous bringing players into St. Louis,” Armstrong said. “It was 110 degrees, the (Enterprise Center) locker room wasn’t that great, and the (practice facility) wasn’t, either. Now, with the work they’ve done down at Enterprise Center, that locker room is state of the art, and bringing players out here is phenomenal, so this is certainly a great recruiting tool for us.”

9. No shortage of opinions on new commemorative sweaters The Blues unveiled their commemorative sweater on Saturday, and there was certainly a split reaction between those who like the 1990s retro look and those who do not.

“It was what we wore when I first came here to St. Louis in 1994-95, and it will be nice to see them come back,” former Blues defenseman Al Macinnis said. “They are a part of the Blues’ history, and I was proud to wear it.”

The Blues will wear them three times this season: Nov. 21 versus Calgary, Feb. 27 versus the New York Islanders and March 31 versus Detroit. They’ll also continue to wear their powder blue Heritage sweaters for Saturday home games.

10. Foley’s future in doubt There were high hopes for Blues prospect Erik Foley when he was acquired in 2018 in the trade that sent Paul Stastny to Winnipeg for Foley and a first-round pick (Dominik Bokk). But this week, the club confirmed
the 22-year-old who suffered a concussion at the 2018 NHL Prospect
tournament in Traverse City, Mich., failed his physical.

"It certainly doesn't look good for him," Armstrong said. "He hasn't felt
well ever since (the prospect tournament). It's just a slow process, and
he's going to continue to work, but there's actually no light at the end of
the tunnel for it."

11. Saying goodbye to Gloria?

It doesn't sound as if we'll be hearing Laura Branigan’s “Gloria” as much,
if any, in 2019-20. Pietrangelo is one of several Blues who agreed that
it's time to pack away the 1980s hit song that became a phenomenon
during the team’s Cup run.

"I saw some of Petro's words about it, and I agree with him," Tarasenko
said. "That was a cool thing for last year. It will be in our memories, too,
but it's time to move on. I think there's going to be a new song. It's not
about a song. It's about winning more."

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Young Lightning fans get a chance to question the players

By Diana C. Nearhos and Ryan Kolakowski

TAMPA — Braydon Coburn and Tyler Johnson are old hands at news conferences, but they aren’t usually asked for their corniest moments or childhood dream jobs.

This news conference was different: No grownups allowed. The Lightning hosted a kids news conference as part of Fan Fest on Sunday at Amalie Arena.

Some of the team’s youngest fans got a chance to ask the two players anything they wanted.

Johnson said his corniest moments are some of the videos the Lightning films. Coburn said he was into dinosaurs as a kid and wanted to be a paleontologist.

Marcus and Arya Galante, siblings from Tampa, asked questions that got the crowd laughing.

Marcus, 5, asked the players what video games they like to play. Johnson, 29, said he spends his free time playing Fortnite and FIFA. Coburn, 34, dated himself, recalling his time playing NHL ’94 on his Super Nintendo.

Arya, 4, asked how they get dressed by themselves. Arya’s mom, Alitta Galante, quickly stepped in to say her daughter wanted to know how long they take to get their equipment on before games. Alitta said the question was inspired by Marcus, who is in his first year of organized hockey and can take more than 45 minutes to get ready for practices and games.

Coburn said he takes a little longer because he changes his undershirt at each intermission.

Another question was “Did you get good grades in school?” Both players said they were straight-A students. Johnson did say he got grounded once for getting an A-minus. The parents liked that answer.

One boy asked the hardest-hitting question of the afternoon:

“Are you going to win the Stanley Cup?”

Coburn gave the crowd exactly what they wanted to hear: “Is there any doubt?”

Finally, Stamkos

For five years, Makayla Johns, 12, has been coming to Fan Fest, hoping to be in Steven Stamkos’ autograph line. Fans don’t know which players will be at which signing stations until the session starts, so she and her dad have never known whom they’ll get.

Over the years, Makayla has gotten Brian Boyle, J.T. Brown, Anthony Cirelli and Yanni Gourde to sign her Stamkos jersey.

On Sunday, she got Stamkos. The captain signed her jersey and gave her a big high five.

Best kind of consolation prize

Piper and Roman Mattacchione of Riverview went to Fan Fest looking for Nikita Kucherov’s autograph. The siblings, 7 and 9, respectively, found his line and slowly inched their way toward the table.

They made it to second in line when the autograph session ended and Kucherov’s time was up.

The Mattacchiones decided to hang around to see who would be at the table next. They ended up with prime spots to add Andrei Vasilevskiy’s autograph to their sticks and Piper’s jersey.

It’s the little things
Lightning owner Jeff Vinik: ‘I don’t think we can ever get over (the collapse)’

By Diana C. Nearhos
Published Yesterday

TAMPA — Jeff Vinik started by wishing people a Happy New Year.

To the Lightning owner, the start of the season represents a more relevant passage of time than Jan. 1.

He said the offseason always feels too long and the season opener too far away, so this year isn’t any different. But he cited something Victor Hedman said last season about the 2015 Stanley Cup Final loss to Chicago:

“I don’t think we ever get over it,” he said. “It’s tough, we had a really good team. We had a really good opportunity and for whatever reason things didn’t go our way. We’re disappointed by it. We’ll learn from it and hopefully we can have a better outcome.”

Jeff Vinik is part of FBN Partners, a group of local investors who have loaned $15 million to Times Publishing Co., which owns the Tampa Bay Times.

The Lightning didn’t feel a hit business wise from the first-round sweep, according to Vinik. They still expect to sell out, for which he credited the “tremendous” fan base that is so good to the Lightning.

Vinik, who spends about half of his time traveling for business or hockey, sees growth of the brand across the country. He sees three times as many Lightning fans in other cities as he did five years ago.

“People know about the Tampa Bay Lightning,” Vinik said. “They know about the community and the fan support here.”

He feels a great sense of pride in that.

Vinik is looking forward to the Lightning’s trip to Sweden in November, a good chance for the team and for the organization growing its brand.

“Hopefully we’ll have other experiences like that, Mr. Commissioner,” Vinik said leaning into a microphone, “like an outdoor game in the not-too-distant future.”

He’s been trying to bring an outdoor game to Tampa since he bought the Lightning 10 years ago. Dallas will host one this year. Is it encouraging or frustrating to see one in a location outside the north?

“I noticed it,” he said simply.

Vinik also spoke highly of Julien BriseBois in his first year as general manager, saying he couldn’t be more pleased with the job he is doing.

“He’s not Steve Yzerman, he’s different from Steve Yzerman,” Vinik said. “He’s Julien BriseBois. He came in and he’s confident. He knew he wanted to do the job. It’s been seamless.”

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.16.2019
Upgraded Yesterday

There’s still no sign of Brayden Point at Lightning training camp.

Julien BriseBois remains optimistic about signing the restricted free agent center, but the general manager didn’t give a timeline when he expressed that optimism Thursday as camp opened. That might be because the Lightning and Point are still pretty far apart in their negotiations.

Tampa Bay has offered Point a three-year deal with a $5.7 million average value, the Tampa Bay Times confirmed. The offer was first reported by Pierre LeBrun of Canadian TV network TSN and the website the Athletic.

That value is lower than the one that had been thrown around in the offseason, when speculation was in the $8 million range.

It also is smaller than the deal given to the biggest chip to fall off the frozen restricted free agent market so far.

Maple Leafs wing Mitch Marner agreed to a deal of six years at an average value of $10.893 million a year, the team announced late Friday. Now the question: What does that mean for the rest of the market, especially the Lightning and Point?

The Maple Leafs were willing to risk overpaying Marner to get a deal done on the second day of training camp. Last season they had restricted free agent center William Nylander hold out until the December deadline for eligibility to play the rest of the season.

The Lightning haven’t shown that willingness. Their three-year offer to Point fits with their usual modus operandi. Just about every contract a Lightning player has signed coming out of his entry-level deal has been a three-year bridge deal—a contract in which a player agrees to leave money on the table and bet on himself to earn big bucks in his next contract.

Nikita Kucherov signed a three-year bridge deal with an annual average value of $4.7 million in 2016 after holding out through training camp. At the time, that was better than the three-year, $3.3-million-average bridge deals given to Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat in 2014.

The market has again seen an uptick. And Point is in a different place than Kucherov was in 2016.

Three years ago, Kucherov was coming off back-to-back seasons of 65 and 66 points, and was two years away from being a healthy scratch in the playoffs. In his three seasons with the Lightning, Point, 23, has an All-Star Game appearance in 2018 and is coming off his first 40-goal season and a career-high 92 points.

It can be argued that because Point played with Kucherov last season, he benefited from the latter’s playmaking. But of all NHL players with at least 75 shots last season, Point had the second-highest shooting percentage, 21.5.

The league is getting younger, and young stars are demanding a greater share of the money rather than waiting for bigger contracts as veterans. The market is moving away from bridge contracts for star players.

Defenseman Zach Werenski, another of the high-profile restricted free agents this year, signed a three-year, $5-million-average bridge deal with the Blue Jackets on Monday. But Werenski, 22, isn’t in the same stratosphere as Point.

On the other side, it would be a stretch for Point to match Marner’s contract value. The Lightning don’t have that kind of salary cap space. They have about $8.5 million, according to the salary website CapFriendly, and have little flexibility to free up more.

Tampa Bay also isn’t Toronto.
Is it time to put Mikhail Sergachev in Lightning’s top pair with Victor Hedman?

By Joe Smith Sep 15, 2019

BRANDON, Fla. — Mikhail Sergachev is tearing through his travel bucket list.

This summer alone, the Lightning defenseman zipped around the globe in trips with his girlfriend, Liza, to Greece, Paris and the Maldives.

But Sergachev, 21, is focused on another bucket-list item during training camp: earning a top-pairing role with former Norris Trophy winner Victor Hedman.

Coach Jon Cooper said Sergachev will get “ample time” to show he can do it, and the two were paired together for Friday’s first practice at the Ice Sports Forum.

Is Sergachev ready to make the jump to the top pair? He got a pretty strong endorsement from Hedman, who enjoyed playing with the youngster toward the end of last season.

“Absolutely,” Hedman said. “Sergy has taken steps (toward improving) every year. He’s an up-and-coming guy, but he’s making a big impact for us right now, and he’s ready for the ice time. It’s a lot of fun for me to play with him. We complement each other well on the ice. We’ll see how the pairings work out, but if we’re paired together, it’ll be a lot of fun.”

Sergachev entered last year’s training camp believing he was ready for a top-four role, and while he spent most of the season in the third pair with Braydon Coburn, he made significant strides. The Russian’s point totals were down a bit (six goals, 26 assists versus nine goals and 31 assists as a rookie), partly due to less power-play time, but he got better defensively. That’ll be the key for Sergachev in camp, to send a message to his coaches that he can be reliable and consistent in his own end.

Last season, Sergachev earned more trust from the staff, and you could tell by his minutes, which bumped from 15:22 average ice time as a rookie to 17:55. Sergachev’s Corsi-for at five-on-five was actually the best among Lightning defensemen (54.05 percent), ahead of Coburn (52.75 percent) and Hedman (52.46 percent) — that’s with Sergachev playing more five-on-five minutes than both (Sergachev appeared in five more games than Hedman).

“Sergy’s taken positive steps each year,” Cooper said. “People have got to remember how young he was when he first came into the league. He’s still a young kid now. For his development and how far he’s come so far, it’s been awesome to see. And now it’s time to start taking some more steps.

“Every year, his minutes have gotten more, his responsibilities have gotten some more, and he’s found out he can play both the right and left side. Are there going to be opportunities here for him? No question. It’s hard to sit here and say where we’re going to pencil everybody in these exact spots, but there will be ample time for Sergy to get reps with Hedman, and we’ve just got to go from there.”

Sergachev changed his training regimen this summer, going for shorter workouts but at a higher intensity. He was skating more, 4-5 days a week, while focusing on puck-handling, his shot and some one-on-one battles with fellow Russian (and current Capitals defenseman) Dmitry Orlov.

Could Sergachev (98) earn a spot in Tampa Bay’s top pair with former Norris Trophy winner Victor Hedman (77)? (Charles LeClaire / USA Today)

Sergachev also got a confidence boost after the season while playing for Russia in the World Championships. There, he quarterbacked a power-play unit with future Hall of Famers including Evgeni Malkin. He’ll have some competition for power-play minutes with the Lightning, thanks to the acquisition of Kevin Shattenkirk.

“I don’t have a spot on the power play — nobody has a spot in camp,” Sergachev said. “Obviously, (Shattenkirk) is very skilled, has a good shot, is a great player. It’s a sport you’ve got to be better than the other guy to earn the spot — that’s what I’ve got to do.”

Shattenkirk also got reps with Hedman during Friday’s first practice, and there will be plenty of time for the coaching staff to tinker with their blue line. The fact that Sergachev is comfortable and has played well on his right side gives Tampa Bay plenty of options, whether it’s reuniting with Coburn or jumping up with Hedman.

Sergachev and Hedman got a taste of what they could do together for a few weeks at the end of last season, partly due to injuries to Dan Girardi and Anton Stralman.

“It was great,” Sergachev said. “Whenever I messed up or lost the puck, (Hedman) would always recover for me. I tried to do the same for him, but he doesn’t lose the puck a lot. He does a lot of things really, really well. It’s like a partnership, and I tried to be there for him.”

Hedman’s Corsi-for percentage was actually better without Girardi (53.90 versus 51.68). Girardi’s Corsi-for percentage dropped to 47.02 without Hedman, who could carry most partners he’s paired with. When Sergachev was on the right side with Hedman, they were on the ice for 53.32 percent of the shot share. Without Hedman? Sergachev was still on for 53.72 percent, although it’s worth noting that when he was away from Hedman, he was also lower on the depth chart so he faced easier matchups. Still, the Lightning were better with Sergachev on the ice in general, which gives them options.

“We like playing with each other,” Hedman said. “We can read off each other, both can play right side, both can play left side. Our constant movement creates confusion in their zone. We’re pretty good at that. Whenever we get an opportunity to play together, we want to take advantage of that. We’ll see what happens in the future.”

The Lightning have taken some big swings at defensemen over the past year or so, pursuing players like two-time Norris winner Erik Karlsson. They also had interest in Buffalo’s Rasmus Ristolainen. But, at some point, you have to figure out what you have in a budding young star like Sergachev, especially with him becoming a restricted free agent after this season.

“I’m feeling ready,” Sergachev said. “We’ll see how it’s going to go in camp. Hopefully, I’ll find a spot in the top four. It’s a process. You’ve got to earn your spot.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Marner signing’s impact on salary cap means Leafs’ window of contention closing, not opening

CATHAL KELLY
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Now that they’ve outsmarted Mitch Marner into taking a US$11-million per year deal, the Toronto Maple Leafs are collectively paying their top four players about US$40-million annually.

That doesn’t leave much for everyone else, and though they may love the game, they aren’t going to play it for free.

The Boston Bruins have been kicking the Leafs like a can down the playoff road for a few years now. They pay their top quartet about US$28-million, and just convinced defenceman Charlie McAvoy to take a cut-rate bridge deal (US$14.7-million for three years).

Boston has done what Toronto can’t – getting its players to buy into an one-for-all culture rather than a multilevel-marketing operation.

The Tampa Bay Lightning – the most talented, most humiliated and therefore most dangerous team in the NHL – notch in around US$33-million. Through a different route, the Lightning have managed the same thing.

That leaves the Leafs in what’s known around your house as a budget crunch. Except your house isn’t competing for anything.

And when someone comes home to your place and says, “Bad news. We have to get rid of the car,” your kids aren’t going to say, “Mom, dad, we appreciate all you’ve done for this organization, but we’re gonna have to go with a different approach. We wish you all the best of luck with your next family.”

There are two ways of looking at this right now – the Leafs have secured their future; or, the Leafs have bought themselves a golden parachute (since gold has a way of getting you to the ground a lot faster than you’d intended).

That window of contention people are always talking about didn’t just open. Instead, it’s starting to close. The club has this season, and this season only, to prove it has made the right choices.

This is what happens when you take risks, which should always be applauded in sport. But doing the right sports thing is not synonymous with doing the correct thing. You don’t know a right thing is correct until it works out. If it doesn’t, it was wrong by definition.

Signing John Tavares to the biggest contract in club history was the right thing.

The Leafs did all the right things, but in the wrong order. Whether the ordering of it was their choice (it wasn’t), that’s how you end up paying more for your elite talent than any team has before. And it still ends you up in a financial pickle that cannot be solved by saying, “We didn’t want to do it this way.” Try that one at the mortgage department of your bank and see how far it gets you.

Another problem, with creating a situation in which siblings rush to grab as much of mom and dad’s money as possible, is that no one is particularly satisfied after getting what they want.

When he’d done his deal, Marner did the usual “I bleed blue” routine, while also complaining about how hard this all was. He told TSN some kid yelled at him in a park.

This year, with front-loaded bonuses, he’ll make more than anyone in the NHL. Maybe it’s not yet time for him to be writing The Sad Ballad of Mitch Marner.

On the European continent, if you don’t play well, the more unbalanced fans will sneak into the stadium overnight and dig you an imaginary grave, or throw flaming Vespas at you from the stands. North Americans – professional athletes, as well as all the rest of us – have a very poor basis from which to bemoan their lot in life, but it has never stopped them.

Getting the paperwork in order is great and all, but now the Leafs have to win. Not should win, or would love to win, or believe they can win. But must win.

Because if they don’t win – and a single postseason round is no longer the benchmark – the operation begins to blow smoke and pop rivets.

The first thing that will happen is a power struggle within the hierarchy. The coach comes under enormous pressure. The GM only slightly less so. That struggle inevitably begins leaking out into public. It usually ends with someone packing all their stuff into boxes.

Then you have to go out and secure your remaining talent with reduced resources. It’s great that new arrival Tyson Barrie looks like the real deal. It will seem somewhat less so if the Leafs lose again and he then asks for a substantial raise. Getting defencemen under contract will imminently become a crisis for the team.

Goalie Fredrik Andersen is not the best Leaf, but he is the most important. If he gets hurt, the team’s top backup option is three jumbo bags of flour strapped into pads.

Andersen’s going to be looking for a raise in a couple of years and, based on the way Kyle Dubas & Co. have been splashing around cash, he’s unlikely to limit his financial aspiration.

This could conceivably work if the salary cap rises steeply, but that’s a basis for prayer rather than planning.

The worst thing about being short of money (rather than honest-to-God poor, which is a unique hardship) is the worrying.

Worrying is contagious and non-conducive to performance. It brings out the best in some people, but the Leafs – historically and presently – have not yet shown themselves to be those sort of people. Expectations seem to eat them from the inside out.

None of them – up and down the organization, top to bottom – has felt pressure like this before. By April, it will be the weight of the world.

Once there, they probably have to get through the Bruins or the Lightning, and maybe both. Things haven’t got easier since the last time they got this bit wrong, despite the hurrah-ing over recent administrative successes. They’ve got harder.

Then we’ll see if all this money has bought the Leafs something that becomes precious material under extreme stress, or something more brittle.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 09.16.2019
PARADISE, N.L.—Not that the Maple Leafs necessarily had to, but they endeared themselves even more to the people of Newfoundland with a weekend of open practices and autograph sessions, while also availing themselves of the local culture.

Leafs centre Auston Matthews, defenceman Morgan Rielly, forward Tyson Barrie and goalie Frederik Andersen even went to a bar on famed George Street in St. John’s to get themselves “screeched in.” It involves eating bologna, taking a shot of Screech — the local rum — and kissing a cod to become an honourary Newfoundlander in a ceremony presided over by a bartender.

“‘A wave comes over you and you just feel like a Newfie, it’s pretty nice,’ said the Vancouver-born Rielly. ‘They played Irish music, turned the lights down, had a big speech. Then you eat something, take a shot and kiss a cod. We had a fun time. I got my little diploma, so I’ll be hanging on to that.”

Matthews went first.

“That was interesting, for sure,” the American centre said. “I figured I wanted to kiss it first and (Rielly, Andersen and Barrie) could have sloppy seconds.”

Defenceman Barrie seemed the least impressed.

“It’s quite the scene,” he said. “I like rum, and that didn’t taste like rum. And I was last in line to kiss the fish. It felt a bit slobbery by the time it got to me.

“I kind of knew the gig, but I definitely made a mistake going last. Freddie got it before me and it was just all wet. It looked disgusting.”

It was clear that the four had a good time, and others — including coach Mike Babcock — planned to follow suit.

“I’ll get screeched in,” the coach said. “I’m not leaving without it.”

The Leafs have understandably been the talk of the town — which has a loyal fan base, even if the odd Habs and Bruins supporters get in a few chirps — and played tourists. Some took a tour of St. John’s Harbour, climbed Signal Hill, golfed and went for a helicopter tour. On Monday, they’ll visit a local hospital. Alumni were also in town for a charity game including Doug Gilmour, Wendel Clark and Nik Antropov.

On Tuesday, they’ll get down to business with their first exhibition game against the Ottawa Senators at Mile One Centre in St. John’s, after three days of camp at a double rink in Paradise about 20 minutes away.

“Oh my gosh,” said Elizabeth Laurie, deputy mayor of Paradise, when asked what it meant to have the Leafs visit. “To hold an event like this is absolutely amazing. It’s been great, and a great opportunity for our residents and the residents nearby. Everybody loves the Leafs.”

Her 3-year-old daughter Laurie Furlong watched practice with Leafs logos tattooed on her cheeks.

“Her last words last night going to bed were ‘Go Leafs go,’” said Laurie.

Centre John Tavares, a late arrival after the birth of his son, and winger Mitch Marner, who missed the first couple of days until his contract was signed, were greeted like the Beatles when they landed on Saturday.

“It’s amazing to be here,” said Tavares. “The reception with me, Mitch and Kyle (Dubas, the GM) landing here yesterday, just when we stepped off the plane, getting to the hotel, just the way everybody’s been.

“It was all the people working at the airport, all with their Leafs gear, excited to see us. The volunteers driving us back to the hotel. Fans outside the hotel waiting for us. Really excited about Mitch getting signed. An amazing way to start camp off.”

Marn got a nice ovation when he was introduced at the rink. During breaks in practice, he would skate to the boards and pose for selfies with fans.

“It’s a nice feeling in front of this fan base, especially down here, the love for our team is awesome. It’s a lot of fun,” said Marner. “It’s great to be back on the ice.”

One native son who was beside himself was Zach O’Brien, a right winger with the ECHL champion Newfoundland Growlers who earned a camp invite.

“The buzz around the city was crazy, and to see the guys get screeched in, I’m sure (Newfoundlanders) loved that,” said O’Brien. “To be able to come watch a practice, I’m sure everybody had a real good weekend. I never thought I’d be in an NHL camp in my hometown of St. John’s. It’s pretty cool.”

It’s the fifth year in a row that the Leafs have opened camp on the road. Two years in Halifax were followed by two in Niagara-On-The-Lake. This seems bigger than both, with fans lining up overnight to get in and standing-room-only crowds for practices and scrimmages.

“Tremendous part of the country, a community that loves their Leafs, loves their hockey,” said Tavares. “Such a unique place. It’s amazing to experience.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 09.16.2019
PARADISE, N.L.—With the first 22 cuts made and the Maple Leafs down to 54 players in camp, a number of jobs remain up for grabs. Notably, the third pair of defencemen.

The top four are obvious: Morgan Rielly, Cody Ceci, Jake Muzzin and Tyson Barrie. With Travis Dermott (shoulder) rehabbing, the blue line is a mystery, even to coach Mike Babcock.

"I'd love to tell you," he said. "I have no idea. Just keep on watching. No idea. That's the truth."

Among the blue-liners who survived Sunday's cuts: Rasmus Sandin, Timothy Liljegren, Justin Holl, Martin Marincin, Jordan Schmaltz, Ben Harpur, Jesper Lindgren, Kristians Rubins, Kevin Gravel, Joseph Duszak, Mac Hollowell and Teemu Kivihalme. In all, 31 forwards, 17 defencemen and six goalies remain in camp, which switches to Mile One Centre in St. John’s on Monday after three days in neighbouring Paradise.

CHEQUE, PLEASE: The way Mitch Marner's contract works — with $15.3 million in signing bonus and $700,000 in salary this coming season (all dollars U.S.) — means he will be the NHL's highest-paid player at $16 million in total income. Teammate Auston Matthews ($15.2 million in signing bonus, $700,000 in salary) is second.

That raises a dicey question: Who buys the team meal first?

"I don't know," said Marner, while also bringing up the summertime signings of Kasperi Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson. "Kappy and Johnny, they're kind of undercover now. We're going to get them. I guess whoever wants to be the first one. I'm sure it will be both of us offering up in different cities. I'll leave it up to the team to decide where."

KILLING TIME: Matthews and coach Mike Babcock have differing views on why the centre doesn't kill penalties.

"I talked to him about that almost two years ago, and basically his thought was: 'I've never done it and I'm not doing it,'" said Babcock.

"I don’t remember saying that," said Matthews. "I figure, a lot of times, you're out there against four forwards. One of them is usually playing (defence). So you catch a break and maybe isolate the forward, but I guess when you're on the penalty kill you're not really thinking to score. That's probably why I'm not out there."

It does sound as if the first power-play unit will stay out longer.

"We're going to be able to get (Matthews) and Johnny (Tavares) — especially without (Nazem Kadri, traded to Colorado) — more than their fair share," the coach said.

WING MAN: The team practised mostly special teams on Sunday, meaning Kapanen didn't get much time on the left wing with Tavares and Marner. Kapanen will likely play there until Zach Hyman (knee) returns to the lineup.

"It's something I haven't played in a while, but I played there when I was younger and back and forth with the Marlies," said Kapanen. "It's nothing that new to me, but it's something to adjust to and get better at. Obviously when we break out, I'm getting the puck a lot on my backhand and then it's getting it to my forehand. But like I say, it's just hockey and I'll try and figure it out."
PARADISE, N.L.—Maple Leafs centre John Tavares certainly sounds as if he’s embraced the idea of being a father, with all that entails, as much as he likes being a hockey player.

“It’s a very emotional thing and it’s still kicking in, really thinking I’m a dad. It’s been pretty cool, though,” said Tavares, who joined the team for his first workout Sunday after some extra time back home with his wife and newborn son.

“I think mentally it will be just an amazing thing to be a father and to go home and have (Jace) and my wife (Aryne) to look forward to, and just cherish those times and those memories. That’s what life is all about.”

As he looks around the locker room, the soon to be 29-year-old Tavares is one of the older Leafs, meaning there aren’t a lot of teammates who can offer guidance on the trials and tribulations of being a dad.

“We have a pretty young team,” said Tavares. “I’ve known (Jason Spezza) for a long time and he’s got four girls, so he has his hands full every day. I talk to him a lot. And then seeing (Jake Muzzin) going through it at the end of last season, a baby is pretty close. It’s nice to have a couple guys for sure.”

No question life with a newborn means change, but for the routine of an athlete — where sleep is important and travel comes with the job description — the challenges can be difficult. Tavares said his family and in-laws have been a big help. “From my mother-in-law to my parents stopping in a couple times, siblings and what not, it’s pretty incredible. It’s a very emotional thing.”

Spezza said the reality for players is that the mother does most of the work early on.

“You have to focus at the rink, then you get home and enjoy,” said Spezza. “It’s pretty special to have your first baby, soak it in. You create energy from it. (Tavares) is a good pro. He’ll be fine.”

As teammates offered congratulations to the famously uber-focused Tavares, Mitch Marner had an interesting thought.

“(Tavares) might be a little looser now that he’s got a kid, which could be nice in the locker room,” said Marner.

Coach Mike Babcock shot that down right away.

“I think he’s as loose as can be,” said the coach. “He’s serious about his craft, very professional, very driven, knows what he wants, not letting people get in his way. But he sure is unbelievable with his teammates. A good person, knows what’s right and wrong.”

On that front, Tavares knew that staying with his wife and their newborn son was more important than a couple of days of camp. To the organization’s credit, they let him.

“I really appreciate the team and management giving me the first couple days of camp to really make sure my wife and son were recovering well, doing good … and for me, feeling good about that (before) coming out here,” said Tavares. “I really appreciate that from the organization and I just tried to take advantage of it — tried to soak in every minute, every little thing that he does. It’s pretty incredible.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 09.16.2019
The optics are terrible.

Even the NHL Players' Association, an organization that could never be accused of being overly sensitive to how it is perceived by the hockey public, must see that.

On Monday, the players' union will announce whether it plans to exercise an option to opt out of the current collective bargaining agreement a year from now, which would be two years before the CBA actually expires. In theory, if the union does exercise that option, the NHL could be in the throes of another labour shutdown a year from now.

Oh joy,

Conversely, if the union doesn’t opt out next September, the earliest NHL fans would have to deal with a lockout or strike would be 2022.

In terms of strategy or hockey economics, this is a tricky decision. It always is for unions in pro sports as they calculate their relationships with owners. The financial stakes are becoming greater for every sport, and hockey is no exception.

In terms of public relations, however, this is a no-brainer.

This is especially true given that 10 days ago, the league announced it wouldn’t exercise its option to cut the CBA short, making it clear owners want no part of labour problems any earlier than 2022.

“Based on the current state of the game and the business of the game, the NHL believes it is essential to continue building on the momentum we have created,” said NHL commissioner Gary Bettman in a statement.

That put the onus strictly on the NHLPA to either follow suit or take sole responsibility for bringing about a labour squabble more quickly than is currently necessary. When you think about it, the NHL’s ability to make its decision first certainly put Bettman and Co. in an advantageous position.

Meanwhile, recent contracts signed by Mitch Marner, Ivan Provorov and Zach Werenski have highlighted once more just how wealthy marquee NHLers are becoming. You could argue, one supposes, that the players deserve more than 50 per cent of the pie, or that there shouldn’t be a salary cap at all. But you can’t argue that salaries and benefits haven’t all continued to improve since the last deal was negotiated in 2013.

Marner, just 22 years old, is the proud new owner of a $65-million contract extension (all dollars U.S.) after only three years in the NHL. He hasn’t won a Stanley Cup or a major individual trophy, but $65 million was the number.

Provorov got $40.5 million for six years. Werenski got $15 million for only three years. These are players who are still establishing their value in the NHL, and they are being handsomely rewarded. You can also expect another flurry of contracts for similarly aged players to be signed in the next few weeks now that Marner is under contract.

NHL owners are obviously also doing very well or they would want to reopen the CBA next year. Las Vegas brought in $500 million as an expansion team, and Seattle is bringing in another $650 million to be the NHL’s 32nd team. The players get none of these monies, so sure, there are undoubtedly reasons the union might want to negotiate a better deal.

But not now. Not unless they want their players despised by the hockey public, because if the players do reopen and there is a work stoppage in September 2020, it will be viewed as having been caused by the players, fairly or not.

Now maybe the NHLPA doesn’t care about this. Maybe Don Fehr’s been in the pro sports business long enough to understand that taking fan interests into consideration just can’t be part of the calculation by unions or owners. We do know the NHLPA is an organization that struggles with optics. It once vowed never to accept a salary cap, then caved. It complained about players not being permitted to compete in the 2018 Winter Olympics, but didn’t bother to include that guarantee in the 2013 contract.

The union frequently comes under fire for defending players who commit grievous on-ice crimes, and never standing up for the victims of those actions. Think Todd Bertuzzi and Steve Moore. The union also went to bat for Slava Voynov, who had been booted out of the NHL after domestic assault allegations surfaced, and was subsequently suspended for the 2019-20 season by the league.

Sometimes it’s like this union goes out of its way to look bad.

So who knows what Fehr will announce on Monday, but it’s clear that if the union has any interest whatsoever in currying favour with hockey fans, Fehr won’t announce that the NHLPA wants out of the current CBA early.

Is the current deal working? Only the two sides really know as they divvy up billions of dollars. The players hate escrow, and Jonathan Toews has a valid point about signed contracts not really being honoured when the league claws back a percentage every season. But escrow is simply a way of making sure the league’s revenues are split 50/50, and when they aren’t escrow is the mechanism that makes up the difference to either side.

The salary cap has gone up by more than 20 per cent over the life of this contract. The 200th-highest-paid player in the league makes $4.875 million, more than the entire payroll of some teams back in 1993 when Bettman took over as commissioner.

The league has grown dramatically, the owners have gotten richer and so have the players.

The possibility of new revenue streams, including those from gambling, could change the picture significantly, and owners will eventually have to fight with players over that.

But not now. Owners have made it clear they prefer labour peace until 2022, and players need to be smart and go along with that. Even if they have to grit their teeth to do it.
PARADISE, NL — Ilya Mikheyev hasn’t said much at training camp, but Maple Leafs sure talk a lot about him.

The young Russian free agent whom coach Mike Babcock keeps hinting will make an impact this year, has not yet given a full interview because of his lack of English. But the left winger must be excited at Babcock’s early plan to use him with centre Alexander Kerfoot in a potential third attack chain.

Kasperi Kapanen would be on the right, but is currently on trial up top with John Tavares and Mitch Marner, playing on his opposite wing.

“That could be a real good line for us, that’s what we’d like,” Babcock said of Mikheyev-Kerfoot-Kapanen, while acknowledging Zach Hyman is projected to miss “14 or 15 games”.

The 6-foot-2 undrafted Mikheyev improved his KHL goal total every year from 8 to 12 to 19 to 23 with Omsk Avangard before taking the Leafs offer in free agency. Jason Spezza befriended him from early August at the club’s training facility.

“I’ve seen different Russians come over at different times and it can be difficult for them,” said Spezza. “Ilya seems really eager to learn, has a great attitude. He got here early which is important because the language can be a barrier. He’s older, too, 24, a step ahead of younger guys who come in from Europe.

“There will be an adjustment. Things happen quicker out there than on the big ice.”

Nic Petain is on the left side with Kerfoot and Mikheyev so far.

MARNER POWER

Three days into camp, Babcock is already in power play tinkering mode.

Most interesting is shifting Mitch Marner to the left side, an idea that likely sprang from new assistant coach Paul McFarland, who ran a pretty good group in Florida. Marner cautioned that he still hasn’t practiced with the projected No. 1 unit, namely centre Auston Matthews.

“It’s a feel-out moment to see what Paul wants to do with us,” said Marner, whose presence on the right was seen as too predictable for rivals to thwart by the end of the season. “I’ll just try and adjust quicker, become more of a shooter.”

CUTS IN CLASS SIZE

Sunday afternoon was the Leafs’ last day in Paradise after three days of workouts and scrimmage games, followed by the first round of cuts from the 75 players in attendance.

The first amalgamation of the Marlies, to be coached by the Leafs player development staff, will include Matthew Bradley, Justin Brazeau, Giorgio Estephan, Brady Ferguson, Alex Gudbranson, Ryan Johnston, Michael Kapla, Aaron Luchuk, Tanner MacMaster, Zach O’Brien, Scott Pooley, Marcus Power, Sergei Sapego and goalies Ian Scott and Maksim Zhukov. The Marlies’ camp under coach Sheldon Keefe begins Sept. 24.

Seven Leafs went back to junior clubs, including 2019 first pick Nick Robertson who returned to Peterborough. Also sent back were Mikhail Abramov (Victoriaville), Semyon Der-Aruchintsev (Peterborough), Filip Kral (Spokane), Kalle Loponen (Sudbury), Marc-Antoine Pepin (Shawinigan) and Riley Stotts (Calgary).

LOOSE LEAFS

Jiminy Crickets, the pre-game pep talk before Sunday night’s Leaf alumni game against a team of local Canadian Forces personnel at Mile One Centre was delivered by 95-year-old former analyst Howie Meeker. The oldest living Leaf was an inspired choice, having lived on The Rock for many years before moving to B.C, and serving in the Canadian army in World War II … With a new $65 million contract in his hockey pants, Marner was asked if he was footing the bill for a players’ dinner at some point. “I don’t know,” he said. “Kappy and Johnny (Andreas Johnsson), they’re both undercover right now (new contracts both signed the summer). We’re going to get them going, too” … Spezza continues to dwell on how important this first season with the Leafs is, given the 36-year-old’s shrinking window to win a Cup. “That’s why I’m still going. When you’ve played this long and haven’t won, it’s something you definitely think about all the time” … Tyson Barrie and Frederik Andersen were among the Leafs getting ‘Screeched In’ with Auston Matthews on Saturday night: “Quite the scene,” Barrie said. “I like rum but that (Screech) didn’t taste good at all. I was last in line to kiss the fish so it was a bit slobbery when I got around to it.”
PARADISE, NL — Sunday morning in Newfoundland had a new Maple Leafs line comprised of a new left winger, a new father and a new multimillionaire.

About a thousand locals had the first look at Kasperi Kapanen, John Tavares and Mitch Marner before their NHL debut, perhaps in Tuesday’s exhibition at Mile One Centre in St. John’s or a night later against the same Ottawa Senators. After a whirlwind few days of life-changing events in Toronto, there was a huge ovation when the re-signed Marner and proud papa Tavares made their first appearance on the ice. They quickly got down to business with Kapanen, who gets the first chance to plug in at left wing in place of the injured Zach Hyman.

"I’ll let them do all the nice things and I’ll do the dirty work," Kapanen cackled. "It will be skating, getting the puck to them and standing in front of the net.

"(Left) is something I haven’t played in awhile, but I was there when I was younger and back and forth with the Marlies. It’s nothing that new to me, but something to adjust to and get better at. Obviously, when we break out I’m getting the puck a lot on my back hand, but like I say, it’s just hockey and I’ll try and figure it out."

As if by magic, a sea of Marner sweaters were visible in the crowd after three days of Auston Matthews’ prominence. Marner and Tavares hooked up to beat Frederik Andersen on the first drill and just like that came the Marner celebratory fly past of fans. A few minutes later during a break, he came to the glass to pose for selfies with some young kids and the off-ice animosity of a year-long contract dispute started to fade.

Marner signed Friday night for $65 million US over six years and was on the same plane here from Toronto with Tavares on Saturday.

"It was pretty cool," Marner said. "When we got off the plane, people (in Leafs colours) were waiting for us. It’s not close to Toronto so you see how many fans you have world wide."

Marner insisted his conditioning was fine after skating parallel to the Leafs summer workouts with other NHLers in the GTA. Marner and Kapanen horsed around in practice, Marner given the celebrity status of leading the team stretch.

"It should be a lot of fun," Marner said of his new line. "(Kapanen) has a lot of speed. Either of us, when we don’t have the puck, we’re going to try and find some open space for each other."

Marner and Tavares are already established, a team-high 94 points and 47 goals, respectively. Tavares thanked the team for allowing him a few days at home with his wife and new son, Jace, and came here with plenty of adrenaline.

"It’s just great to have everyone in," he said of Marner’s signing coinciding with his arrival. "We’ve talked about Mitch’s importance to our team on and off the ice. It’s just about getting ready for the season, focusing on the long journey ahead and building towards that. Now the work starts."

Kapanen, who has been in the shadow of Marner and William Nylander on the right side, is ready to rock on the left.

"Everybody knows what type of players Mitchy and Johnny are. It’s easy playing with them. We’re just getting a little chemistry going."

PROUD PAPA JOHN

The first thing John Tavares realized of his split role as father/NHLer is most Maple Leafs teammates will be zero help providing baby-rearing tips.

"We have a pretty young team," laughed Tavares, whose wife Aryne gave birth to son Jace on Wednesday. "But I’ve known Jason Spezza a long time, he has four girls and has his hands full every day. I talk to him a lot and seeing Jake Muzzin go through it at the end of last season (also a first-time parent), it’s nice to have a couple of guys for sure."

The 28-year-old Tavares called it "a hell of a few days", with Jace’s birth, the start of camp and linemate Mitch Marner signing a new deal. Both men jump on a plane Saturday for a three-hour flight to join the Leafs in Atlantic Canada.

"It’s a very emotional thing, really thinking I’m a dad, and it’s still kicking in," Tavares said. "Mentally it will just be an amazing thing to be a father, to go home and have him and my wife to look forward to and just cherish those times and those memories."
Harper is one of many battling for one of the two available spots on the Leafs defence. He has size and penalty-killing ability. Whether he has enough to beat out a group of six fighting for two places will be determined by the end of camp. But as many coaches have said — you can’t coach size. And the Leafs don’t have a lot of it on defence.

“You get here (rink) early in the morning and they’re people who are lined up to get in. I’m told some of them were sleeping overnight just to get in. It’s pretty crazy, really. Makes you realize just how big the Leafs’ following is and how exciting this for a community like this one.

“This is pretty far away from the rest of Canada and I guess this is their opportunity to see the NHL in some way. You know, I played my first ever exhibition game here against the Islanders. But it was nothing like this.

“This is Leafs country.”

The three little guys in Leaf jerseys, no more than eight years old, were banging on the glass, screaming loudly, jumping up and down, trying anything to get Mitch Marner’s attention.

The rink was jam-packed with people, not a seat to be had on this Sunday morning as Marner returned to the Leafs on the ice with his first practice of training camp.

Marner was skating on a line with John Tavares, at camp for his first practice after becoming a father for the first time, and with a new winger, Kasperi Kapanen, taking the place of the injured Zach Hyman. And the crowd was clearly inspired with Marner’s appearance, after him being signed to his $65-million US, six-year contract.

And at the end of the drill, Marner made his way to the glass, made a face and posed for a selfie with the three little boys. It was an old kid and three young kids having some fun.

“That’s a $65-million photo,” one of the dad’s from the stands yelled. Pretty much everybody around laughed. Marner continued to smile.

“Kids love him,” said Tavares, who is in St. John’s for the second time in his life. “They really do. Everybody saw Mitch today, the crowd was going nuts. That’s pretty special.”

An American has never been captain of the Maple Leafs. The people of St. John’s are voting for Matthews to be the next Leafs captain, if only by their actions since training camp began.

On Sunday, after the parking lot at the Paradise Double Ice Complex was cordoned off by barriers to set up for an afternoon of autograph signing, the place almost exploded when Matthews walked through the barriers and towards the stage.

The cheers went on and on and on. One young man held up a sign: “When I grow up I want to be Auston Matthews.”

Another held up a sign: “Welcome to the Rock, Auston Matthews.”

Matthews walked to the stage and after answering a few softball questions by the host, he took the microphone himself and talked about how great this camp visit has been. Then he gave away one of his jerseys, to a young fellow sitting on his father’s shoulders. The gesture was a lot like this training camp in Paradise — pretty close to enlightening, pretty close to perfect.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 09.16.2019
PARADISE, Newfoundland — The initial few days of any NHL training camp are often chaotic, with so many players, new locations and unfamiliar team staff.

The Maple Leafs’ first few skates here were even more scattered given their injuries (Zach Hyman and Travis Dermott) and absences (John Tavares for the birth of his son and Mitch Marner with the tail end of a contract stalemate), meaning there was a bit of a line-blender effect.

On Sunday, however, we started to get a closer look at what Mike Babcock and his new assistant coaches are piecing together, including a little special teams.

With the caveat that it’s very early, here are a few thoughts on the Leafs’ early progress in camp.

1. What the lines say about who’s in and who’s out

Even though it’s Sept. 15 and a few days into camp, you can still get a sense as a player what your chances are based on whom you’re lining up with.

If it’s Auston Matthews, that’s probably a pretty good sign you’re getting the full three weeks and preseason games.

If it’s someone like Marcus Power — the undrafted local kid who had a big year with his hometown Growlers last season after four years of university hockey — probably less so.

The lines have been a little scattered through three on-ice days, but these were most of the combinations with NHLers on them on Sunday (the locks are in bold):

- Johnsson – Matthews – Nylander
- Kapanen – Tavares – Marner
- Mikeyev – Kerfoot – Petan
- Moore – Spezza – Aberg
- Timashov – Goat – Korshkov
- Marchment – Brooks – Bracco
- Conrad – Shore – Read

Kenny Agostino also spent some time with Kalle Kossila at centre in Group 1. That accounts for 23 of the 42 forwards skating in camp and most of those who will survive the first big cuts as they get down to two groups of players before Tuesday’s first exhibition game here against Ron Hainsey’s Ottawa Senators.

Barring something unexpected, the top two lines are probably what we’ll see on the opening night of the regular season. KHLer Ilya Mikeyev — or “Mickey,” as Babcock calls him — and Nic Petan getting long looks with projected 3C Alexander Kerfoot bodes really well for them making the team, too.

Jason Spezza obviously isn’t going anywhere and is ideal as a 4C and PP2 quarterback. Trevor Moore will almost certainly make the team after a strong audition last season.

So that puts Pontus Aberg in a decent spot for consideration, as the staff gets a handle on some of the more unfamiliar newcomers.

Surprisingly, however, Babcock reserved some of his nicest comments this weekend for Yegor Korshkov, a controversial second-round pick from 2016.

“I thought Korshkov had a real good day (Saturday),” he said. “A big man, makes plays. What slows him down right now is you’ve got to have him understand the language. Mikeyev’s another big guy who can really do it. But Kappy will get first kick at the can there (on left wing with Tavares and Marner). We’ll take a look and see how that looks.”

His Jeremy Bracco comments were less effusive, even though Kapanen moving to the left side seems to open a lane for the Marlies’ scoring leader in a point-producing role.

“I’ve had lots of conversations with Braccs,” Babcock said. “Braccs has got an unbelievable skill set, the things he can do with the puck. It’s what he’s got to do without the puck and what he’s got to do in his own zone that are in the way of him being an NHL player. We always talk — are you on the four-year plan or the five-year plan?

“For most kids coming out of junior, it’s a five-year plan. It’s that hard to play in the league. But I think he’s taken huge strides. He’s a good kid. He wants to be a player. He’s tried to work hard at it.”

This will be Bracco’s fifth season since his draft year and his third as a full-time pro. Time’s not running out by any means, and on a weaker NHL club he probably makes it.

But he’s going to have to have a great camp to convince Babcock he’s ready.

(Billy Hurst / USA Today)

2. What the D pairs say about who’s in and who’s out

Similarly, the Leafs’ top two D pairs are completely locked in, right from day one of camp.

Everything else is up in the air.

Here’s the list of what the coaching staff has been working out so far:

- Muzzin – Barrie
- Rielly – Ceci
- Sandin – Schmaltz
- Harpur – Marincin
- Gravel – Holl
- Kivihalme – Liljegren

That’s 12 of the 23 defencemen in camp, and all of the ones who have a hope of playing in the NHL in the near future. Expect 14 or 15 to get a longer look, with maybe a couple of the young Marlies like Joseph Duszak or Mac Hollowell getting into a preseason game or two.

The Leafs are likely going to carry seven defencemen out of camp, so that could mean keeping one of these early camp pairings plus a veteran who will sit in the press box. Sandin-Schmaltz catches my eye given the skill level involved, but the more likely two to stick could be Harpur-Marincin as a gangly, low-minute, PK-heavy third pair.

Kivihalme had a strong showing at prospects camp last week, but I expect they’ll want him to start in the AHL, potentially on a top pair with Liljegren. Gravel and Holl are probably the wild cards at this point, depending on what kind of camp Sandin has.

It really does feel like any of the six or seven defencemen after the big four could get one of the final three spots.

“I’d love to tell you I do,” Babcock said when asked whether he had any idea what his third pair could look like this season. “I’m just going to keep on watching. No idea. That’s the truth. I know who four (of my D) are. But you guys do, too.”

3. Kasperi Kapanen = the new Hyman

Babcock revealed that Hyman could miss 14 or 15 games to start the season (under 50 minutes at even strength).

That opens the door wide for Kapanen to impress on Tavares’ left wing in nearly 20 percent of the season, a spot he played very sparingly in last season (under 50 minutes at even strength).

Hyman-Tavares-Marner drove a lot of the Leafs’ success at five-on-five last year, eating tough matchups while also producing huge point totals.

It was probably going to be tough to duplicate exactly that given their high on-ice shooting percentage, but now they get a new look with a different speedy right-shot left-winger and it’s hard to forecast how that will play out.

Kapanen isn’t as hard on the puck on the forecheck as Hyman, but he has some higher-level skill tools to work with and he’ll get them down the
ice with possession more frequently. The organization played Kapanen on left wing a lot with the Marlies because they knew they were loaded on the right side, with Marner and Nylander blocking him for years, so it’s not as if the position will be altogether unfamiliar.

Playing the off wing, generally speaking, is harder in the D zone, but it could open up more scoring opportunities, especially with Marner’s playmaking abilities on the opposite wing.

It’s going to be important that Kapanen’s awareness when he has possession continues to improve, as finding his high-profile teammates and getting them the puck in the offensive zone will be a must.

“It’s nothing that new, but it’s something I’ll have to adjust to and get better at,” Kapanen said. “Playing with those guys, obviously I’m going to be the guy skating and getting the puck to them and standing in front of the net. I’ll let them do all the nice things and I’ll do the dirty work.”

“There’s a real good opportunity for someone else: Why not Kappy?” Babcock said. “Kappy plays hard. He works hard. He’s got to adjust his game a bit, but he can.”

4. Ice-time distribution possibilities

One thing I really like about having Kapanen on the Tavares line and Johnsson on the Matthews line is they can lean in on their top two lines more than they did last season.

Conversely, if they put someone like Mikheyev on left wing on one of the top two lines, they’d have to worry about workload and strength of competition for a new player in the league.

Tavares was 21st among NHL forwards last year with 16:18 minutes per game at even strength. Matthews was 33rd with only 15:57.

Both of those figures will go noticeably up this season as Babcock dials back his third and fourth lines. The ice time breakdown from lines one through four could look something like 20-20-13-8 once you factor in special teams and overtime.

“We’re going to be able to get (Matthews), especially without Naz here, and Johnny more than their fair share of what’s coming (in terms of minutes),” Babcock said.

Twenty-six forwards around the NHL averaged at least 20 minutes a game last season. That would mean another minute for Tavares and another minute and a half for Matthews, which will be welcome news to much of the fan base.

5. Power-play roles shifting

New assistant coach Paul McFarland’s special-teams influence has been apparent early. Mitch Marner was working on some power-play drills Sunday as part of the early on-ice group.

And he was on the left flank instead of the right, where he has been the Leafs PP1 general for years.

It’s hard to read too much into what the Leafs are doing on the man advantage at this point given all of their best players are split up over three separate groups, but Marner confirmed he expects to be in a different role.

“We’ll see,” Marner said. “I think the plan is still to have me and Auston on the same unit. So until that happens, it’s just kind of a feel-out moment, trying to see what Paul (McFarland) wants to do with us and seeing how he wants it to run.

“But I mean last year our power-play ranking was pretty high up there. Hopefully, that can happen with this team.”

On paper, the Leafs had the NHL’s eighth-most effective power play at 21.8 percent, but it struggled in the second half of the season as opposing teams adjusted to what they were doing.

The plan this year will be for the unit to be more unpredictable, with shooting threats from more than only Matthews and Tavares.

“I’ve tried to work on my one-T because I thought I’d be in that position (on the left wall),” Marner said. “We’d talked about it kind of at the end of last year and throughout the summer, what was going to happen with the power play. I guess I just try and adjust quickly, try and be more of a shooter.”

“I think it’s good for the players,” Babcock said. “They’ve got a new voice (in McFarland and Dave Hakstol). A new way, a different term, different thoughts on the power play and the penalty kill. We all need to get better, and they’re going to help us.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Max Pacioretty’s hat trick boosts Golden Knights in preseason opener

By David Schoen September 15, 2019 - 6:07 PM

Max Pacioretty had a hand in the first four goals scored by the Golden Knights in their preseason opener Sunday.

But that wasn’t his biggest contribution.

After linemate Cody Glass cross-checked Arizona’s Vinnie Hinostroza awkwardly into the boards in the first period, Pacioretty stepped in the middle of a potential scrum to protect the top prospect.

“He did that for me, too, so I can’t take the credit,” Pacioretty said with a laugh. “He is the future. He’s a tremendous talent.”

Pacioretty notched a hat trick as part of his four-point effort, and Cody Eakin chipped in with a goal and an assist in the Knights’ 6-2 victory before an announced crowd of 17,767 at T-Mobile Arena.

Here is what else we learned in the Knights’ victory:

1. Subban makes early debut

Dylan Ferguson was the winning goaltender for the Knights in their preseason opener each of the past two seasons, including a 7-2 victory over Arizona last season at T-Mobile Arena.

He was supposed to start Sunday but wasn’t feeling well, according to coach Gerard Gallant, and Malcolm Subban stepped in to make the start.

Subban got off to a shaky start in the first period, as Ilya Lyubushkin’s shot from the point trickled over the goal line four minutes in. Hinostroza then wired a shot from the high slot that beat Subban a little more than five minutes later.

But Subban settled down and finished with 29 saves, including a key stop on Jan Jenik’s wraparound in the second period to preserve the Knights’ one-goal lead.

Subban went 8-10-2 last season as Marc-Andre Fleury’s primary backup and battled inconsistency and injury. He will have to fight off challenges from Garret Sparks and Oscar Danek this preseason.

“You try to get up to speed as quick as possible. It took a little longer than I hoped, I guess,” Subban said. “I think the biggest thing now is just bringing that to the start of next game and not letting myself start not as focused.”

2. Glass gets opportunity

Gallant put the 2017 first-round pick in position to succeed, skating him between Pacioretty and Reilly Smith.

Glass showed chemistry with Pacioretty in the preseason opener last season against Arizona when he recorded two assists and had his moments Sunday.

The 20-year-old appeared to be forcing plays in the first period, when he had two giveaways and took a minor penalty.

In the second period, Glass had the secondary assist on Pacioretty’s third goal. He finished with a plus-2 rating in 15:04 of ice time and went 10-5 on faceoffs.

Glass admitted he was frustrated with his lack of production during the Anaheim Rookie Faceoff last week, but looked more comfortable on a line with NHL players.

“He’s got the hockey sense you can’t teach,” Pacioretty said. “He looks like a man out there.”

3. Defensemen earn praise

Gallant did not want to single out any of the four rookie defensemen who played Sunday, but was generally pleased with their play.

Jake Bischoff finished with a plus-3 rating, while Dylan Coghlan continued to shine during training camp with an assist and a plus-2 rating in 19:44 of ice time. Zach Whitecloud was second on the team in ice time (20:09).

Also, Jimmy Schuldt thwarted a potential two-on-one break in the first period, but also was on the ice for both Coyotes goals.

Gallant and his staff shuffled the defensive pairings in the third period. Whitecloud joined Brayden McNabb, while Coghlan skated with Schuldt. Bischoff and Holden were the final pairing.

“I made a couple mistakes but that’s bound to happen,” Coghlan said. “I thought I had some good offensive chances and when you’re playing with good players chances are going to come.”

LAS VEGAS REVIEW JOURNAL LOADED: 09.16.2019
Keegan Kolesar makes big hit in Knights' preseason opener

By Ben Gotz

September 15, 2019 - 5:52 PM

It took Keegan Kolesar 13 minutes, 49 seconds, to make his presence felt in the Golden Knights' first preseason game Sunday at T-Mobile Arena.

It wasn't in a way the 22-year-old forward necessarily wanted, but he knows he can't be timid if he wants to make an impact. Kolesar was penalized for a neutral zone hit on Arizona Coyotes defenseman Aaron Ness in the first period that forced the latter out of the game.

The 6-foot-2-inch bruiser, who had 90 penalty minutes in 74 American Hockey League games last season, regretted the outcome afterward but not his decision.

"Honestly, that's a part of my game," Kolesar said. "I have to use my size to my advantage, and when the hit presents itself, I'm going to take full advantage of it. Unfortunately, he got hurt."

Ness was skating toward center ice when he bobbled the puck and seemed to lose his footing. Kolesar already was skating toward Ness, and his shoulder caught the side of the defenseman's face. Ness fell to the ice, stayed down for a while, was helped off and didn't return.

Kolesar left as well after serving charging and fighting penalties. His next shift didn't come until 6:23 into the second period. The latter penalty came after Coyotes right wing Christian Fischer instigated a skirmish with Kolesar once play was stopped.

"For me, it looked worse than what it was," Knights coach Gerard Gallant said. "The guy was going through the neutral zone, sort of fumbled the puck, and he leaned forward. Keegan was coming to finish his check on him, and he was pretty low when he hit him. I don't think there's anything wrong with it."

Kolesar should rest easier knowing his coach has his back as he seeks to prove he's ready for the NHL. The right wing has worked hard to put himself in a position to make the team, speeding up his game to better suit the Knights' style of play.

He said he's watched the team's fourth-line forwards, a group that includes Ryan Reaves, William Carrier and Tomas Nosek, and thinks he can emulate their style of play. He got a good chance to prove that Sunday because he was also given power-play and penalty-kill time.

"I try to keep it as simple as I can," Kolesar said. "In the American League, (coach) Rocky (Thompson) and the coaching staff keep that in my mind all the time. 'You're a high-energy player, you have a big body, you have a good shot. Use your abilities and play with high speed and high pace and try to keep the game simple.' And that's what I try to do when I'm up here."

Crowd wows youngsters

The Knights' announced attendance was 17,767 on Sunday after the team averaged 17,833 fans for its four preseason games last season. The club's young players came away impressed with the atmosphere.

"We fed off the crowd," defenseman Dylan Coghlan said. "It got us going. I've never played in front of 17,000 people before, so that was pretty crazy."

Taking their time

Coach Gerard Gallant said "it'll probably take all seven" preseason games for the Knights to settle their position battles.

The team has an opening on defense, third-line left wing and fourth-line center.
Golden Knights host Coyotes to open preseason schedule

By David Schoen

September 15, 2019 - 9:15 am

The Golden Knights open their preseason schedule Sunday when they host the Arizona Coyotes at T-Mobile Arena.

Opening faceoff is scheduled for 1:30 p.m., and the game will be televised on KTNV-13.

"I love what I've seen in the two scrimmage games; a lot of the things we show on video before the practice sessions that they're doing real well, and some of the kids are learning from the practice sessions," coach Gerard Gallant said. "Hopefully they'll bring them over to the game. We want to play that style of hockey. We all explained to them what we want to do. Hopefully they're going to get it and play hard and work real hard."

The Knights did not make any major offseason additions to the team that finished third in the Pacific Division at 43-32-7 (93 points) and was ousted from the playoffs in the Western Conference quarterfinals by San Jose.

The team did not release its roster for the game against Arizona.

"Just opportunities for some of the kids and some of the veterans to get some playing time," Gallant said. "We've got seven exhibition games and really I'd like three or four games for the veteran players. You have to put eight or nine in your lineup for the NHL rules, so a few guys will play."

The Coyotes were one of the surprises in coach Rick Tocchet's second season, finishing fourth in the division at 39-35-8 (86 points) and challenging for a wild-card berth until the final week of the season.

Winger Phil Kessel was acquired in an offseason trade to boost Arizona's offense.

The Coyotes did not announce their roster for Sunday.

This is the second straight season the teams have played to start the exhibition schedule. The Knights defeated Arizona 7-2 in last season's opener.
Max Pacioretty appears ready for season, has hat trick in preseason victory

By Justin Emerson

Sunday, Sept. 15, 2019 | 6:06 p.m.

We are still more than two weeks away from a Golden Knights game of significance, and it would be foolish to draw too many conclusions from a preseason game, particularly with the first preseason game on Sunday mostly featuring players fighting for a roster spot.

That disclaimer does not make the following statement any less true. Max Pacioretty was a monster against the Coyotes and appears to be more than ready for the regular season to begin.

Pacioretty scored three of the Golden Knights' goals and assisted on the other in a 6-2 win at T-Mobile Arena.

"I had a really good summer, I felt I was skating really well the first couple days of camp, carried it over into tonight," Pacioretty said. "Not just for myself, but the whole team."

Pacioretty isn't the only veteran who appears ready for the regular season.

Reilly Smith showed in the third period what makes him one of the team's best penalty-killers. Vegas was defending a 5-on-3 when Smith came out of the box, collected an Arizona shot, chipped the puck off the glass to exit the zone, collect it, raced down the ice and beat goalie Erik Kallgren through the five-hole.

It was a short-handed and unassisted goal for Smith, who helped Vegas keep its penalty kill perfect on the afternoon.

It was a high-paced game, maybe more than expected for not only the first preseason game for both teams, but the first NHL game of the league year. There were five goals and five penalties in the first period of the game in front of 17,768 fans that didn't seem to care about it being a preseason game.

"It wasn't like the first exhibition game," Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said. "They played hard, they played a complete game and it's fun to play like that. All the guys on the bench were pretty excited."

It was in that first period that Vegas rookie Keegan Kolesar grabbed attention for the wrong reasons, laying a thunderous hit on Arizona's Aaron Ness at center ice. Kolesar was assessed a five-minute major for charging, then another five minutes for fighting when Christian Fischer jumped in to defend Ness.

"You never want to see that happen," Kolesar said. "I feel really bad about the hit. It's a fast game and mistakes like that can happen."

LAS VEGAS SUN LOADED: 09.16.2019
Vegas Golden Knights

Vegas’ forward lineup has very few holes: ‘There are high expectations’

By Jesse Granger Sep 15, 2019

The biggest problem Golden Knights forwards may face this season is there simply isn’t enough ice time to go around.

It’s a good problem to have for coach Gerard Gallant, who has a plethora of quality forwards at his disposal. Vegas enters the season with one of the deepest forward groups in the entire NHL, and they know it.

“You look at our top guys and it’s pretty tough to find another roster in the NHL that rivals them, so it’s definitely exciting,” defenseman Jon Merrill said. “On paper when you look at it, it’s definitely one of the most talented teams I’ve played on.”

Gallant has made it clear he won’t be experimenting with his top two lines before opening night. That means Mark Stone, Paul Stastny and Max Pacioretty will be lining up together, as well as William Karlsson, Jonathan Marchessault and Reilly Smith. Which is considered the top line is still up for debate, but that’s about it.

The Golden Knights struggled to score at times during the 2018-19 season, and finished 14th in the league in goals scored. That’s far below where you’d expect, considering the scoring talent on their top lines. But Vegas’ offense looked far better down the stretch — particularly after acquiring Stone at the trade deadline.

Vegas improved from 2.48 even strength goals per 60 minutes (15th in the league) to 2.93 (sixth in the league) after acquiring Stone. The line of Stone, Stastny and Pacioretty put up phenomenal numbers in their limited time together. Look at their numbers compared head-to-head with some of the top lines in hockey.

The sample size is obviously much smaller, and Vegas’ top line will need to prove it can produce consistently over an 82 game regular season, but the initial returns are great. Stone, Stastny and Pacioretty had a higher expected goals per 60 minutes than any of the lines listed above, which is one of the best predictors for future production.

“We get Mark Stone for a full year, and even in camp you can see how much better he makes other players,” defenseman Nate Schmidt said. “His vision and his presence, and you just can’t teach what he does.”

The scary thing for the rest of the league is, that line may actually get better with a full season together. Stastny was acquired on July 1 last offseason, while Pacioretty was traded to Vegas just before training camp opened. All three players were adjusting to a new city, moving their families to a new home, and trying to learn the Golden Knights’ system.

With all of that settled, they can now focus solely on hockey.

“It think the expectations are high,” Stastny said. “We have a lot of motivation. Last year I had a short summer and it’s a different mindset now. I’m way more comfortable. Not having to worry about the wife or girlfriends getting settled. We don’t have to worry about anything on the family side, which is great for us. Once you’re a little more comfortable, and know what the coaches want out of you, you’re able to focus.”

The second line — or 1B as Gallant will likely call it — is just as dangerous with Karlsson, Marchessault and Smith. The three finished first, second and third on the team in scoring last year, and believe they have something to prove after falling short of their inaugural season numbers.

“It’s very exciting. The forwards look really good,” Karlsson said, looking around the dressing room after the second day of camp. “There are a lot of lines with dangerous players who can do a lot of things. I think that’s why we’re a good team.”

But Vegas’ scoring talent beyond the top-six is what may set them apart from other talented forward units in the NHL.

“You have (Cody) Eakin and (Alex) Tuch who played on the third line last year,” Marchessault said. “They aren’t third-line players, but they’re there because we have so much depth on this team. Lucky us.”

Eakin finished third on the team with 22 goals last season — 18 of which came at even strength — and Tuch led the team in points for a large portion of the season before tapering off near the end. At only 23 years old, Tuch has plenty of room for growth and is expected to take another step forward in his third year as a pro.

“I think this is the most talented team, depth-wise, that I’ve ever played on,” Schmidt said. “I think throughout the lineup you have skilled guys everywhere. I’ve played on teams that are very top heavy, where the first line and a half are incredibly skilled, and then your third and fourth lines are more of grinding, checking lines.”

One of the few positions up for grabs at training camp is the third line left wing spot. Brandon Pirri, who scored 12 goals in 31 games last season, is probably the favorite to land the job, but Valentin Zykov, Tomas Nosek, Patrick Brown and William Carrier are all gunning for it.

There’s also a wild card, Cody Glass. The first-round pick hopes to make his NHL debut this season and could provide yet another skilled, scoring option for Gallant and his staff.

“We understand that to be there at the end of the year we need three, excellent, first lines,” Schmidt said. “That’s just the way every team is built now, and the way all teams are trying to build.”

You can’t fault Gallant for keeping the lines as they were down the stretch last season, but the good news is that, if they don’t produce the way he expects, there’s plenty of room to tinker.

“It’s a treat,” Marchessault said. “I think the lines are pretty much set, but even if you move them around, who cares who plays with who? There are so many good players on this team.”

With essentially eight players who belong in the top-six (nine if you count Glass, and 10 if you count Pirri) Gallant will have plenty of talent to mix-and-match as he sees fit.

“That’s great because if things get stagnant or you want to switch things up, you can,” Stastny said. “If anything, it’s not going to be a demotion, it’s just to wake you up. All of a sudden you’re playing with another highly-skilled player that brings something different. It’s nice. When you play with smart guys like that, they’re easy to play off. Everyone brings something different, and you change your game a little bit but not too much.”

“We know we have a good hockey team,” Gallant said. “I think there are high expectations and that’s what we’re here for.”

Training camp forward battles

With eight of the top nine forward spots all but cemented, what positions are up for grabs during the preseason?

“There’s not a whole lot,” Gallant replied. “Up front there are four or five guys competing for a couple spots there. Obviously when you lose (Pierre-Edouard) Bellemare, you have to replace him, so that’s an opportunity for people.”

Who are the “four or five guys” and what are the “couple spots”?

Let’s dissect it. Bellemare’s vacated fourth-line center spot is Vegas’ biggest hole to fill. Carrier and Ryan Reaves — who is missing camp with a minor injury — are penciled in as the fourth-line wingers, and that’s unlikely to change. That means the only forward spots up for grabs are the third-line left wing, and fourth-line center.

The forwards with realistic opportunities to claim either of those spots are Glass, Pirri, Nosek, Zykov, Brown, Nicolas Roy and Curtis McKenzie. The fact that Gallant said “four or five guys” likely means he’s already ruled a few out.

“You want young players pushing for jobs, and when they’re good enough they’ll get the jobs,” he said. “For three years we’ve had good, veteran players in here with good leadership, and our team has been really good. So you have to come in here ready to take a job.”

In the end, here’s how the forwards remaining in Vegas’ camp fit:


Likely heading to AHL/junior (12): Paul Cotter, Reid Duke, Lucas Elvenes, Tyrell Goulbourne, Ben Jones, Keegan Kolesar, Jake Leschyshyn, Jermaine Loewen, Tye McGinn, Mason Primeau, Gage Quinney, Jonas Rondbjerg.

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
Alyce Wheeler compared it to Christmas, New Year’s and a gooey chocolate chip cookie all rolled up in one.

The Vegas Golden Knights fan was describing what it felt like to walk through the doors of T-Mobile Arena at 12 noon Sunday for the preseason opener between the Golden Knights and the Arizona Coyotes.

Don’t tell Las Vegas it’s only a preseason game.

It was a longer than expected summer after the Knights bowed out in painful and bizarre manner to the San Jose Sharks in Game 7 in the Stanley Cup Playoffs’ first round after VGK coughed up a 3-1 games lead in the series in April. Wheeler, the fan, talked about what it meant to be back in the Big Ice House by the Strip.

Fans have forged friendships through several large fan clubs like the Golden Misfits. They include Derek Caldwell, who showed up in a gold jacket for the preseason match and put it simply about what it has meant to create bonds with people he otherwise would not have met if not for the VGK.

“It’s a blessing,” Caldwell told LVSportsBiz.com. You can see the rest of the interview here:

Sunday’s attendance was announced at 17,767, which is 400 more than capacity of 17,367 at T-Mobile Arena. The Knights took the preseason opener against the Coyotes, 6-2. Winger Max Pacioretty, who scored a hat trick, discussed how crazy the VGK fans are during this postgame interview.

VGK coach Gerard Gallant was impressed with the arena atmosphere for an exhibition game.

And it’s not a Golden Knights game without The Wolverine — superfan Jason Griego.

The crowd included Jason Griego, The Wolverine.

The Knights are known for raising the bar for its arena atmosphere in the NHL, breaking out a new pregame video with Deep Purple’s Smoke on the Water serving as the soundtrack for the vid. Let’s take a look.

The Golden Knights preseason game kick-started a busy Sunday afternoon for the sports industry in Las Vegas. Only two miles to the east, the WNBA Las Vegas Aces defeated the Chicago Fire in a wild finish at Thomas & Mack Center at a 2 p.m. game. And the Big Boys of NASCAR went racing at Las Vegas Motor Speedway for the South Point 400 in late afternoon.

Plus, Las Vegas is keeping an eye on the Raiders and their division game with the Kansas City Chiefs at the Coliseum in Oakland. It’s the final season for the Raiders in the Bay area before the Silver & Black move to Las Vegas to christen a $1.9 billion stadium project on the west side of Interstate 15 near the Strip and the Mandalay Bay casino-hotel.

But the Golden Knights fans were focused on hockey, and their allegiance to VGK borders on the faith you see in religion. In this preseason game, VGK winger Max Pacioretty scored a hat trick and the bailcaps came raining down when he notched his third goal late in the second period.

LVSportsBiz.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
5 biggest questions for the Capitals entering 2019-20

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times - Sunday, September 15, 2019

Don't look now, but hockey season has arrived. The Washington Capitals kick off their preseason Monday by hosting the Chicago Blackhawks, the first of three home games this week. Here are the five most important questions the Capitals and their players face in the 2019-20 season — some which should be answered pretty soon, others that will be on fans’ minds throughout the year.

1. How does salary cap pickle end?

The first question is the most urgent one. The Capitals took on too much salary over the summer when they signed three free agent wingers, went to arbitration with Christian Djoos and avoided arbitration with Chandler Stephenson by giving him $1.05 million. The salary-tracking website CapFriendly says Washington stands at almost $82.9 million, over the limit of $81.5 million.

The Capitals don't have to get under the cap until Oct. 1, but a new development actually gave them more time. Evgeny Kuznetsov’s salary won't count against Washington’s cap while he is suspended for three games to start the season.

Still, the Capitals eventually must make a move to shed the necessary amount of salary. They could see how the training camp battles for the sixth and seventh defensemen go to inform their decision. A trade prior to Opening Day is among the options, but the front office has several directions it can go.

2. What is the future in net?

Braden Holtby forever will be known as the goaltender that made "The Save" and helped deliver the Capitals a Stanley Cup. He ranks among the top 10 or 12 goalies in the NHL. But he's entering the final year of his contract, and with an expansion draft on the horizon, the Capitals have to consider what’s best for their future.

Pheonix Copley is a serviceable backup, but behind him, Washington also has two highly-touted prospects in its system: Ilya Samsonov and Vitek Vanecek. The Capitals are expected to give Samsonov, 22, a few NHL games sometime this year to see how close he is to being ready to take over the No. 1 job.

General manager Brian MacLellan said he would like to see Samsonov play some games at the big-league level this season, but added the team wouldn’t "force it."

"You have a grand plan in mind, but it just seems like more often than not the performance really helps dictate a lot of those decisions," Capitals coach Todd Reirden added.

3. What will remade bottom six do?

The third and fourth lines will look nothing like they did 12 months ago. Lars Eller will remain a very solid third center, but gone are Brett Connolly (free agent departure), Andre Burakovsky (traded) and Devante Smith-Pelly (not signed back). In are Richard Panik, Brendan Leipsic and Garnet Hathaway.

Reirden described Panik, a few seasons removed from a season with 22 goals and 22 assists, as a "very complete two-way player." Will he, Carl Hagelin and Lars Eller combine to make the third line a dangerous scoring threat, or will Washington rely on its top six forwards to deliver the goals?

Leipsic, a likely fourth-liner with some skill, spoke about bringing some tenacity to the ice. Capitals teammates like Tom Wilson seemed excited for what Leipsic and the other free agent signings will do to make the bottom six more physical.

"It’s nice to have some guys that are willing to play that style," Wilson said. "It’s always nice going out there knowing your teammates have your back. Those are guys that have done it in the past and that earned respect from their teammates pretty quick."

4. Will Jensen fit in second pair?

One of the Capitals' most important players this year is Jensen, who was acquired at the trade deadline in February and given a four-year extension. When the Capitals traded Matt Niskanen for Radko Gudas in the offseason, it created a gap on the second pair next to Dmitry Orlov.

That opening within the top-four defensemen figures to be Jensen's to lose. How will he perform early on?

"It's not necessarily in my mind where I am on the roster, but it's more so how hard I'm working," Jensen said. "I'm always shooting to be the best player that I can be, the best player on the ice. Wherever that puts me, I think that mindset's a little more important than I just want to be in this third, fourth spot. I think with that mindset, I'll end up where I deserve to be."

If Jensen doesn't fit there, Gudas wouldn't be a bad Plan B. The 27-year-old has experience playing in a top-four role with Philadelphia.

5. How many will Ovechkin score?

There have not been any question marks around Alex Ovechkin’s game for at least a few years. He seemed to slip off in 2016-17 with a 33-goal season, but rebounded and drove the Capitals to a Stanley Cup with his prolific scoring.

If there’s anything to wonder about, it’s how much longer Ovechkin will continue scoring at a 50-goals-a-year clip. He stands 237 goals away from breaking Wayne Gretzky’s career goals record, a mark teammate and friend Nicklas Backstrom thinks he can reach.

"I think he might catch him. It’s possible," Backstrom said. "The way he’s shooting the puck and the way he scores, that’s incredible. We just have to feed him."

In the meantime, a typical scoring year from Ovechkin still ought to see him reach his 700th career goal. He can pass the likes of Mario Lemieux, Steve Yzerman and Mark Messier on the all-time list this year.

Washington Times LOADED: 09.16.2019
Caps coach Todd Reirden calls Evgeny Kuznetsov suspension ‘a career-defining time’

By Brian McNally September 15, 2019 12:54 PM

Capitals coach Todd Reirden was blunt when the NHL suspended Evgeny Kuznetsov for the first three games of the regular season.

“It’s a career-defining time in his life,” Reirden said.

Circumspect on Thursday before the NHL announced the suspension for what was deemed “inappropriate conduct” – i.e. lying to his club and NHL investigators during an investigation into Kuznetsov’s drug use – Reirden did not hold back Saturday when the news became official.

“Him and my relationship is one that it’s important that I am there for him,” Reirden said. “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.”

Thursday was a day his Washington teammates expressed support for Kuznetsov, who failed a drug test on May 26 at the World Championships in Slovakia playing for Russia. The day after a video surfaced on social media that showed Kuznetsov in a hotel room in Las Vegas with a white powdery substance on the table in front of him.

It was all a bit reckless and Kuznetsov expressed remorse on Saturday to his teammates, coaches, management and fans. He will pay the price with a four-year suspension in international play by the International Ice Hockey Federation and missing the first three games of the NHL season. No one is happy about it.

Reirden said he and Kuznetsov have had multiple conversations since the IIHF announced the suspension on Aug. 23. So far, Kuznetsov has taken the advice to heart. He takes part in an NHLPA drug treatment and education program. He showed up much earlier than normal for on-ice workouts in Washington before training camp.

In many ways, he is the same old Kuznetsov. A happy-go-lucky personality, a world-class center, who never takes anything too seriously: From competing for Hart Trophies to winning faceoffs to looking ahead to the Stanley Cup playoffs. Expect him to change all of that at age 27 is unrealistic. He’s an adult.

But the suspension, the drug use, has chastened him some. He embarrassed his family. He has worried his teammates. They know the level Kuznetsov can reach. We all saw it during the 2018 Stanley Cup playoffs when he was arguably the best player in the world for two months.

Kuznetsov has reached a fork in the road in his career. He has Hall-of-Fame talent. But he can coast to 70 points for the next few years and maybe get a pass. But he’ll never be as good as he should be. It is the dilemma of any brilliant talent. It is the one Kuznetsov faces now: How good do you want to be?

“It’s a difficult thing that he’s going through. But it’s absolutely an amazing opportunity to really change the course of how things will be for him the rest of his life,” Reirden said. “That’s where we’re at right now. Understanding that he’s going to be an example. How he reacts will be how people speak about this a year from now, five years from now and 15 years from now. This is a life-changing event.”

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
The Caps will eventually need to make a tough decision somewhere to shed salary and I believe that will mean moving Christian Djoos. If a team suffers an injury in training camp and wants to make a deal, I could see that happening. For now, like with many of the forwards, Kuznetsov’s suspension means the Caps have an extra week to make that decision. For now, I will keep him in the lineup, but I would not be surprised if he is playing for a different team by the start of the season.

The team is excited about prospects Alex Alexeyev and Martin Fehervary. Alexeyev, however, is dealing with an upper-body injury and there is no timetable for when he may return to the ice. Fehervary, meanwhile, has received nothing by rave reviews. Like with the forwards, the Kuznetsov suspension could open the door for a player like Fehervary to get a game or two.

Goalies

Braden Holtby Phoenix Copley

I’m not ready to predict this yet, but with Kuznetsov’s salary off the books for the first week of the season do the Caps consider keeping Samsonov and starting him against the New York Islanders in the second game of the season?

The Caps face a back-to-back with the Islanders and the Carolina Hurricanes. I assume Holtby gets Carolina since it is the home opener, but what about the Islanders? Washington has to get their young goalies through the first week of the season. We have a lot of depth. Vanecek played well last year, and I’d like to see him get games. I’d like to see Samsonov get games. Copley has continued to improve, so it’s going to be a competitive situation.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 09.16.2019
Dmitry Kulikov went from a potential buyout candidate in the off-season to a defenceman with a major role to play this season for the Winnipeg Jets.

The NHL team’s blue line is rather thin on experience, and Kulikov finds himself as the veteran of the group at training camp at the Iceplex. Kulikov’s former partner, Tyler Myers, is now with the Vancouver Canucks, Jacob Trouba was traded to the New York Rangers and Ben Chiarot signed with the Montreal Canadians.

Dustin Byfuglien remains out of action for the time being after asking for, and being granted a personal leave of absence late last week.

Kulikov, who averaged a career-low 15 minutes, 40 seconds of ice time per game during the 2018-19 campaign, said having to step up hasn’t been a taxing adjustment.

"(It’s) fine. It’s the exact same thing," Kulikov said Sunday morning from the Iceplex. "Players change, but the game doesn’t change. So, it’s totally fine.

"Everybody has to work hard and there’s no exception. I have more experience, so I can use it sometimes. But you know, hard work, there’s no way around it."

Kulikov entered the 2018-19 season coming off back surgery, started slowly, but was picking up his game and earning the trust of his coaches when he suffered an upper-body injury in mid-November that shelved him for four weeks. Returning to the lineup before the holiday season, his play was hardly consistent the rest of the season.

The Russian-born 28-year-old, who had six assists in 57 games a year ago, said he feels ahead of schedule because he was healthy all summer and had a regular training regimen.

Jets head coach Paul Maurice said the difference is noticeable.

"First of all, his fitness numbers were really strong. A player that came in off a back injury so he looks right, back to full go, and he wants this opportunity," Maurice said. "He’s able to push. He’s shown that he wants more by how hard he is working now, and he’s going to get it."

Don’t ask Kulikov about his back because he’s done talking about it. After confirming his back is feeling 100 per cent, Kulikov walked away from a scrum of reporters, with a parting shot: "That’s the last question about my back."
The Winnipeg Jets didn't sign any marquee free agents in the off-season, nor did they acquire any household names via trade. They also have two of their top goal scorers — forwards Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor — sitting at home waiting to put pen to paper on new contracts. Dustin Byfuglien is out indefinitely and the team lost several key pieces this summer such as Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers, Brandon Tanev, Ben Chiarot and Kevin Hayes.

Add it all up and the Jets desperately need players from within, especially the young ones, to step up this upcoming season. One name that's expected, and needed, to take on a bigger role is 22-year-old Jack Roslovic.

The third-year forward spent the majority of last season bouncing between the third and fourth lines and finished the year with nine goals and 15 assists in 77 games. Roslovic was quiet down the stretch, as in the Jets' first round playoff series against the St. Louis Blues, he was pointless in six games.

Roslovic, who took turns playing centre and on the wing, said it was hard to get in a rhythm offensively with his limited role.

"You know, that's just the depth of our team. It's really good," Roslovic said on not being able to consistently crack the team's top-nine forwards last season. "For me, I gotta go out there and try to play my game. I can't try to play like a fourth-line checker and that's just the way it is."

Although Roslovic saw his role diminish down the stretch, he was overall pretty happy with how he did in his first full season in the NHL. Roslovic split the 2017-18 campaign between the Manitoba Moose and Jets, where he had 14 points in 31 games at the NHL level.

"I know Jack is waiting for his chance and he's going to have lots of opportunity to get that chance. Guys got hurt and he ran a long time with Laine and (Bryan) Little (last season). His fitness scores were awesome, so we like that because we know he put the work in. He's going to get his chance over time."

— Jets head coach Paul Maurice

"I liked my game. I'm a playmaker. I like to think of myself as a playmaker. I want to shoot the puck a little more. I definitely want to think about that as a priority for this season and help score goals, and not only just pass the puck and distribute the puck. So, offensively, that was the biggest thing last year," said Roslovic, who was selected 25th overall in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft by the Jets.

"And obviously, as a young guy, it's tough to play centre and try to develop there and then get switched back to the wing, which I was more comfortable with for a lot of the season because I played it more often. I think that's something that I'm going to be better at and, you know, really take some time and effort to really focus in on wherever they put me."

Jets head coach Paul Maurice revealed on Friday Roslovic would start training camp on the wing. After the team's training session on Sunday at Bell MTS Iceplex, the coach was asked about Roslovic's up-and-down season and what the club expects to see out of him this year.

"We're hoping more. If I say to you a lot more, it's not because I'm saying that he's not where we want him to be. I'm happy with where Jack is," Maurice said.

"I know Jack is waiting for his chance and he's going to have lots of opportunity to get that chance. Guys got hurt and he ran a long time with Laine and (Bryan) Little (last season). His fitness scores were awesome, so we like that because we know he put the work in. He's going to get his chance over time. We really like Jack as a player, we were pretty thick up front there, so it was hard to get extra ice time. He's going to have to fight for his ice time, just like the rest of these guys."
ERIC Comrie’s short-term fate was sealed in late May when the Winnipeg Jets negotiated a deal to retain the services of backup goaltender Laurent Brossoit for the 2019-20 NHL season.

Comrie’s training camp is a preamble to a fifth-straight season tending the crease of the Manitoba Moose, an injury to either No.1 goalie Connor Hellebuyck or Brossoit notwithstanding or a scenario where he’s scooped up on waivers by another team.

But if the former American Hockey League all-star is ranked by his current ranking on the team’s pecking order of puckstoppers, he is showing it neither publicly nor otherwise.

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“It’s about bidding your time, you get better every single day and eventually if you do the work, it will take care of itself,” said Comrie.

Reporter: Bell
JOHN WOODS / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

“When you say to me, ‘It’s tough on (Comrie),’ I’m not disagreeing with that, but you never see it from that young man. If you could bottle an attitude, it would be his,” Jets head coach Paul Maurice said Sunday afternoon, following Day 3 of training camp. “He’s upbeat, he’s positive.

“Goalties take longer... that’s not unusual for goaltenders to develop at a different age. I’m not saying even late or later, just at a different age. So, he’s waiting for that opportunity, but he’s also working while he’s waiting for that opportunity.”

If the old adage about patience is true, Comrie might just be the most virtuous person ever associated with the Jets organization. Drafted in the second round (59th overall) of the 2013 NHL Draft, the Edmonton product completed a brilliant junior career with the Tri-City Americans of the Western Hockey League in 2015 and was anointed as Manitoba’s main masked man that fall.

Since then, he’s watched Ondrej Pavelec hit the road and Hellebuyck — drafted in 2012 — earn the starters’ job, while Michael Hutchinson, Steve Mason and Brossoit all took turns riding shotgun.

Brossoit was so proficient last season — in 21 games he went 13-6-2 with a 2.52 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage and posted his first career shutout — that Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff made inking him to a one-year, $1,225,000 contract one of his first orders of off-season business.

The writing’s on the wall for Comrie, still considered a top prospect who many thought might have been packaged up to another team either at the February trade deadline or on draft day in June. He’s still here and remains just as committed to flexing his work ethic, self-improvement and professionalism as any other time in his career.

“At the end of the day, hockey's just a game. Being a human being is about being a good person. I love this game, I play it with everything I have, but I pride myself on being a good person first,” said Comrie, who began the season as a restricted free agent before agreeing to a two-year contract a week before training camp.

The contract carries an average annual value of $700,000, and is a two-way deal for this year and a one-way deal in 2020-21. For the first time in his career, Comrie is no longer waiver exempt.

“For myself, this is about working as hard as I possibly can and get better. This is an NHL camp, you’re going to get better every single day when you’re facing the top shooters in the world. This is a really good hockey team and I’m just happy to be here facing these guys every single day,” he said.

“I try and force things sometimes. I had a very good AHL career and finished good in every single category. I look at the guys who’ve come up from the AHL and I know I can play just as well as those, and I think it’s about letting it happen instead of trying to make it happen.”

— Eric Comrie

Comrie is expected to play the entire game tonight as the Jets visit Edmonton to battle the Oilers in the first pre-season test for both Western Conference squads, while Mikhail Berdin will back him up. It’s formula that Moose head coach Pascal Vincent is expected to use this winter.

In a Moose jersey, Comrie has been sensational on some Manitoba teams that were anything but. In 183 career AHL contests, he has compiled a 77-83-20 record with eight shutouts, a 2.88 GAA, and .910 save percentage.

He made five NHL starts since the ‘16-17 campaign and the body of work earned mixed reviews — a 2-3-0 record with a 4.20 GAA and .870 S%.

Maurice said there are parts of Comrie game that need improvement, and the 6-1, 180-pound netminder concurs that he needs to get his game to another level — once again, with a patient approach.

“Calm down and let the game happen. I try and force things sometimes. I had a very good AHL career and finished good in every single category. I look at the guys who’ve come up from the AHL and I know I can play just as well as those, and I think it’s about letting it happen instead of trying to make it happen,” he said.

He references the career path of Stanley Cup winner Jordan Binnington, who toiled with a couple of AHL teams for five years before getting back into the St. Louis Blues’ grand plans. The rest is history.

Comrie will likely need to wait a full year before he gets a legitimate opportunity to crack the Jets roster. By then, Brossoit might be vying for a No.1 job somewhere else.

“It’s about bidding your time, you get better every single day and eventually if you do the work, it will take care of itself,” said Comrie. “You can get better no matter where you are, and I think for myself it’s going down (to the Moose), if I go down, it’s working as hard as I can, getting better and better, and just trying to take every shot like it’s my last and just have fun doing it.

“That’s one thing I’m really going to work on this year, just really enjoy the moment. We’re playing a great game and I just love the game and just really enjoy it.”

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 09.16.2019
Jets lineup for preseason game against Oilers

Posted: 09/15/2019 7:37 PM | STAFF

The Jets face the Oilers in Edmonton on Monday night at 8 p.m. (TSN TV, TSN 1290 Radio).

Forwards suiting up are: Bryan Little, Mark Letestu, Jack Roslovic, JC Lipon, Logan Shaw, David Gustafson, Joona Luoto, Andrei Chibisov, Gabriel Bourque, Jansen Harkins, C.J. Suess and Mason Appleton.

The defensive group includes: Logan Stanley, Cam Schilling, Anthony Bitetto, Tucker Poolman, Neal Pionk and Nathan Beaulieu.

Goalie Eric Comrie gets the start and Mikhail Berdin backs him up.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 09.16.2019
Fresh starts excite Jets’ vets on the bubble

Scott Billeck
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Some trying times have tagged along with Mark Letestu over the past couple of seasons.

In 2016-17, he put together his most productive season to date, scoring a career-high 16 goals and 35 points with the Edmonton Oilers.

It coincided with what was thought to be Edmonton’s breakout season with Connor McDavid and Co. Letestu, now 34, featured in 78 regular-season games and would play in all 13 of the Oilers’ playoff games, scoring five times and adding six assists before getting knocked out in the second round by the Anaheim Ducks in Game 7.

The good times in Edmonton didn’t last long. As the Oilers took a step back the following season, so too did Letestu.

He was traded at the deadline, first to Nashville and then over to Columbus a few hours later. There, he went pointless in six playoff games as the Blue Jackets crashed out of the postseason at the hands of the eventual Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals.

From a career-year two years earlier, Letestu suited up for just two games in the NHL last season. He’d spend most the year, some 64 games, playing with Columbus’ American Hockey League affiliate in Cleveland.

“There’s certainly been some adversity for me,” Letestu said on Sunday after Day 2 of Winnipeg Jets training camp wrapped up.

“Tough’ is how Anthony Bitetto would characterize his past couple of seasons.

Being a defenceman on the outside looking in with the Nashville Predators and their vaunted rearguard isn’t an easy situation to navigate.

“We had top-four defencemen that were studs, and even the five and six guys there were good players,” Bitetto, with his thick Long Island accent, said. “So I felt a little bit shellied there.”

Life, then, was spent in and out of the lineup.

Last season, he was eventually waived by the Predators in January after appearing in 18 games. He’d get claimed the following day by the Minnesota Wild and would get another 18 games with them before becoming an unrestricted free agent in the summer.

“It’s the past now. It’s a new start (here),” said Bitetto, now with his third Central Division team since the beginning of the year.

A new beginning is what brought Gabriel Bourque into the fray, as well.

Like Letestu and Bitetto, Bourque has arrived looking for a regular role after several seasons trying to carve one out elsewhere, first in Nashville and then in Colorado, with significant time spent playing in the American league along the way.

And like Letestu and Bitetto, Bourque comes to Winnipeg on a two-way deal, looking to seize an opportunity in a lineup that’s had some vacancies as of late.

“It was a good fit,” Bourque said. “After the talk I had with them, it was a good match. A good chance for me to come here.”

The trio’s two-way caveat in their respective contract dictates their characterization heading into camp.

They are players sitting on the bubble, with no guarantees of a roster spot come Winnipeg’s opener in New York against the Rangers on Oct. 3.

But if their future rests on a bubble, one that could burst at any moment, their mentality most certainly does not.

“Those three of us, we’ve had enough experience in the NHL that when we come to camp, we carry ourselves as NHL players and we expect to be here until we are told we’re not,” Letestu said.

Letestu said he doesn’t enter a training camp, a practice or a game with any extra anxiety being lugged along.

They’ve kept to their word.

Saturday’s first session was rough and rugged, and all three were in the mix as the intensity picked up.

“That’s a team that competes and works hard, it’s fun to be a part of it,” Bitetto said after Saturday’s skate.

Entering his sixth training camp, Bitetto said he hasn’t seen one quite as focused as his first with the Jets.

“It’s a team that works, up and down the sheet competing on every drill,” he said. “It was intense out there. I like that, it’s a good feeling.”

For Jets head coach Paul Maurice, first and foremost, a ‘bubble’ guy has to fit — in the room, in the system and the style of the team.

“It’s about how do you fit with the group, what’s your work ethic. If this is the role that you’re trying out for, how comfortable are you in that role? If it’s an eight- to 12-minute role, do you embrace it? Can you sit the bench for four minutes and come out and give us that energy? Can you be real reliable in the systems?

Then, they have to separate.

“They’ve gotta do something to be seen, to make an impression,” Maurice said. “With these players, it doesn’t have to be on the scoresheet.”

MAURICE FINDS VALUE IN INTANGIBLES

One of the great debates in hockey these days has been the quantifiable value of the unseen.

While many facets of the game can now be captured through the use of mathematics, it’s the intangibles — grit, or being a room guy, for instance — that doesn’t have a hard and fast metric to evaluate their effects on the game.

You will, however, find few coaches who don’t value these veiled traits in some way, and Jets head coach Paul Maurice is no different.

Maurice said the team’s veteran additions over the summer — Mark Letestu, Gabriel Bourque and Anthony Bitetto — check those boxes.

“They’re all pretty darn good system-wise with whatever team they’ve played on (and) they’ve got really good reputations for being great character, room guys,” Maurice said. “And there is a value to that.”

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 09.16.2019
Eric Comrie has done his homework. Would he like to be a full-timer in the NHL at the moment? Yes. Is he down because it hasn’t happened yet? No.

“There’s been a lot of goalies up there and it has taken time to get going,” Comrie said on the eve of his preseason start at the Edmonton Oilers on Monday.

Comrie research is evident when he brings up Jonathan Quick, and how it took the two-time Stanley Cup champion more than a handful of games to find his stride.

“His first 10 games in the league, it wasn’t the most pretty thing in the world,” Comrie said.

Comrie has been in the Jets organization ever since he was selected 59th overall in the second round by the club in the 2013 NHL Draft. Six years later, Comrie has played five NHL games — winning two, losing three — while carving out himself a nice American Hockey League resume with the Manitoba Moose.

But the 24-year-old, who signed a two-year extension with the team earlier this month, isn’t content sticking in the minors.

“I look at the guys who come up from the American league and I know I can play just as well as those guys,” he said.

What’s holding him back? Comrie admits he has a tendency to force things rather than staying calm and allowing the play to come to him. It’s something he’s spent time working on.

Patience can be tough for a young goaltender still looking for that break.

“Look at Jordan Binnington, it took him a little while to get going,” Comrie said. “He was kind of cast away by the St. Louis Blues, they threw him to a different farm team. He went down to Providence and had an unbelievable year. Everyone said it kind of came out of nowhere but I was like, ‘it didn’t come out of nowhere, that guy put up a .922 in the American league and was the back-to-back goalie of the week before he got his first NHL win.’ ”

Comrie said Binnington proved that breakthroughs can come when you least expect them to, and at any age.

“Eventually, if you do the work, it will take care of itself,” Comrie said.

RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

Reading into the first couple days of training camp is like reading into the leaderboard after the first day at The Masters. Most of it isn’t reality.

But if you’re looking for an early standout from the first two on-ice sessions for the Jets, it’s been Russian forward Andrei Chibisov.

The 26-year-old has spent the past five seasons plying his trade in the Kontinental Hockey League and was swapped into the veteran group at Sunday’s skate to show what he could do.

“He’s a big, strong man,” Jets head coach Paul Maurice said. “So he’s powerful enough that he can get up and down the ice and he lasted right through practice. You’re a young player in terms of NHL or pro hockey experience over here, but this is fully developed player. I thought he was fine.”

Chibisov’s English isn’t a strong suit at the moment. He has yet to speak with the media and the Jets have had either prospect goalie Mikhail Berdin or Dmitry Kulikov alongside him so far to translate the basics.
Jack Roslovic ready for more: Jets forward needs to seize opportunity

By Ken Wiebe Sep 15, 2019

Jack Roslovic figures it’s time to get greedy.

No, not greedy in the sense that he needs to start putting himself ahead of his team, the Winnipeg Jets.

More so, in the sense that he needs to start using one of his strengths a bit more, especially when it comes to looking to use his quick release and shot.

That can pose a challenge, especially for a guy who has been known more for his vision and passing ability.

“I’m looking to do it more often and more consistently,” Roslovic said. “Greedy is a good word, a fine word. I’m a naturally born playmaker and have a pretty unselfish personality. So, it’s pretty tough to get into that (shoot first) mindset. But you’ve got to make it work.”

The Jets play their first of seven preseason games on Monday night in Edmonton against the Oilers.

Although Roslovic is about to enter the final year of his entry-level contract, it’s important to remember that he’s only four years removed from being chosen 25th overall in the 2015 NHL Draft and less than three years removed from making his NHL debut against his hometown Columbus Blue Jackets.

With the benefit of hindsight, Roslovic was able to put a little more perspective on his first full NHL season.

Like most young players, Roslovic would love to increase his role — and his ice time.

But he’s been around long enough now to know he’s going to need to go out and seize that opportunity, to force his way into it, essentially.

Roslovic is coming off what can only be referred to as an up-and-down campaign.

The highlights were easy to identify, including his first four-point game and NHL hat trick against the Anaheim Ducks.

There was a brief time on the first power play when he replaced Patrik Laine.

But there were also long stretches on the fourth line, at centre and on the wing, where points and ice time were tough to come by.

In the next 14 games after his career night, Roslovic managed only one assist, despite spending a chunk of time on a line with Laine and Bryan Little.

Roslovic finished with career highs in goals (nine), assists (15) and points (24) in 77 games while averaging 9:45 of ice time (down from 12:19 per game during the 31 games in his rookie season).

When you look at the big picture, it seems like Roslovic is just starting to scratch the surface in reaching his full potential.

What did he take out of last season that he plans to apply?

“I’m definitely a bit more mentally stronger,” Roslovic said. “I feel a bit older and I feel a bit more wise and secure with where I’m at. I’m not letting a lot of things affect me.”

That moment of clarity was required, since it’s easy for a young player to get down on himself as he’s trying to find his way.

“It’s just about keeping the work ethic up and keeping a positive mindset,” Roslovic said. “It’s a really, really long season and that was my first full season. The wear and tear is something you can feel and it can really take a toll on you. Staying sharp that way.”

Roslovic had an excellent summer of training, focusing on a number of different things.

“I went through the same routine, with the same people and put in good work on the things I needed to work on,” he said. “Obviously, keep my conditioning going, keep my strength up and some on-ice skills work. I even did some videos and some statistical stuff. So I’m adding every year and have a lot of eyes from back home (in Columbus) that are trying to help.”

Roslovic wanted to keep his analytics work private.

“That I don’t know if I can tell you about that,” he said. “It’s just a tool in the toolbox.”

Roslovic made another significant change, replacing his longtime agent Ken Robinson with former NHLer Claude Lemieux.

“There’s not really much to say about that,” Roslovic said. “That’s in the past right now and I’m looking towards the future.”

Going into training camp this fall, there were questions about whether Roslovic would be in the mix for the second-line centre job or whether he would find himself on the wing.

For the time being, Roslovic is on the wing and says moving from one position to another hasn’t been a tough thing to deal with.

“Not for me. I don’t think there is,” Roslovic said, noting that he put in some additional work in the offseason to strengthen his game to be ready to play centre if called upon. “I don’t know exactly what is going to happen, but whatever does happen is going to be what we need.

“Generally, I use the summers more for skill development, but I was a little bit more specific this year and tried to take a different route and a different angle.”

As long as Laine and Kyle Connor remain unsigned, Roslovic is the type of guy who eats up some of the available minutes and shows he can be used regularly on a scoring line.

“For me, I want to be as high as you can as a lineup,” Roslovic said. “I like to think I can play on all of the lines and all of the positions, but my game suits to be up there. It’s not in my hands, but when the opportunity arises, I’m going to try to make the most of it.”

At one point last season going into the NHL trade deadline, Jets head coach Paul Maurice included Roslovic among those players who were untouchable.

Yet, Roslovic was a healthy scratch at times during the following weeks. Those two things generally don’t go hand in hand.

As for Roslovic’s growth and possible ceiling, Maurice expressed confidence in him while reminding the assembled media that nothing would simply be handed to him.

“We’re hoping more. If I say to you a lot more, it’s not because I’m saying that he’s not where we want him to be. I’m happy with where Jack is,” Maurice said. “I know Jack is waiting for his chance and he’s going to have lots of opportunity to get that chance. Guys got hurt (last season) and he ran a long time with Laine and Little. His fitness scores were awesome, so we like that because we know he put the work in. He’s going to get his chance over time. We really like Jack as a player, we were pretty thick up front there, so it was hard to get extra ice time.

“He’s going to have to fight for his ice time, just like the rest of these guys.”

Roslovic knows exactly what’s at stake for him.

It’s a contract year and it’s time to show that he can be a consistent contributor the Jets know they can count on.

“I know what I need to do to get better, to be a better player and to help the team,” Roslovic said. “It’s a big year, I’m excited for it, and we’ll see what happens.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
The 2018-19 version of the Vancouver Canucks’ power play should have been better.

With shooters like Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser, the Canucks underachieved as they finished with the league’s 22nd-best power play.

The Canucks scored a dozen goals with the man advantage over the last month of the season, a stretch of 16 games. Had they been similarly successful over the whole season, they’d have tallied 62 goals on the year, 19 more than they actually did.

That extra offence would have been valuable as an average of six goals were scored in every NHL game last season. Those 19 goals would have been worth at least four more wins for the Canucks.

Four wins is eight more points. Eight more points wouldn’t have put the Canucks in the playoffs, but it would have put them close.

The fixes aren’t necessarily complicated.

“Simplify. Don’t try to make the home run pass all the time,” Pettersson said Sunday when asked what was going wrong when the power play was struggling. “It was frustrating because, we felt like we didn’t come up with good chances.”

Assistant coach Newell Brown, who is in charge of the Canucks’ power play strategy, pointed out another element: avoiding key injuries.

“Therefore, we had, I think we had 27 different groupings last year,” he said. “You watch all the top teams, like Tampa Bay and Washington, they never changed that many times in three years. So we weren’t connecting as well, we didn’t have time to form the chemistry as much as we would have liked to.”

He also pointed to the experience factor, hoping that his younger forwards have learned a bit about what didn’t go right, about how, perhaps, other teams were defending against them.

That late-season groove that the Canucks found wasn’t a mirage, Brown believes.

“It was good to see that we finished on a positive note. And were able to salvage some good things at the end of the year that we could bring forward.”

This coming season, as he looks to build not one, but two effective units — the first unit accounted for three quarters of the Canucks’ power play goals last season — a pair of players with differing offensive skill sets in Quinn Hughes and Tyler Myers will help a lot too, he said.

Myers, it should be noted, had the best rate among NHL defencemen of primary assists while at 5 on 4 over the last two seasons.

“Tyler’s played a lot on the power play during his career,” Brown said. “That’s going to be his forte.”

You can add in veteran Alex Edler to the mix on the blue-line with the man advantage, as he’s been a strong contributor on the power play for years.

Wille’s Musings: Getting Boeser’s signature on a new deal just got harder
Ben Kuzma: Miller time is the right time for Horvat to find missing link
Canucks notebook: Elias Pettersson dangles like Peter Forsberg
Ben Kuzma: Reid Boucher can control low-flex stick more than his camp fate
Recap: Day three at Canucks training camp

The trend in the NHL has been to have four forwards and one defenceman making up a five-man power play unit — some dream of the five-forward unit and given what data has shown about the potential of such a quintet, one presumes that will appear sooner rather than later — but having three potent power play defencemen means that yes, one of the Canucks’ units will likely lineup with two defencemen as part of it.

Put once the puck drops, on the man advantage, the traditional positions matter less, the skill sets matter much more.

Might that mean Hughes isn’t necessarily only a point man? Might Myers be deployed as the net-front, down-low forward in the now-standard 1-3-1 setup?

The situation remains wide-open, it would seem.

“Finding out where players’ strong points are in their game, whether it’s on the goal-line, in front of the net, in the middle, on the flanks, sometimes defencemen are good on the flanks. So we just have to figure that out and put the right pieces of the puzzle together.”

Brown maintains an open dialogue with the players who make up his units.

“We are very open about it, we talk,” Pettersson said about how Brown and the other players on the power play discuss their approach. “If I have something to say I’ll say it then there’s another guy who has something. We always talk that way to each other.”

Add it all up and the Canucks expect their 2019-20 power play to be much, much better.
As the summer draws to a close, here are the always sunny Monday
morning musings and meditations on the world of sports.

There are a number of ways to look at the Mitch Marner contract — and
various media outlets in Toronto have examined them all — but this is
what it looks like from Vancouver.

The Maple Leafs didn't make the Brock Boeser negotiation any easier on
the Canucks.

Marner, as you may be aware, signed a six-year deal with an average
annual value of US$10.893 million (all figures in U.S. dollars). He has,
over the course of his short career, outperformed Boeser.

The next question is by how much and that will be asked intently by
Boeser's agent Ben Hankinson.

Marner is coming off a breakthrough 94-point season which placed him
11th among all NHL scorers last season. Boeser had 56 points in 69
games.

But it's the per-game averages over their NHL careers where things get
interesting in this comparison. Over his three seasons with the Leafs,
Marner has averaged .28 goals per game, .65 assists and .90 points.

Boeser has averaged .42 goals per game, .41 assists and .81 points with
the Canucks.

OK, Marner has been the more productive player. But, if you believe the
Canucks are trying to bring Boeser in at $7 million per, is that difference
worth $4 million a year?

Let's look at it another way. Even if it's worth $2 million a year, that puts
Boeser in the $9-million ballpark and that will impact the negotiations for
Elias Pettersson in two years and Bo Horvat two years after that.

And that's just the Canucks because Marner's contract will send
reverberations around the NHL. Mikko Rantanen, another one of the
RFAs, has put up 84 and 87 points the last two years with Colorado. He
now has to be looking for Marner money but how's that going to play on
an Avs' team where Nathan MacKinnon is locked in at $6.3 million the
next four years.

Brayden Point, yet another RFA, finished two points behind Marner last
season. How does Tampa pay Point more than Nikita Kucherov, the
reigning Art Ross and Hart Trophy winner, who has seven years left on a
deal that pays $9.5 million?

Marner got paid and good for him. But these deals aren't made in a
vacuum. His contract has reset the bar for Rantanen, Point, Calgary's
Matthew Tkachuk, Winnipeg's Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor and Boeser.

We're about to find out how high.

I think we all have a friend or a family member like Jake Virtanen. They
are likable. They are talented. You want to see them do well but, for
whatever reason, they just can't seem to stay out of their own way.

Virtanen has been given any number of chances because he was the
sixth overall pick in the 2014 draft and he's a tantalizing combination of
speed and power.

But somewhere along the line the light has to go on. Who knows. It might
happen one day.

The fear is it won't be in Vancouver.

So I'm flipping through Twitter and there's a post with video of 95-year-
old Howie Meeker attending the Leafs' alumni game in St. John's on
Sunday. Fricking awesome.
Ben Kuzma: Reid Boucher can control low-flex stick more than his camp fate

VICTORIA — Reid Boucher saw the future Sunday.

The Vancouver Canucks depth winger was aligned with Elias Pettersson in a training-camp scrimmage and it didn’t take long for the Calder Trophy winner to do his thing.

With the ice starting to deteriorate, he flipped a high pass in the neutral zone that found Micheal Ferland for a breakaway goal. He then calmly executed a shootout move in which the slick Swedish centre shifted to the left, put one hand on the stick and went wide right to slip the puck home. What impressed Boucher the most?

“Everything,” he said. “Every time he touches the puck, something good happens. Ferland and I were kind of joking, just give him the puck and he’ll make the plays. He plays a full-ice game as well and hustles back to the D-zone and makes good plays and it’s been special to watch.”

And watching Pettersson on the ice is imperative. Just when it looked like he was being hemmed in on another foray through the neutral zone, he sensed Boucher should be on the right side and somehow slipped the puck over. Boucher wasn’t ready.

“I was kind of at the end of my shift,” said Boucher. “I saw he had a bit of space on a rush and I was kind of caught in between and told him on the bench that I should have been there for him.”

Boucher obviously hopes to be there when the Canucks play a string of pre-season games, but a glut of wingers likely means he’s once again destined for Utica where he piled up 31 goals and 62 points in 56 AHL games. If anything, the leaner 26-year-old from Lansing, Mich. is doing everything he can to stay on the Canucks radar.

He appeared in just one NHL game last season and his 133 career games with New Jersey, Nashville and Vancouver include just 48 with the Canucks in which he managed eight goals. It would take a rash of indifferent play or injuries for a recall, but Boucher is handling the reality the best he can. He’s on an expiring two-way contract that pays US$750,000 in the NHL and US$450,000 in the minors, so perspective is imperative.

Boucher isn’t the faster skater, but he has a hell of a shot.

“If take everything in practices seriously when it comes to shooting the puck and trying to score in practice and that’s been part of my success for the last couple of years,” he reasoned. “I don’t think it’s a matter of staying positive, it’s controlling what I can control. I can’t control being called up or sent down, but I can control how hard I work.”

It doesn’t hurt that Boucher has found the right tool of his trade.

He uses an STX composite stick that has a 75 flex rate, which players have called a “noodle.” After all, Brock Boeser made his mark as a rookie with a 90 flex because he has the strength and skill to get a lot on his shot and pick corners. What’s the deal with Boucher low-flex stick?

“It lets me shoot the same with less effort,” he said. “It lets me shoot hard without loading the stick as much and it comes off (the blade)! quicker. I’ve used a 75 flex my whole life and it’s just about dialing the kick point on the stick.”

That much Boucher can control.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 09.16.2019
The Vancouver Canucks played another scrimmage on day three, with the two main groups facing each other again at the Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre in Victoria, which has served as the base for the three-day training camp.

The game was a brisk affair, finishing at 2-2 after a pair of 20-minute rolling time periods. Adam Gaudette and Guillaume Brisebois gave the blue team a two-goal lead, but the white rallied on goals by Ashton Sautner and Micheal Ferland.

Coach Travis Green, knowing the fans would want to see some bonus hockey, signalled that he wanted to see some three-on-three overtime and while no one scored, the tempo remained high.

Corey Hirsch, of course, was scored on by Peter Forsberg in the 1994 Olympic gold medal game with a move that saw the Swedish forward leave one hand on his stick and guide the puck into the right side of the net, around Hirsch, as he skated to the left of the net.

“No one say anything,” Hirsch joked in the press box after Pettersson pulled off his move.

The scrimmage was a better tempo, Pettersson said but he’s ready for the games to start.

“Looking forward to that, a 60 minute game,” he said. “I’m fully ready to start the season now. But of course, it’s great to get some pre-season going on. I don’t know how many games I will play before the season. Yeah, we’ll see.”

No lineup clues

Travis Green wasn’t revealing how he was going to break down his two squads for Monday night, with one group staying in Victoria to face a Calgary Flames split-squad, another heading out on an early afternoon flight to face another group of Flames at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

But one presumes that the team that travels will be led by mostly depth players — each team is obligated to dress eight NHL veterans — like Jay Beagle, Tim Schaller and Loui Eriksson, while stars like Elias Pettersson and Bo Horvat, as well as hometown boy Jordie Benn, are likely to play in Victoria.

The coach cares

Canucks assistant coach Nolan Baumgartner spent a lot of time on ice this weekend, featuring in every session, including when the Utica Comets-dominated group was practising.

He said he felt it was an important message to send to the players who are bound for the Comets. He wanted them to feel as much part of the organization, of training camp, as the players in the main groups.

Podkolzin’s lack of playing time

It is not unusual for young players in Russian hockey, when playing on a men’s team, to not get much ice time.

But it is still notable that Vasili Podkolzin, the Canucks’ first-round pick, is barely playing for SKA St. Petersburg in the Kontinental Hockey League. He played just 70 seconds in a game on Friday against CSKA Moscow, and just two minutes and 45 seconds on Sunday against Jokerit.

“It’s the coach’s choice,” Canucks general manager Jim Benning said on Sunday when asked about the situation. “We respect what the coach is doing.”

The Canucks knew the score when they drafted him, that there was a chance Podkolzin would be handled like many other teenagers who’ve been signed by top Russian clubs.

And while Benning put on a positive face and responded in a professional manner, you can’t help but wonder what he’s thinking behind the scenes. This is a player that the team wants to see play games.

Mystery revealed

It wasn’t intentional, but Jake Virtanen revealed that the injury he suffered last year in a hit by Ryan Getzlaf wasn’t a rib injury, but a collarbone.

“The injury with my collarbone, or whatever,” he began, before realizing that was not something that had been discussed before. He drew a round of smiles.

“I mean, I forget what it was even. Whatever it was. Whatever it was.”

CBA re-opener deadline pushed back

If you were expecting to hear about the NHLPA’s decision on whether to open the collective bargaining agreement on Sunday, you’ll have to wait a day.

The deadline, as laid out in the current CBA was originally planned for Sunday but the players exercised a clause to push their deadline until the end of day on Monday.

Bo Horvat, the team’s NHLPA representative, said he had a call scheduled for Sunday afternoon.
Ben Kuzma: Miller time is the right time for Horvat to find missing link

VICTORIA — Bo Horvat called J.T. Miller “undercover speedy.”

Not sure that term would pop up in a hockey thesaurus, but what the Vancouver Canucks centre was trying to say about his potential new winger is that he gets to crucial areas quicker than you think. Is he a burner? No. Will his pace and game complement Horvat? Absolutely.

In two training-camp scrimmages, Miller came as advertised. He was hard on pucks and the opposition. He set up a goal Sunday by digging hard and feathering a pass to Guillaume Brisebois in the slot. He even gave Alex Edler a whack on the shin pads during one testy shift.

“I’m fast for being 215 pounds,” reasoned the 6-foot-1 Miller. “It’s not upper-echelon with smaller and fast guys. I don’t know how I adequately skate, but I don’t think I’m slow and can get up and down the ice quickly. And when I have a feel for the game, I think I’m playing fast. I’m in on the forecheck, beat the defence to the puck and take them wide and pull up — that’s when I’m at my best for speed.”

NEXT GAME

Monday | Split squad games

Calgary Flames vs. Vancouver Canucks

6 p.m., Scotiabank Saddledome, Calgary, TV: None

7 p.m., Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre, Victoria, TV: SNP; Radio: SNET 650 AM

There’s way more to Miller than pace. It’s the way he willingly plays in traffic, gets to the dirty areas to display some soft hands and an underrated shot. And for Horvat, who had a dozen different wingers last year and three-dozen line combinations, having possible stable linemates in Miller and Tanner Pearson would work on several levels.

Miller is also good in the faceoff circle and could alleviate some of that pressure because Horvat led the NHL in total draws in 2018-19.

“I knew he was tough to play against,” said Horvat. “He’s hard in the faceoff circle and hard in the corners and really smart and undercover speedy. I even noticed it in one drill down low where he, me and Goldy (Nikolay Goldobin) were just dominating. We’re going to complement each other if we stick.

“And he’s somebody you can rely on shift in and shift out because he protects pucks along the wall, is great in his own end and at the same time, can put up numbers.”

It’s not a stretch to suggest that Miller should surpass his career-high 22-goal seasons with the New York Rangers in 2015-16 and 2016-17, in which he played on a line with Derek Stepan and Mats Zuccarello. And if he becomes a first power play fixture in the bumper position and gets to the net, the goals and points should pile up. So, how about 25 goals?

“That’s a good number,” he said. “I shoot the puck hard enough to get more than that, but I’m not going to put pressure on myself. I need to get my shot volume up.”

In his career-goal seasons, he managed 135 and 132 shots respectively and dipped to 102 last season. The 26-year-old East Palestine, Ohio native also dropped to 13 goals last season in a more limited role with the Tampa Bay Lightning in which he was often a third-line, right-wing staple with Anthony Cirelli and Alex Killorn.

Despite three less minutes per outing at an average of 14:40, he had a career-high 20 power play points and his 34 assists matched a career high, while his 47 points were second highest of his career.

Miller became expendable in a Lightning salary-cap crunch. With four more seasons at an annual US$5.25 million hit — and Tampa Bay needing space to sign 92-point restricted free-agent winger Brayden Point — he was a traded to the Canucks on June 22.

For the Bolts, it was about dollars and sense because they finished the season just US$1.7 million under the cap ceiling. For Miller, it was about incentive.

“I knew there was a (trade) possibility and with how tight the cap was I had to look at it pretty realistically,” he said. “I wasn’t surprised but when you sign long term, you get the assumption that you’re going to be there a long time. But when a deal came along that made sense for both teams, I could be the guy.”

Miller was selected 11th overall by the Rangers in the 2011 draft. He would eventually endure tough Ranger camps under John Tortorella and Alain Vigneault. Tortorella had a crazy long Day 1 testing run and Vigneault had two tough bike tests and on-ice testing before camp commenced. But Miller has sensed something in Travis Green practices that set them apart.

“As far as tempo, this is probably the hardest I’ve had in my career,” stressed Miller. “I can tell that he wants to beat into our heads that we’re going to be a fast-paced team and be hard to play against.”

Which, of course, is music to the ears of the Canucks coach.

“I like him,” Green said of Miller. “He’s got skill, he can shoot the puck and has a got some tenacity in his game. He gets in and wins puck battles and fights to get to the net. He has a lot of good qualities and you can see why he’s a good player.”
Canucks training camp: The Forsberg deke, Rafferty and the leadership group on Hughes and Pettersson’s emergence

By Thomas Drance Sep 15, 2019

September is the most optimistic time of year in the NHL. Most everyone likes their team and their chances. Most everyone had a great summer working out. Meanwhile, the results on the ice, the wins and losses that drive this business, are still more than two weeks away from influencing the conversation.

It’s a heady time of year and even in this upbeat environment, after three days of hard work and scrimmages, the mounting excitement and expectations that face Elias Pettersson going into his second NHL season have metastasized into something approaching a frenzy.

If we’re not quite at Petey-mania yet, you can at least see it from here.

From the Captain America memes (which Pettersson himself described as unfair to Dan Murphy on Sunday) to the long lines of autograph seekers, Pettersson’s presence at camp dominated the coverage and the proceedings.

His performance even overshadowed the ongoing Brock Boeser contract stalemate. And then the Alien capped it all off with a Forsberg deke in the shootout that ended the final scrimmage of camp and only accelerated the hype train.

“I’m just trying to do my best out there,” Pettersson said of his performance at camp. “This summer, I’ve been trying to prepare myself as good as possible, and whatever I do, I’m doing 100 percent. That’s what I’m trying to do always.”

Pettersson’s 100 percent resulted in a sequence of dominant Images over the weekend. He crushed the bag skate on Friday and then authored a tremendous effort on the opening goal of the first scrimmage on Saturday. On Sunday, he scored on a lovely Forsberg deke in the shootout, but he also delivered a perfectly weighted aerial pass to Micheal Ferland to set up a breakaway on the game.

Even across a league awash with unbridled optimism at this time of year, Pettersson’s preternatural display of hockey skill this weekend stands as unfair to Dan Murphy on Sunday) to the long lines of autograph seekers, Pettersson’s presence at camp dominated the coverage and the proceedings.

The better scrimmage

Travis Green skated his club extremely hard all weekend, but with Sunday’s focus on systems — the players worked on their forecheck and neutral zone forecheck a bit in the on-ice sessions — the early group was far less fatigued on Day 3 than it was on Day 2.

“The second day was really hard,” Canucks forward Jay Beagle said. “Today was more systems and the scrimmage was better because of that.”

With fresher players competing, the Day 3 scrimmage was a fine show for the thousands of Canucks fans who attended. Green even called an audible when the scrimmage ended in a 2-2 tie, deciding to treat the fans to a five-minute period of 3-on-3 action and a shootout.

“That was just thinking on the fly a little bit,” Green said. “Tie game, let’s keep playing. Lot of people in the building, I think it’s exciting.”

It was a good call from the Vancouver head coach and set up an entertaining finale.

The in-game trade

Not since Mike Cammalleri was pulled from the bench in Montreal has hockey seen an in-game trade as unconventional as the one Green pulled off on Sunday, when he left the blue team bench after the first half of the scrimmage — with the blue team leading 2-0 — and switched to the white team bench to lead the comeback.

“I had money on white!” Green joked.

“No, I had to make a quick decision to decide who I thought was going to win, so I jumped benches. Wish I could do that in the regular season!”

No lineup update

No Canucks are traveling Sunday ahead of Monday’s split-squad game against the Calgary Flames.

Both the side that will host the Flames in Victoria on Monday night and the side that will concurrently travel to play the Flames at the Scotiabank Saddledome will hold morning skates at Save-on-Foods Memorial Centre in Victoria on Monday morning.

As such, the Canucks wouldn’t reveal their lineup for either contest, and I’d expect we’ll have to closely watch line rushes at both morning skates to get a sense of which players are playing in which games.

“There will be a lot of bodies playing in the games, so 60 guys have to dress,” Green said of selecting his lineup for the split-squad game on Monday and Tuesday night’s preseason game at Rogers Arena. “There will be some guys that play back-to-back games, a lot of guys have to dress and so a lot of guys will get game action, which is nice for them.”

Green also wouldn’t reveal anything about the coaching staff he’s planning to send to Calgary. He did advise the media, however, that he would “mix it up” rather than sending the Utica Comets staff to run the bench in Calgary.

Look at this graph

The Coy Genius, aka The Athletic’s Harman Dayal, showed Bo Horvat a bar graph featuring information on what tends to happen when the linemates of a high-end defensive centre improve.

In fact, Dayal was having some great conversations with a variety of Canucks all weekend. The features that Dayal is going to write with the insight gleaned from chatting through and even looking over graphs with actual NHL players are going to be mind-blowing.

Horvat seemed genuinely curious, too.

Brogan Rafferty has a fascinating personal story.

The Quinnipiac product, signed late last season to an entry-level deal, is legally blind in his right eye.

With his contacts on, he can see pretty well.

When he put his hand over his “good” eye after Sunday’s on-ice session, an on-ice session in which he once again impressed observers — including Canucks brass — with a composed, all-around performance, Rafferty told me that while he could still see me, he couldn’t quite make out the letters on my media pass.

Rafferty’s lack of vision in his right eye hasn’t stopped him from excelling at the college level, or earning an NHL contract, or making his NHL debut, which he did with the Canucks late last season.

It also hasn’t stopped Rafferty from putting together a stellar performance throughout camp, one that’s left the Canucks officially and unofficially impressed.

“The problem is when I say something like that is I’m also leaving someone out and this is all off the top of my mind,” Green said after naming Carson Focht and Ethan Regier on Saturday, when asked to list some players who’d stood out at camp so far, “but Brogan Rafferty looked good in the game today. Composed.”

Asked the same question Sunday, Green was a bit cagier, but only slightly.

“I thought a couple of the young D played well,” the Canucks bench boss said. “I hate saying one or two names, I could probably say six names. Some of the young D stood out to me.”

Fellow defensive prospect Josh Tervo had a strong performance on Sunday as well, but Rafferty has clearly upped his stock with a stellar weekend in Victoria.

“For him to single out me, it’s flattering, but I can’t let it get to my head,” Rafferty said Sunday. “Just continue what I’m doing and if he likes what I’m doing, then that’s good.”

Rafferty cited his brief cup of coffee last season with helping him get up to speed quickly this weekend.
“Getting those NHL games helped my confidence a lot,” he said. “Going to a few camps, seeing the staff over and over, it helped me get comfortable, which is a big deal going into my first NHL training camp. Having that confidence is priceless.”

The confidence appears to be paying off, though there’s still a lot of road to run. Rafferty is already 24 years old, and the vast majority of NCAA players with a similar build and production profile haven’t managed to make it to the NHL. There are exceptions, players such as Nate Prosser and Matt Gilroy, but the Canucks clearly see separators in Rafferty that suggest to them that he can beat the odds.

If there’s one area that Rafferty still hopes to improve, it’s his shooting. His “offensive killer instinct” as he put it. He’d also like to improve his overall digital footprint.

Rafferty has told the story a lot, but he shares the same first and last name and the same age with one of the Craigslist killers who terrorized Ohio earlier this decade.

In the past, when you’d type his name into Google, Google’s predictions would fill out the query with words like “murderer” and “trial.” It seems that Rafferty’s hockey success has changed that equation somewhat, although “Craigslist” remains when I tested it out in incognito mode on Sunday afternoon:

“I’m still working to try and make it so that when you look my name up it won’t say like ‘Craigslist’ or ‘court case’ after it,” Rafferty said. “I’d like it to just say ‘hockey.’”

If he keeps performing the way he did this weekend, it’s only a matter of time.

The reveal
Jake Virtanen discussed training camp and his second-half struggles last season with the media Sunday. In so doing, he revealed that a previously undisclosed upper-body injury, it seems, was a collarbone injury.

The exchange was hilarious and went like this:
Virtanen: Just with the injury with my collarbone, actually, I forget what it was even...”
(Widespread laughter from the media pool, Jake and even Canucks PR)
Reporter: Upper body!
Virtanen: “Yeah, (laughing) whatever it was. I think I made a big step last year and I’m going to do that again this year as well.”

Best insight
The Canucks have a relatively large leadership group. It consists of veteran players such as Chris Tanev, Brandon Sutter, Alex Edler, Bo Horvat and Jay Beagle — players who have been around, had success and have worked with stellar players throughout their careers.

Often those stellar players helped mold the current Canucks leadership group into the NHL veterans they’ve become.

“I just try to think about how it was when I was a young guy, what the older guys did for me, how much they helped and how important that was,” Edler says of his approach working with Vancouver’s young core.

“I’m just trying to do the same for the young guys now, if they need me.”

With Pettersson putting on a show all weekend, I decided I’d ask Vancouver’s leadership group about working with Pettersson and the likes of Quinn Hughes. How does it work for a team that’s transitioning to a young core of elite players?

“Our young guys are all great people, good heads on their shoulders, and special players too,” Tanev said. “They’ve all been in positions where they’re top players on their teams ... I like to try and have guys over for dinner, just chat. They’re all such great kids though that it’s not too much work. They know how to play, and they know how to prepare.”

Tanev, in particular, has been paired with Hughes on occasion at training camp and has spent a lot of the weekend working with him — in drills on the ice, and socially off of it.

“It’s fun to be able to go hang out with Quinn,” Tanev said. “It’s just like, ‘Let’s just go to watch football today,’ hang out and chat, talk hockey and talk about what we can do on the ice, how we can work together. It’s fun.”

Beagle and Sutter, meanwhile, praised how little mentorship Pettersson requires. How he has a sixth sense about doing the right things.

“The thing with him is, he thinks the game so well, he knows the game so well and he knows what he needs to do, on and off the ice,” Beagle said. “He’s a guy that people say, ‘As a leader, what do you do with Petey?’

“Nothing. There’s nothing you need to do.”

“He showed it from Day 1 last year, too,” said Sutter, suggesting that he hasn’t seen much of a change from Pettersson between last year’s training camp and this one. “A lot of young guys, skilled guys, when they’re young come in and think it’s going to be easy. But he pitched right in.

“You watch him, first week of last season and he’s in the corner battling guys, blocking shots. Not a lot of 19-year-olds do that. For a guy that’s as high-skill as he is, you don’t see that a lot.”

When asked about the system of working with young, elite players, Horvat recalled the primary lesson that he took from the Sedin twins and Alex Edler when he was a young man in the league – a lesson that’s especially valuable during the bag skates of training camp weekend.

“I think work ethic is the biggest thing that I learned from the twins and Eddie,” Horvat said. “They were always the players that were in the best shape at camp. I learned that quickly, if you want to be the best, you have to beat the best. They always came to camp in great shape and were unbelievable and I try to do that every single year.”

Horvat also suggested that Pettersson is noticeably more comfortable this year — in his opinion.

“I think he’s matured, he’s a lot more comfortable and he’s still dancing out there on the ice,” Horvat said. “I think he’s in better shape, he knew what to expect and that’s made him that much better.”

Pettersson seems to agree with Horvat’s overall assessment: He’s better prepared and he’s learned from last year. If those lessons apply to all facets of his preparation off the ice and his work on it, that could be a scary proposition for the rest of the league.

“This year, I knew what was coming,” Pettersson said. “I know the guys on the team, the coaching staff and all that. So I knew what was going to happen, where I didn’t know last year.”

The Athletic LOADED: 09.16.2019
PARADISE, N.L. — This is a week John Tavares will never forget.

None of the Toronto Maple Leafs will, come to think of it, not with the way St. John’s and its neighbouring communities have wrapped their arms around the team during the first few days of training camp.

Tavares hadn’t even stepped off the plane before feeling the love. That’s because airport workers wearing Leafs gear were there to welcome him when his flight with Mitch Marner and general manager Kyle Dubas touched down here Saturday afternoon.

The 28-year-old had stayed back in Toronto for a couple days following the birth of his son, Jace, on Wednesday. That the Leafs managed to end their contract stalemate with Marner — his linemate and primary set-up man — amounted to a nice bonus for the highly focused centre.

“It’s been a hell of a few days, especially for myself with my little guy,” said Tavares.

“And then knowing I was going to have a partner flying in with me.”

There was a legitimate buzz in the air at Paradise Double Ice Complex for Sunday morning’s practice. Yes, practice. Young kids pressed their faces against the glass to get a look at Tavares and Marner back on the ice with the Leafs, and a big cheer went up when they participated in a series of routine drills.

Talk about gracious hosts. The folks in Newfoundland have made a strong case for bringing another camp back here in the future. They’ve also provided perspective about just how strong and wide-reaching the Leafs brand is.

“The fanbase here, it’s a lot bigger I think than all of us thought,” said Marner.

“I kind of saw what the (ECHL’s) Growlers did here last year in winning it all. Seeing it first-hand, it’s pretty amazing.”

Perhaps that’s why there is such an air of optimism around the Leafs in these early days of preparation for a new season — although Marner’s signing, Tavares’s growing family and the promise of a captain soon to be named have to be thrown in the mix, too.

This is part of what drew Tavares home to begin with.

The chance to be part of a team overflowing with talent and possibility. By his own admission, he feels more comfortable reporting for his second training camp with the Leafs because the rhythm and routine is familiar.

The only change is happening away from the rink as he and wife Aryne wade into parenthood.

“Well, I’ve got to give family a lot of credit,” said Tavares.

“They’re already helping us out quite a bit, from my mother-in-law to my parents stopped in a couple times, siblings and whatnot.

“It’s been pretty incredible. It’s a very emotional thing and it’s still really kicking in thinking I’m a dad.”

It’s impossible to go through that kind of transition without gaining a new perspective or view on the work-life balance. But there Tavares was an hour after flying into St. John’s, working out by himself on a foam roller at the arena.

Even after posting career-bests with 47 goals and 88 points in his first season in Toronto, he feels the need to prove himself all over again.

“He’s serious about his craft, he’s very professional, he’s very driven,” said Leafs coach Mike Babcock.

“Knows what he wants and he’s not letting people get in his way and what he wants done.”

Those are the kind of traits you hope rub off.
It was just your average Sunday-afternoon intra-squad scrimmage, except with more than 15,000 screaming fans in attendance and some players treating it like a Stanley Cup Playoff game.

Welcome to Montreal, Ben Chiarot.

"I've never seen anything like that," the freshly signed Canadiens defenceman said afterwards.

Get used to it, Ben.

Oh, by the way, how was the game?

"It felt good to get out there and hit some guys," the six-foot-three, 225-pounder said.

Chiarot wasn't the only one throwing his weight around in what turned out to be a rather chippy affair at the Bell Centre.

Intense?

"You had Paulie Byron snapping sticks out there," said Montreal Canadiens forward Jonathan Drouin.

So yeah, it was intense. Especially for the young players trying to make their mark in the limited window they have to perhaps convince Canadiens coaches Claude Julien, Luke Richardson, Dominique Ducharme and Kirk Muller they're worthy of a spot in the opening-night lineup.

About them, two in particular were at the centre of virtually everyone's attention. Nick Suzuki and Ryan Poehling, prospects chosen 12 picks apart in the first round of the 2017 Draft, are both pushing for spots with the Canadiens and it probably wasn't a coincidence they were matched up against each other for Sunday's scrimmage.

It was an entertaining battle to watch, with Poehling earning an assist and Suzuki making several quality plays. Afterwards, we asked Drouin to put his scouting cap on to give us a report on both players.

"I don't want to fully compare him to Brayden Point where maybe he's missing that speed, but, in the next couple of years, if it comes, he's that kind of player where he just kind of does everything right," Drouin said about Suzuki. "It's maybe not the boom, spectacular play every time, but he makes little smart plays. He makes the right plays where it makes a difference.

"I was there in Halifax for the Memorial Cup last spring and you could see Suzuki's poise (with the Ontario Hockey League's Guelph Storm) was really there. His playmaking ability, small plays, big plays — he made them all. I was impressed."

And on Poehling, who made his NHL debut with a hat trick and a shootout winner in Montreal's final game of the 2018-19 season?

"He's a big, powerful forward and he has speed," Drouin said. "I think his hands are underrated. I skated with him this summer, he's got quick hands and they're quick on his quick wrist shot. I think you saw last year that he can play in this league, and hopefully he just keeps growing and growing and growing as a player."

Montreal Canadiens' Ryan Poehling looks on during training camp.

(Graham Hughes/CP)

There's no question Poehling has transformed considerably since that remarkable night at the Bell Centre back in April. For one, his confidence has grown from the experience of getting into an NHL game. And, on the physical front, he jumped into summer training quickly, put an emphasis on improving his cardio in preparation for playing a much more rigorous schedule than the one he was on at the college level, and he's feeling stronger and much faster than he was five months ago.

"I have a good stride, a long one," Poehling said. "I gained a lot of power in the summer, though. When you have more power to push into it I think you do get a little bit more speed out of it."

It was clear that extra jump was there when Poehling chased down a puck on one of his shifts in the second half of Sunday's game. The jets were on as he beat Brett Kulak to a puck behind the net and found linemate Matthew Peca for a chance in front.

Speaking of finding players in open ice, Suzuki did that a number of times on Sunday.

On one play in particular, he took the puck down the right wing and slowed his pace through the neutral zone before two Canadiens defenders sprinted over to cut him off. Suzuki drew them in and then put a perfect pass on linemate Jordan Weal's tape and Weal got a good rush opportunity out of it.

It was a play that showed off just how deceptive a player Suzuki is, one that he felt boosted his confidence in the game.

"I think I'm good at finding guys through little holes," Suzuki said afterwards. "(Weal) did a good job of staying in the middle and getting behind those guys and I just had to feed it through them, so I feel like that's a strong suit of my game."

Suzuki also had four quality scoring chances and showed some nice chemistry with Weal and left winger Charles Hudon.

"I thought I got to show a good amount," he said. "Created a lot of chances. My line was brand new, we've only skated together for a couple of days, but I thought we generated a lot of chances. Have to clean up a couple of things in the D-zone, but I guess that just comes with repetition of playing the games."

There's a good chance Suzuki will be in the lineup on Monday, when the Canadiens welcome the New Jersey Devils to the Bell Centre for their first pre-season game.

Poehling won't be in action, but with six more games on the team's exhibition schedule he'll have plenty more opportunity to show what he's capable of.

"I just think that I want to prove that I'm ready," said Poehling. "I think I've been ready, and I had a long summer and worked hard and I know I'm young and everyone says that coming out of college the long season is going to fatigue me, but I just want to show people and get the chance to show people that I am ready for this."

After watching both Poehling and Suzuki in their first game of training camp, both players appear ready for the challenge in front of them.
Minded Larsson is freed up to roam a little bit more. That could be the
Like Klefbom for the past few seasons, whoever plays with the d
“I feel great on the ice right now.”
have to keep up with those smaller forwards.
The league is getting smaller and faster, and even the big guys
told me, “Even if you’re going to play
changes. I was open, and I changed a lot of things in my training,” he
“Looking at his game from last year, I thought he really grew on when and where he can go for offence,” said the quiet Swede Adam Larsson, who will be Nurse’s new partner under head coach Dave Tippett, at least through training camp. “There’s a fine line there, and I thought he really did that well last year. He took a lot of steps last year, and I want to help him grow some more.”
Ironically, Larsson dropped 10 pounds himself this year, after a 2018-19 campaign he was unhappy with. He’s at 202 pounds, lean and hungry to reclaim his spot as one of the NHL’s harder-to-play-against defenders.
“When you feel like you’ve had a disappointing season, you’re more open to changes. I was open, and I changed a lot of things in my training,” he said. “Even if you’re going to play a big, heavy game, you still have to keep up. The league is getting smaller and faster, and even the big guys have to keep up with those smaller forwards.
“I feel great on the ice right now.”
Like Klefbom for the past few seasons, whoever plays with the defensive-minded Larsson is freed up to roam a little bit more. That could be the
EDMONTON — There is a time in every successful athlete’s life where they begin to figure things out on their own. That moment when they stop listening to what everyone around them is saying they should be — or telling them what they can’t be — and they take control of their own mission.
Meet Darnell Nurse, the leaner, smarter and — if he has a say — more-dynamic-than-ever-before defenceman for the Edmonton Oilers.
“I’m going into my fifth year in the league now, and when you first come in, everyone is like, ‘Put on weight. Put on weight,’” Nurse recalled on Sunday morning, in a long, confident chat at Rogers Place, another sign that this 24-year-old has grown up. “Honestly, I would go home in the summer, eat as much as I could, get in the best shape as I could while trying to be as heavy as possible. And sometimes uncomfortably, to be honest.
“It kind of just clicked in my head this summer. Why am I forcing myself to just get heavier and heavier, when I could just be at a comfortable weight and just see where my strength goes? And it’s been kind of weird: My strength has skyrocketed just by finding my comfortable weight.”
He’s stronger at 215 pounds than he was at 225?
“And more powerful too,” he said. “I know the Twitter trainers might not understand that concept, but it’s cool. I just got in a state of mind where I was doing things that were comfortable, and stopped trying to force everything. That’s where my head is at.”
His arms aren’t big, and his chest is more like a decathlete than a the traditional, six-foot-four NHL defenceman. “It’s a fast league. You’ve got to stay fast.”
Edmonton Oilers defenceman Darnell Nurse controls the puck as Tampa Bay Lightning left wing Alex Killorn defends. (Codie McLachlan/CP)
The questions that have followed Nurse, however, have always been more about his head than his body. When it comes to offence, where he has always wanted to become an effective points producer, scouts tend to focus on what Nurse leaves in his wake when he makes his offensive forays.
For instance, Nurse went from 26 points and a plus-15 rating two seasons ago, to 41 points and minus-five last season. Yes, we know there are a lot of factors to consider, and plus-minus does not tell the whole story. But the gist is, they don’t call them “offencemen” — they are known as defencemen for a reason.
So while Nurse did lead all Oilers defencemen in points last season — tied for 27th among all NHL blueliners — the trick here is to produce points but be the shutdown defenceman Nurse was drafted to be.
“Not that you can take more risks, but you know (Larsson) will be in the right spot to back you up, so you can try to make a couple of more plays,” Nurse figured. “Having said that, when you play with Larss you’re playing against the top lines. So, the risk to reward is a really, really fine line.”
Nurse’s career points totals have climbed consistently, from 10, to 11, to 26 to 41. To hear him tell it, being a 50-point defenceman is well within his parameters.
“My offensive game grew last year, yeah, but I think there is a whole lot more I can produce, just from watching tape. Whether it’s on the rush, from the blue-line,” he said.
Or with more power-play time, where he was on and off the top unit at practice Sunday, sharing the assignment with Klefbom.
“In my mind I don’t think I’m close to the ceiling that I can get to.”
Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.16.2019

Mark Spector | September 15, 2019, 3:37 PM
It is clear how the organization is lean, but our election desk is already calling it for Horvat. opener whether to name a captain for this season. Travis Green and staff will monitor the pre-season games against the Calgary Flames on Monday.

“I know he sucks to play against, and I think that’s one of the highest compliments you can pay to a player,” Miller said of getting to know Bo. “He’s hard to play against. Whether that’s putting the puck in the net or toe-dragging you or winning the one-on-one battles, that can mean a lot of things. He brings a lot of that to the table. He’s an identity guy. I haven’t played with these guys, but you just know when Bo’s going, others will follow. He’s a leadership guy.”

Exactly. Canucks general manager Jim Benning reiterated Sunday that coach Travis Green and staff will monitor the pre-season and decide before the opener whether to name a captain for this season.

But our election desk is already calling it for Horvat. It is clear how the organization is leaning. “Bo’s a mature person, a mature player,” Benning said. “I know all his teammates respect him for the way he handles himself on a day to day basis, the habits he has and how he conducts himself on a day to day basis. For me, he’d be the guy.”

For everyone, he’d be the guy. “I’ve been saying this for a long time: it doesn’t matter if I’m wearing a ‘C’ or an ‘A’ or anything like that,” Horvat said. “If it did happen, of course, I’d be happy. But I wouldn’t change my game or the way I am as a person. I do feel I’m ready for it.”

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek.

He’s also ready for regular linemates. After a February trade from Pittsburgh, Tanner Pearson scored nine times in 19 games playing with Horvat at the end of last season. Although Pearson practised on a different line at camp, it’s easy to imagine Pearson-Horvat-Miller becoming a thing.

A pretty good thing, too. “It would be great; I’m not going to lie,” Horvat said of regular linemates. “Obviously, last year with injuries and stuff, playing with pretty much everybody on every combination you could think of, was tough. It’s tough to get chemistry. But I take it as a compliment more than a slap on the face. Of course, you want to play with Brock (Boeser). Of course, you want to play with Petey (Elias Pettersson). You want to play with top-six guys all the time.

“At the same time, it’s rewarding when you play with everybody and you’re still able to put up numbers and help other guys take their game to the next level, too. Obviously, when you play with more offensive guys, you’re going to get more points.”

Last season, third- and fourth-line centres Brandon Sutter and Jay Beagle missed 81 games between them, which is partly why Horvat took so many faceoffs and had ever-changing linemates. “I feel like I’ve definitely matured as player, just going through the things I’ve been through the last three or four years,” Horvat said. “I’ve played roles I wasn’t used to playing, basically just getting thrown in there. It was either a sink or swim kind of thing.”

Mostly, he swam like a fish. Like a great, big Orca with a “C” on him. Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.16.2019
It was just your average Sunday-afternoon intra-squad scrimmage, except with more than 15,000 screaming fans in attendance and some players treating it like a Stanley Cup Playoff game.

Welcome to Montreal, Ben Chiarot.

"I've never seen anything like that," the freshly signed Canadiens defenceman said afterwards. Get used to it, Ben.

Oh, by the way, how was the game?

"It felt good to get out there and hit some guys," the six-foot-three, 225-pounder said.

Chiarot wasn’t the only one throwing his weight around in what turned out to be a rather chippy affair at the Bell Centre.

Intense?

So yeah, it was intense. Especially for the young players trying to make their mark in the limited window they have to perhaps convince Canadiens coaches Claude Julien, Luke Richardson, Dominique Ducharme and Kirk Muller they’re worthy of a spot in the opening-night lineup.

About them, two in particular were at the centre of virtually everyone’s attention. Nick Suzuki and Ryan Poehling, prospects chosen 12 picks apart in the first round of the 2017 Draft, are both pushing for spots with the Canadiens and it probably wasn’t a coincidence they were matched up against each other for Sunday’s scrimmage.

It was an entertaining battle to watch, with Poehling earning an assist and Suzuki making several quality plays. Afterwards, we asked Drouin to put his scouting cap on to give us a report on both players.

"I don’t want to fully compare him to Brayden Point where maybe he’s missing that speed, but, in the next couple of years, if it comes, he’s that kind of player where he just kind of does everything right," Drouin said about Suzuki. "It’s maybe not the boom, spectacular play every time, but he makes little smart plays. He makes the right plays where it makes a difference.

"I was there in Halifax for the Memorial Cup last spring and you could see Suzuki’s poise (with the Ontario Hockey League’s Guelph Storm) was really there. His playmaking ability, small plays, big plays — he made them all. I was impressed."

And on Poehling, who made his NHL debut with a hat trick and a shootout winner in Montreal’s final game of the 2018-19 season?

"He’s a big, powerful forward and he has speed," Drouin said. "I think his hands are underrated. I skated with him this summer, he’s got quick hands and they’re quick on his quick wrist shot. I think you saw last year that he can play in this league, and hopefully he just keeps growing and growing and growing as a player."

Montreal Canadiens’ Ryan Poehling looks on during training camp.

(Graham Hughes/CP)

There’s no question Poehling has transformed considerably since that remarkable night at the Bell Centre back in April. For one, his confidence has grown from the experience of getting into an NHL game. And, on the physical front, he jumped into summer training quickly, put an emphasis on improving his cardio in preparation for playing a much more rigorous schedule than the one he was on at the college level, and he’s feeling stronger and much faster than he was five months ago.

"I have a good stride, a long one," Poehling said. "I gained a lot of power in the summer, though. When you have more power to push into it I think you do get a little bit more speed out of it."

Speaking of finding players in open ice, Suzuki did that a number of times on Sunday.

On one play in particular, he took the puck down the right wing and slowed his pace through the neutral zone before two Canadiens defenders sprinted over to cut him off. Suzuki drew them in and then put a perfect pass on linemate Jordan Weal’s tape and Weal got a good rush opportunity out of it.

It was a play that showed off just how deceptive a player Suzuki is, one that he felt boosted his confidence in the game.

"I think I’m good at finding guys through little holes," Suzuki said afterwards. "(Weal) did a good job of staying in the middle and getting behind those guys and I just had to feed it through them, so I feel like that’s a strong suit of my game."

Suzuki also had four quality scoring chances and showed some nice chemistry with Weal and left winger Charles Hudon.

"I thought I got to show a good amount," he said. "Created a lot of chances. My line was brand new, we’ve only skated together for a couple of days, but I thought we generated a lot of chances. Have to clean up a couple of things in the D-zone, but I guess that just comes with repetition of playing the games."

There’s a good chance Suzuki will be in the lineup on Monday, when the Canadiens welcome the New Jersey Devils to the Bell Centre for their first pre-season game.

Poehling won’t be in action, but with six more games on the team’s exhibition schedule he’ll have plenty more opportunity to show what he’s capable of.

"I just think that I want to prove that I’m ready," said Poehling. "I think I’ve been ready, and I had a long summer and worked hard and I know I’m young and everyone says that coming out of college the long season is going to fatigue me, but I just want to show people and get the chance to show people that I am ready for this."

After watching both Poehling and Suzuki in their first game of training camp, both players appear ready for the challenge in front of them.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 09.16.2019
The Knights beat the Chiefs for the area championship that season, then trumped all the top teams in North America to hoist the Compuware Honeybaked Invitational trophy. “[My age group] had never won that big of a tournament before. We were rated top-10 in North America with Brad as our coach. I know it’s only minor hockey, but it felt like this big accomplishment. Our team just took this other step with him as our coach,” Brown said. “His big quote was, ‘If I’m not yelling at you, I don’t care.’ So when he was yelling at me, I at least knew he cared and wanted me to get better … [and] he obviously saw something in me I didn’t see.”

Same goes for Ottawa Senators defenceman Dylan DeMelo, for whom Ostrom fought to get the OHL’s attention. “Skill you can teach,” asserted Ostrom, who also doubled as a scout for the London Knights for a handful of years. He believed it was the kid with heart and spark that you needed to spot — and push.

Ostrom remembered sitting in restaurant with DeMelo’s dad, Tony, and pulling out the Jr. Knights stat sheet. “Jeez, he got 25 goals this year. Not bad, eh?” Tony beamed.

“Yeah. And he only showed up for half the games,” Ostrom shot back, a challenge for DeMelo to reach his potential. DeMelo responded well to the jolt and later raved about the coach’s tough-love tack.

Ostrom went to bat for DeMelo and all his unrealized potential hard against a room full of OHL scouts pushing for another kid. The endorsement was proven out by history; DeMelo was the one of the two to make the NHL. Ostrom sounded even more proud to see DeMelo and Brown succeed than the no-brainers.

“The first month, September, on the ice every day, just working your tail off. No shortcuts. A lot of discipline,” DeMelo said, describing life under Ostrom. “But it was something that was vital for me. At 13, you don’t really know how hard you have to work. But when you come to the rink and you have order and you have discipline like that, I think it was great for my development.”
Power play so try and season and throughout the summer what was going to happen with that position,” Marner revealed. “We talked about it at the end of last season and throughout the summer what was going to happen with the power play so try and adjust quickly, try to be more of a shooter.”

Marc Masters

The Maple Leafs practised at the Paradise Double Ice Complex in Paradise, NL on Sunday.

Mitch Marner received a big ovation upon taking the ice for the first time at Maple Leafs training camp. More than 1,000 fans crammed into a rink in the town of Paradise (“Our name says it all,” reads the sign welcoming visitors) to see the man who racked up 94 points last season before signing a big, new contract on Friday night.

“You feel the love in this city,” Marner said. “The fan base here is a lot bigger than I think all of us thought.”

Despite missing the informal team skates in the run up to camp, Marner worked hard on conditioning in the summer and said he felt fine in a pair of practice sessions on Sunday. He was reunited with centre John Tavares during the workouts.

“Just trying to get the chemistry down again,” he said, “try to get it back, it’s been a while since we skated together so at these practices we really have to talk to each other get the chemistry going again.”

Mitch Marner says it was great to get back onto the ice with his teammates and put the business side of things behind him. Kasperi Kapanen admits that there were a lot of smiles today with Marner back in the mix.

The dynamic duo have a new linemate as Kasperi Kapanen takes the place of Zach Hyman.

“He’s got a lot of speed so, either one of us, when we don’t have the puck I know we’re going to try and find open space for each other,” said Marner.

Hyman is working his way back from knee surgery and is expected to miss 14-15 games, according to head coach Mike Babcock.

“Obviously, I’ll be the guy skating, getting the puck to them and standing in front of the net,” said Kapanen, who potted 20 goals last season. “I’ll let them do all the nice things and I’ll do the dirty work.”

Kapanen has played only sparingly on left wing in NHL, but did get some reps on that side with the Marlies.

“It’s nothing too new to me, but it’s something I have to adjust to and just get better at,” the Finn said. “When we break out I’m getting the puck a lot on my backhand and it’s getting it to my forehand, but it’s just hockey and I’ll try to figure it out.”

“We’ll have a talk,” said Babcock, “and I’ll explain clearly what he needs to do and then can he do it? I think he’d look real good on a line with (Alexander) Kerfoot and (Ilya) Mikheyev. I think they’d be a real good line for us, that’s what we’d like, but while Hyman’s (out) … there’s a real good opportunity for someone else, why not Kappy? Kappy plays hard and works hard. He’s got to adjust his game a bit, but he can.”

Kapanen ready to do the ‘dirty work’ for Marner and JT

Kasperi Kapanen has been promoted to John Tavares and Mitch Marner’s line with Zach Hyman out to start the season. The 23-year old already knows his role on the line and is ready for the ‘dirty work’ that comes with it.

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The Leafs power play, which came out of the gates strong last season, but was inconsistent down the stretch, will have a different look this season with new assistant coach Paul McFarland, who worked on Florida’s bench last season, devising the game plan. During Sunday’s practice, Marner was operating on the left flank instead of his usual position on the right side.

“Tried to work on on my one T, because I thought I was going to be in that position,” Marner revealed. “We talked about it at the end of last season and throughout the summer what was going to happen with the power play so try and adjust quickly, try to be more of a shooter.”

McFarland guided the Panthers to the second best power-play percentage in the NHL last season (26.8 per cent). The Leafs ranked eighth (21.8 per cent).

With the Leafs practising in three different groups, it’s hard to read too much into the power play work so far, but here’s what some of the notable units have looked like:

Has Jason Spezza gotten over not winning the Stanley Cup in Ottawa?

“No,” he said muttering a smile, “you think about it all the time. That’s why I’m still going. That’s why you want to change your role, you want to stick around, you want to keep playing. I love coming to the rink and I love playing the game. When you haven’t won and you’ve played this long it’s definitely something you think about all the time.”

Spezza, who played 11 of his 16 previous NHL seasons with the Senators making the Cup Final in 2007, compares the feel around this young Leafs team with the Ottawa teams that contended for a title.

“It does feel similar with the really dynamic offensive players, the really mobile defencemen and then a few defensive guys,” he said. “It does feel similar, to be honest, I was thinking about that the other day how with these guys coming and how dynamic they are offensively. I think we can be a team that really overwhelms teams offensively. You see when those guys start snapping the puck around and hanging on to it that can be a headache to play against.”

The Leafs held a team-bonding event last night with some players getting “screeched in” becoming honorary Newfoundlanders. The ceremony includes reciting an age-old saying (“Long may your big jib draw”), eating a piece of bologna (also known as a Newfoundland steak), kissing a cod and then taking a shot of Screech rum.

“The whole ceremony beforehand, laying down some history about The Rock, that was pretty sweet,” said Auston Matthews. “I figured I’d want to kiss it first (and other Leafs) could have the sloppy seconds.”

“It’s quite the scene,” said Tyson Barrie. “I like rum, but that didn’t taste good at all to me. I was last in line to kiss the fish so it was a bit slobber when I got around to it. I definitely made a mistake. Freddie (Andersen) got it before and it was just all wet and it looked disgusting.”

“That was a good looking cod,” said Morgan Rielly with a smile.

Maple Leafs get ‘screeched-in’

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Notable lines at Sunday’s practice:

FORWARDS

Johnsson-Matthews-Nylander

Kapanen-Tavares-Marner

Mikheyev-Kerfoot-Petan

Moore-Spezza-Aberg

Timashov-Gauthier-Korshkov

Marchment-Brooks-Bracco

Timashov-Gauthier-Korshkov

Conrad-Shore-Read

Agostino-Kossila-(Rotating RW)

DEFENCEMEN

 Rielly-Ceci

Muzzin-Barrie

Kapanen admits that there will be a lot of competition for early lineup spots before and after the drills.

“It’s just a feel-out moment now seeing what Paul wants to do with us and how he wants it to run.”

Marner said, “His resume last year, his team’s power-play ranking was pretty high up there so hopefully that can happen to this team.”

 matter. They have a new coach, Paul McFarland, who has had success with special teams in the past. Marner says that the team has a lot of young talent and is looking to improve their special teams.

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Ironing out chemistry and timing with Kapanen could be a lot simpler for Tavares than balancing a busy hockey season with a more chaotic home life. Noting that the Leafs ‘[are] a pretty young team,’ Tavares isn’t counting on many baby-rearing tips from around the dressing room, but will lean on veterans like Jason Spezza and Jake Muzzin if needed.

One way or another, he’ll have a thing or two to learn about compartmentalizing.

“You always put extra focus on [hockey] away from the rink, always trying to take care of yourself.” Tavares said. “But I think mentally it will be just an amazing thing to be a father and to go home and have him and my wife to look forward to and just cherish those times and those memories. That’s what life is all about.”

And Marner’s already hoping a new addition to the Tavares clan might have a certain positive effect on its patriarch when he is on the job.

“He might be a little looser now that he’s got a kid, which could be nice in the locker room,” Marner joked. “No, I’m super happy everyone’s healthy in the family and it’s great seeing how happy he is having a boy.”

TSN.CA LOADED: 09.16.2019
VICTORIA – It should have come as no surprise to Vancouver Canucks management, coaches, players or fans that Elias Pettersson opened the scoring in Saturday’s first training camp scrimmage. The National Hockey League’s reigning Calder Trophy winner and the team’s goal-scoring leader last season picked up where he left off scooping up a loose puck in the offensive zone, shifting past a couple of defenders before tucking the puck into the net.

After racking up 28 goals and 66 points in his first NHL season, the 20-year-old has shown already to be an elite level offensive producer. And while responsible defensively as a rookie, Pettersson says he worked hard over the summer to increase his strength and endurance. As a centre that’s likely to attract the attention of top players on other teams, Pettersson knows his biggest challenges this season will likely be in the defensive zone.

"Playing centre you move a lot more than the wingers because in the d-zone wingers can mostly just chill up top with their D," he explains. "I feel great. I feel I've got good conditioning, but I learned to take care of my body more and, of course, I feel stronger."

Like Pettersson, Adam Gaudette returns after his rookie campaign in the NHL. Unlike Pettersson, however, Gaudette struggled to produce offensively in his first full season as a professional. While he had five goals and 12 points in 56 NHL games, Gaudette went the final 20 games of the season without finding the back of the net. The 22-year-old comes to camp looking to push incumbents Brandon Sutter and Jay Beagle for one of the centre positions behind Pettersson and Bo Horvat. Waiver exempt, however, Gaudette will likely be in tough to crack the Canucks’ opening night roster.

Still, he put in the work this summer that he hopes will allow him to make decisions difficult on the Canucks’ coaching staff. Gaudette says he processed the ups and downs of last season over the off-season and has come to camp bigger and better than a year ago.

"I've always had an offensive side to my game and I think with the work I put in this summer I'm a little more confident and I'm not so concerned about being one of the weaker guys out there," Gaudette says of the growing pains that come with the jump from college to the NHL. "I'm more confident playing defensively and being stronger on pucks and I think that's going to help me be more confident in the offensive zone. I'm looking to go out there and put up points and not just go out there and get by. I want to be an impact player and put some points on the board."

While Gaudette was putting in the work in the Boston-area, fellow New Englander Tim Schaller was at home in New Hampshire gearing up for his second training camp as a Canuck. The first, as Schaller recalls, did not go as well as he would have liked and that set the tone for a spotty season in which he had difficulty cracking the line-up with regularity. A year ago, Schaller said he had trouble ‘getting his motor running’ at camp and through an ineffective preseason and that carried over once the Canucks started playing for keeps.

The 28-year-old winger now admits that the difficulty of Travis Green’s training camp in Whistler caught him off guard.

"I worked maybe twice as hard this summer knowing that camp was a little tougher than what I had been used to in the past," Schaller says. "So I worked on conditioning a lot. If I can come out with an edge to my game and with a little more confidence because I did so much work this summer, I’m in a really good mindset right now and if I go out there work hard, play my game I think anything will be better than last year.”

Schaller suited up for 47 of the Canucks 82 games last season scoring just three goals (all against Dallas). It was a significant drop from the dozen goals he registered for Boston before signing a two-year free agent deal with Vancouver in July 2018.

With the Canucks bolstering their forward ranks in the off-season, Schaller finds himself in a battle to keep his job in the big leagues. He’s hoping his work as a penalty killer may give him an edge on others when the coaching staff begins to make difficult decisions selecting the skaters that will be on the opening night roster.

“’I’d like to kill penalties a lot more this year,” Schaller says. “I’m willing to block shots and do the dirty stuff, so if I get the opportunity to kill more penalties that’s one area of the game I have confidence in and I’d definitely flourish with that opportunity.”

Schaller and the Canucks wrap up their three-day training camp on Sunday. There is no word yet on the line-ups the team will ice for its split-squad preseason openers against Calgary on Monday.
ST. JOHN’S, N.L. — The morning after he stood side-by-side with Kyle Dubas to together navigate questions about his brief and since-resolved contract stalemate, Mitch Marner was finally able to settle back into his comfort zone.

On the ice Sunday with his teammates in St. John’s for the final training session in Paradise, Marner posed for photos, led stretches, showed flashes of his $65-million skillset, and shot smiles into the crowd and at his teammates.

This, here, is what Marner signed up for.

And it's what the Newfoundland fans were waiting all weekend to see.

"It was nice," Marner said after the skate. "It was nice being in front of this fan base, especially down here - I mean the love for our team is awesome. It was a lot of fun."

"It was great getting back on the ice with the guys today."

It was a far more relaxed setting for Marner, but he isn't quite out of the woods. With a stop in Ottawa before more questions are inevitably asked of him when he returns to Toronto, the process of repairing or at least steadying his image will continue.

But it can continue concurrently with phasing back to his previous reality — which means being stationed on John Tavares’ wing.

Their training camps delayed for different reasons as the Tavares family welcomed their first child into the world while the Marner clan was deep in contract negotiations, the two eight-figure linemates travelled to Newfoundland together on Saturday to begin the process of picking up where they left off.

The two formed an immensely successful partnership in their first year together, each posting career numbers with a combined 73 goals and 182 points.

But things will be different this year, at least to start, with the third member of the most routinely selected forward trio from last season, Zach Hyman, slated to miss the first chunk of the year while rehabbing the ACL he tore in the Maple Leafs’ first-round loss to the Boston Bruins.

Head coach Mike Babcock’s favourite facilitative grinder, Hyman did plenty for Tavares and Marner, and his contributions shouldn’t be overlooked.

Which is why Kasperi Kapanen will play such a crucial role for Toronto at the outset of the season.

Slated to start on the left side, Kapanen has been tasked with temporarily servicing the Tavares-Marner partnership — a role that is not just crucial to the Maple Leafs’ success on the ice, but also in muzzling the fans eager to see Marner’s numbers and performance potentially fail to measure up to his enormous price tag.

Those duties will also require a move from his preferred right wing, but it’s not like Kapanen is sweating it.

"It’s easy playing with them. Today we were just getting a little chemistry going. It was good," Kapanen said after the skate.

"I'll let them do all the nice things, and I'll do the dirty work."

The Maple Leafs will open their exhibition schedule in Newfoundland on Monday night in St. John’s.

No word yet on whether Marner, Tavares and Kapanen will be included in the lineup.

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