Anaheim Ducks
757264 Ducks beat Canucks, 4-3, in shootout amid boos for Ryan Kesler
757265 Ducks get Rene Bourque in trade with Canadiens for Bryan Allen
757266 Ducks trade Allen to Montreal for Bourque
757267 Ducks' victory doesn't come easy
757268 Ducks trade Allen to Canadiens for Bourque

Arizona Coyotes
757269 Arizona Coyotes blow early lead in Dallas
757270 Tippett gives Coyotes break amidst packed schedule
757271 Game Day: Arizona Coyotes at Dallas Stars
757272 Stars rally past Coyotes in third period

Boston Bruins
757273 TD Garden unveils $4.5 million upgrade of ProShop
757274 For Bruins president Cam Neely, team is a work in progress
757275 Bruins Remain Supportive As Former Comrade Nathan Horton Faces Career-Ending Decision,
757276 Bruins face a must mission to win
757277 Young Bruins D-men ready to accept challenge
757278 B's feel for Horton as he faces possible career-ending injury
757279 Neely happy with Bruins current position
757280 Marchand practices but is out vs. Blue Jackets
757281 Marchand, Hamilton return to practice ice for Bruins
757282 Bruins recall Trotman from Providence
757283 Point drought doesn't tell whole story for Fraser

Buffalo Sabres
757284 Snow days at home don't sit well with Kaleta
757285 Postponement catches Sabres players by surprise
757286 An NHL first: RIT vs. RIT as Pinizzotto opposes Tanev
757287 Sabres-Rangers game postponed due to storm

Calgary Flames
757288 Newest Hitmen defenceman Kanzig excited to play in front of Calgary fans
757289 Flames lines mixed up ahead of meeting with Chicago BlackhawksNovember 20, 2014. 1:09 pm • Section: Flames Ins
757290 Flames' late-game magic runs out in 4-3 loss to Blackhawks
757291 Calgary Flames defence duo catches eye of Blackhawks counterparts
757292 Calgary Flames prospect traded to Hitmen 0
757293 More than just Flames in Calgary 0
757294 Sporty’s Scribbles: Which teams can turn it around? 1
757295 Chicago Blackhawks edge Calgary Flames 2

Carolina Hurricanes
757296 LA Kings hold off Carolina 3-2 for 10th home win
757297 Canes claim Nestrasil on waivers from Wings

Chicago Blackhawks
757298 Thursday's recap: Blackhawks 4, Flames 3
757299 Young players get chance to step up as Blackhawks injuries pile up
757300 Andrew Shaw sidelined for Blackhawks vs. Flames
757301 Surging Patrick Kane lifts Blackhawks to victory over Flames
757302 Patience a necessary virtue for Blackhawks prospects, rookies
757303 Blackhawks’ Andrew Shaw sidelined with injury; Clendening to debut
757304 With Johns in lineup, IceHogs look to rebound this weekend
757305 Five things we learned: Blackhawks’ Kane getting into groove
757306 Adam Clendening scores in debut as Blackhawks beat Flames
757307 Blackhawks: Shaw out against Flames with upper-body injury
757308 Kane, Hawks beat Flames at own game
757309 Rapid Reaction: Blackhawks 4, Flames 3
757310 Clendening set to make NHL debut
757311 Shaw (upper-body) out vs. Flames
757312 Hawks’ van Riemsdyk undergoes successful surgery
757313 Saad now feels worthy to be with Hossa, Toews

Colorado Avalanche
757314 PETER FORSBERG BACK IN DENVER, THIS TIME AS HALL OF FAMER
757315 NATHAN MACKINNON COULD LEARN FROM PETER THE GREAT
757316 ALEX OVECHKIN NOTCHES GAME-WINNER AS CAPITALS EDGE AVALANCHE

Columbus Blue Jackets
757317 Blue Jackets notebook: Failures on faceoffs frustrate Richards
757318 Blue Jackets: Around NHL, Johnson’s bankruptcy a warning
757319 Crashing the Net: Skille and Calvert are back, lineup changes and being disciplined
757320 Blue Jackets still in search of consistency

Dallas Stars
757321 Stars notebook: Jordie Benn gets the night off; Stars will honor Modano’s HOF induction
757322 He said it: Coaches, players comment after 3-1 win over Arizona Thursday
757323 Heika: Stars finally make a statement with big third period, snap seven-game home winless streak
757324 Cold facts: Stars beat Coyotes 3-1 for first win in Dallas since Oct. 21
757325 Cowlishaw: My favorite on-ice and off-ice moments covering Stars
757326 Cowlishaw: Something fundamentally wrong with Stars; it’s on Jim Nill to ‘do something’ to shake up team
757327 Jyrki Jokipakka in, Jordie Benn out as Stars seek slump solution against Coyotes
757329 Stars score 3 in 3rd period to rally past Coyotes
Detroit Red Wings
757330 Why the Red Wings beat the Jets on Thursday night
757331 Red Wings finish with flurry to beat Jets, 4-3
757332 Xavier Ouellet wants to be ‘reliable’ for Red Wings
757333 Hockey legend Gordie Howe showing small improvement
757334 Detroit Red Wings lose Andrej Nestrasil to Carolina
757335 Mrazek, Ouellet in for Wings at Winnipeg
757336 Instant analysis: Hockey belongs in Winnipeg
757337 Justin Abdelkader helps Red Wings ground Jets
757338 Hurricanes claim ex-Wing Andrej Nestrasil off waivers
757339 Petr Mrazek keeps Red Wings in game early, Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader lead charge late
757340 Red Wings 4, Jets 3: Tomas Tatar snaps tie late with second goal of game as Detroit storms back
757341 Second-period analysis: Jets 3, Red Wings 2
757342 First-period analysis: Red Wings 0, Jets 0
757343 Woman pleads guilty to trying to sell prized puck belonging to Detroit Red Wings’ Gustav Nyquist
757344 Detroit Red Wings Gameday: Surprising Winnipeg Jets have been among NHL’s top defensive teams
757345 Red Wings’ lineup vs. Jets: Xavier Ouellet makes season debut for Detroit; Pavel Datsyuk still out
757346 Andrej Nestrasil claimed by Carolina Hurricanes on waivers from Detroit Red Wings
757347 Tatar’s 2 goals lift Red Wings to win over Jets
757348 Wings beat Jets in comeback fashion, 4-3
757349 Wings lose Nestrasil to Carolina on waivers
757350 Wings try to keep rolling against Jets

Edmonton Oilers
757351 Oilers notes: Devils limp into Edmonton suffering lack of offence
757352 Oilers pull minor trade with Canucks
757353 Edmonton Oilers break up top trio again
757354 Hockey World ‘Short Shifts’: Production by Wild’s Thomas Vanek has vanished
757355 Hockey World: Edmonton’s Tyler Benson a good high NHL draft bet for 2016
757356 Decoding the Oilers’ head coach following sloppy 5-4 loss to Canucks
757357 All’s well that ends well for Greg Chase in trade to Victoria
757358 Oilers centre Leon Draisaitl pumped about chance to play on line with Taylor Hall
757359 Oilers head coach Dallas Eakins moves Taylor Hall to second pairing to kick-start offence

Florida Panthers
757360 Recap: San Jose vs. Florida
757361 Florida Panthers (6-5-5) at San Jose Sharks (10-9-2), 10:30 p.m. (ET)
757362 Nick Bjugstad finishes what he starts in 3-2 shootout victory over Sharks
757363 Panthers’ Boyes faces team that traded him after one game
757364 Barkov, Kulikov, Grimaldi to play; Upshall, Robak out vs. Sharks
757365 Bjugstad leads Panthers to 3-2 SO win over Sharks

Los Angeles Kings
757366 Tanner Pearson ends scoring drought as Kings beat Hurricanes, 3-2
757367 Tanner Pearson lifts Kings to 3-2 win over Hurricanes
757368 Former King Jack Johnson bankrupt, estranged from parents
757369 Alec Martinez’s return to Kings lineup not imminent
757370 Kings’ Slava Voynov charged with felony in wife abuse case
757371 Statement from lawyer of Voynov’s wife
757372 Kings’ Slava Voynov faces felony domestic-violence charge
757373 Pearson might get chance to play out of funk
757374 Sutter reluctantly keeps Doughty’s minutes high
757375 Martinez skating, but not quite ready
757376 L.A. Kings down Carolina Hurricanes as Tanner Pearson ends goal drought
757377 Los Angeles Kings player Slava Voynov charged with felony domestic violence

Kings cont’d
757378 November 20 postgame notes
757379 Zone Entries vs Carolina: November 20
757380 November 20 postgame quotes: Brown, Pearson
757381 November 20 postgame quotes: Carolina
757382 November 20 postgame quotes: Darryl Sutter
757383 Game 20: Los Angeles vs Carolina
757384 November 20 Kings Weekly preview
757385 Game 20 Preview: Los Angeles vs Carolina
757386 Unclear if Pearson plays; King talks about his return
757387 Martinez could miss more than one week
757388 November 20 morning skate quotes: Darryl Sutter
757389 November 20 morning skate notes

Minnesota Wild
757390 Yeo shuffles lines in search of goals
757391 Postgame: Zucker, Kuemper lead Wild to fourth straight victory
757392 Wild-Philadelphia game recap
757393 Zucker’s late goal lifts Wild past Flyers, 3-2
757394 Wild wins a nail-biter over Philadelphia on Zucker’s late goal
757395 Russo: Yeo explains juggling lines during winning streak

Montreal Canadiens
757396 Pacioretty nets a pair to lead Habs past Blues
757397 Habs send Bourque to Ducks for veteran defenceman Allen
757398 Loss to Penguins shows Habs still not an elite team
757399 Penguins capitalize on early chances to cool-off streaking Habs
757400 Here’s why the Habs are No. 1 in the league standings
757401 About last night…
757402 Canadiens trade Rene Bourque to Ducks for defenceman Bryan Allen
757403 Mike Weaver will be game-time decision as Habs face Blues

Nashville Predators
757404 Predators’ Carter Hutton: ‘I have to be sharper’
757405 Predators fall as Senators surge in second period
757406 Hutton to start for Predators in goal against Senators

New Jersey Devils
757407 Will Martin Havlat’s honesty get Patrik Elias back on track?
757408 Devils coach Pete DeBoer talks about the urgency to start winning
757409 Mark Fayne says it will be ‘real weird’ facing Devils for 1st time
757410 Jacob Josefson back in for Devils? Damien Brunner likely to sit
757411 Eric Lindros’ Flyers career ended on headshot by Devils great Scott Stevens
757412 Is Pete DeBoer the right head coach for the Devils? GM Lou Lamoriello says…
757413 Will Devils’ Ryane Clowe ever play again?
757414 Dainius Zubrus just fine with role on Devils’ 4th line
757415 Devils focusing on consistency, execution
757416 Devils’ Clowe “feeling a lot better”, seeing specialist in Boston area; Appears Salvador will be OK
757417 Lamoriello believes in DeBoer, staff, players to get Devils on course; Gomez could get chance soon
757418 “No more excuses” for Devils; They need to start winning now
757419 Looks like Devils will use Henrique and Elias on same line Friday; Schneider to start again
757420 Mark Fayne could sense he wasn’t in Devils’ plans before he signed with Oilers
757421 Henrik back with Elias and Havlat for Devils’ practice today in Edmonton
757422 Fan voting for 2015 NHL All-star Game open

New York Islanders
757423 John Tavares willing to sacrifice scoring for team wins
New York Rangers
757424 NY Rangers-Sabres game scheduled for Friday is postponed as massive snowstorm blasts Buffalo
757425 Friday's Rangers-Sabres game in Buffalo postponed due to snowstorm
757426 Why Rangers' Dan Boyle is struggling since his return
757427 Rangers' Derek Stepan on a tear since return from broken leg
757428 Rangers game vs. Buffalo Sabres postponed
757429 Hextall rips Flyers after Rangers loss: 'F—in embarrassing'
757430 Stepmiak's dad snowed in; AV's storm memory
757431 Rangers game in Buffalo postponed
757432 NHL postpones Rangers game in Buffalo on Friday
757433 Snowstorm forces postponement of Rangers-Sabres game in Buffalo Friday night
757434 No game tonight … but Live Chat today at noon
757435 Rangers-Sabres game Friday postponed due to snow

Ottawa Senators
757436 Senators secure victory over Predators behind Robin Lehner's goaltending
757437 Scanlan: Bobby Ryan utilized as the Senators' ultimate line fixer
757438 Senators notebook: Old Kids and New Kids on the block
757439 Jonathan Pitre to sign with Ottawa Senators pro scouting staff
757440 Senators goalie Robin Lehner juggling fatherhood, consistency between the pipes 0
757441 Predators' Mike Fisher close to making season debut 0
757442 Ottawa Senators add teen Jonathan Pitre to scouting staff 0
757443 Senators winger Bobby Ryan warns fellow NHLers to be smart with cash 0
757444 Senators rookie Curtis Lazar out with 'minor' injury 0

Philadelphia Flyers
757445 'Legion of Doom' gets its day in the sun
757446 Lindros' career seen in a new light
757447 Renberg thrilled to join his 'Legion of Doom' teammates
757448 'Tough way to lose' for Flyers
757449 Flyers lose 4th straight on late goal by Wild
757450 Full transcript: Eric Lindros, John LeClair Hall of Fame speeches
757451 Flyers Notes: Lindros, LeClair say thanks to Flyers fans
757452 Finally, Lindros gets the recognition that he deserves
757453 GM wants more consistency, better starts
757454 Rob Parent: Lindros deserving of a higher Hall than this
757455 Despite better effort, a fourth straight loss
757456 Flyers' HOF party spoiled with 4th straight loss
757457 10 observations from Flyers-Wild
757458 Instant Replay: Wild 3, Flyers 2
757459 Eric Lindros, John LeClair inducted into Flyers' HOF
757460 Flyers-Wild: 5 things you need to know
757461 Fittingly, LeClair and Lindros enter Flyers' HOF together
757462 Ron Hextall uses colorful language on Flyers after ugly loss to Rangers
757463 Remembering Lindros, LeClair on Flyers' 'Legion of Doom'
757464 Flyers Notes: Hextall irate with effort vs. Rangers
757465 Flyers drop fourth straight, fall to Wild
757466 Flyers Notes: Lindros not haunted by concussions
757467 5 things to watch in Game 18: Minnesota Wild at Flyers
757468 Flyers tie game late, then lose to Minnesota Wild in final minute | Rapid reaction
757469 Legion of Doom reunites for Eric Lindros, John LeClair
757470 Flyers Hall of Fame night: Q&A of Eric Lindros, John LeClair opening up, sharing laughs
757471 Greetings from the press box: Ray Emery in net, Andrew MacDonald returns on Flyers Hall of Fame night

Pittsburgh Penguins
757472 Pens move on with, without Dupuis
757473 New assistant Agnew has Pens' PK, defense among league's best
757474 Penguins notebook: Fleury awaits word on when he'll vie for 300th victory
757475 Despres alters game, wins confidence of new coaches
757476 Penguins Notebook: Idled Dupuis might get new role and title
757477 30 years of Lemieux highlights: Oct. 12, 1984

San Jose Sharks
757478 Sharks fall to Panthers 3-2 in shootout
757480 Rewind: Sharks know there's work to be done
757481 Instant Replay: Sharks tie it late, fall to Panthers in SO
757482 Sharks need to take advantage of upcoming home schedule
757483 Marleau, Couture split up as Sharks prep for Panthers
757484 In the Crease: Sharks finally get stretch of home games

St Louis Blues
757485 Bluenotes: Paajarvi promoted, Lindstrom sits out
757486 Blues play giveaway at Montreal
757487 Canadiens blast Blues 4-1
757488 Blues' Allen living a dream as he plays in Montreal
757489 Pacioretty's 2 goals lift Canadiens over Blues 4-1

Tampa Bay Lightning
757490 Spark missing, Bolts let Leafs off hook
757491 Bolts Notes: Hedman joins morning skate; Connolly returns
757492 Lightning loses to Leafs
757493 Victor Hedman takes next recovery step
757494 Vladislav Namestnikov featured on "Tonight Show" with Jimmy Fallon
757495 Victor Hedman joins team skate; Brett Connolly back in lineup

Toronto Maple Leafs
757496 Roller coaster ride for Leafs continues with win over Lightning
757497 Maple Leafs on alert for jersey tossers
757498 Van Riemsdyk sparks Leafs win over Lightning
757499 Unpredictable Maple Leafs strike back vs. Lightning: Arthur
757500 Steven Stamkos won't take Leafs lightly
757501 Analytics poke hole in success of Patrick Roy, Avs
757502 No salute to fans from Maple Leafs 5
757503 Leafs' coach Randy: Little things do matter 0
757504 Finally, a fast start for Maple Leafs 1
757505 Maple Leafs can exhale after beating Tampa Bay Lightning 0
757506 Stamkos not surprised by Maple Leafs' play 1
757507 Maple Leafs bounce back with win over Lightning 250
757508 'Do it for our fans': Leafs coach Carlyle 124
757509 Toronto Maple Leafs redeem themselves in statement win over Tampa Bay Lightning
757510 Should Toronto Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle be worried about his job?
757511 Toronto Maple Leafs' Phil Kessel may not be a talker, but media access to athletes has plenty of value
Vancouver Canucks

Canucks notes: Burrows hurt, Vey and Horvat both stick for now

Edmonton Oilers send Will Acton to Vancouver Canucks for Kellan Lain

Game Day: Canucks, Ducks set to face-off with loaded lineups

Canucks fall to Ducks, 4-3 in SO


Despite the loss, Canucks restore hope among the faithful

Jensen's two goals sparks Canucks farm team to another victory

The Morning Skate, Nov. 20:

One of the best points the Canucks have earned in a long while

Anaheim’s Emerson Etem got big boost in junior from Desjardins

Washington Capitals

Postgame: Capitals deem road trip ‘pretty successful’ with second straight win

Capitals at Avalanche: Game 19 discussion thread

Capitals seeking more production from Ovechkin, Backstrom on top line

At 5,200 feet, Capitals focus on shorter shifts to handle Colorado altitude

After game-winner, Eric Fehr tries to stay ‘even keel’ during ‘tough’ early season

Pregame primer: Caps look to finish strong

Schmidt playing like he wants extension

Websites

ESPN / Jack Johnson’s family torn apart

ESPN / Rene Bourque-Bryan Allen trade breakdown

FOXSports.com / Kings keep winning despite recent adversity

NBCSports.com / NHL postpones Rangers-Sabres due to ‘weather-related difficulties’

Sportsnet.ca / Signs of discontent linger with Leafs’ salute snub

Sportsnet.ca / North Dakota hockey player ‘lucky to be alive’

Sportsnet.ca / Vasilevskiy to rock new Frozen Dome mask

USA TODAY / Canadiens add another defenseman in trade with Ducks

Winnipeg Jets

Postma fits role to the letter

Ugly wasn’t enough

Frolik is Mr. Shutdown

Lowry shakes early nerves, making great strides in first 20 games

Tonight: RED WINGS @ JETS

The fab freshmen of Jetsville

Jets have major sore point

Old, bad habits return as Winnipeg Jets blow leads, fall to Red Wings 2

Babcock: Teams find success when they learn to ‘bring it’ every single day

Jets set for puck possession battle with Red Wings 2

SPORT-SCAN, INC.  941-284-4129
Ducks beat Canucks, 4-3, in shootout amid boos for Ryan Kesler

By LISA DILLMAN contact the reporter Anaheim Ducks NHL Sports Ice Hockey Ryan Kesler Vancouver Canucks Radim Vrbata

Ducks beat Canucks, 4-3 in shootout despite going cold in second period; Ryan Kesler gets chilly reception

This was such a nice love-in with No. 17.

Except that it was with current Canucks forward Radim Vrbata, not former Vancouver center and Anaheim Duck Ryan Kesler.

When 17s collide.

The new-kid-in-town, Vrbata, who signed as a free agent in the summer, felt the love as he scored his team-leading ninth goal. Kesler, who played here for 10 seasons, mostly felt the cold shoulder in a chilly reception from the fans in his first game back since getting traded to Anaheim in June.

Kesler said he felt “a lot” of satisfaction as the Ducks came away with the victory, 4-3, in a shootout over the Canucks on Thursday night at Rogers Arena.

“The guys battled extremely hard,” said Kesler, who heard boos all night and even louder ones when he took his turn in the shootout and missed.

“We had a terrible second period, but we battled back like we've done all year, a resilient group in here. I'm proud the way the guys played tonight.”

He was happy to put this game in the rear-view mirror.

"Let's just say I'm glad it's over with now," Kesler said. "Get back to the sunshine, get back home."

Kesler admitted the reception hurt.

"When you play somewhere for 10 years, you expect something different," he said. "But I'm happy for the support I've gotten in the city over the years. They paid for their tickets, they're allowed to do what they want to do."

"Does it hurt? Obviously when you play somewhere for 10 years, you give your heart and soul every night. But it is what it is. Move on, go home and reenergize."

Corey Perry and Jakob Silfverberg scored for the Ducks against Canucks goalie Eddie Lack in the shootout, and Perry's goal featured a terrific show of patience.

"I went back to what I used to be doing," Perry said. "I kind of waited him out and he kind of thought I was going to shoot five-hole. I didn't see anything right away, so I just tried to wait."

Eight of the last 10 Ducks games have gone to overtime, including both games on this trip to Western Canada. They lost to the Calgary Flames in a shootout Tuesday, blowing a 2-0 lead in the third period, and they let a two-goal lead slip away against Vancouver.

They led, 2-0, after one period on goals by Andrew Cogliano (third of the season) and Ryan Getzlaf (sixth). This time, the Ducks faltered in the second period, not the third. Vancouver scored three times in the second: Rookie forward Bo Horvat recorded his first NHL goal, Jannik Hansen had his fifth of the season and Vrbata, all alone in front, scored at 11:48 to put the Canucks ahead, 3-2.

Anaheim's Matt Beleskey tied it, 3-3, with a determined effort down low at 11:52 in the third period; it was his ninth goal of the season.

Vancouver had to play almost the entire game with five defensemen, rather than the usual six. Veteran defenseman Dan Hamhuis went down awkwardly and needed to be helped off the ice. The team called it a lower-body injury and he did not return.

Ducks defenseman Francois Beauchemin, who missed five games because of the mumps, returned to the lineup and had a team-leading 25-plus minutes of ice time.

Ducks get Rene Bourque in trade with Canadiens for Bryan Allen

By HELENE ELLIOTT, LISA DILLMAN contact the reporters Ice HockeyAnaheim DucksBryan AllenMontreal CanadiensRene BourqueAmerican Hockey LeagueRyan Kesler

Ducks acquire forward Rene Bourque from Montreal Canadiens for defenseman Bryan Allen

New Duck forward Rene Bourque was plagued by inconsistency in his stint with the Montreal Canadiens

Facing a surplus of defensemen, the Ducks on Thursday traded defenseman Bryan Allen to the Montreal Canadiens for left wing Rene Bourque, who carries a hefty salary cap hit of $3.33 million this season and next.

Bourque, who will be 33 in December, had three consecutive 20-plus-goal seasons with Calgary but never approached that success after the Flames traded him to Montreal.

This season, he had no goals and two assists in 13 games with the Canadiens. He had been assigned to Montreal’s American Hockey League affiliate in Hamilton, Canada.

Ducks General Manager Bob Murray said Bourque will report to Anaheim once his immigration/work visa issues are sorted out.

"I definitely think I have a lot more to give and I think I'll show it with a new team," Bourque said on a conference call. "I think to have a fresh start, to clear my head and get back on track will help me a lot. It's been a long week, so to get the news today is obviously really nice."

Murray said he had explored a deal for Bourque in June.

"We talked about it at the draft, but we thought our group of forwards were OK at the time and we had been working on the [Ryan] Kesler deal," Murray said on a conference call. "The way things have gone, I'm not particularly happy with the play of our forwards so far. He's a big body who can skate, so he'll get an opportunity."

This season, the rapid improvement of the young Ducks defense made Allen expendable. That, along with some newer concerns, up front.

Bourque has played 573 NHL games with Montreal, Calgary and Chicago and has 142 goals, 278 points and 474 penalty minutes in his career. He is big (6 feet 2, 217 pounds), strong and exceptionally fast. However, his inconsistency has befuddled one coach after another. Montreal finally said enough earlier in November, putting him on waivers and assigning him to their American Hockey League affiliate in Hamilton, Canada.

Bourque for Allen represents a de facto swap of NHL salaries, but it doesn’t mean there isn’t an upside for the Ducks. Last spring, Bourque happened to go on one of his scoring spurts during the playoffs. As the Canadiens made it all the way to the Stanley Cup semifinals, Bourque led the team in goals (eight in 17 games) and hits. But that run — 11 points in 17 games — followed a regular season in which he managed just 16 points in 63 regular-season games.

The recent emergence of Josh Manson as a capable defender helped make Allen expendable for the Ducks. He was considered the team’s seventh or eighth defenseman and had not been scheduled to play at Vancouver on Thursday. The Ducks’ depth on defense extends to having Ben Lovejoy and Mark Fistric out of the lineup because of injuries.

Allen, who signed with the Ducks as a free agent on July 1, 2012, had no goals, 17 points, a plus-21 defensive rating and 113 penalty minutes in 115 games with the team. He had one assist and four penalty minutes in six games with the Ducks this season.

Ducks trade Allen to Montreal for Bourque

BY ERIC STEPHENS / STAFF WRITER
Published: Nov. 20, 2014 Updated: 10:35 p.m.

VANCOUVER, B.C. – The Ducks traded Bryan Allen to the Montreal Canadiens for winger Rene Bourque on Thursday, using a potential spare defenseman to add depth among their forward ranks.

Allen, 34, was made aware of the trade at the team’s hotel after the morning skate. The veteran was slated to be scratched for the Ducks’ game against Vancouver as Francois Beauchemin returned to the lineup.

The trade has the appearance of teams moving high-salaried players whose roles had diminished. The Ducks clear out the remainder of the $3.5 million that they owed Allen, but are also taking on a $3.3 million salary cap hit with Bourque.

Bourque, 32, is owed $2.5 million this season and next to finish off a six-year, $20-million deal he signed with Calgary in 2010. Montreal put him on waivers Nov. 9 and the winger has been playing with the Canadiens’ American Hockey League team, the Hamilton Bulldogs.

Ducks general manager Bob Murray said Bourque will report to Anaheim after a work visa has been secured for the enigmatic forward. Murray said talks about Bourque resumed with Montreal GM Marc Bergevin two weeks ago after they originated at the NHL draft, where Bergevin told him Bourque had requested a trade.

The move also is about Murray sending a signal to their current crop of wingers, several of whom have underperformed.

“Just the way things have gone, I’m not particularly happy with the play of our forwards so far,” Murray said. “He’s a big body that can skate. He’s going to get an opportunity.”

With a reputation for wildly inconsistent play over his career, Bourque has scored as many as 27 goals twice. He also had eight goals to lead Montreal in the 2014 playoffs after scoring just nine times in 63 games during the regular season.

“He’s a very streaky scorer,” Murray said. “What I do like about him again is his size and his skating. He can skate. I think, at times, we’re not moving well enough up front. And I don’t know why, but we’re just not.

“He’s proven that he can also score in the playoffs if we get there. I like that aspect of him also.”

Bourque acknowledged that he had been hoping for a “change of scenery.” A former college teammate of Ducks winger Dany Heatley at Wisconsin, the 6-foot-2, 214-pound wing has 142 goals and 136 assists with Chicago, Calgary and Montreal.

His poor start to 2014-15 – zero goals, two assists and a minus-9 rating in 13 games – spelled the end to his tenure with the Canadiens. But a five-minute conversation with Murray after the trade left Bourque encouraged.

“He wants me to get going right away and be the player that I can be,” Bourque said. “Obviously I’m happy and looking forward to coming there. I’m ready to get going. I still feel I have a lot left and I think I have a lot to help the team win.”

The Ducks have struggled to find consistent production on the left wing next to Ryan Getzlaf on the top line. Patrick Maroon has yet to score a goal in 12 games and Heatley has been injured and ineffective after being signed last summer. Bourque could get a shot there.

“That’ll be up to Bruce,” Murray said. “When he gets here and has been with us a bit, I’m sure he’ll get a look there. Again, that spot seems to be a tough one to keep consistently filled.

“In the end, it’s his speed, the skating and the size that’s something I thought we needed.”

Pushed down to a seventh defenseman role when everyone is healthy, Allen had an assist and four penalty minutes in six games with the Ducks.

He will make $3.5 million this season, the final year of a three-year deal he signed with the Ducks in the summer of 2012.

Allen would have been squeezed out as Murray said the returns of Ben Lovejoy (broken finger) and Mark Fistric (back) are approaching. Youngster Josh Manson has also impressed during his short time with the club.

KARLSSON ON RESERVE

The Ducks put center William Karlsson on injured reserve. Karlsson, who has been recovering from the stomach flu, won’t be eligible to return until Tuesday against Calgary. … Center Chris Wagner was sent back to Norfolk (Va.) of the American Hockey League.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Ducks' victory doesn't come easy

BY ERIC STEPHENS / STAFF WRITER
Published: Nov. 20, 2014 Updated: 11:00 p.m.

VANCOUVER, B.C. – Two points. It didn’t matter how to the Ducks. Just get two.

The Ducks put an end to their recent run of letting extra points get away from them as Corey Perry and Jakob Silfverberg scored in the shootout to secure a 4-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday night at Rogers Arena.

Winning for the second time in eight games wouldn’t be a picture-perfect endeavor for the Ducks (12-4-5) but they didn’t care. Another two-goal lead was blown in spiraling fashion like Tuesday in Calgary, but they recovered and somehow prospered.

Matt Beleskey made sure there would be an eighth overtime game for the Ducks in their last 10 contests. Working down low, Beleskey jammed in a goal by Canucks goalie Eddie Lack to create a tie and get his squad another add in the point column.

“Just trying to get to the net,” said Beleskey, whose nine goals are two off his career high. “I’ve spent seven years watching Corey Perry score in front of the net. Maybe I learned some things from him there.”

It was a welcome shot of resiliency for the Ducks after they coughed up another two-goal lead, one brought about by Andrew Cogliano and Ryan Getzlaf in the first period.

“I’d like to see 60 minutes,” Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau said. “But I give our guys credit. We’ve played a lot of hockey lately. When we didn’t have a lot of energy, we still came back in the third to tie it up, and I thought we had a couple of good chances to win it.”

It made Ducks center Ryan Kesler a victor in his return to Vancouver, where he played his first 10 seasons with the Canucks. Kesler was booed every time he touched the puck and didn’t factor in the scoring, but was happy afterward.

Kesler, who was traded to the Ducks in June, thanked those that showed their support but admitted that the reaction stung him.

“They paid (for) their tickets,” Kesler said. “They’re allowed to do what they want to do. Does it hurt? Yeah, obviously when you play somewhere for 10 years and you give your heart and soul every night.

“You know what? It is what it is. Move on, go home and re-energize.”

After getting to the shootout, Perry waited out Lack to lift up a backhand shot over him and Silfverberg wrapped up the win with a quick wrist shot after failed tries by the Canucks’ Nick Bonino and Radim Vrbata.

The Ducks got some more regulars back into the lineup with defenseman Francois Beauchemin and winger Devante Smith-Pelly, but better health is only taking place in a physical sense.

The mental part? Some work needs to be done there as a two-goal lead was coughed up in a matter of minutes for the second straight game.

It was Calgary that did it in a span of 10 minutes, 18 seconds during the third period, which propelled the Flames to a 4-3 shootout win. About nine minutes were all Vancouver needed in the second.

Bo Horvat whacked in a fine backhand pass from Derek Dorsett to score his first NHL goal and start the splurge. Jannik Hansen and Vrbata wiped out what was left of the deficit with scores 30 seconds apart.

Hansen ripped a one-timer by Ducks goalie Frederik Andersen as the Canucks got an extra skater on the ice during a delayed Ducks penalty. And then the Ducks completely lost Vrbata in front of the net, with the winger getting a pass from Daniel Sedin and scoring on his backhand.

The good feelings created by an early 2-0 lead had vanished. They were created by Cogliano’s goal 37 seconds in and Getzlaf’s top-shelf backhand past Lack off a give-and-go rush with Patrick Maroon.
ANAHEIM DUCKS

Ducks trade Allen to Canadiens for Bourque

November 20th, 2014, 2:54 pm · View comments
- posted by ERIC STEPHENS

VANCOUVER, B.C. - The Ducks traded Bryan Allen to the Montreal Canadiens for winger Rene Bourque on Thursday as they used a potential spare defenseman to add depth among their forward ranks.

Allen, 34, was made aware of the trade at the team's hotel after the morning skate. The veteran was slated to be scratched for tonight's game against Vancouver as Francois Beauchemin returns to the lineup.

The trade has the appearance of teams moving high-salaried players whose roles had diminished. Bourque, 32, is owed $2.5 million this season and next to finish off a six-year, $20-million deal he signed with Calgary in 2010.

Montreal put Bourque on waivers Nov. 9 and the winger has been playing with the Canadiens' American Hockey League team, the Hamilton Bulldogs. The Ducks will be charged with a $3.3 million salary cap hit.

Ducks general manager Bob Murray said Bourque will report to Anaheim after a work visa has been secured for the enigmatic forward. Murray said talks about Bourque resumed with Montreal GM Marc Bergevin two weeks ago after they originated at the NHL draft, where Bergevin told him Bourque had requested a trade.

The move also is about Murray sending a signal to their current crop of wingers, several of whom have underperformed.

"Just the way things have gone, I'm not particularly happy with the play of our forwards so far," Murray said. "He's a big body that can skate. He's going to get an opportunity."

A reputation for wildly inconsistent play over his career, Bourque has scored as many as 27 goals twice. He also had eight goals to lead Montreal in the 2014 playoffs after scoring just nine times in 63 games during the regular season.

"He's a very streaky scorer," Murray said. "What I do like about him again is his size and his skating. He can skate. I think at times, we're not moving well enough up front. And I don't know why but we're just not.

"He's proven that he can also score in the playoffs if we get there. I like that aspect of him also."

Bourque acknowledged that he had been hoping for a "change of scenery." A former college teammate of Ducks winger Dany Heatley at Wisconsin, the 6-foot-2, 214-pound wing has 142 goals and 136 assists with Chicago, Calgary and Montreal.

His poor start to 2014-15 -- zero goals, two assists and a minus-9 rating in 13 games -- spelled the end to his tenure with the Canadiens. But a five-minute conversation with Murray after the trade left Bourque encouraged.

"He wants me to get going right away and be the player that I can be," Bourque said. "Obviously I'm happy and looking forward to coming there. I'm ready to get going. I still feel I have alot left and I think I have a lot to help the team win."

The Ducks have struggled to find consistent production on the left wing next to Ryan Getzlaf on the top line. Patrick Maroon has yet to score a goal in 12 games and Heatley has been injured and ineffective after being signed last summer. Bourque could get a shot there.

"It'd be nice if we did," Murray said. "That'll be up to Bruce. When he gets here and has been with us a bit, I'm sure he'll get a look there. Again, that spot seems to be a tough one to keep consistently filled.

"In the end, it's his speed, the skating and the size that's something I thought we needed."

Pushed down to a seventh defenseman role when everyone is healthy, Allen had an assist and four penalty minutes in six games with the Ducks. He will make $3.5 million this season, the final year of a three-year deal he signed with the Ducks in the summer of 2012.
Arizona Coyotes blow early lead in Dallas

Sarah McLellan, azcentral sports 10:41 p.m. MST November 20, 2014

The Coyotes helped one opponent snap a demoralizing losing streak earlier this month, and they were gracious visitors once again Thursday.

The Stars sport the worst home record in the NHL and toted a seven-game winless streak into their meeting with the Coyotes.

But in following a similar script to what played out less than 10 days ago when the Coyotes blew a lead at home to the Stars, the Coyotes couldn’t preserve their early advantage and were dropped 3-1 by the Stars in front of 16,078 to open a three-game road trip.

“You gotta play 60 minutes not 40 minutes to win in this league,” coach Dave Tippett said. “Third period wasn’t good enough.”

This wasn’t the first time the Coyotes encountered a desperate team. They started the month falling 3-0 to the Hurricanes, who halted a franchise-worst eight-game winless skid to start the season with the victory.

And actually, the Stars snapped a seven-game losing streak the last time these teams met. In that game, the Coyotes gave up the game-winner shorthanded with 1:16 remaining to put the Stars ahead 4-3.

This time the Stars took control in the third. Only 19 seconds into the period, the Stars won an offensive-zone faceoff and rookie defenseman John Klingberg toe-dragged around Mikkel Boedker and went top-shelf over Smith’s glove to tie it at 1 and record his first NHL goal.

“Just a bad missed assignment on a faceoff turned the game right around,” Tippett said.

Only 33 seconds after that, Trevor Daley’s point shot was redirected in front by Cody Eakin to make it 2-1.

“Going into the third period, you need to expect to win and when you’re in tight hockey games, you gotta do the little things right all the way through,” Smith said. “It’s hard to do it like that. It’s hard to play like that. But that’s how this team needs to do it, and we need to find ways to push through it.”

The Stars capped off the scoring on a solid individual effort by Jason Spezza, who used a wrap-around off the cycle to beat Smith near-side at 15:42.

Coyotes insider Sarah McLellan looks at the plus and minus in the loss to the Stars.

For the first two periods, though, the Coyotes were doing what they want to stay competitive in a close battle. They killed off both Stars power plays and managed to capitalize on their own chance at 14:21 of the first.

Center Sam Gagner walked into a shot from the right faceoff circle and while Lehtonen made the initial save, he couldn’t stop the rebound. Winger Lauri Korpikoski was on top of the crease to poke the puck through Lehtonen’s five-hole.

Gagner notched the 200th assist of his career on the play, and the goal for Korpikoski snapped a 15-game drought.

In the second period, the Coyotes blanked on their only other power play but still were applying pressure. The Stars had a goal waved off that period because of goaltender interference when Brenden Dillon planted himself in front of Smith, affecting Smith’s ability to make a save on a Travis Moen shot.

But not building on that lead, ultimately, cost the Coyotes.

“It’s a fine line between winning and losing,” Smith said. “Right now, we’re not generating enough goals and it’s tough to win 1-0 in this league.”

Report

Key player
Stars D John Klingberg started the comeback with his first NHL goal.

Key moment
Stars C Cody Eakin made it 2-1 when he tipped a point shot from Trevor Daley a brief 52 seconds into the third period.

Key number
2 Goals from the Stars in 33 seconds.

View from the press box

This game looked like it would stand up as a prototypical Coyotes win. It was low-scoring, sometimes boring and G Mike Smith was engaged. But all that unraveled once the puck dropped on the third period. These blown leads are a little easier to swallow in November than March, but this is the third time in the last two weeks the Coyotes have failed to grab at least a point in a close game when they were either tied or leading in the third. Eventually, these mistakes will catch up to them. They also tend to sift the playoff teams from those who don’t make the cut.
Tippett gives Coyotes break amidst packed schedule

Sarah McLellan, azcentral sports 8:49 p.m. MST November 20, 2014

DALLAS – The Coyotes are in the midst of one of the busiest parts of their schedule, and coach Dave Tippett knows it.

Tippett held his players off the ice Thursday morning and instead of a usual skate, players worked out individually. The team also decided to remain in Dallas after the game and flew to San Jose this morning before practicing there.

"It comes down to what you can do in the games," Tippett said. "You can push and prod players to play hard and do the right things. But if they don't have energy to do that, you're going to go nowhere. We're a team that we need to have energy every night. We know how we have to play – a hard, committed game – and if players don't have enough energy, you won't get that. So we'll give (them) the best chance to be successful."

Once the Coyotes host the Avalanche next Tuesday, they'll have finished off a span of nine games in 15 days. And by the end of this three-game road trip which concludes Sunday in Anaheim, they'll have wrapped almost a third of their road schedule.

At 49,818 miles, the Coyotes travel the most out of any NHL team this season, according to HockeyGearHQ.com.

"Everybody has hard parts of their schedule, and it's just a hard part of our schedule," Tippett said. "But with that being said, I like the way our guys are competing. We're hanging around games. We're doing a lot of things to give ourselves a chance to win."

The heavy workload certainly hasn't discouraged players from taking it easy on the ice. Before facing the Stars, the Coyotes had blocked 15 or more shots in their previous five games. They had a season-high (25) last Sunday in Edmonton against the Oilers.

"You look at the sacrifice guys have been putting in blocking shots and getting in those lanes and putting their bodies on the line for the team," center Sam Gagner said. "When you play games with intensity like that, it kind of fosters that and that can only help us moving forward."

Made of Stone

It took four stitches to close the cut on defenseman Michael Stone's chin after a puck caught him up high in the third period of Tuesday's 2-1 overtime loss to the Capitals.

It actually wasn't the first time Stone took a puck in the face.

"I had a dump-in off the face in San Antonio my first year," he said. "It wasn't bad. Well, it hit me in the face directly in the cheek. It didn't even cut me. It was weird."

As for this recent blemish, Stone said he has no one to blame but himself for it.

"That situation I was in was my own fault because I didn't get the puck out," he said. "So I guess I deserve what I got."

Eyeing 1000

A little more than three months after celebrating his 25th birthday, Gagner played in the 500th game of his NHL career Tuesday. He became only the second player from the 2007 draft class to reach the milestone.

"You want to make sure the next 500 are good ones, that's for sure," he said. "It's important for me to take that next step in my career. It's not just about playing the games and surviving in this league. It's about thriving and making sure you're helping your team win. That's kind of the next step in my career."

Injury update

Center Martin Hanzal missed a second straight game with a lower-body injury. However, winger Rob Klinkhammer returned to the lineup after sitting out Tuesday's game with an upper-body injury.
Arizona Coyotes

Game Day: Arizona Coyotes at Dallas Stars

Sarah McLellan, azcentral sports 12:26 p.m. MST November 20, 2014

Coyotes (8-9-2) at Stars (6-9-4)
Puck drop: 6:30 p.m.
TV/Radio: FSAZ/KTAR-FM (92.3).
Possible Coyotes lines:
Korpikoski-Vermette-Boedker
Rieder-Gagner-Doan
Lessio-Chipchura-Erat
McMillan-Vitale-Crombeen
Ekman-Larsson-Michalek
Yandle-Murphy
Summers-Stone
Smith
Potential scratches: Hanzal, Klinkhammer and Schlemko.

Injury update: Center Martin Hanzal (lower-body injury) and winger Rob Klinkhammer (upper-body injury) are game-time decisions. Winger Dave Moss is week-to-week with an upper-body injury after blocking a shot with his hand.

More Coyotes: Zbynek Michalek takes time to stretch his career

Possible Stars lines:
Jamie Benn-Eakin-Seguin
Roussel-Spezza-Hemsky
Moen-Fiddler-Eaves
Cole-Horcoff-Sceviour
Goligoski-Daley
Dillon-Klingberg
Jokipakka-Oleksiak
Lehtonen
Potential scratches: McKenzie, Garbutt and Jordie Benn.


The Coyotes opted not to take the ice Thursday morning in Dallas.

"The way our schedule is right now we need all the energy we can have for game time," coach Dave Tippett said.

The Coyotes last played the Stars Nov. 11.

"When it's fresh in your mind, you obviously remember how to do it and do things better," center Joe Vitale said. "So I like that we're playing teams closer together because of that advantage."

The Coyotes have grabbed at least a point in their last three games.

"Everything we do is geared toward what we want to do," Tippett said. "You have different opponents, but a lot of the same structure you try to build into your group. The more times you get to execute it, the more times you are successful at it, the better it builds your group.

"We've been pretty good here lately. We're going to have a test here. Obviously, a desperate team we're playing against tonight. It'll be a good test for our group."

-Center Sam Gagner is an assist shy of the 200th of his career.

-The Coyotes are fifth in the NHL with 305 blocked shots.
-Goalie Mike Smith is 7-4-5 with a pair of shutouts, 2.09 goals-against average and .925 save percentage in 16 career games against the Stars.
-His 2.09 goals-against average against the Stars is his second-lowest goals-against average against an opponent.
-Stars center Jason Spezza has five points in his last six games.
-Captain Jamie Benn snapped an 11-game goalless drought Tuesday.
-Center Tyler Seguin leads the league with 14 goals.
-Seguin has scored five times in the first period and five times in the second this season.
DALLAS -- John Klingberg and Cody Eakin gave the Dallas Stars a much-needed fast start to the third period on Thursday night.

Klingberg and Eakin scored 33 seconds apart in the opening minute of the final period to give the Stars their first lead, and Jason Spezza scored later in the third to rally Dallas to a 3-1 victory over the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday night.

Ales Hemsky had two assists as Dallas ended a seven-game home losing streak (0-5-2), winning for just the second time in 11 home games (2-5-4).

Klingberg's goal from the slot was his first in the NHL, in his sixth game, and tied the score 19 seconds into the period.

"We've had a rough way here, so it felt good to score the goal, and it was a big goal for us," Klingberg said.

Stars coach Lindy Ruff said the team fed off the rookie defenseman's goal.

"It lit the building up," Ruff said. "It was something our fans needed, something we needed. I think that energy from our crowd helped us with the next one right away."

Eakin then tipped Trevor Daley's shot from the blue line over Arizona goalie Mike Smith at 52 seconds to put the Stars ahead.

Stars 3, Coyotes 1

Box score

NHL standings

Spezza made it 3-1 with 4:18 remaining as he skated behind the net, came out on the left side and shot into the net to give his team and goalie Kari Lehtonen some breathing room.

But it was the Klingberg goal that had people talking.

"Spezza said, 'Just stay right behind me.' The puck does not come to that place so many times," Klingberg said. "Then I saw (Ales) Hemsky put it up to me. I just saw the keeper falling down and it was a good screen so I just aimed for the right side of the goal."

Arizona coach Dave Tippett said, "A missed assignment on a faceoff, pure and simple. Come out for the third period, we win the neutral faceoff. We end up icing it and just a bad missed assignment on a faceoff. Turned the game right around."

Lehtonen, who finished with 26 saves, had a personal turnaround. He was removed from Tuesday's loss to Carolina after giving up four goals in the second period. Against the Coyotes, he gave up only Lauri Korpikoski's rebound goal with 5:39 left in the first period.

"You try especially hard after a bad outing like that," Lehtonen said. "Maybe keep it more simple and try to play each shift as their own. It wears a little bit more on you, but that's what you have to do."

The Coyotes, who lost for the fifth straight time in Dallas, dominated the early play. When Korpikoski scored on the power play, the Coyotes had outshot Dallas 9-4. The Stars put the final five shots on goal to finish the period 9-9.

Dallas appeared to tie the score with 5:22 left in the second, when Eakin redirected a pass from Travis Moen past Smith. However, the referees ruled that Brenden Dillon had remained in the blue area in front of the net too long.

The score remained 1-0 after the second period, when the Coyotes outshot the Stars 10-9.

NOTES: The Stars started players from five countries -- Dillon and Spezza (Canada), Lehtonen (Finland), Klingberg (Sweden), Hemsky (Czech Republic) and Antoine Roussel (France). ... RW Patrick Eaves returned after missing three games because of a foot injury. ... C Ryan Garbutt (upper-body injury) is expected to be out for a week. Garbutt scored the winning goal, short-handed, in Dallas' 4-3 victory Nov. 11 at Arizona. ... Coyotes C Martin Hanzal (lower body) missed his second game. ... Gagner's assist was the 200th of his career. ... Arizona is 2-5-1 in games with three or fewer goals scored. Dallas is 2-1-1. ... Smith is 7-5-5 against his former team.
TD Garden unveils $4.5 million upgrade of ProShop

By Nina Joy Godlewski GLOBE CORRESPONDENT NOVEMBER 20, 2014

TD Garden and team executives cut the ribbon Thursday on the next phase of their $70 million renovation of the 20-year-old arena, a $4.5 million upgrade of the ProShop.

"It’s an exciting day for us today," said Boston Bruins Principal Charlie Jacobs. "I couldn’t be more happy with the outcome."

The new ProShop, at 6,000 square feet, is more than double the size of old one, and was moved from a dead-end corner of the first floor to the second level, overlooking North Station.

The shop is the eighth arena pro shop to be "powered by Reebok," featuring gear manufactured by Reebok and its sister brand, Adidas, which are both owned by the Adidas Group. Reebok is the official outfitter of the NHL, while Adidas outfits all NBA teams.

BOSTON, MA - 11/20/2014: Bruins numbers are lined up....TD Garden ceremonial ribbon cutting for the new ProShop, the new ProShop is located on level 2 near turnstiles. Unveiled improvements to Pro Shop, which opens to the public Sat. morning. -(David L Ryan/Globe Staff Photo) SECTION: BUSINESS TOPIC 21proshop

A wall of Bruins gear at the new TD Garden ProShop.

The shop features a “blade” along the ceiling with LED lights that change to gold or green depending on the team playing that day. The blade also functions as a sort of backdrop for video clips of the teams. Inside the shop, fans can design their own team jersey with a customized name and number, and have it made on site within 15 minutes.

BOSTON, MA - 11/20/2014: Lots of Hats for sale....TD Garden ceremonial ribbon cutting for the new ProShop, the new ProShop is located on level 2 near turnstiles. Unveiled improvements to Pro Shop, which opens to the public Sat. morning. -(David L Ryan/Globe Staff Photo) SECTION: BUSINESS TOPIC 21proshop

Bruins President Cam Neely said the team’s fanbase had simply outgrown the old shop and its inconvenient location. The new shop is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on non-game days, and is accessible to fans who don’t hold tickets during games. It opens to the public Saturday at 10 a.m., and is hosting a special Black Friday “doorbuster” deal starting at 7 a.m. on Nov. 28. Items will be 30 percent off between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., 20 percent off between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., and 10 percent off between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Free parking will be offered in the North Station Garage with a ProShop purchase.

The new ProShop was designed by Cambridge 7 and TMS Architects.

For Bruins president Cam Neely, team is a work in progress

By Nancy Marrapese-Burrell | GLOBE STAFF | NOVEMBER 21, 2014

Despite the adversity the Bruins have faced, team president Cam Neely said Thursday they’re in the process of establishing themselves and building toward the postseason.

"It’s a long year, you’re going to have some bumps along the way, but it’s just a matter of understanding where you are as a team, understanding where you are as an individual player, and working toward getting better at the right time," said Neely, who participated in the unveiling of the new TD Garden Pro Shop that will open to the public on Saturday morning.

Neely said all things considered, he is happy with where the Bruins sit in the Eastern Conference, but he certainly isn’t satisfied.

"I think everybody realizes they could probably play better," he said. "As the season progresses, we’d like to see that improvement. But with what's happened to the team and the players, and they’re not excuses, everybody goes through it. But to be able to get the points we have, and some of them were ugly, we can certainly acknowledge that. But we got some points that put us in a [decent] position as we approach Thanksgiving. It's something that we’re building toward improving as the season progresses."

The Bruins are 12-8-0 approximately a quarter of the way through the 82-game regular season.

"By Thanksgiving, it’s better to be in the playoff picture than not," said Neely. "It’s an important date we look at. Having said that, it’s not impossible to get back into the playoffs, but it makes it more difficult."

The trade deadline is March 2, a long way off and Neely wouldn’t address any potential moves, but he did acknowledge that the roster could change down the road.

'I think everybody realizes they could probably play better. As the season progresses, we’d like to see that improvement. ‘

Quote Icon

"It’s hard to pick a team in August, it’s hard to pick a team in November," said Neely. "A lot of things can happen from training camp to the trade deadline, especially with injuries, and we’ve gone through it now. For me, it’s just about seeing the improvement as a team and as individuals as we progress throughout the year."

Finding a way

One who stands to benefit most from David Krejci’s return to the lineup is Milan Lucic. Lucic has just three goals in 20 games and has especially struggled when Krejci has been out for nine games because of injuries.

Neely said it’s up to the individual player to find a way to contribute.

"It’s really about what do you do and what do you bring and how can you play and not think about. ‘OK, I don’t have my centerman that I’m used to,’ " said Neely, who played with two dynamic pivotmen in Adam Oates and Craig Janney. "I may not be getting the puck in situations that I’m accustomed to, but you have to think about what do I need to do to play well and how can I still help my team as opposed to getting frustrated that you may not get the puck in certain situations. You can still go out there and help your team in other ways. It may not be the way you’d like it to be, but you can still find ways to help your team win hockey games."

Marchand practices

Brad Marchand was back on the ice for practice, but coach Claude Julien didn’t think Marchand would make the trip to Columbus for Friday night’s game against the Blue Jackets. "He’s doing better, day to day," said Julien. Defenseman Dougie Hamilton was also back after missing a day because of the flu. He was expected to travel with the team . . . Forward Alexander Khokhlachev was recalled from Providence on an emergency basis and will be eligible to play Friday night.

Not forgotten

There was plenty of support for former Bruin Nathan Horton, who is out of the Blue Jackets’ lineup and facing a decision regarding surgery on his back.

"It’s too bad to see a young player like that have to make a decision on his career at such a young age with so much potential," said Julien. "You really do feel for him. The financial [security] is nice but that’s not what brings you happiness. We all know that. If he doesn’t come back and play, what do you do at a young age of 30 and say, ‘I’m not able to do what I’ve done my whole life.’ It’s a pretty big blow to a young player like that."

Krejci has kept in touch with Horton.

"He is a good friend and he has been going through some tough times," said Krejci. "There is still a chance he can come back and play. I bet he is putting all the positive thinking into returning pretty soon or at all. As long as there is still a chance he can play, it’s a good thing."

Krejci said he has talked to some retired players and it made him realize he can’t take his career for granted.

"You talk to the older players when they retire," said Krejci. "They keep telling us, ‘Just enjoy it. The time flies really fast and before you know it, the career is over. So just enjoy every moment, every day. ’ And that’s what we’ve been trying to do."
Since departing from the Boston Bruins and signing with the Columbus Blue Jackets in July of 2013, Nathan Horton’s career has taken a wrong turn. A wrong turn that Horton, nor anyone, could envision. At 29 years old, the former Bruin is faced with a tough decision. Last month, Blue Jackets beat writer Aaron Portzline of The Columbus Dispatch reported that Horton could be faced with career-ending back surgery. Portzline also reported that the surgery is viewed as a “last resort.” In an emotional and revealing article published by Portzline one week ago, Horton discussed his potential career ending surgery, while also mentioning about his aches and pains he endures on a daily basis.

“I can’t stand up like a normal person; I can’t bend over,” Horton told Portzline in an exclusive interview. “I can’t run. I can’t play with my kids. To get in and out of the car, I’m like a 75-year-old man … so slow and stiff. I can’t sleep at night. I try to lay down and my back seizes up and I can’t move, so sleeping is out. I’m like a zombie in the daytime.”

Horton’s former teammates are well aware of his condition, and the difficult decision that lies ahead. David Krejci centered Horton on the first line for his three seasons with the Black and Gold. He saw a skilled player with the heart of a warrior on the ice. Off the ice, Krejci noticed a person who was humble and easy to get along with. But even Krejci knows he can’t give Horton too much advice in handling his decision.

“He’s a good friend. He’s going through some tough times,” said Krejci. “I don’t want to give him too much, it’s his own life. “You obviously feel for the guy. He’s a really good player and a good friend as well. It must be tough for him, but you know there’s still a chance that he can come back and play. As long as there’s a good chance that he can play, then that’s a good thing.”

Horton arrived to Boston in 2010 courtesy of the Florida Panthers in a trade that also brought Gregory Campbell - who continues in his role as a fourth line center for the Bruins. Having played with Horton for several seasons, Campbell remains optimistic about Horton.

“A lot of us are close to Nathan and you never want to see an athlete on the sideline because that’s what he loves to do,” said Campbell. “He’s a good person, he works hard, he’s a professional and he’ll come through this. He takes care of himself and a lot of us still keep in touch with him. It’s been a frustrating couple of years for him I’m sure, but that’s sports and he’ll come through it.”

At just 29, Horton is already faced with the toughest decision of his career. But he isn’t the only player faced with hanging up the skates at a young age. Cam Neely, who suffered from knee issues throughout his playing career, retired in 1996 at the age of 31. The Bruins’ President spent 10 years as a player donning the spoked B while dazzling fans with his physical style and soft hands as one of the top power forwards in the league.

Sound familiar? Well it should, because Horton, through all the aches and pains he has acquired during his career, has a similar playing style to Neely’s. And in just his first season with Boston, he etched his name into Bruins lore with clutch goals in the Stanley Cup Playoffs against the Montreal Canadiens and Tampa Bay Lightning.

Those on-ice glory days are far behind Horton, however. 

“It’s very difficult to come to a conclusion,” Neely recalled about the decision he faced when asked about Horton. “Ultimately, you get as much information as you can from doctors and the medical staff and you probably don’t want to believe what they’re telling you and get back to playing. Then it becomes really about quality of life for young men, and you have kids and a family to take care of so you have to put in all those factors, too.”

As Horton continues to factor in his decision, the support system from his former teammates and Bruins fans is always something that will be appreciated.
The Bruins said hello to Columbus yesterday, and face the Blue Jackets tonight in the chilly Ohio town.

At stake will be two points the B's should — have to, really — procure, especially given the pair of games coming next: A try-try again match against the Montreal Canadiens tomorrow night at the Garden, followed by a visit Monday from the high-flying Pittsburgh Penguins.

"We have to approach this as a must-win," said B's coach Claude Julien. "When you realize what's coming up next, it's not getting any easier with Montreal and Pittsburgh. We've got some tough games coming up, so this is a game (for which) we have to really buckle down and make sure we come out of there with two points."

Julien laughed off a question about his goaltending plans and then did not answer. It seems a fair bet that Niklas Svedberg will face the Jackets, with Tuukka Rask going against the Canadiens trying to exorcize whatever personal demons he may feel against them. Indeed, the Bruins, as a whole, will have a lot to prove in that one.

The B's, of course, are coming off one of their best performances in this flawed season, a 2-0 victory over the vaunted St. Louis Blues on Tuesday. It was a great checking effort, just the sort of game they've long excelled at but rarely delivered this season.

It looked like they might get a bit of good news regarding injuries, when left winger Brad Marchand rejoined the Patrice Bergeron line for practice at the Garden. Marchand missed the last game because of the most common injury: Undisclosed. However, Julien ruled Marchand out for the Columbus game.

"He skated, but I don't think we're going to bring him on the trip," said Julien. "He needs more time. He felt much better. He's day-to-day."

Defenseman Kevan Miller, with a rare disclosed injury — a dislocated left shoulder — will return tonight. It is a great checking effort, just the sort of game they've long excelled at but rarely delivered this season.

The Bruins may view this game as a must-win situation but better not believe that means it will be easy.

"It's a team that obviously is facing a lot of injuries," said Julien of the Jackets, who are minus a half-dozen key guys. "But it's a team that keeps competing night-in and night-out through a number of injuries. It's amazing how many guys they've got who are injured. It makes us look pretty good in the injury department when you look at that team.

"But they've still got guys who play hard. There are no easy games in this league."

Maybe Columbus' most damaging loss is ex-Bruins right winger Nathan Horton, who is out with a career-threatening back injury. Horton has to decide to let his back heal with treatment or undergo surgery that could mean the end of his playing days.

"It's too bad," said Julien. "He was a great player for us here, always extremely good in the playoffs. We would have loved to keep him if we could have come up with the right numbers. It's just too bad to see a player at such a young age (30) have to make a decision on his career at such a young age and with so much potential. I feel for him.

"People may say, 'He's financially secure.' But when you're here in this situation you quickly realize that the financial part is nice, but that's not what brings you happiness. We have the opportunity to do every day what every kid dreams of doing: Playing a sport that you've grown up doing.
BOSTON – It will be an interesting stretch for the Boston Bruins as they head into some big games against quality opponents with a defense that’s ridiculously young and inexperienced, a recipe that can be problematic for an NHL team. Dennis Seidenberg will be the unquestioned old man on the block and leader at 33 years old with all manner of experience gained in the 635 NHL games played in his rear view mirror.

But with Adam McQuaid now out for the next 6-8 weeks with a broken thumb, the drop-off in experience, both in years in the league and overall game experience, is pretty extreme. The next senior member of the B’s defense corps is 21-year-old Dougie Hamilton, who has three years and 126 games of NHL experience.

“IT’s kind of funny,” said Torey Krug. “Guys get opportunities to come up and fill a void, and hopefully they make the best of it. I’ve never seen anything like [the number of injuries]. Obviously my career has been pretty short here, but guys have done a good job stepping up and filling holes.

“It’s important that we continue to do that, keep going and use that mindset that makes us stick to our guns and be good players.”

After that its older ‘young’ defensemen in 26-year-old Matt Bartkowski (91 games played) and 27-year-old Kevan Miller (53 games played), who have spent the majority of their pro hockey careers at the AHL level, and 23-year-old Torey Krug with 98 games of NHL experience. The true youngster is 21-year-old Joe Morrow, who made his NHL debut just a few weeks ago and is still playing things pretty safe while gaining trust with the Bruins coaching staff.

That means the other five combined defensemen playing vs. the Blue Jackets on Friday night won’t even equal half of Seidenberg’s NHL experience.

That is truly what you call a kiddie corps on defense.

It remains to be seen if the recently called up Zach Trotman also gets into the mix on Friday night against the Columbus Blue Jackets, but Krug knows well the mindset of a young defenseman looking to carve out a niche in the NHL.

“These opportunities don’t come every day,” said Krug. “The reason I’m in the league right now is because I got an opportunity when guys got hurt. Unfortunately it happens, and that situation comes up in our locker room this year and guys are running with [the opportunity]. We’re watching some guys grow into some pretty important roles for sure.

“Even me and [Bartkowski] continue to grow with more experience, and hopefully [Miller] is going to hopefully get back into the lineup soon. This is good for everybody.”

For Krug it could be that chance he’s been waiting for to prove he’s a top four defenseman capable of playing 20 minutes a night, for Bartkowski it’s making certain he plays well enough to stay in the lineup when everybody gets healthy and for a guy like Morrow it’s clearly still a proving ground that he belongs in the NHL to stay.

The young, energetic personnel should give the Bruins defensemen a swift ability to break the puck out and potentially contribute offensively, but it will be a battle to play big, strong and grizzly in the defensive zone down a pair of tall threes in Chara and McQuaid.

But for all of the defensemen now filling in with Chara and McQuaid both down and out, Claude Julien thinks they should be viewing it as an opportunity to prove they can build into a successful NHL unit.

“We felt that we really had some good depth on the back end, and I think it’s really showing right now,” said Julien. “Whoever we bring up seems to be doing a good job, and the guys that are up here right now are going to make it difficult for us when it’s all said and done. There’s a pretty good competition going on among our back end.”
B's feel for Horton as he faces possible career-ending injury

Joe Haggerty
November 20, 2014, 6:15 pm

BOSTON – The Boston Bruins certainly feel for former right winger Nathan Horton, who has fallen into a potentially career-ending back injury for the Columbus Blue Jackets. The key figure in Boston’s 2011 Stanley Cup championship left Boston via free agency and signed with the Blue Jackets prior to the 2013-14 season, and has battled shoulder and back injuries since leaving Boston.

The 29-year-old hasn’t played at all this season while battling through back discomfort that first showed up as he was rehabbing from his shoulder surgery after signing a seven year, $37.1 million deal with Columbus. He told the Columbus Post-Dispatch that he may be forced into a back surgery that would “have at least three, maybe four, fused with a titanium rod. The titanium provides stability and support and a relatively pain-free existence.”

The titanium rod would also signal the end of his NHL career as the procedure takes the ability to withstand body-checking and the hard hits that bodies normally absorb playing a contact sport at that level. So Horton currently sits in limbo, hoping he feels better at some point and living a compromised personal life because of the discomfort.

“I can’t stand up like a normal person; I can’t bend over,” said Horton to the Columbus Dispatch. “I can’t run. I can’t play with my kids. To get in and out of the car, I’m like a 75-year-old man … so slow and stiff. I can’t sleep at night. I try to lay down and my back seizes up and I can’t move, so sleeping is out. I’m like a zombie in the daytime.”

Close friends of Horton like Milan Lucic have been acutely aware of Horton’s plight since last summer, and his former teammates, coaches and upper management are all very sympathetic to his situation.

“It’s too bad. He’s still a young player,” said Claude Julien. “He was a great player for us here. He had a great shot and was always extremely good in the playoffs, and we would have liked to keep him if we could have come up with the right numbers to make it work.

“But it’s too bad to see a young player have to make a decision on his career at that young age with so much potential. You feel for him. You really do feel for him. I don’t care if people say he’s in a good financial situation. You realize quickly when you’re here [in the NHL] that the money is nice, but that’s not what brings you happiness. We all know that. It’s hard when you know you have so much more to offer, and you know how enjoyable this game can be. Not too many people get the opportunity to do what they love in life.”

Perhaps nobody on the Bruins can identify with Horton as much as Bruins President Cam Neely, who was forced to retire early in his Hall of Fame career at 30 years old due to knee and hip problems.

“Anybody would feel for somebody in that situation,” said Neely. “You’re only given so much time before you have to make a decision, and in my case I was feeling better…but it was because I was as inactive as I was. Ultimately you’d love for it to be on your terms, but as professional athletes that happens very rarely.

“But you hate to see it happen in the prime of his career because of injury. When I started a family – which was beneficial to me – it kept my mind off playing, but really when it got easier when I was old enough that I wouldn’t have been playing in the league even if I was healthy.”

Neely hasn’t even skated since participating in the Old Timers/Celebrity Game at Fenway Park prior to the Winter Classic, and clearly has made peace with the way his brilliant career ended prematurely. One can only hope that Horton reaches that same peace of mind at some point given the no-win situation he seems to be facing with his debilitating back injury.
Neely happy with Bruins current position

November 20, 2014, 3:45 pm
Joe Haggerty

BOSTON – The Bruins currently sit third in the Atlantic Division and tied for fourth overall in the Eastern Conference, and in a normal year that wouldn’t be viewed as nearly good enough for a team with Stanley Cup aspirations. But this is no normal year for the Bruins as they watched five defensemen go down to injuries in less than a three week span, and have missed their No. 1 center, David Krejci, for nearly half the games they’ve played thus far.

So all the factors must be taken into account when evaluating the Bruins at the first quarter pole of the season, and Bruins President Cam Neely certainly sounds okay with what he’s seen thus far.

“All things considered? Yeah. But I also think everybody realizes that they could play better,” said Neely, when asked if he was happy with the team’s current position. “As the season progresses we’d like to see that improvement. But with what’s happened to the team and the players – and it’s not excuses, everybody goes through it – but to get the points that we have, and some of them have been ugly, we can acknowledge that.

“We’ve got some points, and that’s put us in [playoff] position headed toward Thanksgiving. It’s something we’re building towards improving as the season progresses.”

Clearly, the consistency in every area and overall defensive play are places that the Black and Gold need a little sprucing up. They rank 10th in the league allowing 2.5 goals per game, and the penalty kill is ranked 21st with a 78.7 percent success rate. But the B’s are also 8-3-0 since Zdeno Chara went down against the Islanders in late October, and that has revealed a lot of character, and organizational depth, in all corners of the Boston dressing room.

Not every team (see the Columbus Blue Jackets) has dealt as well with that kind of continued adversity this season.

Marchand practices but is out vs. Blue Jackets

Joe Haggerty
November 20, 2014, 1:45 pm

BOSTON – Brad Marchand is feeling better and did make it through a full practice on Thursday, but he won’t be traveling to Columbus with the rest of the team for Friday night’s road tilt against the Blue Jackets. The B’s agitator missed Tuesday’s win over the St. Louis Blues after exiting in the third period of last weekend’s win over Carolina with what’s suspected to be an upper body injury, and the team is looking to give him a little extra rest with some tough opponents on the horizon.

“He skated, but I don’t think we’re going to bring him on the trip,” said Claude Julien. “We’ll give him some time, so he can feel much better. He’s doing better, and he’s day-to-day.”

Matt Fraser skated once again in Marchand’s spot with Patrice Bergeron and Reilly Smith on Thursday after playing very well with them in the win over the Blues, and the 24-year-old should once again fill that top-six forward role against the Blue Jackets on Friday.

Fraser helped create a goal for Bergeron with an aggressive fore-check against St. Louis, had another good goal taken away by a bogus goalie interference call and brought some size and strength to a line that tends to be on the smaller side most days.

Dougie Hamilton also missed Wednesday’s practice with the flu, but will be making the trip with the rest of the team and presumably playing against the Blue Jackets.

Marchand, Hamilton return to practice ice for Bruins

Joe Haggerty
November 20, 2014, 12:45 pm

BOSTON – The Bruins prepared for the Blue Jackets with a final practice at TD Garden on Thursday, and got a couple of familiar faces back into the skate.

Brad Marchand (upper body) and Dougie Hamilton (flu) returned to practice on Thursday afternoon after both missing the session on Wednesday, and Marchand took his normal spot on the second line alongside Patrice Bergeron and Reilly Smith while rotating through practice with Matt Fraser skating there as well. The B’s agitator missed Tuesday’s win over the St. Louis Blues with the injury after being forced out of the third period of last weekend’s win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

Zach Trotman also joined the B’s practice crew as they ready to travel for Friday night’s road game in Columbus.

Here are the line combos and D-pairings based on the Thursday practice:

Krejci-Lucic-Griffith
Fraser/Marchand-Bergeron-Smith
Kelly-Soderberg-Eriksson
Gagne-Campbell-Paille
Seidenberg-Hamilton
Bartkowski-Krug
Morrow-Miller/Trotman
Rask
Svedberg

Bruins recall Trotman from Providence

Joe Haggerty
November 20, 2014, 10:15 am

Young B’s defenseman Zach Trotman was sent down to the AHL on Tuesday with the injury situation seemingly starting to stabilize for the Black and Gold.

But the B’s blueliner has been called back to Boston on Thursday with another rash of physical issues attacking the Bruins: Adam McQuaid is out 6-8 weeks with a broken left thumb suffered in the win over the Blues, and Dougie Hamilton missed practice on Wednesday with a flu/virus.

Trotman may just be another extra defenseman brought with the team for Friday night’s road game in Columbus against the Blue Jackets, but the Bruins may need him based on the ability of Kevan Miller (shoulder) and Hamilton to answer the bell. Miller has been cleared to play games, and it would seem that he should be ready to start filling in for McQuaid immediately.

The 24-year-old Trotman skated in nine games for Boston this season, notching two assists and a minus-1 rating in a largely workmanlike body of work for the young defenseman.

In his NHL career, Trotman has appeared in 11 games for Boston and had played in five games for the P-Bruins before serving as one of the first reinforcements called up to Boston once the injuries hit.

BOSTON – From the periphery it hasn’t been all that great a week for Matt Fraser.

He appeared a little dazed and confused after catching a right hand to the jaw from Nathan Beaulieu during a fight in Montreal, and he was robbed of a goal Tuesday night against the St. Louis Blues on a bogus goalie interference call by referee Chris Lee.

But the 24-year-old Bruins winger is encouraged by the way things are developing for him, and it’s easy to see why while scratching underneath the surface.

First off, Fraser was joking about the fight afterward and was happy that he was lucid and clear while going through the Quiet Room concussion protocol immediately after the hockey fight.

“I probably won’t become a fighter anytime soon, but I hope that versatility tells them ‘Hey, we can put Fraser on the fourth line and he’ll get the job done, and we can put him on the first line and he’ll make plays,’” said Fraser. “It didn’t feel very good, but I went into the dressing room to do all the concussion protocol, and didn’t have any symptoms whatsoever.

“If that’s the worst thing that ever happens to me then so be it, but it’s a part of hockey. It’s something where I’m not very good at [fighting], but I’ll do anything that will help me, and help the team.”

He looked wobbly skating off the ice directly afterward, and but looked fine in his return in the third period and went right back to work in practice without missing a beat.

It also showed some fight, defiance and a little bit of emotion in a game where the Bruins didn’t show enough of any of those qualities in a lopsided defeat to their arch-rival.

“It obviously didn’t go how I wanted. But you’re trying to show the guys in the room that you’re willing to step up to do something showing displeasure at the way things were going for us,” said Fraser. “I’ve fought a lot in junior, and I had to in order to get noticed. It’s different here. I want to show that there’s a desire for me to contribute something every night, and to show [the team] that I want to be here, and want to be an impact player.”

Fraser didn’t get on the score sheet against St. Louis, and hasn’t registered a point in the last six games since his two-goal outburst against the Ottawa Senators. But the winger was heavily involved in the action vs. the Blues while getting a chance to play left wing on the top six with Brad Marchand out of the lineup.

It was Fraser’s aggressive, heavy fore-check that caused Ian Cole to rush his breakout pass, and become easy prey for Patrice Bergeron on a quick goal after intercepting the puck.

The second period should have snapped a five-game scoreless streak for Fraser when he crashed the net, and had a bobbed puck bounce off his chest and into the net for a score that would have given the B’s a 3-0 lead over the Blues. Instead it was ruled “no goal” on goalie interference despite the fact the puck was already in the net by the time Fraser and Brian Elliot first made contact.

Going long stretches without getting a goal can be rough for a young player that’s used to scoring a ton in the AHL, but the 6-foot-1, 204-pounder realizes his all-around game is what ultimately will make him stick in the NHL, and more specifically in Boston.

“Every day I just show up to the rink prepared to play wherever I’m slotted in, and you make certain adjustments. Being in the lineup is almost a different feeling because when you’re not, you almost don’t even feel like you’re on the team. I’d like to be contributing a little more offensively, but I’m getting my chances and I’ve been around the net,” said Fraser, who scored 90 goals over the last three seasons in the AHL. “The biggest thing

for me being a younger guy in this organization is that you’ve got to be good defensively, and you’ve got to be good in all three zones.

“When you look at all the guys on this team – Bergeron, Krejci and Lucic – they’re all good in all three zones. You’ve got to gain the trust of the coaches and the other guys in the room, so they know when you’re out there that you’ll get the job done. I just need to play my game and not over-think it too much: I’m a straight line player that also needs to find open spaces where guys can dish me the puck.”

Claude Julien has taken note of the way Fraser is playing, and that’s one of several reasons why he’s sticking with the Bruins through all the other roster changes since the end of training camp.

“He gets deprived from a goal,” said Julien. “But the other part – he deserves a lot of credit for his, he was on the line that played against [The Blues] top-scoring line and defensively I thought he was very reliable. He played big, he played strong with Bergy [Patrice Bergeron] and [Reilly] Smith. I think that line did a great job against the [Vladimir] Tarasenko line.”

The biggest impact for Fraser, of course, will be scoring some goals, and ending the string of zeroes on his stat sheet. He should have had one against the Blues, and one gets the sense that a few more might be coming for a skilled player in Fraser that could produce them in bunches.
Patrick Kaleta must wonder if the locusts are next.

The Angola native has played exactly one game for the Buffalo Sabres in the last 13 months — last Thursday in Minnesota. He's finally healthy after the craziest year of his career, and now he can't get to the rink to even practice.

Kaleta is the only Sabres player who lives in the Southtowns and he's been stuck in his Hamburg home since the region was battered by snow on Tuesday. He missed Tuesday’s game against San Jose and Thursday’s practice, both at First Niagara Center. And he has no idea if he'll make it to today’s practice or the flight this afternoon for Saturday’s game in Washington.

Had tonight’s game against the New York Rangers been played as scheduled, Kaleta almost certainly would have missed that one too. The rest of the players live either downtown or in the Northtowns and have been unaffected by the storm.

Since October 2013, Kaleta has endured a 10-game NHL suspension, a trip to the waiver wire, an assignment to Rochester, a season-ending knee injury and a severe facial injury in September when struck by a puck during an exhibition game.

And now, Mother Nature’s wrath.

“I definitely sympathize for people living in the Southtowns,” Kaleta told The News by phone from his house late Thursday afternoon. “I’m like all the rest of them. I wish I could help more. I remember going to hockey practices when I was a kid and my dad and mom would get me through some deep stuff. I never remember anything remotely close to something like this.”

Kaleta said it was tough watching Tuesday’s 4-1 win over the Sharks on television.

“It’s was horrible, just horrible,” he said. “There’s nothing worse than not being able to get in there with your teammates, especially with my past year. I’ve had to sit and watch for a long time. It’s not something I enjoy and it’s aggravating to not be able to get there. The coaches have been awesome about caring about the guys not able to go there.

“It is what it is. There’s nothing I can do about this but I’m definitely raring to get back to the rink.”

While Kaleta, 28, is the only player stuck by the storm, members of the team’s front office, training, equipment and public relations staffs have also been missing.

Kaleta and his fiancee, Ashley Cook, have been holed up in the house since the storm hit and he estimates they have 5-6 feet of snow outside. Fortunately, she went grocery shopping on Monday so there is plenty of food. The power has been flickering but the house is hooked up to a generator and the fireplace is also on.

Kaleta said he walked to a couple of gas stations to get fuel for a neighbor’s snow blower and the neighbor got a dinner invitation for getting Kaleta’s driveway cleared — except the driveway is covered again.

There was no way, of course, for Kaleta to get to practice. He’s been in contact with Hamburg police about the driving ban there and has been told there’s no route for him to get downtown. He has no idea what today might bring.

“As of right now, I’m playing it by ear,” he said. “It’s really, really bad right now. Hopefully the snow will shift. Whether it takes all night or whatever we need to do, we’re going to try to clear the driveway. I’m sure I’ll be in contact with the Sabres and the police officers here to see if I can get to the arena.

“Whatever is possible, that’s what I’m going to do for sure. You know me, I don’t like sitting around and watching. I get a little crazy.”
Postponement catches Sabres players by surprise

By Mike Harrington | News Sports Reporter | @BNHarrington | Google+ on November 20, 2014 - 11:35 PM

The Buffalo Sabres had a full practice Thursday in First Niagara Center minus winger Patrick Kaleta, still stranded in his Hamburg home. Everything was normal with hockey talk although the players were, of course, marveling at the power of the snowstorm that has enveloped parts of the region.

Jhonas Enroth, for now the starting goalie with the injury to Michal Neuvirth, was chatting about how much he was looking forward to tonight’s game against the New York Rangers and his Swedish hero, goaltender Henrik Lundqvist. Backup Nathan Lieuwen discussed how it took him nearly three hours to drive here from Rochester via Route 104 because the Thruway was closed.

Most of the players had already showered and left the building when a surprise announcement came down just after 3 p.m.: The NHL has decided to postpone tonight’s game due to what it said were “the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres.”

“I was surprised,” said Zemgus Girgensons, who was hanging around to do an interview with a visiting TV crew from his native Latvia. “I was actually in the shower when I heard someone say it and I thought it was a joke. I had no idea. But it is what it is. It’s Mother Nature and you can’t do anything about it.”

“Some of the pictures that have been on the Internet are crazy,” added Tyler Ennis. “I can’t imagine being buried in snow like some of these people are. You want to wish everyone the best, so it’s smart. You have to worry about saving people and getting them in better situations.”

No makeup date has been announced and fans should hold their tickets for the new date. So with downtown easily accessible, why is tonight’s game off when Tuesday’s game against San Jose went on?

Michael Gilbert, the Sabres’ vice president for public and community relations, said the decisions were made by the league in consultation with the teams in both cases. Gilbert also said the fact that Tuesday’s game was a national telecast on the NBC Sports Network was not a factor.

“We had a team from California that was already in town and wasn’t coming back this way until March,” Gilbert said. “There just weren’t as many options in play to get that game in. This is a team from New York that wasn’t here yet and you’d have a lot of chances to make it up.”

The Rangers were waiting for NHL officials to give them the go-ahead to travel to Buffalo when the league decided to call off the game. The Sabres, like many other businesses in Buffalo, continue to be stressed on the staffing end by employees stranded in the snow unable to get to work because of the weather and driving bans in their towns.

Tuesday’s game was a heavy lift, even with only 6,200 fans in the house. President Ted Black served a stint as an usher, many full-time employees joined him or worked as ticket-takers, and many concession stands were not open.

The team was likely concerned about the potential for more people in the house for a Friday game. In addition, Gilbert said the arena was fully stocked Tuesday but some concession items and supplies are now running low because deliveries have been interrupted by the closure of the Thruway.

The Sabres also had a game postponed Jan. 7 against Carolina because of a blizzard. That game was made up on Feb. 25 as the first one coming out of the Olympic break.

“The conditions downtown were worse for that game last season but we certainly understand the conditions just outside of Buffalo here are pretty bad,” Tyler Myers said. “Especially with a guy like Pat Kaleta who hasn’t even been able to come to the rink yet, you can understand why the game was canceled. It’s just an adjustment we have to make.”
There was a first for RIT hockey on Wednesday night:

One former Rochester Institute of Technology player faced off against another on the same NHL ice rink.

Right winger Steve Pinizzotto, just called up from the AHL's Oklahoma City Barons, played for the Edmonton Oilers against defenseman Chris Tanev and the Vancouver Canucks at Rexall Place. Vancouver won 5-4.

Tigers coach Wayne Wilson had the proud-father feeling.

"It's pretty cool, to think we had two guys playing against each other," Wilson said. "I would have never envisioned that, not when we were Division III and not at Division I."

Pinizzotto had quite the night, too: He ended up with a "Gordie Howe hat trick." He fought Derek Dorsett just 2:27 into the game, scored his first NHL goal at 4:43 of the second period, and assisted on a goal by Boyd Gordon at 11:43 of the second period.

"A lot of veteran NHL players have never accomplished that," Wilson said.

Pinizzotto, 30, has played only 19 NHL games in his seven pro seasons. He left RIT as a free agent following his sophomore season of 2006-07, when he produced 13 goals, 31 assists and 44 points in 34 games. He also had 76 penalty minutes.

He had two assists in six games with Edmonton last season, and no points in 12 games with the Canucks as Tanev's teammate in the 2012-13 season.

"It's not like he was a first-round pick where he was going to be given multiple chances," Wilson said. "He's what, 30 now? That's a long, hard fight. He still has that passion and that's a credit to him."

Now in his fifth year, Tanev, at 24, is a well-established NHL veteran. He was plucked away from RIT following his freshman season of 2009-10, when the Tigers improbable journey to the Frozen Four provided great exposure and allowed a host of NHL scouts to see Tanev's talents.

He signed with Vancouver as a free agent following the season. He has played 175 NHL games for the Canucks.

"They both have strong beliefs in themselves," Wilson said.

If there was one down side to Pinizzotto's night, his gamble to beat Ryan Kesler to a loose puck deep in the Canucks zone failed, and Vancouver sprinted away on a two-on-one fast break to score the winning goal.

"Maybe he's watching our games," Wilson joked.

Sabres-Rangers game postponed due to storm

Kevin Oklobzija, Staff writer 3:53 p.m. EST November 20, 2014

With mountains of snow growing higher and travel bans throughout much of Erie County, the Buffalo Sabres have postponed Friday's home game against the New York Rangers.

No makeup date has been announced.

The Sabres cited "continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres" as reasons for the decision.

The Sabres practiced today at First Niagara Center and winger Patrick Kaleta still wasn't able to drive in from the Orchard Park area. He also was snowed in at home on Tuesday night, missing Buffalo's home game against San Jose.

Rochester Americans goalie coach Bob Janosz lives in East Aurora and has been unable to even get onto the street in front of his house, so he has missed the past two days of practice.

The Sabres play at the Washington Capitals on Saturday. They're not back at the First Niagara Center until Wednesday.
Newest Hitmen defenceman Kanzig excited to play in front of Calgary fans

BY KRISTEN ODLAND, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:45 PM

Newest Hitmen defenceman Kanzig excited to play in front of Calgary fans

Calgary Flames prospect Keegan Kanzig takes on Klarc Wilson of the Vancouver Canucks during the Youngstars Tournament in Penticton, B.C. in September.

Sometimes, the most logical choice is the best one.

The Calgary Hitmen took that route, striking a deal with the Victoria Royals and acquiring Keegan Kanzig, a simple, puck-moving defenceman on Wednesday night, finding value for disgruntled forward Greg Chase and also adding a second-round pick in 2016.

It also makes sense considering Kanzig is a Calgary Flames prospect — who is sure to benefit from working under the careful watch of the neighbouring National Hockey League franchise.

"The Flames involvement, I think, will be like any one of our players that isn’t owned by a hockey team,” said Mike Moore, the Hitmen general manager and vice-president of business operations who also surrendered a fifth rounder in 2015 and eighth rounder in 2016 in the deal. “They’re there to help us every day. They’re a tremendous resource. They’ll be a tremendous resource for Keegan. He’ll be right under their nose.

“It’s just an added opportunity to play in front of a team he wants to play for down the road.”

At six-foot-six, 248 pounds, the physically intimidating Kanzig was a third-round selection of the Flames in the 2013 NHL draft and signed a three-year entry level contract last December.

The 19-year-old Athabasca, Alta., native is into his fourth WHL season with the Victoria Royals and had six assists and 51 penalty minutes in 21 games this season.

Assigned to work on his foot speed when departing the Flames’ training camp in the fall, little did Kanzig realize that he’d be back — permanently — in the Scotia bank Saddledome so soon.

“It’s a great city,” Kanzig said in front of the Hitmen dressing quarters, just down the hall from the big boys of the Flames. “I’ve heard lots of good things about (the Hitmen) organization and I’m very excited to be back in Calgary.”

Kanzig had received the news prior to hitting the ice for a home game against the Kelowna Rockets.

“I was right in my pre-game routine,” he said. “I knew something was going down and I was told that I was traded. I was bit distracted, but when I found out I was going to Calgary, my disappointment disappeared pretty quick.

“I was looking forward to coming here.”

Chase had a falling out with the Hitmen and, on Nov. 4, he was a healthy scratch for a game at the Saskatoon Blades. Shortly after, he was sent home to Sherwood Park and requested a trade.

Since then, the Edmonton Oilers draft pick, who was selected by the Hitmen 22nd overall in the 2010 bantam draft, has been playing a waiting game while Moore worked on a deal. The Hitmen, 11-8-1 overall, are 3-1-2 since Chase was a healthy scratch.

Kanzig is set to debut on Friday as the Hitmen host the Moose Jaw Warriors.

Hitmen head coach Mark French was asked about the relief to get a deal done, for the dressing room — specifically.

"Not to try and get away from your question, it is a good question but it’s more for the players than for me," he said. "As a coach, I just focused what we were getting from the guys in the room.

“I think this is a nice acquisition to complement what we already have.”

Kanzig becomes the fifth Flames prospect since the 2000-01 season to play for the Hitmen — others include Brent Krahn, Wade Davis, Shaun Sutter, and Jiri Cetkovsky. Total NHL games of that group? One (Krahn, and with the Dallas Stars).

Still, it doesn’t hurt — for the player, the Hitmen, and the Flames — to have him play, what is likely his last season in the WHL, in the Saddledome.

“That’ll be exciting, too,” Kanzig said. “I think it’ll add a little bit of motivation. No matter where you play, there’s motivation to perform well and to be at your best. But when you know the Calgary Flames are right next door and in the rink all the time, it might add that little extra.”

Flames lines mixed up ahead of meeting with Chicago Blackhawks
November 20, 2014. 1:09 pm • Section: Flames Insider

Kristen Odland

Michael Ferland is in, David Jones is not. That we know.

As for tonight’s line combinations and who-is-playing-with-who, things are very much up in the air ahead of the evening clash with the Chicago Blackhawks.

“(Ferland) is going to be in the lineup tonight,” said Flames head coach Bob Hartley. “I want to get him back going. He came a long ways. He deserves to play and it’s a good challenge … I’m not quite set on all my lines so we’re going to wait and see. I have some juggling to do this afternoon. I’ll look at my combinations and be set for tonight.”

The Flames are searching for a fourth straight win at the Scotiabank Saddledome and look to improve a 5-2-2 record which was 2-2-2 when they returned for this five-game home stretch. Overall, they’re 12-6-2 and third in the Pacific Division. The Blackhawks, meanwhile, are 10-7-1 and are starting the first of a six-game “Circus Trip” … a road-trip which shoos them out of the United Center while the Ringling Bros B&B Circus is in Chicago.

The Flames are coming off a 4-3 shootout victory which was the latest example of their come-from-behind efforts — trailing 2-0 after 40 minutes of play. They’ve now out-scored opponents 27-12 in third periods.

Out of the 61 goals scored this year — third most in the league — 17 of them have been scored by their defence (specifically, Mark Giordano, Dennis Wideman, and TJ Brodie). Sean Monahan has seven, like Wideman, while Jiri Hudler is tied with Mark Giordano with six. Lance Bouma has five.

Couple that with good goaltending, it’s a true team effort.

“It’s almost like tag-team wrestling,” said Flames head coach Bob Hartley. “It seems when one line is down, three other lines will be going. We’ve got great consistency from our blueline, you look at our goaltending. Hills and Rams have gave us good minutes.

“It seems we always find a different way … it’s not always the same actors that are on the main stage.”

Jones (upper body) and D Kris Russell (defence) are out for tonight’s game and both day-to-day. The line of Sven Baertschi, Josh Jooris, and Paul Byron were together at practise but later in the dressing room, it sounded like Ferland would be playing with the Jooris-Byron combination.

The preliminary lineup looked like this:

Lines:
C.Glencross-S.Monahan-L.Bouma
J.Gaudreau-M.Granlund-J.Hudler
S.Baertschi-J.Jooris-P.Byron
B.Bollig-M.Ferland-D.Setoguchi

Defence
Mark Giordano-T.Brodie
L.Smid-D.Wideman
R.Diaz-D.Engelland

Goalties
J.Hiller
K.Ramo

BY KRISTEN ODLAND, CALGARY HERALD
NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:46 PM

Calgary Flames defenceman Mark Giordano and Chicago Blackhawks centre Jonathan Toews battled along the boards during the second period on Thursday night. The Hawks won 4-3.

The Calgary Flames, nearing the quarter pole of the 2014-15 National Hockey League season, have been masters of the third period and establishing themselves as late comeback specialists.

Unfortunately on Thursday night against the Chicago Blackhawks at the Scotiabank Saddledome, their magic ran out.

Heading into the clash, the Flames had out-scored opponents 27-12 in the final 20 minutes — and were fresh off an exciting 4-3 shootout victory over the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday which they’d trailed 2-0 after 40 minutes of play.

But they met their match in the Blackhawks, also an expert in that department, allowing a league-low seven goals in the third period.

Scoring with 10:47 remaining in the final frame and then controlling the hard-working Flames until the end, the visitors spoiled their party with a 4-3 win and snapped Calgary’s three-game win streak at home.

Jonas Hiller, trying to recreate an unbelievable 49-save effort that resulted in a 2-1 overtime victory on Oct. 15, had gone to play the puck to Dennis Wideman who mishandled the puck.

Then, easily dangling around Sven Baertschi’s feet, Patrick Kane expertly put the Hawks ahead and it stayed that way until the buzzer.

With less than four minutes left, Curtis Glencross and Johnny Gaudreau jammed at Corey Crawford’s doors step on a power play — one of Calgary’s seven (!) on the evening — but he slammed the door.

And, for the fans still glued to their seats (and televisions at home), they still couldn’t manage anything in the final seconds.

“It was a tie game there,” Paul Byron said. “Unfortunately, it’s just the way the game goes. You can’t win every one. One bad bounce and it ends up in your net.”

After a slow start to the first period but getting out alive and tied 2-2, the Flames found themselves in more trouble during the second period.

Midway through the frame, Brent Seabrook was all alone in the slot and flicked home a wrister past Hiller to go ahead 3-2.

It didn’t seem to faze the Flames, however, as they quickly responded a few minutes later when a wide-open Sean Monahan one-timed a pass from Curtis Glencross through Corey Crawford’s left side.

Notable, too, was the play of Calgary’s fourth line of Brandon Bollig — playing against his former team for the second time this season — Max Reinhart, and Baertschi. The trio were able to pin Chicago’s big three — Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, and Kris Versteeg — in their own zone.

“For the most part,” Glencross said, “we played a pretty good game. A couple turnovers, a couple mental breakdowns they got a couple goals out of. At the same time, we have to take a lot of positives out of that game, too.

“They’re probably one of the best teams in the league and we had a good game with them all night. It could have gone either way.”

But, still, there was something missing from the home side on this night.

“The goals (Chicago) got, without taking anything away from the talent on their team, we were not sharp,” said Flames head coach Bob Hartley. “On every goal, there was a huge mistake. And, as we know, this is a game of mistakes and they have the talent to make you pay.

“It’s too bad, but, hey, (Friday) we’re going to re-crank the big machine and go again.”

Adam Clendening, playing his first NHL game this season, put the Hawks on the board with five seconds left in TJ Brodie’s holding penalty and four minutes into the first period. Only 3:12 later, Dan Carcillo scored Chicago’s second goal on their sixth shot — a weak one allowed by Hiller.

That woke up the home team and soon they took advantage of a Niklas Hjalmarsson’s tripping penalty. Byron hammered home a huge rebound kicked out by Crawford.

Less than a minute later, on another power play, Wideman blasted a point shot which had been set up by Markus Granlund (with Duncan Keith draped all over him) and Johnny Gaudreau.

“We knew we weren’t going to put that kind of game on Jonas again,” said Byron, referring to their previous meeting with the Blackhawks. “He made some unbelievable saves but there was no way we were going to let him have 50 shots again like that.

“For the first five or 10 minutes, we sat back and let them play their game and control the tempo.

“But I think the last 15 minutes, our team played great . . . it could have went either way.’’

The Flames, which outshot the visitors 27-22, dropped to 12-7-2 including a 5-3-2 mark at the Scotiabank Saddledome while the Hawks improved to 11-7-1. Calgary rounds out five-game home stand on Saturday against the New Jersey Devils.

“It’s not only about identifying our mistakes,” Hartley said. “It’s about making sure we are very aware of the expectations. We don’t want to lose two games in a row. We’re in a position to respond and we’ve been responding very well since the start. It’s always a new challenge. (Friday) we’re going to rethink the lineup . . . and we’re going to be ready for Saturday.’’

GAME STORY

At Calgary

Three stars

1. Blackhawks RW Patrick Kane: Responds exactly when his team needs him. Demonstrates why he’s among the league’s elite. Another goal and an assist.

2. Flames C Sean Monahan: Physically dominates the Hawks all night and does well in the faceoff circle against an expert like Jonathan Toews. Applies pressure, shoots often, and is rewarded with a marker in the second frame to tie the game 3-3.

3. Flames LW Paul Byron: Dominating on a line with Josh Jooris and, on this night, Michael Ferland. Small, yes, but no one seems to care anymore. Scores a goal and an assist. Becoming a reliable producer.

Why the Flames lost?

Because their late heroics were finally foiled by a solid Blackhawks team.

Because a slow start finally caught up to them.

The Scratches

Flames: D Kris Russell (lower body), RW David Jones (upper body), RW Brian McGrattan, RW Devin Setoguchi, C Matt Stajan (knee), C Mikael Backlund (abdomen), C Joe Colborne (wrist), LW Mason Raymond (shoulder)

Blackhawks: D David Rundblad, LW Patrick Sharp (lower body), C Andrew Shaw (upper body)

Next Up

The Flames welcome their old friend Michael Cammalleri and the New Jersey Devils to wrap up a five-game home stand before heading on the road for visits to Anaheim, San Jose and Arizona.

Calgary Flames defence duo catches eye of Blackhawks counterparts

ERIC FRANCIS, CALGARY SUN

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Months back, it would have been easy for a Calgary hockey fan to identify a matchup with the Chicago Blackhawks as being an evening featuring perhaps the NHL’s best blueline tandem.

For a good chunk of the last decade, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook have been recognized as a duo capable of dominating at either end of the rink.

They’ve won two Stanley Cups together, three Olympic golds between them and a Norris Trophy for Keith.

However, last night, the team with the most impressive defensive duo in hockey so far this year may have been standing on the other side of the rink.

Yes, Mark Giordano and T.J. Brodie have been that impressive.

And Keith agrees.

“I don’t get into talk about where players are at, but I watch the highlights and definitely noticed those two guys — I think you just look at their numbers, and they stick out pretty good,” said Keith, 31.

“They’re good skating defencemen. It’s impressive what they’ve been able to do — they’re the backbone of their team. When they’re going, their team is a lot harder to play against. We don’t play them a lot, but just look at the numbers, and it’s impressive what they’ve been able to accomplish.”

Indeed, the numbers are staggering when you put them head to head as the Flames top duo has combined for 10 goals, 27 assists and is a whopping plus-20.

The ‘Hawks big two have eight goals, 12 assists and sit are even in the plus/minus column.

What’s more, while Giordano and Brodie (dare we call them Brodano?) face the opposition’s top line every night, Keith and Seabrook often leave that to their seconds, Niklas Hjalmarsson and Johnny Oduya.

“Brodie is a great skater, and it seems like he’s got better every year he’s been in the league,” said Keith, who wears an ‘A’ on his jersey, as does Seabrook, 29.

“Gio had a great year last year, and although he got injured, he just picked up where he left off. As a smaller guy who relies on skating, I always try to watch guys like that, and they’re fun guys to watch. Nothing against their forwards, but those two jumping up is something we had to watch for.”

As Giordano’s airtime on the Coach’s Corner can attest, more and more people in the hockey world are paying attention to the heroics being provided by the club’s top pair.

“Hawks coach Joel Quenneville is no different.

“It’s a great pair,” said the league’s highest-paid coach, when asked if he sees similarities between the top blueline pairings.

“They’re both agile and active off the point, make a lot of direct points, they defend well, they’ve got an excellent gap, and they’re out there for all critical minutes and all critical matchups.

“Duncs and Sees came along early in their careers, as well. (Giordano and Brodie) work very well together, and these guys are both offensive and strong defensively, so they’ve got a lot of upside long-term.”

Short-term, Giordano finds himself tied for fourth in NHL scoring after last night with seven goals and 16 assists — a height even Keith never dared dream of. Sure, it’s only 20 games in, but this is no fluke.

Teams like the Blackhawks are now scheming against stopping the Flames prolific defence.
This is what Keegan Kanzig has been working toward — orders to pack up his gear and report to the Saddledome.

Except, in his dreams, it didn’t unfold quite like this.

The 19-year-old blueline behemoth was preparing Wednesday for an outing with the WHL’s Victoria Royals when his pre-game routine was interrupted with some unexpected news — that, in the middle of his fourth season in the Dub, he’d been swapped to the Calgary Hitmen.

“When (Royals GM Cam Moon) told me I was traded, it was a bit disappointing,” Kanzig admitted. “But when I found out I was going to Calgary, that disappointment disappeared pretty quick.”

The Saddledome, after all, is a place that Kanzig hopes to call his long-term hockey home.

The crew from Calgary selected the 6-foot-6, 242 lb. rearguard in the third-round of the 2013 NHL Draft and Hitmen GM Mike Moore admitted he did quiz the Flames’ higher-ups — both on-ice and off-ice material — about Kanzig before pulling the trigger on Wednesday’s swap.

Edmonton Oilers prospect Greg Chase, who had requested a move from the Hitmen, was the key piece traded to the Royals in the deal.

“I think it will add a little bit of motivation,” Kanzig said of the opportunity to play his home games at the Saddledome. “No matter where you play, there’s motivation to perform well and be at your best, but when you know the Calgary Flames are right next door and they’re around in the rink all the time, it might add that little extra.”

Kanzig remains a long-term project for the Flames, but the fitness freak from Athabasca, Alta., told reporters just moments after arriving Thursday at the Saddledome that he’s been working diligently at his on-ice to-do list, which includes improving his foot-work, his mobility in tight areas, his stick positioning and his puck-handling skills.

He’s anxious to show that he’s making strides.

He’s also anxious, after following the Flames from afar, to be a little closer to the action. In fact, he attended Thursday’s clash between his future employers and the Chicago Blackhawks at the Saddledome.

“I’ve been impressed. They’re doing well this year,” Kanzig said. “It’s something I like to see. I know a lot of the guys that are playing on the Flames through the last couple of camps, and it’s good to see that they’re doing well and they’re having some success. It’s exciting for the future, that’s for sure.”

Around the boards

This isn’t exactly breaking news, but this Flames team is F-U-N to watch. There haven’t been many duds at the Saddledome yet this season ...

Flames LW Michael Ferland returned Thursday after missing eight straight contests due to a concussion. With the hosts trailing 2-0 before they’d even fired a shot on the Blackhawks’ goal, the 22-year-old Ferland helped reverse the momentum with a superb shift ... With his terrific vision and ability to avoid checks, some folks have mentioned Flames rookie Johnny Gaudreau in the same breath as Blackhawks sharpshooter Patrick Kane.

After Thursday’s first-star performance, Kane told reporters he was impressed with the 21-year-old left-winger. “He’s going to be a good player, that’s for sure,” Kane said of Gaudreau. “He’s obviously very shifty. For how small he is, he’s one of those guys that doesn’t seem to get hit. I think he’s going to have a very good career in this league. It seems like he’s gotten off to a very good start in the NHL, too. You can definitely tell he’s got some skill, he’s got some patience with the puck. He makes good plays out there. He’ll only get better.”

Off the glass

With Ferland back in action, RW David Jones (upper body) was placed on injured reserve. The Flames were also missing D Kris Russell (lower body) for a second straight night ... The good news is on the injury front is C Mikael Backlund (abdomen) and C Matt Stajan (knee) are both back on their skates, although neither is close to returning ... Football fans, why not turn Sunday into a doubleheader? Kanzig and the Hitmen will host the Red Deer Rebels at 6 p.m., and anybody showing a ticket to Sunday’s CFL West Division Final — a 2:30 p.m. kickoff at McMahon Stadium — can score a seat at the hockey game for just $5.
Nearly two weeks ago, the Calgary Flames faced the Florida Panthers in front of just 9,230 fans at BB&T Center in Sunrise, Fla. The explanation for all those empty seats? The Panthers aren’t the hottest ticket in the Sunshine State, and going head-to-head with a full slate of NCAA football action on a Saturday afternoon didn’t help the cause.

Two days later, the Flames faced the Carolina Hurricanes in front of just 9,906 spectators at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C. The reason for such poor turnout? The NFL’s Carolina Panthers, based about two-and-a-half hours away in Charlotte, were making their only appearance of the season on Monday Night Football.

So no, the Flames don’t need to be reminded that not every NHL market is a hockey town.

“At Philips Arena (in Atlanta), I was on the job for two years and security guards sometimes were asking me, ‘Where’s your pass? or ‘Where’s your credential?’ ” said Flames head coach Bob Hartley, who was behind the bench of the since-relocated Atlanta Thrashers for parts of five seasons from 2003-07.

“I thought at first they were joking with me, but they were saying, ‘No, who are you?’ I was two years the coach in Atlanta, and they didn’t know who I was … And that was our building.

“It just shows that you never take anything for granted.”

The Flames conclude their five-game homestand Saturday against the New Jersey Devils, so sports fans in Southern Alberta won’t have to choose between supporting local hockey heroes and watching Sunday’s CFL West Division Final between the Calgary Stampeders and the Edmonton Eskimos at McMahon Stadium.

In fact, some of the Saddledome employees — including Hartley, a fan of the Montreal Alouettes — will also be tuned in to the pigskin playoffs.

“Stamps by at least 15,” Hartley predicted. “You can quote me.”

Calgary is undoubtedly a hockey-first market, but this isn’t exactly a case of ‘This town ain’t big big enough for the both of us.’

Especially this week.

There’s been a new fashion craze in the Flames’ locker-room, with several skaters — among them, rookie forwards Johnny Gaudreau and Josh Jooris and Edmonton-raised defenceman Deryk Engelland — and members of the coaching staff sporting Stamps ball-caps.

After Stamps quarterback Bo Levi Mitchell spotted a photo on Twitter of Gaudreau with the Horsemen logo on his hat, he replied, “That’s awesome! Gotta support our city.”

That seems to be the consensus.

“(Pittsburgh) was a football town, but it was a hockey town, too. And once the Pirates started winning, it was a baseball town,” Engelland said. “It’s an all-around sports town, even the college teams. I don’t think you can go to a mall or on the street and see somebody wearing a sports hat or shirt or jersey. It’s a lot of fun.

“Coming here, it’s the same stuff. Everyone is a diehard sports fan. The Flames might be on the top, but the Stamps aren’t too far behind.”

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Peter Maher, the now-retired radio voice of the Calgary Flames, has always been a voice of reason.

One of the theories he often bestowed was to put more stock in the second quarter of the season than the first. His reasoning was simple. Just because a weaker team has a hot start, it doesn't mean it'll carry it through to the end of the season. Likewise, a good team will eventually raise its game to the level expected after getting it’s bearings.

Or, at least, the record that teams post in the second set of 20 games is often a closer reflection to their calibre.

As the NHL readies to move beyond the 25% mark of the campaign this weekend, there are a handful of teams you can expect to see differently at the midway point. And if they don’t change their ways, to steal from Dennis Green, they aren’t who we currently think they are.

Here are a few on both sides of the ledger.

The Hot Starts

• Nashville Predators

Why they’ll keep winning: A healthy Pekka Rinne in goal for a whole season, unlike the 2013-14 campaign ... The skilled veteran newcomers such as Mike Ribeiro and James Neal will continue to produce.

Why they’ll fall off: Rookie sensation Filip Forsberg won’t keep it up ... Their team-wide shooting percentage will drop ... The struggling penalty kill won’t pick up the slack.

• Calgary Flames

Why they’ll keep winning: They may just be the hardest working team in the league ... Centre Sean Monahan continues to contain the top opposing pivots ... Mark Giordano and TJ Brodie are that good of a defence pairing.

Why they’ll fall off: They’re not talented enough to keep scoring at that rate ... Goalie Jonas Hiller has started to see his save percentage fall and it’ll continue ... Eventually that negative shots-for/shots-against ratio, and subsequent possession numbers cost them.

• New York Islanders

Why they’ll keep winning: John Tavares is no longer a one-man band among the forwards ... Adding Johnny Boychuk and Nick Leddy has solidified the defence corps ... The Metropolitan Division is weak.

Why they’ll fall off: Goalie Jaroslav Halak is not really the answer between the pipes ... Their sub-par penalty killing ends up biting them.

The Cold Starts

• The Colorado Avalanche

Why they’ll turn it around: All those up-and-coming talented forwards find their game, especially Ryan O’Reilly and Gabriel Landeskog ... Goalie Semyon Varlamov reverts to his form of last season.

Why they’ll keep struggling: After Tyson Barrie, the defence corps is not quick enough or good enough at moving the puck forward ... Team speed simply isn’t up to snuff.

• Philadelphia Flyers

Why they’ll turn it around: All the players going through disappointing seasons catch up to Jakub Voracek and Claude Giroux ... Voracek continues to be one of the NHL’s best stories.

Why they’ll keep struggling: The injuries on defence are simply too much to overcome ... No.-1 goalie Steve Mason and his 3.02 goals-against average is a true reflection of his ability. Not just a reflection of the horrid penalty kill.

• Dallas Stars

Why they’ll turn it around: Jamie Benn, who drives the Stars, finds top gear in his game ... Goalie Kari Lehtonen returns to form between the pipes ... Players such as Erik Cole and Shawn Horcoff win more battles with father time.

Why they’ll keep struggling: Jason Spezza, Ales Hemsky and Trevor Daley continue to struggle defensively ... Losing Valeri Nichushkin takes away too much forward skill.
Chicago Blackhawks edge Calgary Flames 2

BY RANDY SPORTAK, CALGARY SUN

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No third-period comeback this time.

Can’t question whether the Calgary Flames can go toe-to-toe against the big boys, though.

Patrick Kane took advantage of a lucky bounce to break a third-period deadlock that gave the Chicago Blackhawks a 4-3 victory over the upstart Flames Thursday night, but even in defeat it’s fair to say the hosts gave the perennial powerhouse squad from the Windy City all it could handle.

“That was a good hockey game. Unfortunately, one team’s gotta lose,” Flames left-winger Curtis Glencross said.

“For the most part, we had a pretty good hockey game. We had a couple of turnovers and a couple mental breakdowns, that’s how they got a couple goals, but, at the same time, we have to take a lot of positives out of that game, too.

“They’re probably one of the best teams in the league and we had a game with them all night. The game could have gone either way.”

Going into this week’s action, all the talk surrounding the Flames was how they’d fare against the likes of the Anaheim Ducks and Blackhawks, two Stanley Cup contenders.

Well, they fashioned a thrilling comeback win over the Ducks on Tuesday and twice erased deficits against the Hawks before the Saddledome sellout crowd of 19,289.

Even after Kane’s eventual winner midway through the final frame, Chicago goalie Corey Crawford was forced to deliver a slew of clutch stops in the final moments to prevent the Flames from netting the equalizer.

“I think everyone in this room knows we can compete,” said Flames winger Paul Byron. “It’s just a matter of playing a full 60-minute game. We saw that for the last 50 minutes of the game tonight.”

The Flames (12-7-2) saw their three-game winning streak snapped, but for those wondering whether the Flames had enough to skate with the Blackhawks, it took a goofy play to make the difference.

Miscommunication between goalie Jonas Hiller, defenceman Ladislav Smid and forward Sven Baertschi resulted in a loose puck for Kane to pounce, and the skilled winger made no mistake with the golden chance.

“As much as we worked hard tonight, I felt that the goals that they got — without taking anything away from the talent that they have on their team — we were not sharp,” Flames head coach Bob Hartley said. “On every goal, there’s a huge mistake. As we know, this is a game of mistakes, and they have the talent to make you pay.”

As much as the Flames made a game of it, they could do without having to fashion so many comebacks, especially after a lamentable start.

The Blackhawks had a 2-0 edge just past the seven-minute mark, thanks to goals by Adam Clendening, in his NHL debut, and Daniel Carcillo.

That deficit was erased by the first intermission thanks to powerplay tallies just 54 seconds apart by Byron and Dennis Wideman, an impressive feat considering how the Blackhawks, with the NHL’s best penalty-kill, had surrendered only four powerplay goals in their first 19 games and only one in the previous eight games.

Brent Seabrook, celebrating his 700th NHL game, restored Chicago’s lead just past the midway point, but, once again, the Flames drew even when Sean Monahan finished off a great pass from Glencross.

A third comeback wasn’t in the cards, mainly because goalie Crawford made 24 saves for the Blackhawks (11-7-1).
LA Kings hold off Carolina 3-2 for 10th home win

BY GREG BEACHAM
AP Hockey Writer
November 21, 2014 Updated 3 hours ago

LOS ANGELES — Although Tanner Pearson claims he never played baseball growing up in Canada, he fooled his fellow Los Angeles Kings with a home run swing on the decisive goal against Carolina.

And credit Jonathan Quick with the save in the Kings’ latest impressive work at home.

Pearson ended his 11-game goal drought with the tiebreaking score, and Quick stopped 25 shots in the Kings’ NHL-best 10th home victory of the season, 3-2 over the Hurricanes on Thursday night.

Just 38 seconds after Eric Staal tied it with a power-play goal in the second period, Pearson sneaked in on a scramble in front of Cam Ward’s net and batted a puck out of midair for his first goal since Oct. 26.

Pearson’s grouping with Jeff Carter and Tyler Toffoli on That 70s Line was broken up due to coach Darryl Sutter’s dissatisfaction with the rookie’s recent play, but Pearson got back on the scoresheet with the same quick stick that scored seven goals in the Kings’ first eight games.

“When you get into a drought, and I’m not playing my best hockey lately, this game helped out a lot,” Pearson said. “That kind of stuff comes from working hard, and if you work hard, the bounces are going to start going your way.”

Jarret Stoll and Trevor Lewis also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, who have won three straight. The Kings largely controlled play with 39 shots, and they hung on through a scoreless third period for their sixth win in eight meetings with Carolina.

The Kings improved to 10-2-1 at Staples Center, where they have lost in regulation just once since they hung their championship banner on opening night.

“We’ve got to be good at home,” Lewis said. “It’s our building. We can’t let other teams come in and push us around in our own building.”

Quick also won the matchup of Conn Smythe Trophy-winning goalies, capping his 10th victory of the season with a stellar glove save on Elias Lindholm’s shot from the slot with about 90 seconds to play while the Hurricanes had an extra attacker.

Although the game finished with 37 scoreless minutes, Carolina repeatedly got close to a tying goal.

“We hung in there pretty good,” Hurricanes defenseman Brett Bellemore said. “Obviously, our first period wasn’t the best. But at the end, we were throwing everything at them.”

Jeff Skinner also scored for the Hurricanes, who have lost four of five. Ward made 36 saves, but Carolina failed to build on the momentum of its victory in Dallas on Tuesday to open a five-game road trip.

“We had a hard time handling their size and strength on the walls,” Carolina coach Bill Peters said. “They wore us out in the (defensive) zone. They were a big heavy team in the offensive zone, and we spent too much time in there.”

Stoll opened the scoring with a one-timer from captain Dustin Brown, the latest goal from Los Angeles’ revitalized power play.

The Kings have six man-advantage goals in three games since Sutter began using full forward lines instead of power-play units. Los Angeles’ power play began the season in a 6-for-54 slump over the first 17 games before Sutter made the switch.

Skinner evened it with his fifth goal of the season, beating Quick with a nasty shot on a 2-on-1 break. Lewis then forced the puck past Ward early in the second period.

NOTES: Carolina beat the Kings 3-2 at home on Nov. 2. Quick hasn’t lost a start in regulation since that defeat, going 5-0-2. … Carolina’s Brad Malone
The Canes announced Thursday the team has claimed Andrej Nestrasil on waivers from the Detroit Red Wings, adding more depth at forward.

Nestrasil, 23, was to join the Hurricanes on their road trip and be available for the game Saturday against the Colorado Avalanche.

Canes coach Bill Peters, an assistant coach with the Red Wings the past three seasons, said Nestrasil could be a good addition and bring more size to the lineup.

“He's a big, strong kid,” Peters said Thursday. “He's heavy on the puck and he hangs on to it. He's got a good skill set. He's pretty versatile and can play on the power play.”

Nestrasil, 6-3 and 200 pounds, made his NHL debut in Detroit's season opener on Oct. 9 and has earned two assists in 13 games with the Red Wings this season.

The Prague, Czech Republic, native spent the 2013-14 season with Detroit's American Hockey League affiliate, the Grand Rapids Griffins, finishing with 16 goals and 20 assists in 70 regular-season games. Nestrasil tied for fourth in scoring among Griffins skaters in the postseason with six points in 10 Calder Cup playoff games.

The Red Wings selected Nestrasil in the third round, 75th overall, in the 2009 NHL Draft. Since turning professional in 2011-12, he has scored 22 goals and earned 24 assists in 120 AHL regular-season games, and captured the AHL's Calder Cup championship with the Griffins in 2013.

Nestrasil represented the Czech Republic at the 2009 IIHF World Under-18 Championship, and the 2010 and 2011 World Junior Championship.
Thursday's recap: Blackhawks 4, Flames 3

By Chris Kuc,
Chicago Tribune

Patrick Kane nets the game-winner for the Blackhawks in the third period.

The summary
Patrick Kane scored the game-winner in the third period as the Blackhawks topped the Flames 4-3 on Thursday night at the Scotiabank Saddledome to kick off their six-game trip on a positive note.

Adam Clendening, Daniel Carcillo and Brent Seabrook also scored for the Hawks and Kris Versteeg added two assists. Kane also had an assist for this second multi-point game in a row. Paul Byron had a goal and an assist while Sean Monahan and Dennis Wideman also scored for the Flames.

Big moment
Young players get chance to step up as Blackhawks injuries pile up

Chris Kuc

Clendening, who was recalled from Rockford because of an injury to fellow defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk, scored on his first shot on goal in the NHL. The rookie fired a one-timer from the point with the Hawks on the power play to open the scoring.

Turnabout
After yielding one power-play goal in their previous eight games, the Hawks allowed the Flames to score on their first two man advantages.

In the nets
Corey Crawford put together another solid game in goal and bailed out his teammates who had sloppy defensive play in front of him. Jonas Hiller didn't face much pressure from the Hawks in the final two periods but couldn't stop Kane's game-winner.

Tribune's three stars
1. Kane: Winger was dynamic and cashed in midway through the third with his third game-winning goal.
2. Byron: Helped the Flames come from behind twice with a strong offensive effort.
3. Clendening: Manned the point on the power play in his debut and made his presence felt with a score four minutes in.

The quote
"Sometimes you just have to take over and get the puck and skate with it. I feel like I can make plays on the ice. When you're moving well and trying to make those plays things are going to develop." — Kane on his game-winner.

Big number
700: Career games for Seabrook.

Roster report
Andrew Shaw (upper body) missed his first game of the season for the Hawks. Also sitting were Patrick Sharp (right knee) and David Rundblad (healthy). Scratches for the Flames were Kris Russell, Brian McGrattan and Devin Setoguchi.

Up next
At Oilers, 9 p.m. Saturday.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.21.2014
ENTERTING a challenging stretch of schedule, the Blackhawks could have done without some bad news right off the hop.

But that is exactly what they got when they arrived for their morning skate Thursday in Calgary, the first stop on a six-game trip that could go a long way in determining whether the Hawks are NHL contenders or pretenders.

Thursday's recap: Blackhawks 4, Flames 3

Chris Kuc

Forward Andrew Shaw, who practiced Wednesday and traveled with the Hawks, was sidelined with an upper-body injury and already the Hawks were juggling their lineup on Day 1 of a 10-day journey.

"It could be short term," coach Joel Quenneville said of Shaw's injury. "It's not serious but tough to say exactly what. He practiced (Wednesday) and was fine."

Along with Patrick Sharp's knee injury that caused him to miss his sixth consecutive game and the left patella fracture to defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk, that meant the Hawks faced a scorching Flames team with three youngsters in the lineup who normally would be in Rockford or watching from the press box.

The absences meant forwards Jeremy Morin and Joakim Nordstrom and defenseman Adam Clendening were on the ice for the Hawks when they faced the Flames at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

Morin and Nordstrom have a combined 72 NHL games, while Clendening was making his debut.

Behind the youth movement — and Patrick Kane — the Hawks opened their trip with a 4-3 victory over the Flames. In addition to Kane's game-winning score in the third, Clendening contributed in a big way with his first career goal — on his first shot — to help the Hawks win for the fourth time in the last five games.

"This is probably the best D-corps in the league and it's a very hard lineup to crack," Clendening said afterward. "I'm just taking my time and developing my game to the best of my ability and hopefully when I get a chance like now I can maybe stay for a while."

Injuries have opened the door for some players who have been trying to reach the next level.

"We haven't really had a lot of spots for these young players," Hawks general manager Stan Bowman said. "A lot of them are knocking on the door. It's a good situation to be in to be able to sort of delay their NHL arrival. But on the other side, it's not bad to give them a chance to show."

With a veteran-laden team and a coach who likes to lean on experienced players, there isn't much room for error when young players are given a chance at quality ice time.

"Initially, you get a little and then if you please the coach you get a little bit more," Joel Quenneville said. "Certainly … we need that young enthusiastic type of play."

Morin, who had been headed for a second consecutive healthy scratch until Shaw's injury forced a change, continued to struggle as he managed one shot on goal in 6 minutes, 50 seconds of ice time and is now scoreless in 15 games.

The 24-year-old was determined to take advantage of the chance to earn more playing time.

"Personally, I'm not producing like I want to," Morin said. "You can't hang your head. Every time you get in the lineup is another chance to play well. I just have to do something out there to be productive and stay in the lineup. Nobody's going to give it to me."

One-timers: Van Riemsdyk had surgery to repair a left patella fracture after the rookie was hit in the knee with a shot Sunday night. "The procedure went very well and I anticipate a full recovery in three to four months," team physician Michael Terry said in a statement. … Meanwhile, Sharp is close to skating while recovering from a right knee injury suffered Nov. 4 against the Canadiens. Quenneville said Sharp could join the Hawks during the trip but it is "doubtful" he would play.
Andrew Shaw sidelined for Blackhawks vs. Flames

By Chris Kuc contact the reporter Andrew Shaw
Chicago Blackhawks
Joel Quenneville
Calgary Flames
Patrick Sharp
Montreal Canadiens
Brad Richards

CALGARY, Alberta -- The Chicago Blackhawks will be without a key component of their lineup when they kick off a six-game road trip in Calgary against the Flames on Thursday night.

Forward Andrew Shaw is sidelined with an upper-body injury. Shaw practiced Wednesday in Chicago and was at the Scotiabank Saddledome for Thursday's morning skate but coach Joel Quenneville said the veteran would not play.

Thursday's recap: Blackhawks 4, Flames 3

Chris Kuc

"It could be short term," Quenneville said of Shaw's injury. "It's not serious but tough to say exactly what. He practiced (Wednesday) and was fine."

With Shaw out, Jeremy Morin draws into the lineup. During the skate, Morin was on a line with fellow winger Bryan Bickell and center Ben Smith. Morin was a healthy scratch during the Hawks' 6-2 victory over the Dallas Stars on Sunday night and has no points in 14 games this season.

Quenneville said he wants "more predictability" in Morin's play.

"Offensively, defensively, obviously production would help get him more confidence in the scoring area," Quenneville added.

The other lines during the skate were Brandon Saad--Jonathan Toews--Marian Hossa; Kris Versteeg--Brad Richards--Patrick Kane and Daniel Carcillo--Marcus Kruger--Joakim Nordstrom.

Health update: Defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk has successful surgery to repair a left patella fracture after the rookie was hit in the knee with a shot Sunday night.

The procedure was performed at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago under the supervision of team physician Michael Terry.

"The procedure went very well and I anticipate a full recovery in three to four months," Terry said in a statement.

Meanwhile, winger Patrick Sharp is close to skating while recovering from a right knee injury suffered Nov. 4 against the Montreal Canadiens.

Quenneville said Sharp could join the Hawks at some point during the road trip but it is "doubtful" he would play.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.21.2014
Surging Patrick Kane lifts Blackhawks to victory over Flames

Mark Lazerus

CALGARY, Alberta — Patrick Kane’s starting to feel it again. Kane corralled a loose puck on the doorstep and flipped it past Calgary Flames goaltender Jonas Hiller midway through the third period to allow the Blackhawks to escape with a messy, yet uplifting 4-3 victory. The goal book-ended Adam Clendening’s first career goal, which came on his first career shot on an early power play.

After scoring just one goal in an 11-game stretch, Kane has scored in three straight games, with three assists, as well. He nearly added another a few minutes later on a spin-o-rama attempt, and double-shifted down the stretch as Joel Quenneville rode the hot hand.

“Sometimes, you’re just going to have to take over,” Kane shrugged.

The Hawks won despite taking six penalties, despite squandering an early 2-0 lead by giving up two quick power-play goals, and despite a rare off-night for Corey Crawford, particularly in terms of rebound control.

The power-play goals allowed were particularly frustrating. The Hawks began the night having allowed just one power-play goal in 485 minutes of play in November. They then surrendered two in 54 seconds — one on a big rebound that came to Paul Byron, one on a shot from the point by Dennis Wideman to erase a lead provided by Clendening and Daniel Carcillo. But the Hawks got a kill when they needed it most, in the final minutes of the third period as they clung to a one-goal lead.

“Huge kill at the very end,” Quenneville said. “Our PK’s been very good all year long, and it needed to be at the end, because [Calgary’s] power play was working tonight.”

Brent Seabrook also scored for the Hawks, off a feed from Kane.

For Clendening, his NHL debut couldn’t have gone any better. He had an easy first shift to calm his nerves — “It was in the O-zone … didn’t really need to play defense, so it was nice,” he said — and blasted a shot past Hiller from the blue line on the first power play of the game. He wasn’t sure it went in at first, but once Marian Hossa put his arms up, Clendening knew, a huge smile on his face.

“I had a lane and just tried to shoot as hard as I could,” Clendening said. “Ended up finding a way.”

Just like the Hawks did despite just firing 22 shots in an occasionally wobbly performance.

“Those things are going to happen,” Kane said. “You have to fight through adversity and you have to find a way to come out with two points.”
Patience a necessary virtue for Blackhawks prospects, rookies

Mark Lazerus

CALGARY, Alberta — Here’s a little secret: Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville doesn’t really trust rookies.

OK, so maybe that’s not much of a secret. For every Brandon Saad or Andrew Shaw who cracks the lineup and becomes a staple almost instantly, there are countless players such as Joakim Nordstrom and Jeremy Morin, who see limited minutes in bottom-six roles and shuttle back and forth to Rockford for years. Or players such as Brandon Pirri and Jimmy Hayes, who wait their turn only to find it in another city. Or players such as Mark McNeill and Klas Dahlbeck, who are still waiting. And waiting. And waiting.

That’s the rub, the “double-edged sword,” as defenseman Adam Clendening put it, of being a prospect in the Hawks organization. A roster spot in Chicago is something to covet, but it’s also awfully hard to come by. If you get one, you’re playing with world-class talent in front of sellout crowds and competing for a Stanley Cup.

But good luck getting one.

“It kind of does suck,” admitted Clendening, who’s making his NHL debut tonight in Calgary after two years at Boston College and two-plus years in Rockford. “But at the same time, hopefully when you get the call, you’ll be ready and you can maybe stay here for a long time.”

Clendening got the call because Trevor van Riemsdyk is out three to four months after having surgery on Thursday to repair a fractured left patella. Nordstrom got the call (for the fourth time in 14 months) because Patrick Sharp is hurt. Morin, whose been with the team all season after being on the Rockford shuttle last year, is back in the lineup because Shaw has an upper-body injury.

Each is hoping to force Quenneville’s hand. But as Morin in particular knows all too well, even when the opportunity is there, it can be limited. Rarely does a rookie get thrown on a line with Jonathan Toews and Marian Hossa, as Saad was in 2013. Quenneville wants you to earn it first. He’s looking for “consistency and predictability,” as he puts it — something van Riemsdyk showed right away. Just don’t try to do too much too quickly — one bad turnover, one ill-timed pinch, one foolish penalty can land you in the doghouse. And it can be tough to get out.

“Initially, you get a little,” Quenneville said. “And then if you please the coach you get a little bit more. We need that young, enthusiastic play, and usually give the guy a chance to play. You put him in situations you think they can have some success in, be it offensive-zone faceoffs, or sometimes matchups [where] you don’t want to expose them too much. But sometimes they get that chance where they are out there against top players. If they meet the challenge, [then] you usually give them a little bit more.”

You can’t bury a defenseman as easily as you can bury a forward, so Clendening will get a good look right away. A power-play specialist, the skilled puck-mover will start out on the point on the Hawks’ second unit — a major role for a guy playing in his first game.

“It’s definitely exciting,” he said. “When they told me [Wednesday], I was really shocked. It’s nice. I’ve got some world-class guys on my unit. I don’t know. I’m at a loss for words.”

As for Nordstrom, Quenneville’s a fan of his speed and defensive awareness. The smooth Swede was a surprise last year, making the team out of training camp. This year, he started in Rockford, and was even named captain — an honor, to be sure, but one that could be alarming for someone with his sights set on a regular NHL gig. But the IceHogs staff assured him that the captaincy didn’t mean he was stuck in Rockford. And after posting five goals and three assists in 14 games, he got the call.

“Of course, it was a disappointment not making the team,” Nordstrom said. “But you can’t go around and feel sorry for yourself. You’ve got to get back to work and try to get better and be ready if you get the call. I want to be up here as much as possible, so I have to keep doing that now that I am here.”

As an organization, the Hawks value speed. They value possession. And they value savvy, two-way play. But for a Hawks prospect, perhaps the biggest virtue is patience.

“It’s nice to be here,” Clendening said, beaming. “Finally.”

Blackhawks’ Andrew Shaw sidelined with injury; Clendening to debut

Mark Lazerus

CALGARY, Alberta — The Blackhawks will be short another key player as they open the circus trip tonight in Calgary, as Andrew Shaw is out with an upper-body injury. The Hawks already were without regulars Patrick Sharp and Trevor van Riemsdyk.

Hawks coach Joel Quenneville wouldn’t specify what Shaw’s injury is. Shaw was in a spirited fight with Dallas’ Antoine Roussel on Sunday, but appeared to be fine at Wednesday’s practice in Chicago. He did travel to Calgary with the team.

“Could be short term,” Quenneville said. “It’s not serious, but it’s tough say exactly when [he’ll be back].”

With Shaw out, Jeremy Morin draws back into the lineup. He skated alongside Bryan Bickell and Ben Smith on the third line during the morning skate.

“[Shaw] plays a hard game, gives you energy,” Quenneville said. “[Morin] gives you some of that, as well. We’ve got different guys coming in and out of the lineup here. [Adam] Clendening playing his first game, so we’ll get some energy from that, as well.”

Shaw had been slumping of late, and had no goals and two assists in his last 12 games, twice losing the second-line center spot to Brad Richards in the process. But Patrick Kane — who called Shaw’s fight against Dallas the turning point of the game — said his absence will be felt.

“It’s kind of like when you lose Sharpie,” Kane said. “It’s not one guy that’s going to come in and step up and fill the void. It’s just not going to happen like that. I think collectively as a group you have to fill in for those guys.”

Kane said there were plenty of guys who are “looking for more ice time” and are eager to step up.

One of those players is Clendening, brought up from Rockford after van Riemsdyk suffered a patella fracture (the Hawks said he underwent successful surgery on Thursday and will be out three to four months). He’ll be making his NHL debut. The offensive-minded defensemen will get a big role right away, on the point for the second power-play unit.

“They’ve been pretty clear. Just play my game and keep it simple for the first little bit,” Clendening said. “Then when we get on the power play, maybe I can get a little more creative.”

With Johns in lineup, IceHogs look to rebound this weekend

Brian Sandalow
@BrianSandalow | email

The IceHogs’ eight-game winning streak ended over the weekend with consecutive losses to the Milwaukee Admirals. They’ll try to rebound with help from defenseman Stephen Johns.

On Friday, Milwaukee snapped the IceHogs’ run with a 4-1 win. Then the next night in Milwaukee, Teuvo Teravainen’s goal was the only one for Rockford in a 2-1 loss to the Admirals. The IceHogs rebounded Sunday by beating Texas 3-2, with Antti Raanta making 33 saves and T.J. Brennan scoring the game-winner 10 minutes into the third period.

“Taking two out of six points isn’t the greatest but obviously understandable with our schedule so far,” Brennan told reporters in Rockford. “Hopefully we can do a better job this weekend.”

It looks like Rockford, which has three games this weekend, will have help from Johns. On Monday, Johns was recalled by the Blackhawks only to be reassigned back to the IceHogs on Tuesday.

It seems like Johns took the shuffle in stride.

“I think I understand it. It was more of a business transaction. Part of the whole business operation of things,” Johns said. “But you know what, you still see your name on the bottom ticker on the NHL Network it’s still kind of cool to see. It still motivates me even more to see it again and try to get back up there. Just got to keep working here.”

CALGARY, Alberta — Road trips: everyone sees them differently. The Blackhawks seem to like them, especially these lengthy ones.

Yep, it’s Circus Trip time, and the Blackhawks got off to a positive start on the 2014-15 installment with their 4-3 victory over the Calgary Flames. So before we turn in for an early flight, let’s look at Five Things to take from the Blackhawks’ victory.

1. Patrick Kane is getting his groove back. It wasn’t that long ago when the points were sparse for Kane. Well, not so much anymore. Kane’s goal on Thursday was his seventh of the season and his third in as many games. It was also his third game-winning goal of the season. Your best players have to be just that down the stretch of tight games, and Kane was. He was looking so good that coach Joel Quenneville started double shifting him after that goal. “He likes playing,” Quenneville said, “and we like using him.”

2. Clendening has a nice debut. Here’s a bunch of firsts for the defenseman: first goal on his first shot in his first NHL game. That goal came on Clendening’s second shift of the game and – wait for it – his first time on the Blackhawks’ power play. Clendening was jokingly asked afterward if this NHL thing is easy. “No, a lot of guys have been joking about that. It’s definitely not easy,” he said. “It’s just lucky [on goal No. 1].”

Thanks for the texts/tweets. Tonight was a dream come true to play in the NHL and to score was surreal.

— Adam Clendening (@Clenny5) November 21, 2014

3. The penalty kill gets dinged but it survives. Thursday marked the first time the Blackhawks have given up two power-play goals in a game this season. It was hard to believe, considering how good the Blackhawks’ penalty kill has been this season. But when the Blackhawks needed it most, it was there again. They killed off a late-regulation Calgary power play – with Niklas Hjalmarsson in the box – to preserve the victory. It’ll be OK.

[ALSO: Clendening shines in debut as Hawks win]

4. Seabrook has a nice milestone night. The Blackhawks defenseman played in his 700th career NHL game on Thursday, garnering a goal that tied the game at the time. There are times when Seabrook’s decisions can be maddening and costly. But he’s tough, he’s a strong leader in the Blackhawks’ locker room, and he can still bring the shot, be it from the blue line or from the slot, from which he scored his fifth of the season on Thursday.

5. The start isn’t too shabby. Sure, this wasn’t the cleanest Blackhawks victory but give the Flames some credit. They’re doing a lot of good things this season, and they gave the Blackhawks fits for a while in this one. Still, the Blackhawks got composed enough at the end with Kane’s goal, their penalty kill and Corey Crawford. Leg one of the Circus Trip is a positive.
Adam Clendening scores in debut as Blackhawks beat Flames

Tracey Myers
November 20, 2014, 10:45 pm

CALGARY, Alberta – The Blackhawks got their first goal from a player who’s new to this whole NHL goal-scoring thing. They got their game-winner from someone who’s been here, done this plenty of times.

Adam Clendening scored his first NHL goal on his first NHL shot of his first NHL game, and Patrick Kane collected the game-winner as the Blackhawks beat the Calgary Flames 4-3 at Scotiabank Saddledome on Thursday night.

It was a good start for the Blackhawks, who have won two in a row and four of their last five.

Brent Seabrook scored in his 700th career NHL game. Daniel Carcillo also scored. Corey Crawford stopped 24 of 27 shots for the victory.

The Blackhawks had their hiccups early, especially on their penalty kill. But that was strong again by the end of the game, and Kane was once again coming up with the necessary goal. But the feel-good story of the night belonged to Clendening, who was playing just his second shift of the game when he scored his first goal, a power-play effort that put the Blackhawks up 1-0 at the time.

“I had a lane and just tried to shoot as hard as I could. It ended up finding a way,” Clendening said after the game. “I thought the game was going to go much differently but that put it and ease and hopefully got the guys going.”

Coach Joel Quenneville liked Clendening’s first NHL game overall.

“First game, first period score a goal, can’t get any better than that,” he said. “We get a win as well, so it’s a good start for him. He played well, too, outside of the goal.”

Kane agreed.

“Oh man, great start,” Kane said. “I like the reaction after he scored. He seemed he didn’t know it was in and then pure excitement when he knew he scored that one. Great start to his career.”

The Blackhawks had a good start, too, especially through the first 10 minutes. They skated around the Flames and fired 10 shots on Jonas Hiller. They scored on two of them, Clendening’s and later Carcillo’s, a shot that hit the inside of the far post and went in to give the Blackhawks a 2-0 lead at the time.

But midway through the period the Blackhawks’ penalty kill, so stellar all season, was filleted by two consecutive Flames power plays. Paul Byron scored on Marcus Kruger’s interference call to cut the Blackhawks’ lead to 2-1, and 54 seconds later Dennis Wideman scored with Niklas Hjalmarsson in the box to tie it 2-2.

Seabrook gave the Blackhawks a 3-2 lead midway through the second but about 90 seconds later Sean Monahan forced a deadlock once again, 3-3.

Then, it was Kane. The right wing picked up a loose puck in front of the net and beat Hiller for the 4-3 lead the Blackhawks wouldn’t relinquish.

“Sometimes it happens like that,” said Kane, who’s had a propensity of scoring in third periods lately. “Obviously you want to be counted on in third periods to produce and make plays. When you get those opportunities, you want to find a way to produce. It’s nice for the team to start that way.”

The penalty kill would right itself by the end of the game as the Blackhawks kept Calgary from scoring when Hjalmarsson committed a hooking penalty with 3:32 remaining in regulation. Crawford also stood tall, stopping Calgary’s late attempts to tie.

Kane makes this goal-scoring thing look old hat. Clendening is new to it, at least at this level. That first one felt awfully good.
Blackhawks: Shaw out against Flames with upper-body injury

Tracey Myers
November 20, 2014, 2:00 pm

CALGARY, Alberta – Andrew Shaw is out Thursday night with an upper-body injury, and Adam Clendening will make his NHL debut when the Blackhawks play the Calgary Flames at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

Shaw, who practiced on Wednesday in Chicago before the team headed to Calgary, was not on the ice for morning skate. Head coach Joel Quenneville said the injury, “could be short term.” Asked if the injury had anything to do with Shaw’s fight with Dallas Stars forward Antoine Roussel on Sunday night, Quenneville said, “he practiced [Wednesday] and was fine.”

The Blackhawks will miss Shaw’s presence tonight; some thought his fight on Sunday was the turning point in the game, which the Blackhawks won 6-2.

“[MORE HAWKS: Blackhawks trying to start Circus Trip ‘on the right foot’]

“One place we’ll miss him most on is the net-front presence on the power play. He seemed to grow into that role and he’s been awesome at it. Someone will have to step up and fill the role,” Patrick Kane said. “A lot of guys are looking for more ice time, so it’s an opportunity for them. Collectively we’ll build up and take care of it. It’s like when we lost [Patrick Sharp]; it’s not one guy who comes in and steps up. As a group, you have to fill in the next couple of days.”

Jeremy Morin draws into the lineup in Shaw’s absence. He was on the third line with Bryan Bickell and Ben Smith. The Blackhawks’ fourth line was Daniel Carcillo, Marcus Kruger and Joakim Nordstrom. Corey Crawford gets the start against the Flames.

Meanwhile, Clendening replaces Trevor van Riemsdyk, who underwent successful surgery on a left patella fracture on Thursday morning. Dr. Michael Terry said in a statement that van Riemsdyk should make a full recovery in 3-4 months. Quenneville said Clendening should bring a good amount of energy tonight, and his play will dictate his minutes.

“Initially you get a little [ice time]. If you please the coach you get a little bit more. That’s how it goes,” Quenneville said with a grin. “Certainly from young guys, we need that enthusiastic type of play. You usually give a guy a chance to play, put them in situations you think they’ll have success in. Sometimes, if they get that chance when they are out there against top players and meet the challenge, you usually give them more.”

Sharp (right knee) hasn’t skated yet but Quenneville said the left wing could in the next day or two. Sharp could come on the Circus Trip eventually but it’s doubtful he would play on it.

Kane, Hawks beat Flames at own game

By Ryan Dittrick
Special to ESPNChicagocom

CALGARY, Alberta — This isn’t the first time the Calgary Flames have given a team fits, and it certainly won’t be the last.

The Chicago Blackhawks got a first taste in a 2-1 overtime loss Oct. 15 at the United Center, and Thursday’s meeting at Scotiabank Saddledome came right down to the wire after the ever-resilient home side charged back from an early 2-0 deficit.

The Flames just don’t quit. Fortunately for head coach Joel Quenneville and the Blackhawks, the same can be said of Patrick Kane on nights like this.

“Sometimes you’ve got to take over,” said Kane, who scored his seventh goal of the year, breaking a 3-3 tie just shy of the midway point of the third period. “You want to be coming on [the ice] in third periods to produce and make plays. I feel I can do that.”

And that he did. Kane was double-shifted late in an effort to produce offense and help protect the narrow lead in the latter stages of the contest.

“He likes playing and we like using him,” Quenneville said with a laugh. “He was great tonight — as good as he can be. A lot of puck possession, a lot of zone time. ... That line [Kane, Kris Versteeg and Brad Richards] in back-to-back games has been very good.”

Added Kane: “I’m fortunate to be playing with such skilled players right now. They’re putting me in good situations and there’s definitely some excitement with how things are going for us. Hopefully we can continue that.”

Recalled Wednesday, Adam Clendening got things started, scoring his first NHL goal on his very first shot four minutes into his big league debut.

“Shocked” to have gotten second-unit power-play time, the 22-year-old showed why, launching a shot past Jonas Hiller for the icebreaker.

“I didn’t know it went in, but as soon as Hoss [Marian Hossa] put his hands up, I knew it was in — and I couldn’t believe it,” Clendening said with a mile-wide smile. “I had a lane, so I tried to shoot it as hard as I could. It ended up finding a way.”

The Flames rallied after Daniel Carcillo made it a 2-0 game near the seven-minute mark of the first period.

The Hawks’ league-leading penalty kill, operating at a 92.3 percent clip coming in, was uncharacteristically off early, surrendering two power-play markers on back-to-back opportunities near the midway mark of the opening period.

The pair came in a 52-second span on back-to-back penalties to Marcus Kruger and Niklas Hjalmarsson.

Paul Byron deftly deposited the first at 13:44, capitalizing on a plump rebound kicked out into the slot by the right pad of Corey Crawford, while the second — coming hot off the stick of the offensively gifted Dennis Wideman — eluded traffic en route, bringing the game back on even terms at 14:38.

But when the Blackhawks needed it the most, the penalty kill came up big. Among three others, the Hawks scotched a Hjalmarsson minor with less than four minutes to play, all but sealing victory.

“Huge kill,” Quenneville said. “They had a lot of good zone time and a great presence at the net, with some quality shooters at the point. ... Our PK needed to step up and it did.”

After Brent Seabrook gave the Hawks a 3-2 lead with a wrister from the high slot midway through the second, there they came again — those gnat-like Flames, burrowing their way back into the game with a gutsy effort to tie it up, setting the stage for another one of their patented third-period coups.

Calgary came into the night with 27 goals for and only 12 against in the final frame in 20 games this season. Better yet? They’d outscored their opponents 6-0 when the teams are tied heading into the third.

Silence. Until Kane.

“It’s a good start [to the circus trip],” he said. “We had a great start and obviously they got a couple quick ones after we took back-to-back penalties, but those things happen. You’ve got to fight through the adversity and you have to find a way to come out with two points.

“We hung in there and got the job done.”

Late hits: Patrick Sharp has not yet skated since suffering a right knee injury, but according to Quenneville, he could be back on the ice in the next day or two. Sharp might join the Hawks at some point on the trip — which finishes Nov. 29 in Los Angeles — but is “doubtful” to suit up for game action.

ESPNChicagocom LOADED: 11.21.2014
CALGARY, Alberta – Here’s a quick look at the Chicago Blackhawks’ 4-3 victory over the Calgary Flames on Thursday night at Scotiabank Saddledome.

How it happened: The Flames -- as they’ve been known to do this season, surprising many as one of the league’s hottest and most consistent teams -- didn’t quit, but the Hawks were one better. Adam Clendening scored his first NHL goal with a power-play marker at the four-minute mark of the opening period, and Daniel Carcillo extended the margin with a wiry shot off the rush, beating Jonas Hiller off the far-side post, but the two-goal lead didn’t last. In arrears to the tune of an 8-0 count in shots, Calgary countered with a spirited stretch, netting back-to-back power-play goals in a 52-second span (Paul Byron and Dennis Wideman). The teams traded goals in the middle frame -- Brent Seabrook for the Hawks and Sean Monahan for the Flames -- before Patrick Kane delivered the dagger, capitalizing on a Flames turnover and beating Hiller through the wickets with 10:47 to play in the third period.

What it means: With the victory, the Blackhawks improve to .500 on the road this season (4-4-0) and are now 11-7-1 overall (23 points), putting them back in a Central Division playoff spot.

Player of the game: Kris Versteeg continues to roll for the Blackhawks. The 28-year-old quietly registered a pair of assists in 14:18 of ice time. Versteeg has now recorded five points in his past two games on a line with Brad Richards and Kane. Honorable mention to Clendening who, nine hours earlier, said he was “shocked” to be getting second-unit power-play time in his NHL debut. Just four minutes into the game, the rookie realized a dream 16 years in the making, scoring his first NHL goal on his very first shot, 1:56 into the Hawks’ first advantage of the evening. Clendening played 10:41 and was a plus-2 on the night.

Stat of the game: The Flames came into the night as the league’s best team in the third period, scoring 27 goals and only allowing 12 in 20 games -- including a 6-0 mark in goals for and against when the teams are tied. Kane’s winner bucked that trend.

What’s next: The Blackhawks’ six-game road trip (longest of the season) continues with a back-to-back set Saturday and Sunday against the Edmonton Oilers and Vancouver Canucks, respectively. The Hawks will then head to Denver to take on the struggling Avalanche on Wednesday before wrapping up their annual circus trip with another back-to-back set against the Anaheim Ducks and Los Angeles Kings on Nov. 28-29 in Southern California.
Clendening set to make NHL debut

By Ryan Dittrick
Special to ESPNChicago.com

CALGARY, Alberta -- As the squall of inquisitive scribes descended upon his locker stall, Adam Clendening knew this was big, partially adding to the nerves otherwise blanketed by a smile the size of the Saddledome itself. Indeed, 22-year-old has arrived. After two-and-a-quarter seasons with the Rockford IceHogs, the Chicago Blackhawks' second-round pick (36th overall) in 2011 will make his NHL debut tonight against the Calgary Flames.

"Nerves are OK," Clendening laughed. "The guys have been really comforting, trying to make me feel at ease. The smile hasn't gone away and I'm sure it won't for a while. Seebs (Brent Seabrook) played a little trick on me this morning -- made me do the hot lap. Honestly, these past 12 hours or so have been a blur. I can't wait to get going."

Clendening, a product of Wheatfield, N.Y., was recalled yesterday and will be paired on defense with veteran Michal Rozsival.

"I'm going to take it all in. You only get to do it once, right? Michal's been a great resource for me so far. He's been very talkative and has been helping me out every step of the way."

Asked what his plan is early in tonight's contest, Clendening offered the most candid of answers: "Probably put it off the glass a couple times," he laughed.

"Honestly, it comes down to those clichés. I had a good skate this morning, got loose, so I need to make sure I have my legs under me early. If I can do that, feel the puck a little bit and keep things simple, I'll be fine -- effective, not flashy."

In 74 games with the IceHogs last season, Clendening recorded 12 goals and 47 assists for 59 points. Tonight, he'll look to make an impact offensively with the second power-play unit.

"One thing you look for in young players is consistency in their game -- and they usually get a little better at that each time they step on the ice," Hawks coach Joel Quenneville said. "Your play dictates that. If you please the coach, you get a little more."

"We'll see how he does. When you do get a chance, you want to take advantage of it the best you can."

In addition to the change on defense, the Blackhawks will be going with the following forward line combinations:

Brandon Saad -- Jonathan Toews -- Marian Hossa
Kris Versteeg -- Brad Richards -- Patrick Kane
Bryan Bickell -- Ben Smith -- Jeremy Morin
Dan Carcillo -- Marcus Kruger -- Joakim Nordstrom

Corey Crawford will get the start in goal.

Coming off a 6-2 victory over the Dallas Stars, the Blackhawks are a confident group -- but none more so than Versteeg, who has two goals and five points in his last four games.

For the first time since 2010, the 28-year-old is healthy and as close to 100 percent as possible after a 2013 knee injury in which he returned too quickly.

"The first few games it was about getting my lungs and my wind. But these last 10 games or so, it's getting back to where it should be," Versteeg, who has 10 points in 14 games this season, said after the morning skate. I haven't been healthy since -- well, it's been a long, long time. It's always a positive to play when you're feeling good.

"When you're mentally aware of what your body can do for you, you're obviously going to have more confidence. I can't tell you how amazing it feels to have that and to be contributing to the team in such a big way right now. I've got to keep it going."

Versteeg will be looking to do that tonight against the red-hot Calgary Flames, who have surprised many this season and are coming in on a three-game winning streak, one point out of the Pacific Division lead with a 12-6-2 record. Their 100-plus point pace has many citing the club's unusually high shooting and save percentages -- the quirky, 'unsustainable' trends that ultimately led to the Toronto Maple Leafs' repugnant, 2-12-0 face plant late last spring.

"We know what to expect," Versteeg said. "They're a team that prides itself on work ethic. They have some kids that are coming in and the other teams around the league don't quite know them yet, so they might be a bit of a surprise factor there. When they're that skilled, that talented at that young of an age, they're going to make stuff happen and give other teams fits. That's why they've had a lot of success."

"We're not surprised with how they've performed -- not at all. We're never going to take a team lightly, especially one that's playing as well as they have."

ESPNChicago.com LOADED: 11.21.2014
CALGARY, Alberta -- As the Chicago Blackhawks took to the ice for the morning skate at Scotiabank Saddledome Thursday, there was a 5-foot-11, 179-pound void, impossible to miss.

Andrew Shaw, who practiced Wednesday in Chicago, will not play against the Calgary Flames due to an upper-body injury.

"It's not serious," Blackhawks Coach Joel Quenneville said, "but we'll see (when he can return). It could be a short-term thing, so it's tough to say exactly."

Shaw has three goals and three assists for six points in 18 games this season.

As a result, Jeremy Morin will draw back into the lineup and will be stationed on the wing alongside Bryan Bickell and Ben Smith, who moves to center. Smith, who has one goal in 18 games this season, has played every position at one point or another in his time as a Blackhawk, bringing some much-needed grit and versatility to the void left by No. 65.

"I do whatever I'm asked and I try to do it well," said Smith, who played two seasons at right wing and another two at center with Boston College. "I was given a lot of ice time in a variety of roles -- invaluable experience, I say. Getting that responsibility, both in college and with Rockford, it serves you well. I'm comfortable in these roles and I'm happy the coaching staff has trust in me, too."

While there are a number of challenges with bouncing back and forth from line to line, role to role, Smith embraces the opportunity, insisting his commitment to preparation is what sets him apart as one of the team's most resourceful assets.

"You never know how games are going to pan out, shift-to-shift, period-to-period, game-to-game," Smith said. "Whenever I'm asked, I take a couple seconds to go over my responsibilities, my positioning, and talk myself through it. 'Here's what I need to do this shift. Here's what I need to do to be productive.' It's all about doing the homework and that's what's helped me be successful in these roles."

"I'm excited to put it to work tonight."

ESPNChicago.com LOADED: 11.21.2014
Chicago Blackhawks
defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk underwent successful surgery to repair a left patella fracture at North Memorial Hospital on Thursday and is expected to return in 3-4 months, the team announced.

“The procedure went very well and I anticipate a full recovery in three to four months,” Blackhawks head team physician Dr. Michael Terry said in a statement.

Van Riemsdyk, 23, suffered the injury when he was hit in the left leg by a shot against the Dallas Stars on Sunday. He has one assist and a plus/minus of zero in 18 games. He has averaged 13:32 of ice time. He was placed on the long-term injured reserve on Monday.

Van Riemsdyk suffered a left ankle injury at the University of New Hampshire last season and missed the team's final 15 games. He signed a two-year deal with the Blackhawks on March 24.

The Blackhawks recalled defenseman Adam Clendening from the Rockford IceHogs of the AHL to replace van Riemsdyk on Tuesday.
Saad now feels worthy to be with Hossa, Toews

By Scott Powers

CHICAGO -- Brandon Saad felt like an intern when he joined Marian Hossa and Jonathan Toews on the Chicago Blackhawks' top line as a rookie two seasons ago.

Saad was only 20 years old and had played in just four NHL games when he was given the opportunity to play alongside two of the league's premier forwards. Saad followed their example and learned plenty throughout the season.

When Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville reunited Saad with Hossa and Toews against the Dallas Stars on Sunday, Saad certainly didn't feel as he was at their level yet, but he did believe he belonged.

"My first year was kind of watching up to them, looking up to them and trying to find things," Saad said on Wednesday. "I'm still learning, but at the same time I'm much more confident. I feel like I can bring more to the line."

Saad showed that Sunday while having one of his best games of the season. He scored a goal, had three shots on net, was a plus-2 and led the team's forwards with a plus-15 Corsi in 5-on-5 situations.

Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville witnessed a difference in Saad's play.

"Saader played his best game of the year," Quenneville said. "It looked like he had that hop to his stride that we've seen. [Wednesday in practice] he looked like he had the same jump. Potentially that could have been a line to start with at the beginning of the year. Where they're at now, it looked like they were probably excited about being together."

Toews and Hossa had similar jumps to their games. Toews had a goal and an assist. Hossa had two assists and seven shots on goal. Hossa was a plus-14 Corsi and Toews was a plus-10.

Saad thought their success was due to their past experience with each other.

"I think we find chemistry," Saad said. "We're familiar with each other from the first year, kind of know each other a little bit, our tendencies, things like that. We seem to fit with each other, playing down low and having a high guy and working well with each other and interchanging. I just think we click well for some reason. We all work hard, and it seems to work out."

ESPNChicago.com LOADED: 11.21.2014
Newly inducted Hockey Hall of Famer Peter Forsberg, with his family in a Pepsi Center suite, waves to fans attending the Avalanche-Capitals game Thursday.

With the pressure turned high, in front of a room full of the hockey cognoscenti, Lennox Forsberg made his entrance. Or tried to. The 2½-year-old son of former Avalanche star Peter Forsberg just wanted to play. But he will have to hold off for another trip to the Hockey Hall of Fame stage in Toronto.

"I guess he has to wait another 40 years to get up there," Peter Forsberg said.

Lennox's dad was inducted Monday into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

"At least he got to see me (inducted)," Forsberg said. "But I don't think he was really paying attention."

Father and son visited Denver on Thursday and attended the Avalanche's game against the Washington Capitals at the Pepsi Center.

Whatever pressure was on Forsberg's shoulders Monday for his induction speech has worn off. Maybe now he can absorb his achievement, he said.

"It's a little hard to describe," said Forsberg, 41. "I don't think it's really sunk in yet. My kids and grandkids can go there and say 'Peter was a pretty good player' and be there with the other awesome players. That's an awesome feeling."

Forsberg, who retired in 2011 after playing 15 seasons in the NHL and nine more in his native Sweden, has career NHL totals of 249 goals, 636 assists and 885 points.

Along with Joe Sakic, now the Avalanche's general manager, and Patrick Roy, who coaches the Avs, Forsberg won Stanley Cup championships in 1996 and 2001.

Forsberg also is a member of hockey's elite "Triple Gold Club" — NHL championship, world championship and Olympic gold medal with Sweden.

But while he was being raised in Sweden, all of that success didn't register in Forsberg's future plans.

"I didn't think about it at all," he said. "I grew up in Sweden. I wasn't even thinking about the NHL."

Forsberg became just the third Swede in the Hockey Hall of Fame, following Borje Salming (inducted in 1996) and Mats Sundin (2012).

"It's been a big thing in the papers back home," Forsberg said. "Swedish people know what it is now and how hard it is and what you have to achieve to get in."

For one night, though, Forsberg was "back home" in Denver.

"I just enjoyed winning," he said. "Every year, you just try to win everything you possibly can. And there was no other goal here in this organization than to win the Cup. I didn't think about the Hall of Fame or anything — just winning games. That's what I enjoyed."
NATHAN MACKINNON COULD LEARN FROM PETER THE GREAT

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
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Former Avalanche center and new Hall of Famer Peter Forsberg speaks during a news conference Thursday at the Pepsi Center.

Looking up from the dinner table, hockey legend Michel Goulet asked: "Were you in Toronto to see Peter Forsberg go in the Hall of Fame?"

"No," I confessed sheepishly. "Hate to admit it, but I've never been to the Hockey Hall of Fame."

"Well," Goulet replied with a wry smile as he took note of my receding, gray hairline. "What are you waiting for? The next Avalanche player to be inducted?"

As the 41-year-old Forsberg held a small child in his arms Thursday night and the Pepsi Center crowd saluted the finest honor hockey can bestow upon a player, two questions crossed my mind:

1) Where did all the time go? Foppa is a father? It seems like only yesterday he was a baby-faced young man raising the Stanley Cup for Colorado.

2) Who is the next truly great Avalanche player? Six months ago, Nathan MacKinnon was breathlessly hyped as the next Sidney Crosby. Now he's a teenager, who much like a struggling Avalanche team, is struggling to live up to his immense potential.

Forsberg won Olympic gold at age 20, the Calder as the league's top rookie at age 21 and the Stanley Cup at age 22. He was a young phenom, no doubt.

But know what was even more impressive? Forsberg was Peter the Great. But he never got impressed with his achievements, never took his greatness for granted and never dared to dream he was destined for the Hall of Fame.

"I didn't think about it at all actually. ... I never thought I was going to be a good NHL player," Forsberg insisted.

The first time I saw MacKinnon skate during a regular-season home game, in 2013, his talent was so undeniably electrifying that I guaranteed the long-suffering Avalanche franchise would make the playoffs. Mac-Kinnon was so good so early that outlandish statements seemed safe. And the Avs not only made the playoffs, they won the same Central Division that the Chicago Blackhawks and St. Louis Blues call home.

OK, fast forward to a November night shortly before Thanksgiving in 2014. After 20 games, the Avs bear little resemblance to the team that was the league's most pleasant surprise of a season ago. And it's not too early to be concerned; the schedule is nearly 25 percent done and the competition in the brutal Western Conference won't get any easier.

What's more, MacKinnon seldom looks like hockey's next big thing. There's no polite way to put it: On too many nights, the 19-year-old forward has looked a little soft and a stride slow. The stats don't lie. After a 3-2 loss to the Washington Capitals, Mac-Kinnon is a minus-eight. That's not the stuff of a superstar.

So I asked Forsberg: Why wasn't he spoiled by so much early success on the ice? And what's the biggest challenge to a young player in trying to convert early accolades into a Hall of Fame career?

The memory of Forsberg went reeling back 20 years, when he was a rookie with the Quebec Nordiques, and the time he was summoned to the office of coach Marc Crawford, fearful he was going to be asked to turn in his NHL sweater.

"I thought Crawford was going to send me down (to the minors) that first year after 12 or 13 games," Forsberg said. "He called me into the office and said: 'You better start playing.'"

MacKinnon is in the NHL to stay. But maybe it's time for the teen phenom to be given a healthy dose of tough love.

Almost every Hall of Fame player I've ever had the chance to know, from Patrick Roy to Michael Jordan to Peyton Manning, has shared one trait: an abnormal, unhealthy obsession channeled in a positive direction that never allows satisfaction with being second best.

"You're just trying to win everything you possibly can. I was fortunate to be here (in Colorado), there was no other goal in this organization other than to win the Cup," said Forsberg, who finished his NHL career with 249 goals and 636 assists.

"There's nothing else we talked about in the room other than: Who do we play tomorrow? How are we going to play? And make sure to go to bed early."

In winning the Calder as the league's best rookie, MacKinnon made hockey look easy.

The long skate to the Hall of Fame awaits.

The hard part has only just begun.

**ALEX OVECHKIN NOTCHES GAME-WINNER AS CAPITALS EDGE AVALANCHE**

By Nick Groke

The Denver Post

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All the Avalanche needed, it seemed, was to get blown out of the water. A 6-0 loss last week to the Islanders in New York kicked Colorado's rears in gear. The Avs won their next two games in impressive fashion, on the road against the Rangers and Devils. And their return home for eight of the next 11 in Denver set up the Avs for a run back on track.

Problem was, Alex Ovechkin came to town.

**BOX SCORE: Washington 3, Colorado 2**

The Capitals captain wrecked the Avalanche with an amazing individual effort late in the third period Thursday night at the Pepsi Center, muscling through the Colorado defense, then scoring off his own wall pass to give Washington a 3-2 victory.

With six minutes remaining, Ovechkin made a break into Colorado's zone down the right side. Then he bullied his way around Avs defenseman Jan Hejda and backhanded a purposeful pass to himself off the back boards.

With Avs goalie Reto Berra on a swivel, Ovechkin sneaked in a shot just inside the back post for the game-winner.

PHOTOS: Capitals-Avalanche game Thursday at Pepsi Center

"It's a game about mistakes," Hejda said. "And I made one. And we paid the price."

The Avalanche held high-scoring Washington to just 23 shots, well below Colorado's average this season of 35.1 shots allowed.

"I thought we were outstanding defensively," Colorado coach Patrick Roy said. "It's a tough situation losing a game where you think you played a good game, but sometimes those things happen."

The Avs dropped to 6-9-5 (17 points) and remain in last place in the NHL's Central Division. Washington improved to 9-7-3.

"He made a great play, between the skates," Roy said of Ovechkin's game-winner. "He made a second effort to pick up his own rebound. Nice goal by him."

Former Avalanche star Peter Forsberg, who attended Thursday's game after his induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame on Monday, said he is keeping a long-distance eye on the Avs from his home in Sweden.

"I know the scores, I know where they are in the standings," Forsberg said. "I know Patrick Roy is probably not happy."

The Avs' defense, their bane in losing five of six before a mini-streak of two wins in a row, came back to haunt them again.

With backup Berra in goal for the injured Semyon Varlamov (groin), the Avs seemed aware of needing to double-down on defense. Colorado cleared at least three loose pucks from the crease after Berra made an initial save.

Capitals star Alex Ovechkin, left, celebrates his game-winning goal against Avs goalie Reto Berra in the third period Thursday at the Pepsi Center.

Capitals star Alex Ovechkin, left, celebrates his game-winning goal against Avs goalie Reto Berra in the third period Thursday at the Pepsi Center. (Andy Cross, Jpg)

One crease clear led to the Avs' first goal in the second period. Dennis Everberg raced back to get the puck out of the blue on Berra's backside, and his clearance keyed Daniel Briere's break through the neutral zone.
Blue Jackets notebook: Failures on faceoffs frustrate Richards

By Shawn Mitchell

The Columbus Dispatch  •  THURSDAY NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:22 PM

The Blue Jackets must be ready to compete from the first drop of the puck tonight against the Boston Bruins at Nationwide Arena, coach Todd Richards said after practice yesterday.

That was not coach-speak. He meant it quite literally.

"We were 1 of 10, I think, in the first 11 faceoffs against Detroit (in a 5-0 loss on Tuesday)," Richards said. "We ended up chasing the puck, and it started with that first faceoff."

The Blue Jackets have lost a lot of faceoffs and chased a lot of pucks during a 6-11-1 start. After finishing in a tie for eighth in faceoff percentage with Boston last season at 51.6 percent, they have dropped to 26th (47.9 percent) this season.

Two of their best on faceoffs, Brandon Dubinsky and Mark Letestu, remain out because of injuries. Another, Artem Anisimov, missed seven games because of a concussion.

Their replacements have struggled. Rookie Alexander Wennberg has had to adjust to the North American style and rules and has won only 37.7 percent of his draws. Adam Cracknell, primarily a wing for most of his NHL career, is at 38.2 percent.

Boone Jenner, playing center for the first time in his NHL career this season and taking draws with a left hand that was broken late in training camp, is at 43.3 percent. Ryan Johansen has been the best among the Blue Jackets’ healthy centers, but even his win rate is below 50 percent (49.7).

Letestu had won 58.8 percent of his draws before suffering a groin strain on Oct. 28.

Dubinsky led the Jackets with a 52.9 percent success rate last season. Derek MacKenzie won 51.5 percent of his draws last season, but he is now with the Florida Panthers. They will be sorely missed tonight.

Bruins center Patrice Bergeron ranks second in faceoff percentage (60.5) behind former Blue Jacket Manny Malhotra, now with Montreal. Home ice, on which the Jackets will have the advantage of the last stick down, might not matter much. Bergeron is better on the road (61.8 percent) than in Boston (59.7 percent).

"Bergeron, he just wins," Anisimov said. "He is so good, with his methods and his timing."

Bruins banged up

Their injury woes have not yet approached those of the Blue Jackets, but the Bruins will be at far less than full strength.

Defensemen Zdeno Chara (knee), Adam McQuaid (broken thumb) and David Warsofsky (groin) are out, and forward Brad Marchand (undisclosed) will not travel. The Bruins yesterday recalled forward Alexander Khokhlachev and defenseman Zach Trotman from minor-league Providence.

Slap shots

Online fan voting for the All-Star Game has begun at NHL.com. The top six players in fan voting — three forwards, two defensemen and one goalie — will earn automatic roster spots for the game on Jan. 25 at Nationwide Arena.
The list of professional athletes who have faced financial trouble, or even bankruptcy, is frighteningly long. Six-figure signing bonuses and million-dollar salaries can disappear in a hurry if they aren’t managed correctly.

“You see it on ESPN and think, ‘That’s not going to happen to me, or anybody I know,’” Blue Jackets defenseman James Wisniewski said. “But this isn’t just a story on ESPN or HBO’s Real Sports; it can happen to any of us. This one hits close to home.”

Even if they weren’t sure of the details, Blue Jackets players said they knew about the financial distress of defenseman Jack Johnson long before the story of his bankruptcy was published on Thursday by The Dispatch. He shared his situation with teammates so they wouldn’t hear about it in the press, they said.

Johnson, citing less than $50,000 in assets and more than $10 million in debt, filed for bankruptcy early last month. His hearing is scheduled for January.

“He’s like a brother, a family member,” Wisniewski said. “So, yeah, we knew about it.”

But the hope of those around Johnson is that his story will be a cautionary tale for others.

One player, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said, “I think it’s made everybody sort of re-evaluate how you handle things, maybe just think again who is making decisions for you and how much you know and trust them. Just double-check everything to make sure.”

Johnson’s story spread across the NHL like wildfire. Two agents said they emailed copies of The Dispatch article to their players. Speaking with Gord Miller of Canadian sports channel TSN earlier this week, NHL players’ association executive director Donald Fehr said the stories of athletes going broke is “heartbreaking.” He also told Miller there is little the union can do beyond educating players about the dangers and that they are often made victims by people close to them.

Johnson said his parents, Jack Sr. and Tina, took out as many as 18 high-risk loans without his knowledge, borrowing against the seven-year, $30.5 million loan he signed with the Los Angeles Kings in 2011. This came after Johnson split with player-agent Pat Brisson in 2008 and turned his finances over to his parents.

Pro sports is replete with players who, like Johnson, have run aground financially. A Sports Illustrated report in 2009 — the foundation for ESPN’s film Broke — stated that 78 percent of NFL players are bankrupt or under financial stress within two years of retirement, and 60 percent of NBA players are out of money within five years of their retirement.

Hockey is not immune. One year ago, financial adviser Phil Kenner and business partner Tommy Constantine were charged with swindling 13 current and former NHL players out of $15 million. Former Blue Jackets defenseman Bryan Berard has publicly acknowledged his involvement, and former Jackets forward Michael Peca is also listed in court documents.

Last year, former Blue Jackets forward Gilbert Brule accused his father, Chris, of stealing money from him, a charge his father has denied.

The most notable player to file for bankruptcy during his career is former Detroit Red Wings forward Darren McCarty, who filed in 2007 after a gambling habit and “bad business decisions.”

Wisniewski said players, especially those who sign massive contracts, are targeted by those who would do them harm. He saw it himself in 2011, when he signed a six-year, $33 million contract with the Blue Jackets.

“Oh,” he said, shaking his head, “there are sharks out there, just looking for blood.”
Crimson the Net: Skille and Calvert are back, lineup changes and being disciplined

Rick Gethin
FOX Sports Ohio
NOV 20, 2014 1:31p ET

Blue Jackets forwards Matt Calvert (pictured) and Jack Skille are ready to rejoin the lineup for Friday night's game against the visiting Boston Bruins. Columbus, Ohio - Tuesday evening there were three healthy players watching the game from the press box. Forwards Jack Skille and Matt Calvert are ready to make their return to the lineup, with newly-acquired defenseman Kevin Connauton "possibly" drawing in versus the visiting Boston Bruins, according to head coach Todd Richards.

Skille, himself a waiver claim, is anxious to get back to playing and helping the team climb out of the early season hole they are in.

"In my situation, I don’t want to be missing games," he said. "I want to be playing and helping this team in whatever way that I can. I want to be a part of the change in this room. Hopefully, we can get back in it and start winning some games."

Todd Richards had Skille and Calvert flanking rookie center Alex Wennberg in practice this morning. Speed coupled with, at times, sublime passing could very well make for a potent line against the Bruins.

"Hopefully, they can bring some energy," said head coach Todd Richards. "Alex (Wennberg) thinks the game well and he’s a pretty responsible player. And the other two guys on the wing can hopefully bring some speed and energy."

Wennberg, having already been reassigned once to Springfield (October 26), never left the Blue Jackets. He was reassigned on the west coast trip and recalled the next day due to Nick Foligno being stretchered off the ice on October 26. He’s taken it upon himself to show improvement and give the coaches a reason to keep him here.

"His game has gotten better," said Richards, "now we still need him to improve."

Matt Calvert, activated off Injured Reserve earlier this week (Tuesday), is ready to go after suffering an upper-body injury on November 7 in Carolina. He doesn’t have any worries about having a setback.

"I've better practicing harder and feeling better every day," Calvert said. "I think with any injury, you try to come back when you know you won’t be a liability out there. Sometimes there are situations when you come back early and sometimes you can give it a little time. For me, if there’s anything I can do to help the team, I’ll do."

The club has missed the speed, energy and skill that both Skille and Calvert bring to the lineup on a nightly basis. For the first time in a seemingly long time, the Blue Jackets have extra healthy players that are ready to get into the lineup and contribute.

Blue Jackets lines/pairs

The forward lines and defensive pairs in practice Thursday looked a bit different than what has been the norm lately. Todd Richards said Wednesday that there would be changes to the lineup for Friday’s game against the Boston Bruins.

Forward lines:
Foligno / Johansen / Jenner
Hartnell / Anisimov / Atkinson
Skille / Wennberg / Calvert
(Tropp/Boll) / Cracknell / Gibbons

Defensive pairs:
Johnson / (Prout/Connauton)

The Blue Jackets have the fourth best power play in the NHL as of Thursday, converting at 23.6 percent. Their penalty kill, on the other hand, is in need of improvement. It is ranked 26 at 75 percent. The Bruins have a road PP percentage of 12, good enough to be ranked 23rd in the league. Their PK on the road is 26th at 72.7 percent. By being disciplined, Columbus can take advantage of the Bruins.
Blue Jackets still in search of consistency

Rick Gethin
FOX Sports Ohio

NOV 20, 2014 8:20a ET SHARE 0 TWEET 0 0

Blue Jackets defenseman James Wisniewski knows they have to focus on one game at a time.

Every year, the seasons change as a new year of hockey dawns. And yet, there is one constant about the Blue Jackets that never seems to alter itself from one year to the next.

It's reminiscent of starting your car on a cold morning. You turn the key and the engine chugs and chugs until it finally turns over and fires up to life. The Blue Jackets start each season in almost the same way. The initial adrenaline of a new season gives way to getting yourself into the grind that is an 82-game season.

The last three years have seen them start with almost identical records through the first 18 games. Two years ago in the lockout-shortened season, they got off to a 5-11-2 (12 points) start. Last year, their record was 6-10-2 (14 points). You can chalk that year up as the youngest team in the league coming together and trying to find some chemistry.

Through 18 games this season, they have accumulated a record of 6-11-1 (13 points). While they are still the youngest team in the NHL, the main story this year has been one of injuries. They have said that it's not an excuse for their poor start. But the reality is that when you are replacing guys in the lineup on a weekly basis, there really is no chance for anything resembling chemistry and stability to form.

"I really don't have an explanation for that," said defenseman James Wisniewski of the slow start this season. "We've had a lot of injuries this year. No matter what, even when you have healthy guys coming back in the lineup, they're still missing time. I mean, you're still rusty. It's like you're not yourself for quite a while. Even when Dubi (Dubinsky) comes back, it's going to take him some time.

"Your first game you play pretty good because it's pure adrenaline. And then it kind of hits you a little bit. But hopefully not; hopefully he comes in and scores hat trick after hat trick. But most of the time, it just takes you a while. We've played 18 games and it's hard for guys to come right back in. That's the 'excuse' I can think of. Other than that, there are no excuses."

They've gotten away from playing to their identity, playing "Blue Jackets hockey." There have been glimpses of it. Of that, there is no doubt. But it's the consistency of effort that has been missing. It's almost as if they need to rediscover that magic each October.

"It's not the core leadership," said Richards of the lack of consistency, "it's everyone. It's everyone involved - myself, the other coaches, players... it's all of us. It's not just a single group of guys. It's not just forwards or defense. It's everyone."

Wisniewski knows that the clock is ticking on getting the season turned around. They are not out of the race for the playoffs at this point, but the effort shown Tuesday against the Detroit Red Wings shows that they still have a steep hill to climb. At this point, the focus has to be on short-term goals.

"We need to look at one game at a time. We all know that it gets harder and harder to win those games in February and March. You don't want to have to keep playing playoff hockey for three months straight before you get into the playoffs and then you don't have any gas left because you've been working your tail off just to get in.

"For us, right now, we have to take one game at a time. With our consistency, we have to worry about one shift at a time. We have to stick to our identity that we've started to obtain and work from there."

If you look at the rest of the schedule through a "baby step" approach, that means putting the games in a manageable format. With the points shaking out the way that they are in the Metropolitan Division, three-game series seems the most logical way of seeing what they need to do in order to make the playoffs. Really, it has come down to winning two of every three games the rest of the way.

"I just hope that it starts to smooth out this weekend," Wisniewski said. "Hopefully we get another two big wins and move on from there. We've talked about come Christmastime, we need to be in the hunt. It would be a long season if you're not playing for anything in February or March."

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"We have to make sure that we really turn it around. We had a good weekend last weekend, but we need four, five or six in a row to really get back into the swing of things."

They won two of the three games going back to last Friday in Philadelphia. The next three games on the schedule should be looked at in the same way. They host the Boston Bruins on Friday, travel back to Philadelphia on Saturday and host the Winnipeg Jets next Tuesday.

Blue Jackets head coach Todd Richards sums it up succinctly, "I just want to see us engaged and intense. And whatever that leads to, that's fine. Whether it's playing fast or playing physical, however you want to describe our game. When we're engaged and there's some intensity to it, we're usually okay."
Stars notebook: Jordie Benn gets the night off; Stars will honor Modano’s HOF induction

MIKE HEIKA Follow @MikeHeika mheika@dallasnews.com
Staff Writer
Published: 20 November 2014 11:45 PM
Updated: 20 November 2014 11:45 PM

Jordie Benn has come a long way in the last two years, but now the 27-year-old Stars defenseman might have to take a step back.

Benn is averaging 21:01 in time on ice but has struggled with mistakes and is minus-4. On Thursday, Benn was a healthy scratch for the first time this season, as Jyrki Jokipakka took his place.

“He’s had some good moments,” coach Lindy Ruff said. “He’s had some tough moments. He’s faced some tough situations, outnumbered rushes where sometimes it’s his partner or our team has got him in trouble. For me, his game is a lot about skating and making that first play, and I think he’s had some good games and maybe had some tough ones.”

Benn admits it has been a challenging season. When asked about his improvement last season, he bristled and said he has do it every game.

“Last year is last year, and this year is this year. You have to move on and get better, and obviously I’ve struggled and we’ve struggled,” he said. “It’s time to turn it around, get back to the way I used to be playing.”

With the addition of John Klingberg, Benn is likely to see his minutes reduced. In recent games he has been closer to 17 minutes.

“We’ve scaled him up, and it has been a tough adjustment,” Ruff said. “Without the way he played last year, where we had to play him, we wouldn’t have made it [to the playoffs]. I give him a lot of credit, [but] he has struggled playing up the lineup this year.”

Benn said he needs to concentrate on playing one shift at a time and not worry about how many shifts there are or what side of the ice he has to play on.

“You just have to keep your feet moving and make the right play,” he said. “That’s the key to it all, good decisions.”

Modano to be honored: The Stars on Saturday will honor Mike Modano for his recent induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto. There will be a ceremony before the game against the Los Angeles Kings that will include the three other Hall of Famers off the 1999 Stanley Cup championship team — Ed Belfour, Brett Hull and Joe Nieuwendyk.

Each of the first 15,000 fans through the doors will receive a Modano poster.

Ruff on Sceviour: Colton Sceviour had shoulder surgery in the offseason and is off to a slow start. The 25-year-old winger has yet to score a goal in 18 games after scoring eight in 26 last season.

“I can’t offer any excuses. The offseason is way behind us,” Ruff said. “To me, Sceviour has to be in on more opportunities. There hasn’t been enough opportunities where it’s been on his stick where he can make a difference.”

Sceviour tallied 63 points (32 goals, 31 assists) in 54 AHL games last season before getting called up to the NHL.

He said it: Coaches, players comment after 3-1 win over Arizona Thursday

MIKE HEIKA
Staff Writer
Published: 20 November 2014 11:38 PM
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Stars Head Coach Lindy Ruff
On how the win feels:

“We’ve been in a lot of these games where the game is determined in the third period. I thought we did a lot of good things. It was a tight game but we knew it was going to be. The Klingberg goal speaks for itself and then to get the next one right after that. Then dealing with the disallowed goal, we didn’t let that affect us. There was a lot of good in the game.”

On the Stars’ defensive effort:

“It was good. It was solid. I thought the puck movement, which was important for our transition game, was good. There were a lot of good outlet plays. That’s a big deal for us because then we don’t have to spend a lot of time in our zone.”

On Kari Lehtonen’s performance:

“There aren’t many players that can pull that off. It’s a special goal, it lit the building up. It was something the fans needed and something that we needed. I think the energy we got from our crowd helped us with the next one right away. I know it’s been disappointing here, but it was good to hear the building erupt like that.”

On the importance of the Klingberg goal:

“From the start it was a faceoff. We usually switch a little bit there to get a one-timer but then [Jason] Spezza said, ‘stay just right beh..."
that's a mistake that you can't make in a game like this and we did, and it cost us."

On their desperation playing a role in this game:

"They had desperation coming into the game. It wasn't just that period. It was our willingness to do things right to get a win and we didn't do that."

On learning to preserve the leads in a game:

"It's a one-goal game. It's not like we were leading by five goals and we give it up. It's a tight game and it could go either way. It's disappointing when goals like that are unearned goals. When you make a critical mistake like we did those are unearned goals and that's disappointing."

Coyotes Forward Shane Doan:

On playing a good 40 minutes tonight, but not finishing the last 20:

"We played a decent road game. Obviously we gave them some chances, but we had a bunch of guys sacrificing and blocking shots and doing all the little things we have to do to hold on to a one goal lead, and then the third period they obviously got a big one on a nice move by their D-man and then after that they got the next one."

On Dallas coming out strong in the third period:

"For sure, they were desperate and we needed to match it. They came out and played a little more desperate and found some goals and we didn't find any. [Kari] Lehtonen made some nice saves to keep it 1-0 and then made a couple of nice saves to keep the lead in the third period. We've got to find ways to score."

On keeping the lead until the third:

"They got some breaks in the second and their goaltender made a couple of big saves. He made one really nice one on me. I've got to score there and it's got to be 2-0 and we've got to have the lead. We played well enough to have more than a one goal lead, but he made some nice save and we've got to find ways to bury those."

Coyotes Forward Lauri Korpikoski:

On not playing a full 60 minutes tonight:

"Obviously a lot of skill, they can make a lot of plays and that team showed that when you're not quite ready in the third, for some reason, to start we make a couple of mistakes that ended up in the back of our net and they're back into the game building momentum, and we never grabbed it back after that. So, the first five minutes they got a couple of goals and so the game is over. You have to do a better job there."

On Dallas' desperation after their recent struggles:

"Well, I think right there we had some good offensive zone time, but just making that one extra play to find that scoring chance and get that second goal was going to be huge in this game, who gets the second goal. And it was them, and we saw what happened after that. So, we had our chances there, but we've got to execute better and put it in the back of the net."

Heika: Stars finally make a statement with big third period, snap seven-game home winless streak

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Published: 20 November 2014 11:28 PM
Updated: 20 November 2014 11:49 PM

If the NHL gave points for style, Thursday’s 3-1 Stars victory over Arizona would be worth more than two points in the standings.

Not only did the Stars break a seven-game winless streak (0-5-2) at home, they did it by rallying in the third period. For a team that had been melting down in third periods at American Airlines Center ever since last season’s playoffs, it was a massive confidence-builder.

“It’s a huge relief,” defenseman Trevor Daley said.

Dallas beat Arizona for the second time in a week and moved to 7-9-4 (18 points). The Coyotes fell to 8-10-2 (18 points). While the Stars can’t even begin to talk about fixing all of their problems, they can at least begin to talk about fixing some.

After falling 6-4 to Carolina on Tuesday, the Stars came back and played a strong defensive game. It was a display of what coach Lindy Ruff talked about Wednesday. The second-year Stars bench boss has been preaching possession, and the Stars answered by taking fewer risks and putting the puck in safer places.

“I think it was the best defending third period we’ve played,” Ruff said. “Once we got the lead, we did all the right things. Didn’t get careless with the puck, we didn’t give up transition opportunities. By far, I think [it was] the best effort when it comes to protecting the lead and still playing good hockey.”

It was a statement game — if you can have a statement game in November.

Dallas scored twice in the first 52 seconds of the third period to erase a 1-0 deficit and make Arizona goalie Mike Smith look fallible. Rookie defenseman John Klingberg walked in from the left point and made a beautiful move to snap a shot in the upper corner to tie the score at the 19 second mark of the period.

It was Klingberg’s first NHL goal, and it was a great sign of what the 22-year-old blueliner might mean to the team.

“There’s not many players who can pull that off,” Ruff said. “It’s a special goal. It lit the building up. It was something our fans needed, something we needed. I think that energy from our crowd helped us with the next one right away. I know it’s been disappointing here, but it was good to hear the building erupt like that and be able to see a goal like that to create that type of energy.”

Ruff has been juggling his lines and defense pairs. He scratched Jordie Benn and Curtis McKenzie and inserted Jyrki Jokipakka and Patrick Eaves. He also kept Cody Eakin as a center on the top line with Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin, and that line got the game-winning goal.

Benn pushed a puck up to Daley at the point, and Daley’s hard shot was tipped by Eakin at the net. That goal came just 52 seconds into the third period and infused energy into a stale arena. After that, the Stars found the right balance of attacking and defending.

And Kari Lehtonen, who allowed four goals on 16 shots and was pulled Tuesday, was exceptional in stopping 26 shots against the Coyotes.

“You try especially hard after a bad outing like that,” Lehtonen said. “Maybe keep it more simple, keep mentally focused and be ready.”

The Stars were toying with all sorts of potential negative aftermath to a loss. Dallas had lost five straight at home in regulation, and the franchise record is six. And had Dallas not stopped the bleeding at some point, the questions would have gotten even tougher, and the frustration even deeper.

“It’s a good feeling, obviously,” Daley said. “This win is a better win than the other wins. The next one is what we’re after, but this one makes you feel good.”
Cold facts: Stars beat Coyotes 3-1 for first win in Dallas since Oct. 21

MIKE HEIKA Follow @MikeHeika mheika@dallasnews.com
Staff Writer
Published: 20 November 2014 07:09 PM
Updated: 20 November 2014 11:31 PM

Stars 3, Coyotes 1

THE GOALS

Coyotes: With Arizona on the power play after a Jyrki Jokipakka cross-checking penalty, Lauri Korpikoski cleaned up the rebound of a Sam Gagner shot at the 14:21 mark of the first period. Coyotes 1, Stars 0.

Stars: Jason Spezza won a faceoff and Ales Hemsky quickly got the puck to John Klingberg at the left point. Klingberg calmly walked around a defender and then snapped a shot into the top corner for his first NHL goal at the 19 second mark of the third period. Stars 1, Coyotes 1.

Stars: Jamie Benn pushed a puck to the right point, and Trevor Daley unleashed a long blast on net. Cody Eakin buzzed the net and tipped in his fourth goal of the year at the 52 second mark of the third period. Stars 2, Coyotes 1.

Stars: Antoine Roussel made a smart rush, circling around and dumping the puck behind the net. Jason Spezza then wheeled out from behind the net and slipped a puck past Mike Smith at the 15:42 mark of the third period. Stars 3, Coyotes 1.

Three stars
1. John Klingberg, Stars – First goal changes game.
2. Kari Lehtonen, Stars – Big comeback after being pulled Tuesday
3. Cody Eakin, Stars – Game-winning goal, leads first line

Save of the game

Late in the second period, Stars defenseman John Klingberg lost the puck behind the net and Tobias Rieder fed Shane Doan bearing down the right wing. Doan put all of his weight into a one-timer, and Kari Lehtonen kicked it away to keep the Stars’ deficit at 1-0.

Discuss

Has John Klingberg earned a spot on the first power play already? Even with Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin and Jason Spezza on the unit, it struggles to get shots on goal. Klingberg has shown calm and ability to get the puck through a crowd, despite playing just five NHL games.

What does it mean?

The Stars were getting close to the point where they really couldn’t stand another home loss. The energy in the building was lagging, and even the players looked like they were losing steam. For Dallas to come back to start the third period and score twice in the first minute could build needed confidence for players and fans alike.

Cowlishaw: My favorite on-ice and off-ice moments covering Stars

By TIM COWLISHAW wtcowlishaw@dallasnews.com
Columnist

Published: 20 November 2014 09:16 PM
Updated: 20 November 2014 09:16 PM

Columnist Tim Cowlishaw answered questions in a chat Thursday. Here are some highlights.

Question: With Mike Modano’s recent ceremony, what’s your favorite on-ice moment? And then what is your favorite off-ice moment? Thanks Tim!

Tim Cowlishaw: For on-ice, I would go with the Game 7 wins over Colorado at Reunion Arena. I realize winning the Cup is the goal and the bigger deal, and yes I was there, but a third overtime at 1 in the morning in Buffalo -- it’s a rewarding ending for the team but there's something cooler about seeing those home wins and those Dallas crowds going crazy. (I won't dwell on the fact I picked Mike Keane and Sergei Zubov to be the stars of those games in columns, and that worked out pretty well). My favorite ceremonial moment -- and it was total luck to be there really -- was the last game played at the Montreal Forum. Gainey and Carbonneau were part of the torch ceremony (hard to explain what that means but it comes from the poem "In Flanders Fields” and is a BIG deal in Montreal) and when Rocket Richard came out, there was something like a seven-minute standing ovation with people crying. Including Rocket. Pretty amazing stuff. Truly fortunate to be there.

Question: Do you think Jordie Benn's days are numbered? And what do you think of Klingberg's play so far? Having a righty could really help this team out

Tim Cowlishaw: It's amazing they went as long as they did with six left-handed defensemen. That can't possibly work longterm. Klingberg has been good. Jordie obviously has not, but he was definitely an improving player at the end of last year and into the playoffs, so I wouldn't give up on him.

Cowlishaw: Something fundamentally wrong with Stars; it's on Jim Nill to 'do something' to shake up team

By TIM COWLISHAW wtcowlishaw@dallasnews.com
Columnist
Published: 20 November 2014 09:16 PM
Updated: 20 November 2014 09:16 PM

Columnist Tim Cowlishaw answered questions in a chat Thursday. Here are some highlights.

Question: best scenario for the Stars. Are they cooked?
Tim Cowlishaw: This is a tough one. Something fundamentally wrong with a team that provided logical reasons for hope last season. Shaky on defense, poor in goal, inconsistent production up front. I think it's more on Jim Nill right now than Lindy Ruff to do something. Shake up the team. Sign Martin Brodeur. Trade a good, young player (but not a great, young player obviously). Do something. It's getting away from this team quickly.

Question: If you were a paying customer, where would you sit at a Stars game?
Tim Cowlishaw: I AM a paying customer for many games each season. And I sit in the corner where you have the best views for the money.

Question: Do you think it's a good idea to sign Jason Spezza to an extension, and at what price? Dallas needs some money to sign a defenseman and/or a decent backup goalie at some point.
Tim Cowlishaw: That's a good question from both sides. This team badly needs a 25-minute a game defenseman. They have needed one for years. Nill's one attempt -- Sergei Gonchar -- was a spectacular failure. But you certainly would like to sign Spezza as well. However, what does he think at this point? I'm sure he likes Dallas -- basically every hockey player falls in love with the city and the anonymity they have here compared to Canada -- but what if he thinks the team is as big a mess as it appears to be? I don't expect a signing anytime soon.

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Jyrki Jokipakka in, Jordie Benn out as Stars seek slump solution against Coyotes

MIKE HEIKA
Staff Writer
Published: 20 November 2014 12:55 PM
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Cody Eastwood brings you onto the ice at AAC to join the Stars for morning skate.

Here's Lindy Ruff sending his message through the assembled media, who are the conduit of information to you, the gentle fan.

The Stars continue to both develop and transition on defense, and tonight will be another step in the process. With Sergei Gonchar (Montreal) and Kevin Connauton (Columbus) departed, Jyrki Jokipakka joins John Klingberg as young blueliners who the Stars hope are a big part of the future.

Asked what he liked about Jokipakka's first three NHL games before getting sent back to the minors, Stars coach Lindy Ruff said: "His defending, overall. He's played against some pretty good lines, and his defending through those games and in the preseason was good."

Now, Jokipakka is back and he should get a chance to stick for a while.

Here are the expected lines:
- Jamie Benn-Cody Eakin-Tyler Seguin
- Antoine Roussel-Jason Spezza-Ales Hemsky
- Travis Moen-Vernon Fiddler-Cody Eaves
- Erik Cole-Shawn Horcoff-Colton Sceviour
- Alex Goligoski-Trevor Daley
- Brenden Dillon-John Klingberg
- Jyrki Jokipakka-Jamie Oleksiak
- Kari Lehtonen

That means Jordie Benn will be a healthy scratch for the first time this season. Benn had a solid season in 2013-14, playing 78 games and tallying 20 points. Still, he was a healthy scratch four times as he battled to earn more minutes as the year went on. This season, he has played every game, he is averaging 21:01 in time on ice and is minus-4.

"For me, it's really been up and down," Ruff said when asked to assess Jordie Benn. "He's had some good moments, he's had some tough moments. He's faced some tough situations, out-numbered rushes where sometimes it's his partner or our team has got him in trouble. For me, his game is a lot about skating and making that first play, and I think he's had some good games and maybe had some tough ones, but you can say that for a lot of our defensemen."

Asked if he felt Benn was scaled too far up the lineup at times this season, Ruff said: "We've scaled him up, and it has been a tough adjustment. Without the way he played last year, where we had to play him, we wouldn't have made it (to the playoffs). I give him a lot of credit (but) he has struggled playing up the lineup this year."

As for the players on the ice, the Stars have another challenge. They are 1-5-4 at home, worst in the NHL, and are 0-5-2 in their last seven at home. A defeat further brings an intense light on this five-game homestand (the longest of the season), and on what the Stars are doing.

Ruff has tried to remain calm, and avoid terms like "must win."

"We're just going to take it period by period," he said. "If there's a period that hasn't gone well, you have to play better in the next period. I don't think we played that well in the first period the other night and we came out with a 2-0 lead. Then, we might have played better in the second, and it got away from us. So it's funny how that goes. I'm concerned about where our possession game is at, because if our possession game is better it leads to more drawn penalties and us having the puck more, and it's really what I've been focused on."

Ruff moved Antoine Roussel up onto the Spezza line, and said he hopes Roussel's energy and net-front presence can help Spezza (three goals) and Hemsky (no goals) convert on their chances.

"When you look at his game, he's great at getting to the net," Ruff said. "The other night, Spezza had some great looks, Hemsky had some great looks. I'd like a little more traffic when they get those looks. He's the best we have, and without Garbutt in the lineup, we've already shuffled that around, so we'll give that a look and see if that will help him get something 5 on 5."

Garbutt is out for about a week with an upper body injury and will miss his second game. Curtis McKenzie comes out to make room for Eaves, and Ruff said he is hoping Colton Sceviour starts getting more scoring chances. Sceviour has been slow to start after off-season should surgery, and Ruff placed him on the second power play unit this morning.

"I can't offer any excuses. The off-season is way behind us," Ruff said. "To me, Sceviour has to be in on more opportunities. There hasn't been enough opportunities where it's been on his stick where he can make a difference. I think his skating has been a lot better than it was maybe a month ago. He's going to get a good look tonight. There's been very little power play time, so it's hard to even analyze his time 5-on-4."

Here are the Coyotes expected lines (they didn't skate, so there is some speculation here):
- Lauri Korpikoski-Antoine Vermette-Mikkel Boedker
- Lucas Lessio-Sam Gagner-Shane Doan
- Tobias Rieder-Kyle Chipchura-Martin Erat
- Brandon McMillan-Joe Vitale
- B.J. Crombeen-Oliver Ekman-Larsson-Zybnik Michalek
- Keith Yandle-Connor Murphy
- Chris Summers-Michael Stone
- Mike Smith

Stars score 3 in 3rd period to rally past Coyotes

Posted Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014
The Associated Press

DALLAS — John Klingberg and Cody Eakin gave the Dallas Stars a much-needed fast start to the third period on Thursday night.

Klingberg and Eakin scored 33 seconds apart in the opening minute of the final period to give the Stars their first lead and Jason Spezza scored later in the third to rallying Dallas to a 3-1 victory over the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday night.

Ales Hemsky had two assists as Dallas ended a seven-game home losing streak (0-5-2), winning for just the second time in 11 home games (2-5-4).

Klingberg's goal from the slot was his first in the NHL, in his sixth game, and tied the score 19 seconds into the period.

"We've had a rough way here, so it felt good to score the goal, and it was a big goal for us," Klingberg said.

Stars coach Lindy Ruff said the team fed off the rookie defenseman's goal.

"It lit the building up," Ruff said. "It was something our fans needed, something we needed. I think that energy from our crowd helped us with the next one right away."

Eakin then tipped Trevor Daley's shot from the blue line over Arizona goalie Mike Smith at 52 seconds to put the Stars ahead.

Spezza made it 3-1 with 4:18 remaining as he skated behind the net, came out on the left side and shot into the net to give his team and goalie Kari Lehtonen some breathing room.

But it was the Klingberg goal that had people talking.

"Spezza said, 'Just stay right behind me.' The puck does not come to that place so many times," Klingberg said. "Then I saw (Ales) Hemsky put it up to me. I just saw the keeper falling down and it was a good screen so I just aimed for the right side of the goal."

Arizona coach Dave Tippett said, "A missed assignment on a faceoff, pure and simple. Come out for the third period, we win the neutral faceoff. We end up icing it and just a bad missed assignment on a faceoff. Turned the game right around."

Lehtonen, who finished with 26 saves, had a personal turnaround. He was removed from Tuesday's loss to Carolina after giving up four goals in the second period. Against the Coyotes, he gave up only Lauri Korpikoski's rebound goal with 5:39 left in the first period.

"You try especially hard after a bad outing like that," Lehtonen said. "Maybe keep it more simple and try to play each shift as their own. It wears a little bit more on you, but that's what you have to do."

The Coyotes, who lost for the fifth straight time in Dallas, dominated the early play. When Korpikoski scored on the power play, the Coyotes had outshot Dallas 9-4. The Stars put the final five shots on goal to finish the period 9-9.

Dallas appeared to tie the score with 5:22 left in the second, when Eakin redirected a pass from Travis Moen past Smith. However, the referees ruled that Brenden Dillon had remained in the blue area in front of the net too long.

The score remained 1-0 after the second period, when the Coyotes outshot the Stars 10-9.

NOTES: The Stars started players from five countries — Dillon and Spezza (Canada), Lehtonen (Finland), Klingberg (Sweden), Hemsky (Czech Republic) and Antoine Roussel (France). ... RW Patrick Eaves returned after missing three games because of a foot injury. ... C Ryan Garbutt (upper-body injury) is expected to be out for a week. Garbutt scored the winning goal, short-handed, in Dallas' 4-3 victory Nov. 11 at Arizona. ... Coyotes C Martin Hanzal (lower body) missed his second game. ... Gagner's assist was the 200th of his career. ... Arizona is 2-5-1 in games with three or fewer goals scored. Dallas is 2-1-1. ... Smith is 7-5-5 against his former team.
Why the Red Wings beat the Jets on Thursday night

By Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press 2:21 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

Red Wings 4, Jets 3

From MTS Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba

In the first period: Johan Franzen was slow to get up after an early collision with Andrew Ladd, but Franzen was back out for his next shift. Petr Mrazek, in his first start of the season, made a good save on Chris Thorburn off a rush. Dustin Byfuglien went to the penalty box at 5:31, giving the Wings a power play. Mrazek made another quick save on Ladd after he’d gotten in on a little breakaway. The Jets went on a power play at 7:20, after Kyle Quincey went for boarding. They didn’t get any shots on Mrazek. Matt Halischuk was the next to force a quality save from Mrazek, zooming in for a close-range shot. The Wings went about seven minutes without a shot on goal, then got a power play at 14:56. Ladd had a short-handed chance right away. That was the only shot on net during the two-minute stretch. The Wings went on a penalty kill at 17:14 for too many men. Shots were 8-7 to Winnipeg.

In the second period: The Jets scored at 2:15, when Byfuglien redirected Evander Kane’s behind-the-goal pass for a 1-0 lead. The Wings were outshot, 8-0, when Adam Lowry tipped Mark Scheifele’s shot at 9:32. Tomas Tatar forced a turnover and scored from the right faceoff circle, at 10:02. The Wings went on a third power play, at 12:13, and scored at 12:51 when Franzen maneuvered his way to the net, around a diving Mark Stuart, to bury the puck. Mathieu Perreault scored at 16:12 after driving to the net, behind it and back out front. Tomas Jurco went for tripping at 17:55. Shots were 21-13 to Winnipeg.

In the third period: The Wings went on a fourth power play at 2:34 after the Jets had too many men on the ice. Solid puck control led to three good chances, but Pavelec was up to the task. The Wings finally showed the sustained attack missing through the first two periods, with Gustav Nyquist attempting to score off a turnover among the better chances. Tatar had a great shift translate into chance off a rush. Justin Abdelkader scored from the door step with seven minutes left in regulation and Tatar scored at 15:10 by driving to the net just as Abdelkader sent the puck to him. Final shots were 31-27 to Winnipeg.

Coach speak: Mike Babcock had high praise for Petr Mrazek after his 28 saves, saying “Mrazek was great early, his puck-handling was good, he got caught deep on the one goal, the third goal, but even at the end when it’s 6-on-5, he plays the puck so good that we were able to get it back a number of times just because he was in the play. He’s totally relaxed and just thinks he’s going to win.”

Up next: Saturday at Toronto Maple Leafs.

Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings finish with flurry to beat Jets, 4-3

By Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press 2:12 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

WINNIPEG, Manitoba – Petr Mrazek held his teammates in the mix, and then those teammates showed again what they can accomplish when they attack.

Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader scored two minutes apart in the third period Thursday at MTS Centre to rally the Detroit Red Wings to a 4-3 victory over the Winnipeg Jets.

“We were really confident going into the third period,” Tatar said. “I think we took the game from there.”

Tatar had a big hand in that, scoring the winning goal after Abdelkader outworked his man off the boards and threw the puck to Tatar’s stick. Tatar also had the Wings’ first goal, and Johan Franzen also scored to give Mrazek the win he so deserved after the Jets were allowed to roam freely for 40 minutes.

“They were better than us early,” coach Mike Babcock said. “They came out and they were physical and we were kind of standing around watching them, didn’t want to get involved in the game. Our goaltending was good and our penalty killing was good and kept us in the game, and then we got upset, and we got playing.

“Once we got executing, we had lots of opportunity. In the end, it’s a big road win for us.”

The Wings came into the game with Pavel Datsyuk still injured and with defenseman Brendan Smith freshly so, but also coming off their most dominant road victory of the season. The execution wasn’t nearly as crisp in the opening period against the Jets, who consistently had the more dangerous attack. Mrazek had some quality saves among his first eight, including one on Andrew Ladd during what was a Detroit power play. The Wings had little sustained attack, and at one point went about seven minutes without testing Ondrej Pavelec.

“We didn’t shoot it because we never had it,” Babcock said. “It’s hard to shoot when you don’t have it. We just dug in and found a way to get it done. It’s never easy to win in this league now.”

There was little Mrazek could have done to prevent the Jets’ first goal, which saw Evander Kane pass the puck between his legs and straight to the crease for a redirection by Dustin Byfuglien. The Wings didn’t have a shot on net the first eight minutes of the second period, while the Jets had eight in that stretch. Mrazek didn’t mind.

“It was a lot of fun,” Mrazek said of his first start of the season. “I was talking to Ondrej yesterday, we were talking about two Czech goalies in the game, so for me this was great fun, and we got the win.”

It didn’t look like that was likely to happen when Adam Lowry scored on a tip-in to make it 2-0 midway through the second period. Thirty seconds later, however, Tatar showed why his coach is such a fan, intercepting a pass and scoring for a second straight game.

“He saw that pass come and he sniffed it out and he used their D as a screen,” Franzen said. “It’s great to see him score. His confidence really grows a lot.”

Babcock said he didn’t think Tatar was very good before his first goal, but also revealed just how highly he thinks of him. “I might be harder on Tats than anybody on the team, just because I think Tats has a chance to be a real player,” Babcock said. “We’re going to hold him to that. We think he should be good every night because he’s capable of being good every night and every shift.”

That’s pretty much the same thinking for Franzen, who dominates when he moves his feet. He picked up his fourth goal in six games when he made quick work of a power play, skating around a diving Mark Stuart en route to the net.

“I don’t know if he was planning on stepping up or something,” Franzen said. “He scrambled to get back and he fell. It probably looked pretty good.

Mathieu Perreault looked good on his goal to make it 3-2, skating the puck to the net, then around and out front to make it 3-2 to the Jets before the end of the second period.

“We said to ourselves after the second period, we have to exit the zone really easy, started chipping it out and try to outskate those guys,” Tatar said. “That’s what we were doing right.”

That led to two goals 2:10 apart, which gave the Wings their third victory in four games, and improved their road record to 4-2-3. They already have double the two points they had on their first three-game excursion.

WINNIPEG, Manitoba – Xavier Ouellet knew the opportunity would come. All he had to do was play well enough to ensure he'd be the first to get it.

Sure enough, when the Detroit Red Wings needed a fresh defenseman after one of their regulars got hurt, it was Ouellet who made the journey to join them for Thursday's game against the Winnipeg Jets at MTS Centre. He topped 15 minutes in the 4-3 victory, was a plus-1, and had three shots on net, the most of any defenseman on the team.

"I thought he was really good," coach Mike Babcock said. "He was jittery like the rest of us early, and then he really got going. He makes good plays and he supports the rush and he's a confident kid, knows how to play."

It was Ouellet's first game with the Wings this season. He was up for four games last year, during which he impressed with play mature beyond his 21 years. He moves the puck well, can play both power play and penalty kill, and rarely makes a panicked decision. Fellow Griffin call-up Petr Mrazek described Ouellet as "fast, and he can pass the puck really well."

Ouellet is tied for first in scoring among Griffins defensemen with five points in 13 games, and he leads the team in shots with 44. His aim is to translate that to the NHL level.

"My goal is to make least mistakes possible," Ouellet said. "I want to be reliable, I want them to trust me, so I just try to make the right play every time and not try to do too much."

Ouellet cited being called upon in Game 5 of the playoffs last year as especially confidence inducing, because Babcock gave me his trust for that game, so that meant a lot to me. It was a great experience for me, and I think it helped me a lot to realize that whatever the pressure, you just have to focus on the same things."

Ouellet replaced Brendan Smith, who is out through the end of the month after suffering an infected hand as a consequence of fighting Columbus' Nick Foligno. Asked about losing one of his players to a fight, Babcock said, "I guess the way I look at it, I did a fair bit of that myself, I never ended up missing 10 days. Or, there's lots of players in the league that don't miss 10 days. Some things happen some times. What are you going to do? You go back into the corner, if you get hurt, was it worth going back in the corner? I think so."

Hockey legend Gordie Howe showing small improvement

By Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press 5:55 p.m. EST November 20, 2014

Hockey legend Gordie Howe has shown minor improvements, even as he remains largely quiet and immobile.

His son, Mark Howe, told the Free Press today that Gordie Howe, "isn't in so much pain any more. No walking or speech, but at least he's out of the bed."

Gordie Howe, 86, suffers from dementia, and has had a series of strokes since last summer, including a severe one on Oct. 26. That stroke left his right side paralyzed, and his sons, Mark, Marty and Murray, all rushed to the home of their sister, Cathy, in Lubbock, Texas, where Gordie Howe is staying.

After showing some improvement, Gordie Howe's health again appeared dire last weekend. An epidural has helped reduce the pain, and Mark Howe said the family got Gordie Howe "to a living room chair" two days in a row. "A lot of work to do, but at least we got him out of bed," he said.

During his decades with the Detroit Red Wings, Gordie Howe’s accomplishments included six Art Ross and six Hart trophies, four Stanley Cups, and 20 straight years as a top-five scorer in the NHL. He became known as "Mr. Hockey," and his wife, Colleen, as "Mrs. Hockey." She passed away five years ago from Pick's disease, a neurological disorder that causes dementia.

Having gone through seeing how their mother suffered, the Howe children are intent on figuring out how to keep Gordie Howe as comfortable as possible. As of Thursday afternoon, he had been off pain medication for 54 hours, and "his blood pressure is under control," Mark Howe said. "He's eating again, so his quality of life has improved, for now. We take each day as it comes, and are just happy he isn't in so much pain any more."

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - Close friends were sad - and delighted - for now former Detroit Red Wings teammate Andrej Nestrasil.

The Wings lost their third-round pick from 2009 to the Carolina Hurricanes, who claimed him off waivers Thursday, 24 hours after the Wings had exposed him on waivers in hopes of sending him to the minors.

"Nesty is a great kid," coach Mike Babcock said. "If he was my own kid, and I told him this yesterday, it'd be great for him to play a year in the American league and score like crazy. I wish him well. If he can fit in and help them and play every night, that's really good for him. That's what he wants to do, he wants to be an NHL player. We really liked him here, he was a good kid."

Tomas Tatar, who sat next to Nestrasil in the Wings' locker room at Joe Louis Arena, was excited to hear Nestrasil had drawn interest from another NHL club. The Wings play at Carolina on Dec. 7.

"It's unreal," Tatar said. "That's huge for him. I'm really happy for him. He deserves that. He's a great guy. Really hard worker. Hopefully he will find himself in a good spot in Carolina. I'm really excited for him.

"Hopefully when we will play them he will make some dinner for us and show us around."

Petr Mrazek, another good buddy, said he and Nestrasil "talked a little bit after practice last night. It's sad. We're good friends. I think he's great teammate. He played good here, but that's the hockey life."

Nestrasil, 23, had two assists and was a minus-3 in 13 games with Detroit this season. General manager Ken Holland told the Free Press the Wings were willing to risk losing Nestrasil because they are heavy on forwards in the minors, most notably strengthened by Anthony Mantha, Teemu Pulkkinen, Mitch Callahan and Kevin Porter.

Note: The Wings on Thursday assigned center Stephen Weiss to the Grand Rapids Griffins for conditioning and reassigned goaltender Jared Coreau from the Griffins to the ECHL's Toledo Walleye.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11,21,2014
WINNIPEG, Manitoba - A pair of Griffins will be counted on as the Detroit Red Wings seek to keep winning on the road.

The Wings take on the Jets at MTS Centre tonight (8, FSD). The lineup will be without Pavel Datsyuk (groin) for a second straight game, but Datsyuk did at least take to the ice on his own after Thursday's morning skate.

The lineup will feature Petr Mrazek starting in goal, and defenseman Xavier Ouellet subbing in for Brendan Smith, who is out 10 days with an infected hand. Coach Mike Babcock has high regard for both Mrazek and Ouellet, two 21-year-olds who have impressed with steady play in prior appearances during call-ups from the minors.

Babcock said of Ouellet: “We just want him to come in, move the puck, go back, play like he can. He played real well for us in training camp. We didn't have any room for him. We called him up, we could have easy not put him in, but we just decided that he's played well for us.”

Ouellet will be paired with Brian Lashoff, as Jakub Kindl's stint as a healthy scratch continues. Ouellet, 21, made four appearances for the Wings in last year's regular season, and also parachuted in for the last playoff game.

The plan all along was to play Mrazek against the Jets, to spell Jimmy Howard.

"I don't believe you can play your starter every game," Babcock said. "I think the other guy has got to play between 15-20 games in our league. So every once in a while, you've just got to give the other guy an opportunity. Petr's played real well for us, it's kind of like with X, in exhibition, and we thought he was great in training camp. He gets an opportunity tonight."

Mrazek is thrilled the opportunity comes against fellow Czech Ondrej Pavelec. "That means a lot for me," Mrazek said, "but I think more important is to have a good game here and get two points."

Mrazek and Ouellet are the only changes to the lineup. The lines will be the same as the ones who produced five goals Tuesday at Columbus - Henrik Zetterberg with Johan Franzen and Gustav Nyquist, Riley Sheahan with Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader, Darren Helm with Daniel Cleary and Tomas Jurco, and Luke Glendening with Drew Miller and Joakim Andersson.

The Wings improved to 3-2-3 on the road after the big win against the Blue Jackets. The Wings had gone 0-1-2 on their only other three-game road trip this season.
Instant analysis: Hockey belongs in Winnipeg

The Detroit News 12:39 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

Ted Kulfan: One thing is perfectly clear, and it has been since the NHL returned to Winnipeg: The league belongs here.

It never should have left. And, though it's unfortunate it didn't work in Atlanta, let's face it, the NHL wasn't working there at all.

These fans love the Jets. Hockey is obviously in the bone marrow of this community.

Walking to the rink here, compared to what it was like in Atlanta, it just feels a wrong was corrected.

It feels right.

It also feels so darn cold, but that's another matter.

Gregg Krupa: The Red Wings overcame some sloppy defense in the first and second periods and a two-goal deficit to beat the Jets in the third, in a big comeback. Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader help drive the offense.

Justin Abdelkader helps Red Wings ground Jets

Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News 12:38 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

Winnipeg, Manitoba — For two periods Thursday, the Red Wings didn’t look like a team capable of swiping any sort of victory.

But, that final 20 minutes, that was a different matter.

They looked like a different team, and it was that effort that enabled the Red Wings to grab a 4-3 victory in Winnipeg, banking another crucial two points in the standings.

Justin Abdelkader sparked a late Red Wings rally, tying the game then setting up Tomas Tatar for the winner in a 2-minute, 10-second span.

“We were playing simple and more aggressive, we knew we had nothing to lose,” Tatar said of the third-period turnaround. “We were down, so we forced the puck to the net and tried to find a hole.

“We were real happy we played well in that third period and we got those two points.”

Abdelkader tied the game, 3-3, with seven minutes left.

Brian Lashoff fired the shot on net, goalie Ondrej Pavelec stopped it, but Abdelkader — increasingly becoming a presence around the net — put back the rebound for his sixth goal.

Then at 15:10, Abdelkader carried the puck up ice and centered a pass to Tatar cutting inside.

Tatar fired a one-timer past Pavelec, his second goal of the game and eighth of the season, giving the Red Wings the 4-3 lead.

It’s been a tremendous reversal for Tatar, who only scored one goal in his first nine games. He has seven in his last nine games.

“We expect a lot from Tats and he’s capable of delivering.”

The Red Wings (10-4-5, 25 points) won their second consecutive game on this three-game road trip, which ends Saturday in Toronto.

Winnipeg (10-8-3, 23 points) has lost three of its last four (1-2-1).

“We gutted it out,” Babcock said. “They were better than us early. We were standing around watching and not getting involved. Out goaltender and penalty were good and it kept us in the game.

“Then we got upset, or whatever we did, and finally dug in and got playing and executing.”

Tatar and Johan Franzen (power play) scored second-period goals, Franzen’s goal briefly tying the game 2-2.

But Winnipeg’s Mathieu Perreault broke the tie with his second goal of the season at 16:12.

Perreault gathered a shot from Jacob Trouba (Michigan/Rochester) behind the net and wheeled out in front.

Perreault turned and slid a shot wide of Petr Mrazek, temporarily taking the steam out of the Red Wings comeback.

The game opened up after a scoreless first period, with four goals scored in 6:40.

Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry opened the scoring, giving Winnipeg a brief 2-0 lead.

But Tatar answered 30 seconds later.

Jets defenseman Tobias Enstrom committed a costly turnover from the corner, passing the puck directly onto the stick of Tatar in the circle.

Tatar made the Jets pay, firing shot past Pavelec and cutting the lead to 2-1.

With the Jets beginning to take control of the game, Tatar’s answer of Lowry’s goal on the very next shift was crucial.

And with the Red Wings gaining momentum, Franzen tied the game with his sixth goal.

Franzen took a pass from Danny DeKeyser near the red line and wheeled around and through Jets defenseman Mark Stuart.

Cutting to the inside, Franzen froze Pavelec with a quick shot capping a superb individual effort.

“It turned out pretty good,” Franzen said of the highlight-reel goal. “I don’t know what happened. He (Stuart) was trying to step up, lost his feet and kind of scrambled to get back up, and fell.

“It probably looked prettier (than it was).”

Hurricanes claim ex-Wing Andrej Nestrasil off waivers

Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News 12:36 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

Winnipeg, Manitoba — Andrej Nestrasil, a third-round pick of the Red Wings in 2009, is on the move.

The only problem is it's not within the organization.

Instead, Nestrasil was claimed by the Hurricanes on Thursday, one day after being placed on waivers by the Red Wings.

The move was needed to allow Stephen Weiss (groin) to come off the injured list. Weiss was assigned to Grand Rapids for a conditioning assignment.

Red Wings players, though disappointed with Nestrasil's departure, were happy he's remaining in the NHL.

Disappointed to see their friend go to another team, but happy to see Nestrasil will get another opportunity in the NHL.

"That's huge for him," forward Tomas Tatar said. "He deserves it. He's a great guy, a real hard worker. It's exciting.

"He was thankful to stay here after training camp, I don't think he expected it, but for his hard work and personality he deserved to be here. I'm real glad Detroit (and now Carolina) gave him a chance (to show) he can play in this league."

Nestrasil had two assists in 13 games with the Red Wings.

"I heard there were a whole bunch of teams that tried to claim him," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "If he were my own kid, I told him yesterday, it would be great for him to play a year in the American League and score goals like crazy.

"If he can fit in, help them and play every night, that'll be really good for him. He's a really good kid. We really liked him."

The Hurricanes, coached by former Red Wings assistant Bill Peters, must keep Nestrasil on their NHL roster a minimum of 30 days.

"Andrej is a young player with good size who we feel can contribute to our group of forwards," Hurricanes general manager Ron Francis said in a statement. "He has improved in each of his pro seasons and took a big step last year with Grand Rapids."

Ouellet back up

Xavier Ouellet was disappointed to be sent to Grand Rapids after performing well during the exhibition season, but the Red Wings didn't have any room on the roster.

So Ouellet went to the American League, and played well.

And when Brendan Smith (infected finger) was placed on the injured list for a week — he was hurt during a fight Tuesday in Columbus — Ouellet was promoted.

"Obviously my goal was to make the team," Ouellet said. "I was a little disappointed but it's part of the job. All I have to do is play hockey and take care of my game.

"They will decide where I am going to play."

For the next three games, that'll be in the NHL.

"I'm real excited," said Ouellet, who had five points (one goal) in 13 games with the Griffins. "I've been waiting for an opportunity and I guess I have it."

Said Babcock: "We just want him to play like he can. ... He seems to play like a veteran guy. He's under control."

Ouellet was a second-round pick (48th overall) of the Red Wings in 2011. He appeared in four games with Detroit last season and was called up for Game 5 of the first-round playoff series against Boston.

And, he was calm and didn't look out of place.

"It was a great experience for me," the 6-foot-1, 200-pound Ouellet said. "I realized at the end of the day it's the same hockey game."

Ice chips

Thursday's game against the Jets was a chance for Red Wings goaltender Petr Mrazek, who started, to go against longtime Czech Republic friend and teammate, Jets goaltender Ondrej Pavelec.

The two have been teammates on Czech national teams and are friends off the ice.

"We were talking yesterday for a bit when we got here a joking a little bit," Mrazek said. "But when the game starts, it's a game and I want to win."

Mrazek did just that, stopping 28 saves in his regular-season debut.

... Pavel Datsyuk (groin) skated on his own but remains day-to-day.

... Playing in front of family and friends in Winnipeg, Darren Helm was dominant in the face-off circle winning 13-of-14 (92.9 percent) draws.

... The Red Wings improved to 3-1-0 against Western Conference teams.

... Tatar extended his point streak to four games and has six points (four goals, two assists) in those games.

... Danny DeKeyser has a three game point streak, recording an assist in each of the games.

Detroit Red Wings

Petr Mrazek keeps Red Wings in game early, Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader lead charge late

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on November 21, 2014 at 1:01 AM, updated November 21, 2014 at 1:15 AM

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - The Detroit Red Wings got away with playing half a game on Thursday.

That's because Petr Mrazek was sharp early on, keeping his team in the game, and Tomas Tatar and Justin Abdelkader were real good late, spearheading the comeback in a 4-3 victory over the Winnipeg Jets at the MTS Centre.

Tatar and Abdelkader teamed up for the tying and winning goals in the third period. Mrazek made 28 saves in his first appearance this season for the Red Wings.

It was far from a 60-minute effort, but it doesn't really matter how you end up with two points.

"They were better than us early and they came out and were physical and we were kind of standing around watching them and didn't want to get involved in the game," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "Our goaltender was good and our penalty kill was good. It kept us in the game, and then we got upset or whatever we did we finally dug in and got playing.

"Once we got executing we had lots of opportunity around their net. So in the end it's a big road win for us. Winnipeg is always a tough place to play, just because they have a good back end and great forwards, but also they play well here."

The Red Wings outshot the Jets 14-9 in the third period. They tied it when Brian Lashoff's shot from the point when in off Abdelkader at the net front with seven minutes remaining. Abdelkader then made a terrific play to take the puck into the zone and pass out front to Tatar, who scored his second goal of the game with 4:50 remaining.

"I just saw Abby beat his guy off the boards and we out-numbered the guys there and he tried to throw it to my stick and I was just in the right spot and put it in," Tatar said.

Babcock said his team "gutted it out."

"We had good leadership, obviously in our room, we had good leadership on the bench, the vocalness of Dan Cleary and a few unique guys," Babcock said. "Then we just dug in and found a way to get it done."

After a scoreless first period, the Jets scored three times in the second. Dustin Byfuglien (2:15) and Adam Lowry (9:32) staked Winnipeg to a 2-0 lead before Tatar (10:02) and Johan Franzen (10:52) evened it.

Mathieu Perreault put the Jets ahead 3-2 at 16:12.

The damage to that point could have been worse if not for Mrazek.

"I thought he was very good," Babcock said. "I thought he was jittery like the rest of us early, and then he really got going and made some good plays and he supports the rush and he's a confident kid, knows how to play.

"Mrazek was great early, his puck-handling was good. He got caught deep on the third goal, but even in the end when it's six-on-five he plays the puck so good that we were able to get it back a number of times just because he was able to get out and play it."

Mrazek was particularly pleased to beat his good friend and fellow Czech goalie Ondrej Pavelec.

"I feel great right now," Mrazek said. "We're good friends, but when I step on the ice it's a game and everyone wants to win. I'm really happy that I beat Ondrej."

Tatar said the team is very confident with Mrazek in net.

"We trust him, he showed to us many times he can play in the NHL," Tatar said. "He's really good. Down in Grand Rapids he was tremendous for us. I think he got lots of confidence. When Petr or Howie (Jimmy Howard) is in the net we treat it the same way. Really nice to have those kind of goalies."

Detroit Red Wings 4, Jets 3: Tomas Tatar snaps tie late with second goal of game as Detroit storms back

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on November 20, 2014 at 10:38 PM, updated November 21, 2014 at 1:15 AM

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - The Detroit Red Wings didn't get playing the way they want until the midway mark of the game Thursday.

That's usually a recipe for disaster. But not on this night.

Justin Abdelkader and Tomas Tatar scored 2:10 apart in the third period as the Red Wings defeated the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 at the MTS Centre.

Petr Mrazek made 28 saves for the win in his Red Wings season debut.

Tatar scored his second goal of the game to snap a 3-3 tie with 4:50 to play. He went to the net and fired in a pass from Abdelkader, who did a good job of carrying the puck into the zone to set up the play.

Tatar, who also contributed an assist for a career-high three points, has eight goals this season, seven in the past 10 games.

Abdelkader had tied it with seven minutes remaining when he scored his sixth goal of the season. Abdelkader was in front of the net when Brian Lashoff's shot from the point hit his skate and got past goaltender Ondrej Pavelec.

The Red Wings improved to 10-4-5, the Jets fell to 10-8-3.

A defensive struggle for 20 minutes turned into a shootout in the second period, with the Jets doing most of the shooting. Winnipeg dominated the first half of the period and jumped ahead 2-0 on goals by Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry.

Big Byfuglien was hard to handle in front of the net when he took a pass from Evander Kane and banged in the puck at 2:15.

Lowry scored at 9:32, flipping in a rebound that was sitting in the crease.

The Red Wings appeared on the verge of unraveling before Tatar answered quickly at 10:02. Tobias Enstrom's clearing attempt landed on Tatar's stick and he buried it for his sixth goal in the past 10 games.

A terrific effort by Johan Franzen resulted in the tying goal at 12:52. He skated down the right side with speed, made a nice move around Mark Stuart, who fell, and fired in his sixth goal. It came on the power play, as Enstrom was off for tripping.

The Jets, however, regained the lead when Mathieu Perreault skated out from behind the net with the puck and fired it past Mrazek at 16:12.

The Red Wings had two great chances to tie it late in the period when Justin Abdelkader and Drew Miller rattled shots off the post.

Each team went 0 for 2 on the power play in a tight-checking, scoreless first period.

The Jets had better scoring chances. Mrazek was sharp. He stopped Andrew Ladd on a breakaway early on and later turned aside a shot by Matt Halischuk during a two-on-one.

The Red Wings played without Pavel Datsyuk (groin) for the second game in a row and the fourth time in the past six games. He is hoping to return for Saturday's game in Toronto.

The Jets won both games against the Red Wings in 2013-14.

Second-period analysis: Jets 3, Red Wings 2

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - A defensive struggle turned into a shootout in the second period. The Detroit Red Wings got the worst of it, but they're still in it through 40 minutes, trailing the Winnipeg Jets 3-2 at the MTS Centre.

The Jets dominated the first half of the period and took a 2-0 lead on goals by Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry.

The Red Wings answered with goals from Tomas Tatar (10:02) and Johan Franzen (12:52 on the power play) to tie it before Mathieu Perreault scored against Petr Mrazek to give the Jets the lead again.
WINNIPEG, Manitoba - The Detroit Red Wings and Winnipeg Jets are scoreless after one period at the MTS Centre Thursday, not surprising for two of the NHL’s top six defensive teams.

Each team has gone 0 for 2 on the power play.

The Jets had better scoring chances. Petr Mrazek, making his Red Wings season debut, was sharp. He stopped Andrew Ladd on a breakaway early on and turned aside a shot by Matt Halischuk during a two-on-one later on.

GRAND RAPIDS, MI – A woman has pleaded guilty to larceny charges that included the theft of a puck that was the first NHL goal scored by Detroit Red Wings player Gustav Nyquist.

Muskegon resident Amy Lynn Jones, 32, pleaded guilty to larceny by conversion and receiving and concealing stolen property as a fourth felony offender. The Kent County Prosecutor’s Office agreed to drop charges of conducting a criminal enterprise and breaking and entering.

The plea deal entered in Kent County Circuit Court secures at least a five-year prison sentence and saves the Red Wings standout from the possibility of having to testify.

Kent County sheriff investigators say former employees of the Evergreen Storage Facility, 4000 Alpine Ave. NW, illegally entered units and took items in August 2012.

Police said the items were then offered for sale in an “unauthorized auction” in October 2012 that included the puck, which is framed next to a photo of the 25-year-old right wing and Sweden native.

Nyquist played for the Red Wings’ farm team Grand Rapids Griffins during the 2012-13 season before returning to Detroit. He is currently one of the hottest players in the NHL sitting atop a tie for first place in the league for power-play goals this season with five so far.

Numerous people who rented storage facilities were targeted in the scheme, according to police. Nyquist is among 15 victims listed in court files.

Jones will be sentenced Jan. 13.
Detroit Red Wings Gameday: Surprising Winnipeg Jets have been among NHL’s top defensive teams

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on November 20, 2014 at 3:05 PM, updated November 20, 2014 at 4:17 PM

GAME INFORMATION
• Who: Detroit Red Wings (9-4-5) vs. Winnipeg Jets (10-7-3)
• Faceoff: 8 p.m. at MTS Centre
• Live coverage: Join the MLive open thread/live updates at 7 p.m. ET and follow Ansar Khan (@AnsarKhanMlive) and Brendan Savage (@BrendanSavage) on Twitter.
• TV: Fox Sports Detroit
• Radio: WXYT-FM (97.1) and Red Wings radio network

GAME NOTES
• Petr Mrazek, making his first start of the season for the Red Wings, is 3-5-0, with a 1.80 goals-against average, .926 save percentage and two shutouts in 11 career appearances with Detroit.
• Defenseman Xavier Ouellet, playing in his first game this season for Detroit, appeared in four regular season games with the Red Wings in 2013-14, one of them against Winnipeg.
• Winnipeg native Darren Helm will be playing in his second career game in his hometown.
• The Red Wings’ all-time record vs. the Atlanta/Winnipeg franchise is 10-5-1. The Jets won both meetings last season, 4-2 at home and 4-3 in a shootout at Joe Louis Arena.
• Tomas Tatar has five goals in his past nine games after scoring one goal in his first nine games.
• The Red Wings have scored two power-play goals in four of their past six games and are 9 for 27 (33 percent) during that stretch, moving up to 14th in the league at 19.2 percent (14 for 73). The Jets are 29th on the power play at 9.0 percent (6 for 67).

PRE-GAME LINKS
Here are some recent Red Wings-related stories to peruse until game time:
• Xavier Ouellet makes his Red Wings season debut tonight
• Young forward Andrej Nestrasil claimed on waivers by Carolina
• Red Wings were prepared to lose Nestrasil, who would have tough time cracking lineup
• Red Wings recall Xavier Ouellet from Grand Rapids, put Brendan Smith on IR
• Andrej Nestrasil waived in order to clear a roster spot for Stephen Weiss
• Tomas Jurco, Darren Helm gain some confidence by scoring in 5-0 win at Columbus
• Red Wings bounce back with strong goaltending, attack and special teams

Detroit Red Wings’ lineup vs. Jets: Xavier Ouellet makes season debut for Detroit; Pavel Datsyuk still out

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on November 20, 2014 at 2:09 PM, updated November 20, 2014 at 6:43 PM

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - Defenseman Xavier Ouellet will make his Detroit Red Wings season debut tonight against the Winnipeg Jets at the MTS Centre (8 p.m., Fox Sports Detroit).

Pavel Datsyuk (groin) will miss his second game in a row - he’s sat out four of the past six games - but he skated after practice in hopes of being ready for Saturday’s game in Toronto.

Ouellet will be paired with Brian Lashoff. Jakub Kindl is a healthy scratch for the third game in a row.

Xavier-Ouellet-11-20-14 Defenseman Xavier Ouellet before season debut with Red Wings.

Ouellet was recalled Wednesday from the Grand Rapids Griffins after Brendan Smith was placed on short-term injured reserve (minimum seven days) with an infected hand. Ouellet played in four regular season games for Detroit in 2013-14, as well as Game 5 of the first-round playoff series against Boston.

Petr Mrazek, Ouellet’s teammate with the Grand Rapids Griffins, will make his first start of the season in goal for the Red Wings. He’ll be opposing fellow Czech Ondrej Pavelec, who is 7-6-2, with a 2.14 goals-against average and .923 save percentage.

"It's a battle between Czech goalies, so that means a lot to me," Mrazek said. "But more importantly I want to have a good game here and get two points.

"We're good friends. We were talking yesterday about it when we got here, joking a little bit, but when the game starts it's a game and we want to win."

Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said a backup goalie, ideally, should play between 15 and 20 games a season.

"Pete played real well for us, he's kind of like X in exhibition, and we thought he was great in training camp," Babcock said. "He gets an opportunity tonight. Do I know whether I'm right or not? No. I just gathered information and make the best decision I can."

Here are the Red Wings’ lines and defense pairs:

Gustav Nyquist-Henrik Zetterberg-Johan Franzen
Justin Abdelkader-Riley Sheahan-Tomas Tatar
Daniel Cleary-Darren Helm-Tomas Jurco
Drew Miller-Luke Glendening-Joakim Andersson
Pavel Datsyuk (groin, out)

On defense:

Jonathan Ericsson-Niklas Kronwall
Kyle Quincey-Danny DeKeyser
Brian Lashoff-Xavier Ouellet
Jakub Kindl (scratched)

In goal:

Petr Mrazek (starting)

Jimmy Howard

Andrej Nestrasil claimed by Carolina Hurricanes on waivers from Detroit Red Wings

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on November 20, 2014 at 12:05 PM, updated November 20, 2014 at 7:01 PM

WINNIPEG, Manitoba - The Carolina Hurricanes today claimed forward Andrej Nestrasil on waivers from the Detroit Red Wings.

"Andrej is a young player with good size who we feel can contribute to our group of forwards," Hurricanes general manager Ron Francis said in a statement. "He has improved in each of his pro seasons and took a big step last year with Grand Rapids."

The Hurricanes, coached by former Red Wings assistant coach Bill Peters, are required to keep Nestrasil on the NHL roster for at least 30 days.

"I heard there were a whole bunch of teams that tried to claim him," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "Nesty's a great kid. If he were my own kid, like I told him yesterday, I think it would be great for him to play a year in the American League and score like crazy. I wish him well.

"If he can fit in and help them and play every night that's really good for him. That's what he wants to do, be an NHL player. We really like him here, he's a really good kid."

The Red Wings waived Nestrasil on Wednesday in order to create a roster spot for Stephen Weiss, who will begin a one- or two-game conditioning stint with the Griffins Saturday at Lake Erie.

Petr-Mrazek-11-20-14 Petr Mrazek prepared for his first start with Red Wings this season.

Some of Nestrasil's former teammates with the Grand Rapids Griffins were sad to see him leave the organization but glad that he is getting an opportunity elsewhere.

"It's awesome," Riley Sheahan said. "I think a lot of the guys here are happy for him. He's such a great guy off the ice and he works really hard and he's a great player. Obviously, we'll miss him, but it's great for him to get a chance. Whenever you see him he's got a smile on his face and always joking around and fun to be around."

Sheahan added: "I think the biggest asset for him is that he's so strong on the puck. It's cool to see him get picked up and hopefully he'll have success."

Said goaltender Petr Mrazek: "We're good friends. He played well here but that's the hockey life."

Tomas-Tatar-11-20-14 Red Wings forward Tomas Tatar talks about facing the Jets.

Nestrasil, 23, earned a roster spot following a strong training camp and preseason. The Red Wings liked his size (6-3, 200), ability to hang onto the puck and skills. But he is not projected to be a top-six forward in the NHL, so the club viewed him as expendable.

Nestrasil had no goals, two assists and a minus-3 rating in 13 games. He was a healthy scratch in the past three games and five of the previous eight, after playing in the first 10 games.

Detroit selected Nestrasil with its third pick in the 2009 entry draft (75th overall).

Tatar’s 2 goals lift Red Wings to win over Jets

By WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) >> Tomas Tatar scored two goals and added an assist as the Detroit Red Wings beat the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 on Thursday night.

Justin Abdelkader had the tying goal and an assist for the Red Wings, and Johan Franzen scored his sixth of the season.

Dustin Byfuglien, Adam Lowry and Mathieu Perrault had goals for Winnipeg. Ondrej Pavelec made 23 saves.

Detroit rested Jimmy Howard after he was in net for the Red Wings’ 5-0 victory over Columbus on Tuesday. With backup Jonas Gustavsson out because of a dislocated shoulder, Petr Mrazek played in his 12th career game and first this season, and made 28 saves.

Detroit was without center Pavel Datsyuk (groin) for a second straight game.

Tatar scored the winning goal at 15:10 of the third period when he one-timed a pass from Abdelkader.

Abdelkader had tied it 3-3 with seven minutes left after he appeared to tip in Brian Lashoff’s long shot that Pavelec might have pushed in.

The Jets built a 2-0 lead after a scoreless first period.

Byfuglien ended his 14-game goal drought off a nifty setup by Evander Kane. Kane was at the side of the net and sent a between-the-legs backhand pass that Byfuglien used to score his third of the season at 2:15 of the second.

Rookie Adam Lowry scored his second goal off a rebound at 9:32.

The Red Wings didn’t get their first shot in the second period until almost 11 minutes in, but they quickly made up for it.

Just 30 seconds after Lowry’s goal, Tatar took advantage of defenseman Toby Enstrom’s turnover, intercepting his pass and beating Pavelec with a high shot to make it 2-1.

Then with Enstrom in the penalty box for tripping, Franzen scored his sixth when he went around falling defenseman Mark Stuart and fired in the tying goal at 12:52.

Perrault, who assisted on Byfuglien’s goal, put the Jets ahead 3-2 with just under four minutes left in the second.

Perrault took a pass from Jacob Trouba around Winnipeg’s blue line and skated down the boards. He took a shot, got his rebound, went behind the net, and then spun around at the side and beat Mrazek at 16:12.

NOTES: Winnipeg, which beat New Jersey on Tuesday, will finish a three-game homestand Sunday against St. Louis. ... Detroit will travels to Toronto for a game on Saturday.

Wings beat Jets in comeback fashion, 4-3

AP
NOV 20, 2014 10:36p ET

Bruce Fedyck / USA TODAY Sports

Petr Mrazek played in his 12th career game and first this season, and made 28 saves.

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) -- Tomas Tatar followed his coach's advice, and was rewarded with a two-goal game.

Tatar scored twice and added an assist as the Detroit Red Wings beat the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 on Thursday night.

Red Wings coach Mike Babcock had told his players to keep shooting the puck at the net after the team lost 4-1 to Montreal on Sunday.

"I guess (Babcock's) right. He's been in the league forever," said Tatar, who had three shots. "He's a great coach. We want to score always, but sometimes it doesn't go our way, so you have to play simple and just put the puck on the net. We were more aggressive. We knew we had nothing to lose, so we just wanted to force the puck to the net."

Justin Abdelkader had the tying goal and an assist for the Red Wings, and Johan Franzen scored his sixth of the season.

Dustin Byfuglien, Adam Lowry and Mathieu Perrault had goals for Winnipeg. Ondrej Pavelec made 23 saves.

Detroit rested Jimmy Howard after he was in net for the Red Wings' 5-0 victory over Columbus on Tuesday. With backup Jonas Gustavsson out because of a dislocated shoulder, Petr Mrazek played in his 12th career game -- and first this season -- and made 28 saves.

Detroit was without center Pavel Datsyuk (groin) for a second straight game.

Even though the Red Wings trailed 3-2 after two periods, they outshot the Jets 14-9 in the third.

Tatar scored the winning goal at 15:10 of the third period when he one-timed a pass from Abdelkader.

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Abdelkader had tied it 3-3 with seven minutes left after he appeared to tip in Brian Lashoff's long shot that Pavelec might have pushed in.

The Jets built a 2-0 lead after a scoreless first period.

Byfuglien ended his 14-game goal drought off a nifty setup by Evander Kane. Kane was at the side of the net and sent a between-the-legs backhand pass that Byfuglien used to score his third of the season at 2:15 of the second.

"We worked the first 40 (minutes) pretty good as a team," Byfuglien said. "There were a few little things that we could have done better.

"Throughout the whole year we've stuck together and played pretty good as a team. You're going to have your games where you get a few mistakes and it ends up in the back of the net."

Rookie Adam Lowry scored his second goal off a rebound at 9:32.

The Red Wings didn't get their first shot in the second period until almost 11 minutes in, but they quickly made up for it.

Just 30 seconds after Lowry's goal, Tatar took advantage of defenseman Toby Enstrom's turnover, intercepting his pass and beating Pavelec with a high shot to make it 2-1.

Then, with Enstrom in the penalty box for tripping, Franzen scored his sixth when he went around falling defenseman Mark Stuart and scored the tying goal at 12:52.

"Our goaltender was good and our penalty kill was good, and that kept us in the game," Babcock said. "Then we got upset or whatever we did, but we finally dug in and got playing. Once we got executing, we had plenty of opportunities around their net."

"In the end, it's a big road win for us."

Perrault, who assisted on Byfuglien's goal, put the Jets ahead 3-2 with just under four minutes left in the second.

Perrault took a pass from Jacob Trouba around Winnipeg's blue line and skated down the boards. He took a shot, got his rebound, went behind the net, and then spun around at the side and beat Mrazek at 16:12.

NOTES: Winnipeg, which beat New Jersey on Tuesday, will finish a three-game homestand Sunday against St. Louis. ... Detroit will travel to Toronto for a game on Saturday.
Wings lose Nestrasil to Carolina on waivers

DANA WAKUI
FOX Sports Detroit
NOV 20, 2014 1:27p ET

Tom Szczerbowski
The Wings took Andrej Nestrasil in the third round (75th overall) in the 2009 draft.

The Red Wings knew it was a possibility, and it happened Thursday.

The Carolina Hurricanes claimed forward Andrej Nestrasil on waivers before the noon deadline.

Hurricanes vice president and general manager Ron Francis said in a release, "Andrej is a young player with good size who we feel can contribute to our group of forwards. He has improved in each of his pro seasons and took a big step last year with Grand Rapids."

Hurricanes coach Bill Peters was an assistant to Wings coach Mike Babcock for the last three seasons so he likely knows something about Nestrasil.

The Wings took Nestrasil in the third round (75th overall) in the 2009 draft.

The Hurricanes are on a road trip, playing tonight in Los Angeles.

Nestrasil will join the team for Saturday's game in Denver and will wear No. 15.

After Wednesday's practice, Nestrasil spoke about the possibility of leaving the Wings organization if another team claimed him.

"Obviously, everybody knows me here," Nestrasil said. "This is the organization I would love to play for, but if someone else claims me then I would be happy to go somewhere else and play for the organization that claims me. That's hockey life, just take it and go with it."

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Babcock said he believed Nestrasil needed to get a couple of years of experience at the American Hockey League level.

Nestrasil thought he had learned what it takes to play at the NHL level.

"You just have to be smart," Nestrasil said. "Everybody's strong, everybody's fast, there's a lot of good hockey players and every little mistake decides a game whether it goes on way or the other. Don't make mistakes. Just make good plays and not bad plays."

Nestrasil will get to see his former teammates when they visit Carolina on Dec. 7. The Hurricanes don't visit Detroit until April 7.

Wings try to keep rolling against Jets

ALAN FERGUSON
AP
NOV 20, 2014 11:33a ET

Red Wings Blue Jackets Hockey
Jay LaPrete

The Red Wings recorded a season-high 40 shots against the Blue Jackets Tuesday.

Pavel Datsyuk could sit out again Thursday night when Detroit visits Winnipeg, but the Red Wings have played well during their star center's absences this season.

Following a lopsided victory to open a three-game road trip, Detroit will try to keep rolling against the Jets, winners in three of four at home.

Detroit was forced to play without Datsyuk again Tuesday after he aggravated a nagging groin injury, but the Red Wings (9-4-5) routed Columbus 5-0. Two of their younger players, Tomas Tatar and Tomas Jurco, each had a goal and an assist in the most decisive win of the season.

They also helped Detroit record a season-high 40 shots and rebound from a 4-1 loss to Montreal on Sunday.

"We haven't been shooting the puck like we should," coach Mike Babcock said. "We were always looking for a pass. Tonight, we shot the puck and were rewarded."

The Red Wings are 5-1-2 in games Datsyuk has missed and have totaled 12 goals in his three absences since Nov. 6. The forward, who has five goals and six assists in 10 games, did not practice with the team in Winnipeg on Wednesday.

With Datsyuk likely out again, Detroit will face a team that's 3-0-1 in its last four games in its building. The Jets (10-7-3) avoided a third consecutive loss with a 3-1 win over New Jersey in Tuesday's opener to a three-game homestand.

Winnipeg is one of the league's best defensive teams, allowing 2.05 goals per game, but was averaging 1.78 offensively before scoring a combined six goals in the past two contests.

Michael Frolik had his third goal in four games in the third period Tuesday and assisted on another.

"You're hopeful that you can get closer to your team identity. I think we're on page with that," coach Paul Maurice said. "I have a little longer-term perspective on what we're trying to do. I know it's going to take some time. We're in the early stages in a bunch of things, how we generate offense.

"There are lots of things I'm sure are going to get better, but I don't know if they're going to get better in a week or two."

In his first season in Winnipeg, Maurice led his team to a pair of wins over Detroit. Frolik was one of three players with a goal and an assist in a 4-2 home victory Nov. 4, 2013, and the Red Wings couldn't take advantage of two Datsyuk goals in a 3-2 shootout loss in Detroit eight days later.

"They're a good hockey club. They've played good teams and had some success," Maurice said. "It's quite a challenge, but we're playing as strongly now as we have this year."

Ondrej Pavelec is 3-1-0 in four career starts against Detroit and has allowed a combined three goals in those three wins, including the shootout victory last November. Backup goaltender Michael Hutchinson, 3-0-1 with a 0.75 GAA in his last five appearances, has never faced the Red Wings.

Petr Mrazek is expected make his season debut for Detroit and face Winnipeg for the first time. Mrazek, 3-5-0 with a 1.80 GAA in 11 career NHL games, is replacing the injured Jonas Gustavsson, who is likely to miss two months after dislocating his left shoulder.
EDMONTON — The New Jersey Devils have been hunkered down in Edmonton since opening their four-game trip through Western Canada with a 3-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday.

And like the Oilers, they have their own struggles to contend with. They arrived in Edmonton with just two wins to show for their last eight games; the power play was 2-for-23 in that stretch, and they are averaging just 2.42 goals a game.

It is the lack of offensive production that has been a real sore spot for the Devils.

“We’re not scoring on our chances,” Devils head coach Peter DeBoer said. “We’ve got to find a way to get a power-play goal. Someone’s got to get a goal for us. That’s the bottom line.”

Goaltender Cory Schneider has started each of the Devils’ 19 games, to mixed reviews. He has also equaled Martin Brodeur’s team record for consecutive starts to open a season, a mark set by Brodeur in 2001-02.

The penalty kill, meanwhile, has been a perfect 16-for-16 over the last four games.

Following Friday’s game, the Oilers won’t see an Eastern Conference team until the New York Rangers report to Rexall Place on Dec. 14, which is important given the club’s 0-9-1 record against Western opponents.

Edmonton is 6-2-1 against the East but on a four-game losing streak. All the losses have been decided by a goal.

“These gut you as a group,” said head coach Dallas Eakins. “When you’re getting out-chanced greatly and out-scored greatly, you don’t know where to point your gun.

“With these four games, it kills you that your one goal away from a four-game win streak or being 3-1. We have to find a way to get on the other side.”

Minor league swap

Centre Will Acton was dealt to the Vancouver Canucks in a minor-league deal that netted the Oilers Kellan Lain, also a centre.

Lain, 25, had registered one assist and 20 penalty minutes in the 10 games he’d played with the American Hockey League’s Utica Comets this season. In 86 career AHL games, the 6-foot-6, 210-pound native of Oakville, registered 20 points and 155 PIMs. He played nine games for the Canucks last season.

Save for three games of relief duty, Acton spent the early part of this season in the Oilers press box then found himself with a ticket to Oklahoma City. In six games with the Barons, he had one goal and one assist.

For the record

Ryan Miller, who registered his 11th straight win against Edmonton in the Vancouver Canucks’ 5-4 victory on Wednesday, now holds the longest game winning streak against an opponent by an active goaltender.

His 11-0-0 record is the third most wins without a loss against one team in NHL history, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Elias also pointed out that Steve Pinizzotto’s NHL goal makes him the third oldest Oiler to score his first. He follows Ilya Byakin (30 years, 277 days) and Jaroslav Pouzar (30 years, 255 days). Pinizzotto hit the milestone at the age of 30 years and 207 days.

Edmonton Oilers swapped centres with the Vancouver Canucks in a minor deal on Thursday, acquiring Kellan Lain for Will Acton.

Lain, 25, has plated in 10 games this season for the Canucks' American Hockey League affiliate, the Utica Comets, registering one assist and 20 penalty minutes.

Lain played nine games for the Canucks last season, scoring one goal and 21 penalty minutes.

In 86 career AHL games, the six-foot-six, 210-pound centre has recorded 20 points (7G, 13A) and 155 penalty minutes.

Acton, who was signed by the Oilers as a free agent prior to last season, played three games with the Oilers in 2014-15 with no points. The 27-year-old son of Oilers associate coach Keith Acton had scored two points in six games for the Oilers' AHL affiliate in Oklahoma City this season. He played 30 games for the Oilers in 2012-13.
EDMONTON — It appears that reparation will have to wait until the next time that Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jordan Eberle are united on the Edmonton Oilers' top line.

The day after head coach Dallas Eakins had said that the club's key players could not get the job done in the 5-4 loss to the Vancouver Canucks, he separated the top trio, sending Hall out with Leon Draisaitl and Teddy Purcell.

Additionally, the power play units were retooled in the hopes that the Oilers can put the brakes on the four-game losing streak they will drag into Friday's game against the New Jersey Devils.

"Anytime they do what we call getting the bingo balls out, it means that something's gone awry," said Hall, whose old spot is again being occupied by Benoit Pouliot, who filled in when Hall was sidelined with a sprained knee ligament.

"When you're winning and playing well," Hall continued, "the lines don't change. That's a message to us that we have to get better and we have to find some consistency with the lineup."

Both Eberle and Nikita Nikitin, who continues to struggle on the back end, were both kept off the ice on Thursday because of nagging issues. Jesse Joensuu skated in Eberle's spot alongside Nugent-Hopkins and Pouliot, while Martin Marincin skated with Jeff Petry.

Marincin, who has played spectator for the last five games, will draw in if Nikitin does not play.

"We put a lot of pressure on ourselves; we have high expectations, too," said Nugent-Hopkins. "If we're not playing well, we know, but we have to find a way to be consistent out there, too. We have to be driving the team.

"When we take a night off or a period off, it trickles down to the rest of the team. We just have to find a way to be better.

"We're on a four-game slide here. You don't expect everything to be the same," he continued. "It's good to shake things up when things aren't going that well."

Eakins said Thursday the intent of the changes was to find another line that will demand More Coverage from opposition. He liked what he saw out of Draisaitl and Purcell in the loss to the Canucks, which is why Hall has been put with the duo.

Whatever the reason, Draisaitl was anxious to get out for his first test run with Hall.

"To have a guy like him on my side is going to make it easier for myself. I'm really looking forward to the opportunity," said the rookie, who saw more ice time against the Canucks than he had in the previous three games.

Playing with Hall should see his time stay elevated, plus Draisaitl was working with Hall, Purcell, David Perron and Justin Schultz on one of the power-play units.

"I don't think just because I'm playing with Hallsie, it's going to give me more minutes. I still have to earn my ice time," he said.

"I do think I had a bit of a lull through the last couple of games. I didn't play very well, and that's on me for sure. That showed in my ice time as well. (Wednesday) night was a step in the right direction. I felt better out there."

The trio of Hall, Nugent-Hopkins and Eberle has been doing much of the heavy offensive lifting through the first 19 games, accounting for 16 of the team's 48 goals. Seven of those goals have been netted by Hall.

"Not every night is going to be spectacular, especially when you're playing against a line like the Sedins, but we expect a lot more out of ourselves," Hall said. "Those guys are great players, and I have a ton of respect for what they do on the ice, but I feel like we can compete with them and outplay them."
EDMONTON — What’s happened to Thomas Vanek’s hands? The Minnesota Wild forward has scored just one goal on 33 shots in 17 games, with 14 of those shots coming in two games. He’s had about the same success around the net as winger Dany Heatley had there, but Heatley’s career was running on fumes in Minny. Vanek is supposed to have gas left in his tank. He’s notched six goals in his last 34 games if you count his playoff output with the Montreal Canadiens, only three of them even-strength.

I wouldn’t be surprised if Dustin Penner’s agent Gerry Johannson gives Hockey Canada’s Spengler Cup general manager Steve Tambellini a call to see if they would have room for him at the Christmas tournament in Switzerland. Of course, Tambly traded Penner from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings. “Dustin has had some lingering injuries, and he’s OK to sit tight. He’s got training facilities in California (to stay in shape but no team to skate with). We’ve had some interest from (NHL) teams,” said Johannson.

-Zdeno Chara’s left knee is coming along — no skating yet — and it looks like he’ll avoid surgery, but he is weeks from playing in Boston, where the Bruins defence keeps on getting ripped apart. Now, Adam McQuaid has a busted thumb after Kevin Shattenkirk hit him with a shot. Best news there: the strong play of Joe Morrow, the Sherwood Park defenceman now playing with Torey Krug.

-Cam Ward has bounced back and is giving the Carolina Hurricanes strong netminding. “Maybe it was all those injuries he’s had, but he’s been very good,” said an NHL pro scout. All that talk that Anton Khudobin could be the starter there has died down. He hasn’t won a game in six starts. Meanwhile, Carolina doesn’t know what to do with Alex Semin, who is making $7 million per season and has zero goals on 17 shots and five assists in 14 games.

-I know Oilers fans don’t want to hear this, but centre Riley Nash, a former Oilers first-round draft pick in 2007, leads the Hurricanes with 13 points, plays 18 minutes a game and is an even player on a team that’s solidly minus. Maybe he wasn’t as desultory a pick as everybody thought. The Oilers dealt him to Carolina for a second-round pick, taking Martin Marincin with it.

-The Winnipeg Jets had their 115th straight sellout Thursday at the NHL’s loudest, smallest barn (15,026, just 440,000 square feet, built for $133.5 million) when the Detroit Red Wings paid a visit.

-Jakub Kindl is likely available via trade if the Red Wings are bringing up strong rookie Xavier Ouellet to play against Winnipeg and bypassing Kindl, who has really never got traction as an integral part of Detroit’s blue-line. “Only Kindl I know that can’t read (plays),” said a sarcastic pro scout. The biggest concern in Detroit, though, is Pavel Datsyuk’s on-again, off-again groin issues, that and centre Stephen Weiss’s groin problems which have rendered him a non-factor (28 out of 101 games) since they signed him to that five-year free-agent contract in the summer of 2013.

-Arizona Coyotes rookie defenceman Brandon Gormley, who scored his first goal against the Oilers last Sunday, was on crutches as he made his way to the medical room at Rexall Place after Benoit Pouliot’s ill-timed offensive-zone hit from behind into the boards.

-Amateur scout watching the Erie Otters’ phenom centre Connor McDavid play. “He’s got about eight different gears,” he said. Same scout on the best defenceman in the 2015 draft Noah Hanifin, expected to go No. 3 overall: “Skates like Jay Bouwmeester. I don’t know if he can run a power play, though, because he doesn’t have a great shot.”

-Ex-Oilers backup Jeff Deslauriers, who had auditions with the Anaheim Ducks and the New York Islanders in the pre-season, has just signed with Dynamo Riga in the KHL. He did a bunch of interviews at the airport in Riga when he arrived and they had 7,000 hits on their website to see the new recruit. He was supposed to start against Slovan Bratislava Thursday. Another former Oiler, winger J.F. Jacques, is now playing in Klagenfurt in Austria.

Hockey World ‘Short Shifts’: Production by Wild’s Thomas Vanek has vanished

Edmonton Journal November 20, 2014

- It’s no surprise goalie Josh Harding cleared waivers now because he hasn’t played in almost a calendar year (multiple sclerosis complications, then a busted foot), but, say, at Christmas time when he’s playing well in Iowa, then what? The Minnesota Wild’s No. 1 goalie, Darcy Kuemper, has to clear waivers and veteran Nik Backstrom can’t be sent down because he has a no-move clause. In a perfect world, they’d probably like to move Backstrom’s $3.4-million cap hit this year and next, but that’s a lot of money for a 36-year-old goalie.

- Mark Giordano getting Norris buzz but complementary story: Calgary defence partner T.J. Brodie. “He’s come on like gangbusters,” said one NHL GM. Right now, is there a better first defensive pairing in the entire league?

- It’s interesting that Arizona State University will be an NCAA Division 1 hockey school in three years. It should be an easy sell to recruits: bring skates and sandals. The most likely first pick in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft, winger Auston Matthews, learned his craft in Scottsdale. “If you can find the secret (to being this good and growing up there), I’d like to know,” said Brad Treliving, the Calgary Flames’ GM, who used to be the assistant GM in Arizona. “He looks like he could be from Red Deer. We had a lot of kids around our (Coyotes) team. Ulf Samuelsson was an assistant coach and his boys (Philip and Henrik) were there. Jimmy Playfair’s kids play, Shane Doan’s. We’d get to know their friends, too. There would be ice, and we’d be saying ‘omgawd, who is this kid?’ This summer at Lake Placid, there was a tournament and Auston jumped right off the map for all of us.”

- Classy gesture by Peter Forsberg saluting his late, great agent Don Baizley, one of the nicest, straight-shooting men I ever knew, but wouldn’t it be a nice daily double if Baizley and Clare Drake both got into the Hockey Hall of Fame next year as builders? I know one thing: if Ken Hitchcock, Mike Babcock, Barry Trotz, Mike Johnston and Bill Peters, all coaching in the NHL and all whom learned lessons from Drake, somehow hijacked the selection committee vote next June, they would bang on the table loud enough that Drake got his just reward.

- Johnny Gaudreau, all 157 pounds, has that ‘It’ factor in Calgary. “He has a high, high hockey IQ, and a very gifted skill-set. He can make plays that get fans excited — that’s part of what we’re here for, to entertain,” said Flames GM Treliving. “That said, we don’t want to jump a ton on his back, his first month into the season. When you have a shortcoming, whether it’s size or speed, the brain can make up for shortcomings. Johnny thinks the game a step or two ahead of most.” He’s Theo Fleury without Theo’s edge.

- Thumbs-down on two organizations: the Philadelphia Flyers for honouring Eric Lindros and John LeClair, two thirds of the Legion of Doom, as part of their Hall of Fame but bagging the other member, Mikael Renberg, like he was a bit player. Also, the Kings for their long-time jersey number retirement exclusion of Charlie Simmer’s No. 11 — an integral piece of the Triple Crown Line with Marcel Dionne (16) and Dave Taylor (18). Simmer had back-to-back 56-goal years. Bad form in both cases.

EDMONTON — With apologies to gifted fellow centre Jack Eichel, Connor McDavid will probably be the first name called at the NHL Entry Draft in Florida in late June — two generational type talents of the Sidney Crosby-Evgeni Malkin variety — but what about the summer of 2016, when the draft is in Buffalo?

Could it be winger Tyler Benson? He might not go No. 1, but certainly the Edmonton product is Top 5 material.

Benson, who scored 146 points in 33 games for Southside Athletic Club as a bantam two years ago then landed in Kelowna, B.C., to play for the Pursuit of Excellence Academy, where Justin Schultz and Curtis Lazar once toiled in midget-level hockey, is still a first liner with the Western Hockey League’s Vancouver Giants at 16.

Benson will be in the mix in the 2016 draft with Scottsdale, Ariz.-born right-winger Auston Matthews, defenceman Jacob Chychrun, Lloydminster blueliner Kyle Clague of the Brandon Wheat Kings and Seth Jones’s brother Max, who is playing midget in Detroit right now.

Matthews, playing for the U.S. National Development Team out of Ann Arbor, Mich., may have the inside track at going first overall for now.

Scouts will undoubtedly find warts in Benson’s game just as they did with star NHL defenceman Jay Bouwmeester when he was in the WHL and starring at 16, but Benson is a handful at 196 pounds already. Current nursing what could be a shoulder injury, Benson’s been a point-a-game player.

“He reminds so much of Jamie Benn at the same age,” said Craig Button, the TSN commentator, former NHL GM in Calgary and scouting guru. “Tyler can make plays off the wing or score off the wing, and guys like him are rare. He thinks the game at such a high pace, and that translates when you can make plays, when everything around you is busy.”

“For the most part, Tyler’s been our best player ... you don’t like to say that about a 16-year-old, but he’s been that guy,” said Giants general manager Scott Bonner, who’s seen a lot of kids come down the pike in years working in the WHL. “The two best examples would be Evander Kane and Gilbert Brule on our team. They were freaks here, dominant, key players from the start, while Brendan Gallagher was more traditional. He came in, had 10 goals at 16, then 40 goals. What they all had in common was they had to be gritty and they would outwork everybody, and that’s what Tyler does.”

Bonner concedes they’d have been just as happy if they had picked Sherwood Park centre Sam Steel of the Regina Pats, the puck-mover Clague or Winnipeg forward Nolan Patrick (Brandon) in the 2013 bantam draft. Steel is a terrific offensive talent, and Clague is your prototypical offensive D-man.

“The 1998 age group was like the 95s, all good,” said Bonner. “In the ‘95 draft, we saw Lazar (Oil Kings), Sam Reinhart (Kootenay Ice), Nic Petan (Portland Winterhawks) ... who’s been the best? Who really cares? Everybody is happy.”

The Giants got the first pick and opted for Benson.

“Thai kills penalties, he leads us in hits, and we have a guy doing Corsi and his puck-possession numbers are the best with those NHL stats,” said Bonner. “He’s more physically mature than most 16-year-olds.”

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins starred in Red Deer at 16, (65 in 67 games) but he weighed about 165 pounds. Gallagher was small in Vancouver, so was Brule at 16. Benson and Kane were bigger.

“Tyler has huge legs and a huge trunk,” said Bonner. “His parents watched Curtis Lazar with the Oil Kings, and I think Lazar suggested that the routine he went through at the P.O.E (Pursuit of Excellence) was pretty strong.

“I wasn’t sure it was a good idea leaving Edmonton minor hockey for B.C., but he’s made gains off the ice through personal training. He’s a lot quicker. He’s not a pretty skater, per se, but he’s quick and powerful.”

The downside to being very good at 16 is you’re under the microscope for two years prior to your draft day. Scouts said Bouwmeester didn’t have a mean bone in his body and hadn’t played any playoff games in junior in Medicine Hat; ergo his leadership may have been in question. Benson will feel the scrutiny too.

“The kids in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, where NHL teams are based, they tend to get scouted more because scouts live in those markets and they use our players, say, as a gauge. They’re overseen at times,” said Bonner.

Decoding the Oilers’ head coach following sloppy 5-4 loss to Canucks

By John MacKinnon, Edmonton Journal November 20, 2014

EDMONTON - The Oilers can toy with the emotions of the faithful in cruel ways.

On Wednesday night, they fell behind, hopelessly, it seemed, and right off the bat. First 2-0, then 3-1. The Oilers battled back to tie the game 3-3. The Oilers fell behind 4-3. They tied it 4-4, before ultimately losing 5-4, even as the Oilers battled to the siren, pressing for the equalizer.

When it was over, head coach Dallas Eakins, who has piloted the club to a 6-11-2 record so far this season, was asked what element of his team’s play let him down the most, since he clearly had several to choose from.

Here’s what he said:

"The guys that have to be critical for us — right through our lineup, whether it’s the forwards or some of our D — they weren’t there for us. They showed sparks of coming, but for whatever reason, they couldn’t get it done. The guys that we rely on less played well. Your key guys have to be your drivers every night. — Dallas Eakins"

He went on to say that a number of guys “struggled through different portions of the game.”

Eakins was referring, although not by name, to his top six forwards — including Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle — his top four defencemen and the goaltender, on this night, Ben Scrivens.

Put another way, Eakins was suggesting that against the big boys of the Western Conference, Edmonton’s best players have to be their best players. Nugent-Hopkins, Hall and Eberle clearly were not that.

Which was one thing. But the top line for Vancouver — Daniel and Henrik Sedin and the lethal Radim Vrbata — produced eight points, including two goals by Vrbata.

That pattern has been a feature in three of the four games between the Oilers and Canucks this season. In aggregate, that Sedin line has totalled 21 points over the four games; the Nugent-Hopkins line, three points.

If you want to identify a key reason why the Oilers remain winless against Western Conference teams, that comparison is starkly revealing, if not depressing to the hardcore fans.

Those numbers demonstrate the Nugent-Hopkins line may be simply outmatched against the older, more mature Sedins and Vrbata. And other trios. If the Oilers’ best players cannot measure up to their counterparts around the Western Conference, that’s ominous, indeed.

Now, Eakins didn’t single those players out by name, but the implication was clear. And the four-game snapshot perhaps illuminates some of the other comments Eakins delivered to the media after the loss.

What was Eakins not seeing on his power play, a unit that went 1-for-3 on the night, including a shotless 58-second fragment of five-on-three manpower advantage?

"Mostly finish," Eakins said. "If you want to talk big picture, we haven’t had the finish.

"Tonight, we got the one right off the faceoff (Teddy Purcell), but again, our execution wasn’t there. We work a ton on our power play. It’s something that we’re always touching on, so it might be time — and I’ll talk to our coaches about it — but we may have to go to a different look."

Eakins added that he thinks both units can succeed, but he’ll discuss that with his staff.

"I think the easiest thing is to blow it up, and sometimes, the harder thing and the smarter thing is to breathe and try to work (it) out."

Eakins was asked to assess the play of struggling defenceman Nikita Nikitin, a key off-season acquisition. Nikitin had 23:18 minutes of ice time on Wednesday night, the most of any Oilers defenceman, and Nikitin struggled for significant stretches of that.

“I thought Nikki could have been better, I think he’d tell you that, too,” Eakins said. “He’s been battling through some back issues that kind of come and go. We needed more from him tonight, but I know that Nikki is going to battle hard and dig his heels in.”

Eakins raised eyebrows with his response to a question about the mistakes, the turnovers (the Oilers had 19 giveaways in the game) that seem to be a consistent part of their game.

“I think if you watch any NHL game, a lot chances come from turnovers. And if they’re mindless ones, then you have a problem with it. A guy who sees the play and is trying to make the play — the best way to enter the (offensive) zone is under control. Now, sometimes, should we put it in behind (their defencemen)? Absolutely.

“Tact that’s those guys’ call in a split-second. No team in this league is going to survive by getting up to the red line and just dumping it in. You’ll get killed.

“So, do we want to limit the turnovers? Yeah, absolutely. But I didn’t feel we lost the game off turnovers tonight.”

At least two of the Canucks goals — a shorthanded one to open the scoring by Jannik Hansen and an even-strength one by Chris Higgins both came as a direct result of turnovers by the Oilers.

So, it was jarring to hear Eakins talk about turnovers not being the reason the Oilers lost. For the head coach, though, the loss came because the Sedin line produced and the Nugent-Hopkins line did not. It is hard to argue against an 8-1 difference in points between the two lines.

If the games come down to a duel of best-on-best, whether they are facing each other on the ice or not, then Edmonton’s top line — or if you prefer, top two lines — must be better.

More generally, Eakins was asked about his team’s seeming inability to know how to win, up and down the ice.

"That’s an acquired taste. It’s something that I think you go from a team that suffers greatly, will get outchanced and outshot by a ton. And then you start closing the gap and you’re in the games. And then you start winning some of those games and you acquire the taste. And we’re trying to get there. I think when we were the team before, last year, who was constantly outshot, constantly outchanced, it wasn’t a closing a one-goal game, it was trying to get back in a game that you were down three or four in. We’re to that point (one-goal games), but it’s gotta come. And for me, it’s gotta come from basically your top six forwards and your top four D. Those are the guys that have got to put us over the top. — Dallas Eakins"

This was another ‘it’s-a-process’ answer, and there’s something to Eakins’ logic. But you have to think the fans have grown weary of a process that produces so few marks of success. So few victories; so few points.

So, Edmonton Oilers’ draft pick Greg Chase did get traded from the WHL’s Calgary Hitmen for exactly the player people thought he would (OK, I believe I mentioned the name two weeks ago)–Keegan Kanzig, the 6’7″ defenceman the Calgary Flames drafted in the third round in 2013.

It’s a win-win for both sides. Chase, 19, who had a falling out with the Hitmen, is in Victoria playing for coach Dave Lowry, who happens to be the assistant coach to head man Benoit Groulx for Canada’s world junior team which Chase is trying to make. And the stay-at-home, rugged Kanzig, also 19, is with the Hitmen, who are owned by the Flames. He’ll help Flyers’ first-round pick Travis Sanheim on their back-end.

“In a strange twist Kanzig is also my client. I had no idea he was coming back (in the deal) but it makes sense,” said Edmonton-based agent Gerry Johannson, who was doing lots of back-room stuff with the Hitmen to get it resolved after Calgary sent the winger Chase, who had a strong Oiler camp, home from a game in Saskatoon.

The Hitmen told him he was scratched with some family and friends at the WHL game with the Blades, then they had him on a shuttle to the airport. Chase didn’t demand a trade, but realized the situation was untenable. The Hitmen, rather than keep playing Chase at the time and, say, working on a deal quietly, decided to go in that direction with Chase, who did play in the Subway Series and has a reasonable shot at making Canada’s world junior squad.

Lots of teams were sniffing around Chase. Not just Victoria. Kelowna, the juggernaut of the Western Conference, was interested. Maybe Tri City, too. Calgary wasn’t of a mind to send him to an Eastern Conference team, and Victoria will be a good fit for Chase. The Royals gave up a second-rounder in the bantam draft with the huge Kanzig, who is from Athabasca and once played for Fort Saskatchewan in the AJHL, and got back a fifth and an eighth-round picks along with Chase. He’ll be playing with the hottest player in the league, local buddy Brandon Magee in Victoria. The 5’8″ Magee was suspended for the first 12 games of this season for a stick foul to Portland centre Nic Petan’s head in the playoffs last spring.

“We’re very happy the issue (Chase) has been resolved,” said Johannson. “Greg was sent home and I appreciate Calgary Hitmen making a timely trade. Two weeks in the scheme of things isn’t that bad. This is a good deal for both teams. Keegan’s presence will make a difference with the Hitmen, plus he’s in Calgary (their draft pick). Very logical.”

“Greg’s been a very good hockey player for us but sometimes things just don’t work out. Sometimes change with both parties is necessary,” Hitmen GM Mike Moore told the Calgary Herald after Chase was sent home.

“I’m not too worried about Greg not playing for the last two weeks (as to an invite to the Canadian-world camp). Dave is part of the leadership group (Hockey Canada) and he’ll be able to measure his work and I thought he was really effective at the Super Series. I don’t think (waiting for a trade) has materially affected his chances,” said Johannson.

“He’s with one of his best friends Brandon Magee. He has been to Oiler (development) camp. I think he has 25 points in 12 games (25 in 13),” said Johannson.

Edmonton Oilers centre Leon Draisaitl pumped about chance to play on line with Taylor Hall.

First posted: Thursday, November 20, 2014 06:44 PM MST | Updated: Thursday, November 20, 2014 06:50 PM MST

EDMONTON - Leon Draisaitl is moving into the fast lane.

The rookie centre will be lined up with speedy winger Taylor Hall Friday against the New Jersey Devils in a line shuffle that presents him with the best opportunity of his young career.

“It’s really exciting,” said Draisaitl, who’s been struggling to generate offence this year (two points in his last 11 games).

“He’s a world-class player, one of the best players in the NHL. Having a guy like him on my side is going to make it easier for myself for sure. I’m really looking forward to the opportunity to play with a guy like him.”

Hall likes the possibilities, too. Draisaitl is a smart player who can distribute the puck exceptionally well, which could complement a goal scorer of Hall’s pedigree.

“He’s got tons of skill and he’s a really good kid,” said Hall. “I want to see him do well. I’m excited to play with him. I’ve said this a lot before, you’re always excited to play with guys on this team because there’s a lot of depth, but it’s about more than that, it’s about hard work and getting pucks back and letting our skill take over.”

It will also mean a jump in minutes for Draisaitl, who’s been averaging about 12 minutes a night. Hall usually get 18-plus.

• The Oilers made a depth trade Thursday afternoon, moving Keith Acton from the OKC Barons to Vancouver’s system for 6-foot-6, 210-pound centre Kellan Lain. who has one assist and 20 PIMs with Utica this season.

Oilers head coach Dallas Eakins moves Taylor Hall to second pairing to kick-start offence

By Robert Tychkowski, Edmonton Sun

First posted: Thursday, November 20, 2014 06:25 PM MST | Updated: Thursday, November 20, 2014 06:37 PM MST

EDMONTON - When the team is bad, change is good.

So it's no surprise that Edmonton Oilers head coach Dallas Eakins did the Losing Streak Shuffle in advance of Friday's visit by the New Jersey Devils.

With the Oilers in the midst of a four-game losing streak, the most recent defeat being a 5-4 loss to Vancouver in which Eakins called out his top players, the coach decided it was time to put his lines in the blender.

"Any time they do what we call getting the bingo balls out, it means that something's gone awry and something's not right," said winger Taylor Hall. "When you're winning and playing well and scoring lots of goals, the lines don't change."

And when you've lost eight of your last 10, they do.

"This is a message to us that we have to get better," said Hall. "We have to find some consistency with our lineup." Since the first line was nowhere to be seen Wednesday against the Canucks, they won't be seen at all Friday against the Devils. At least not at the start.

Benoit Pouliot will replace Hall on left winger with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jordan Eberle (who didn't practice Thursday but is expected to ready for the Devils). Hall will skate with rookie Leon Draisaitl and Ted Purcell.

"We feel, at least looking at it on paper," said Eakins. "That they all complement each other."

The first and the fourth lines have been the most consistent elements of the team all season, so being called out and broken up is nobody's idea of fun. But that's what happens when you want to be considered an elite first line in the NHL — you deliver every night or you hear about it.

"On a four-game slide, you don't expect everything to stay the same," said Nugent-Hopkins. "We put a lot of pressure on ourselves, we have high expectations. If we're not playing well we know it ourselves."

"We put that responsibility on ourselves and we have to find a way to do that every night. When we take a night off or a period off, it trickles down to the rest of the team. We just have to find a way to be better."

Hall admits they had a tough one against Vancouver.

"Not every night is going to be spectacular, especially when you're playing against a line like the Sedins, but we expect a lot more out of ourselves," he said.

"Those guys are great players and I have a ton of respect for what they do on the ice, but I feel like we can compete with them and we can outplay them for our team to win."

"It's too bad we don't have a chance to play with each other again and show our stuff, but we're going to do whatever we can collectively as a unit as a team to overcome this."

Eakins says this is more about spreading the wealth than any sort of punitive thing. If Hall can jump start a second line and Pouliot, Eberle and Nugent-Hopkins can produce like it did while Hall was out with the knee injury, then maybe the Oilers can get on the right side of all those one-goal losses.

"I'm all for it," said Hall. "I thought Pouli played really well with Nuge and Ebs when I was out. They're a good line with their skill set so I'm excited for the combination."
Recap: San Jose vs. Florida

By Sports Network The Sports Network

11/21/2014 2:38 AM

San Jose, CA (SportsNetwork.com) - Nick Bjugstad scored a pair of goals in regulation and fittingly netted the game-winner in the shootout as the Florida Panthers spoiled the San Jose Sharks' return to the Shark Tank with a 3-2 victory on Thursday.

San Jose's Patrick Marleau was denied by Roberto Luongo on a penalty shot early in the third period, but the veteran forward redeemed himself with time winding down. The Sharks pulled Antti Niemi for an extra attacker, and Joe Thornton, from deep in the right corner, fed Marleau out in front for the tying goal with 33.1 seconds on the clock.

The Panthers carried a power play 1:49 into overtime but did not cash in.

After each team scored in the second round of the shootout, Brent Burns rung one off the post for San Jose, and Bjugstad followed with the difference maker.

Luongo made 28 saves for the Panthers, who also upended the Sharks, 4-1, on Nov. 11.

Logan Couture scored a power-play goal, while Niemi stopped 26-of-28 shots for the Sharks, who were coming off an 11-day road trip that saw them go 3-4-0.

Bjugstad opened the scoring with a deflection of Dmitry Kulikov's point shot just 24 seconds into the game.

"I got that first goal right out of the way, just kind of got my stick on it," said Bjugstad.

Couture evened things on the power play at the 6:19 mark of the second period by crashing the net and getting one past a sprawled-out Luongo.

Sharks forward Tommy Wingels was whistled for a penalty later in the middle stanza, and Bjugstad capitalized with a slap shot from the top of the left circle that Niemi never saw because of a screen.

"The point is great but we're not happy where our game's at," said Wingels. "We'll be a better team than we showed."

Marleau had a chance to even things on a penalty shot with 6:53 remaining in regulation, but Luongo was up to the task.

Miami Herald LOADED: 11.21.2014
Florida Panthers at San Jose Sharks, 10:30 p.m. (ET)

By Sports Network

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(SportsNetwork.com) - Following a lengthy road trip, the San Jose Sharks kick off a six-game homestand on Thursday night with a rematch against the Florida Panthers.

The Sharks went 3-4-0 on a seven-game, 11-day swing, ending the trek with a 4-1 setback to the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday. The loss was San Jose's 16th in 17 all-time trips to Buffalo.

Brent Burns provided San Jose with its lone goal and Troy Grosenick, who was coming off a 45-save shutout of Carolina in his NHL debut on Sunday, allowed three goals on 13 shots in defeat.

"We had a lot of good chances, especially early in the game," Sharks forward Patrick Marleau said. "The chances were there."

Joe Thornton extended his point streak to seven games with an assist and will try to keep that run going at home, where San Jose is 2-3-0 this season.

The Sharks' recent road trip included a 4-1 loss in Florida, with Thornton getting a goal and Antti Niemi making 26 saves in defeat.

Niemi fell to 1-3-0 with a 2.53 goals against average and .899 save percentage in four career games versus the Panthers.

Florida got first-period goals from Jimmy Hayes and Aleksander Barkov in the win. Roberto Luongo had 21 saves and is 12-12-4 with a 2.62 GAA and .919 save percentage in this matchup.

The Panthers have won two straight and six of their past seven versus the Sharks, taking three in a row at San Jose.

Hayes and Jussi Jokinen had a goal in Tuesday's 5-2 setback to the Los Angeles Kings. It was Florida's fifth loss in seven contests as the club was coming off a 6-2 win at Anaheim on Sunday that began a four-game trip.

Luongo made 21 saves, but allowed four second-period goals. He was replaced by Al Montoya in the third period and the backup made one save and gave up a goal in the frame.

"We really played well in the first period and obviously the second period was the difference in this hockey game," said Panthers head coach Gerard Gallant. "We just didn't respond until we got upset in the third period and we started to play a better game."

Barkov missed Tuesday's game due to illness and is day-to-day.

Miami Herald LOADED: 11.21.2014
Sharks fell to 2-1 on this four-game trek, and could end it on a sweet note in Music City on Saturday where the 12-5-2 Central Division-leading Predators are 7-0-2 (ties) since 2001 against Florida. Still, the Panthers have already knocked off the Ducks and Sharks, clubs with 116 and 111 points respectively in 2014, only to lose to the Stanley Cup champion Kings.

The teams exchanged power-play goals in the second period, so although the Sharks had outshot the Panthers 25-15, Florida maintained a 2-1 lead heading into the third period. Florida outshot San Jose 12-3 in the third, but the last one by Marleau was huge.

After both teams were unable to take advantage of power plays in the final period, Marleau split Panthers defensemen Brian Campbell and Aaron Ekblad, forcing Campbell to take him down. A penalty shot was called and Marleau, who has 442 career goals and was playing in his 400th straight game, put on several moves before Luongo stuck it away.

After morning skate, Boyes, who played his first NHL game for the Sharks in 2004 (and only one for them), said it was imperative to get off to a fast start because they’re known for that at home where they’ve scored 19 first-period goals.

Plus, the Sharks would surely be chomping at the bit after coming off a 3-4 road trip that included 4-1 losses to the lowly Sabres and Panthers in Sunrise. In fact, the Sharks have been on the road in 16 of 21 games, while the Panthers had played a total of 16 games.

Well, just 24 seconds after the center-ice puck drop, Jonathan Huberdeau crossed it to defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, who fired a slapper that Bjugstad redirected from the circle past Niemi for the quickest goal of the season. Kulikov, who was back on the ice after a four-game absence with a knee injury, notched his fifth assist.

“We got that first goal out of the way right away and Kuli made a great shot and I kind of got my stick on it, a little puck luck,” Bjugstad said. “We kind of teeter-tottered in the second period and the third period we played pretty well.

“The goal at the end kind of hurt.”

It was the quickest goal by a Panther to start a game since Jan. 14, 2014 when Aleksander Barkov scored 32 seconds into a 4-2 win over the Islanders. The fastest Panthers’ goal ever out of the gate came from Johan Garpenlov on Oct. 17, 1996 at Colorado when he scored 10 seconds in.

The 10-9-3 Sharks came alive after the quick goal and kept the puck in their zone for much of the period, outshooting the Panthers 12-6. The Panthers are 6-1-4 when scoring first and 4-1-1 when leading after one.

A costly crosscheck penalty by Kulikov in the second period gave the Sharks their first power play and they converted it when after Luongo made two great saves to stop Joe Pavelski in the crease before Couture swept in to clean up the rebound to make it 1-1 at 6:19.

The Panthers PK units had killed 17 of their previous 18 power plays, but then gave up three PPGs in Tuesday’s 5-2 loss to the Kings and this one. Couture snapped out of a seven-game goal drought with No. 8. The Sharks were 1-for-13 on the power play in their previous five games.

However, the Panthers countered when Tommy Wingels went off for a stick-holding penalty at 15:56. Panthers defenseman Erik Gudbranson set up Bjugstad at the top of the circle for a one-time blast past Niemi at 17:21. The Panthers have a PPG in each of their last four games.

Huberdeau, playing with more confidence with every game, notched secondary assists on both goals, and now has a goal and four helpers in his past three games while drawing several penalties. His attempt at the game-deciding shootout goal before Bjugstad, beat Niemi but hit the post and caromed out.

Barkov was back after sitting out Tuesday’s loss to the Kings with a fever. He centered a line with Tomas Fleischmann and Grimaldi, who after replacing Barkov Tuesday, filled a wing vacancy with Scottie Upshall sustaining a lower-body injury in the second period of the Kings’ game.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 11.21.2014
Panthers' Boyes faces team that traded him after one game

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel contact the reporter

Panthers right wing Brad Boyes started career with Sharks – for one game
Panthers Boyes to play in 701st NHL game against his first team
Panthers right wing Brad Boyes played in his 700th NHL game in Tuesday's 5-2 loss to the Los Angeles Kings.

On Thursday night he will face the San Jose Sharks, the team where his NHL career began on March 7, 2004, a 4-0 loss to the Dallas Stars in American Airlines Arena.

However, that was Boyes' first and last game with the Sharks, as two days later he was traded to the Boston Bruins for journeyman defenseman Jeff Jillson.

"I didn't know what to think," said Boyes after morning skate at SAP Center. "I was on the same junior team for four years. The first time I got traded I didn't know what to think. It was different for me, tough to adjust to.

"I had a decent year in the minors [25 goals for the Cleveland Barons] and get a chance and then two days later I'm on the ice in warmups and [coach Ron Wilson] says you got to get off the ice you got traded.

"It was a lot of shock and surprise. I'd always grown up playing hard for a team, stick with them, grow with them and then my first two teams I didn't get a chance. I was gone before I knew what was going on."

Boyes, a first-round pick (No. 24) in 2000 by his hometown Maple Leafs, had already been traded by Toronto to San Jose with Alyn McCauley and a first-round pick for Owen Nolan, who went on to score 422 goals in a 20-year career.

"I learned from it and the biggest thing I took from it is to try not to take it personally," said Boyes, 32. "It's a business."

Since Boyes' line gave up two goals on his first two shifts in that first game with the Sharks, he has scored 193 goals with 259 assists. The highly skilled Boyes has also played for the Blues, where he posted back-to-back years of 43 and 33 goals from 2007-09.

He then played for the Sabres, and Islanders in the 2012 lockout season. Boyes came to the Panthers on a professional tryout basis before last season and ended up leading the team with 21 goals to earn a two-year deal worth $5.25 million.

"He's opportunistic and when he puts the puck to the net and get around the net he can score some goals," Panthers coach Gerard Gallant said.

Boyes has no ties or antagonistic feelings toward the Sharks for giving up on him after one game.

"I was here so briefly to be honest and it was so long ago," Boyes said. "I didn't have much of a feeling here. I had no ties and didn't [buy a home], so it's pretty bleak memories."

The line of Boyes, Nick Bjugstad and Jonathan Huberdeau is the Panthers' top line and they combined on five goals and nine points in last Sunday's 6-2 rout of the Ducks.

The 10-9-2 Sharks are coming off a 3-4 road trip, including 4-1 losses to the lowly Sabres on Tuesday and the Panthers nine days ago. They've played 16 of their first 21 games on the road — an NHL record.

"It's a tough building to play in, very loud here," said Boyes, who has just three points in 20 games against the Sharks. "They play well here, especially in the first 10 minutes of the first period. We have to make sure we're ready for that."

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 11.21.2014
Barkov, Kulikov, Grimaldi to play; Upshall, Robak out vs. Sharks

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel contact the reporter

Dmitry Kulikov, Aleksander Barkov return from injury as Panthers face Sharks

Panthers top-four defenseman Dmitry Kulikov will return to the lineup Thursday after missing the last four games with a minor knee injury.

Kulikov, who by all accounts was playing the best two-way hockey of his five-year career before he banged his knee during a game against Calgary on Nov. 8, will reunite with defensive partner Willie Mitchell.

Rookie defenseman Aaron Ekblad will shift back to his partner, Brian Campbell.

"I feel like I was playing good and I don't think this injury was any kind of breakdown on me and not as bad as everyone thought it was at first," Kulikov said after Thursday morning's skate at SAP Arena. "Hopefully, I didn't miss any quality time on the ice and will pick up just where I left off."

Kulikov has four assists and a solid zero plus-minus. Kulikov's return means that Colby Robak will be a healthy scratch again.

Center Aleksander Barkov, who missed Tuesday's 5-2 loss to the Kings with a fever, is also playing Thursday on a line with Rocco Grimaldi and Tomas Fleischmann, who moved up from the fourth line.

Grimaldi, who took Barkov's spot on Tuesday, is now filling a vacancy at left wing because Scottie Upshall sustained a lower-body injury on Tuesday and sat out the third period. He's day to day.

Tomas Kopecky is back with the fourth line alongside center Derek MacKenzie and Shawn Thornton. Center Brandon Pirri (concussion) and Sean Bergenheim (core) continue to skate with the team and are close to a return. Center Dave Bolland (groin) remains sidelined.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 11.21.2014
Bjugstad leads Panthers to 3-2 SO win over Sharks

Staff

Updated: 2:37 a.m. Friday, Nov. 21, 2014 | Filed in: California

Nick Bjugstad was given fair warning that he could be part of the shootout gang. It helped get him into the right state of mind.

Bjugstad scored twice during regulation and added the winning goal in the shootout as the Florida Panthers won their fourth straight in San Jose, beating the Sharks 3-2 on Thursday night.

"Knowing what you're going to do is the main thing," Bjugstad said. "You don't think too much. You're just trying to put the thing in the net."

Florida coach Gerard Gallant said the decision was made easier because of Bjugstad's productivity during the game.

"He was hot," Gallant said. "I thought we'd go with him. He was putting the puck in the net, and he hit a couple of posts, too."

San Jose's Patrick Marleau tied it with 33 seconds remaining in regulation, taking a pass from Joe Thornton and firing it past Roberto Luongo, who had stopped Marleau's penalty shot earlier in the third period.

"I was just trying to get it on the net as quickly as possible," Marleau said. "I knew he'd be at the near post, so I was looking for a spot."

Luongo stopped 28 shots and won for the fourth time in his last five games against the Sharks. The Panthers swept the season series.

Logan Couture ended a season-worst eight-game, goal-less streak with a power-play tally for the Sharks, who played at home for the first time in two weeks.

Antti Niemi made 26 saves for the Sharks, who failed to win for the third time in their last four at home.

"I'm pleased with the point," Sharks' coach Todd McLellan said. "It didn't look so good with a minute left. We were back on our heels a little bit in the third period."

The Sharks opened a six-game homestand after becoming the first NHL team to play 16 of its first 21 games on the road. The Sharks, who have scored two or fewer goals in seven straight, fell to 2-3-1 at home.

Bjugstad opened the scoring 24 seconds in, redirecting a shot by Dmitry Kulikov past Niemi. Kulikov, playing after missing four games because of a knee injury, earned an assist in his third straight game.

"We got the first goal out of the way right away," Bjugstad said. "Kuli made a great shot, and I was able to get my stick on it."

The Sharks tied it early in the second period. Couture tapped in a loose puck in front of the net after Luongo blocked a couple of pokes by Joe Pavelski.

Bjugstad scored with under three minutes to play in the second period on a power play. His slap shot from the top of the right circle flew past Niemi.

"Those goals change games in this league," Bjugstad said. "It's a big point for us to make sure we're scoring goals on the power play and that we're playing well on the penalty kill."

The Panthers improved to 4-2-4 on the road and won for the second time in three games played in California. The Sharks are 3-6 in their past nine.

NOTES: The Sharks had killed 19 of 21 penalties until Florida scored in the second period. ... Panthers D Erik Gudbranson recorded a point for the first time in 10 games. ... The Sharks were held to three shots in the third period. ... Florida F Jonathan Huberdeau has four assists in his last three games. ... Thornton has an eight-game point streak. ... Bjugstad recorded his third career multi-goal game and second in three contests. ... The attendance of 17,331 was the Sharks' second non-sellout at home this season following a 177-game (205 including playoffs) sellout streak.
Kings winger Tanner Pearson scores his first goal in 12 games
Los Angeles Kings extend winning streak to three games

Tanner Pearson's season has been a wild adventure. He went from winning the NHL’s rookie of the month honor in October to being stapled to the Kings’ bench by Coach Darryl Sutter in November when his scoring touch vanished. Sutter could have scratched him from the lineup against Carolina on Thursday at Staples Center but instead put the young winger alongside veteran center Mike Richards and rugged winger Kyle Clifford, a place where Pearson could flourish.

Pearson responded with his first goal in 12 games, since Oct. 26, batting in a fluttering puck early in the second period for the decisive goal in the Kings’ 3-2 victory over the Hurricanes. That extended the team’s winning streak to three.

“I think whenever you kind of go in a drought and I haven’t been playing my best hockey as of lately, but definitely this game I think helped a lot,” Pearson said, crediting Richards — known as “Rick” and Clifford for helping him resuscitate his game.

“When you’re playing with Rick and Cliffie, they’re both going to be in their face and they’re forechecking kind of guys. Rick can make some really good plays and Cliffie and I can just go to the net and hopefully something happens, and today it did.”

It did, because he made it happen.

“Everyone’s going to go through slumps,” said teammate Trevor Lewis, who scored the Kings’ second goal. “I think he did a good job tonight of just working hard and going to the net. You never know what’s going to happen. He did a good job and he always works hard.”

If Pearson has proved resilient, so have the Kings (11-5-4).

They've had to juggle their defense almost daily because of injuries and the league-imposed suspension of Slava Voynov, a situation that's not likely to change soon.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office on Thursday announced it had charged Voynov with one felony count of corporal injury to spouse with great bodily injury in connection with an incident between Voynov and his wife, Marta Varlamova, on Sept. 19.

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said that pending additional review and evaluation, Voynov remains suspended with pay — which means that his $4.167-million salary-cap hit still counts against the Kings' cap total.

The Kings are also missing defenseman Alec Martinez, who might be out longer than the one-week term initially projected for his recovery from surgery on his left pinkie finger. He skated on his own after the team's morning skate and Sutter said it will "take some time" for the wound to heal.

The Kings scored first Thursday, with their suddenly potent power play connecting at 7:53 of the first period.

Dustin Brown did a good job lugging the puck before setting up Jarret Stoll in the slot for Stoll’s second goal in three games. That improved the Kings' efficiency with the man advantage to six for 10 over three games. But Carolina pulled even at 17:16, when Jeff Skinner wristed a shot past Jonathan Quick off a two-on-one break.

Lewis, showing grit around the net, put the Kings ahead off a scramble in front, 37 seconds into the second period. The goal was reviewed to see whether it had been kicked in, but league officials in Toronto confirmed the puck had gone from Lewis' skate to his stick and was a legitimate goal.

The Hurricanes pulled even at 2:21 on Eric Staal's backhander off a rebound during a power play, but Pearson put the Kings back ahead at 2:59 by using his good hand-eye coordination to bat home a shot by Richards that had deflected off the shoulder of Carolina goalie Cam Ward.

“Any time you give up a goal you want to get it back as quick as possible,” Pearson said. “Whether it's five minutes or whatever, you just want to regain that lead. I just whacked it in, I guess.”

It counted, and that's all that mattered. Quick stopped 11 shots in the third to preserve the lead and improve the Kings' home record to 10-2-1.

And so continues the wild ride for Pearson and for the Kings, who both hope the roller coaster is on its way back up again.
Tanner Pearson lifts Kings to 3-2 win over Hurricanes

By Associated Press

Tanner Pearson scores the go-ahead goal and Jonathan Quick makes 25 saves in Kings' 3-2 win over Hurricanes

Tanner Pearson ended his 11-game goal drought with the tiebreaking score, and Jonathan Quick made 25 saves in the Kings' NHL-best 10th home victory of the season, 3-2 over the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday night.

Jarret Stoll and Trevor Lewis also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, who have won three straight. The Kings largely controlled play with 39 shots, and they hung on through a scoreless third period for their sixth win in eight meetings with Carolina.

Jeff Skinner and Eric Staal scored for the Hurricanes, who have lost four of five.

Cam Ward stopped 36 shots, but Carolina failed to build on the momentum of its victory in Dallas on Tuesday to open a five-game road trip.

Former King Jack Johnson bankrupt, estranged from parents

By Helene Elliott contact the reporter

Former Kings defenseman Jack Johnson has declared bankruptcy

The Columbus Dispatch has a fascinating piece on former Kings defense man Jack Johnson and how he has lost nearly all of his considerable earnings — apparently because of his parents' free spending.

The story, written by Aaron Portzline, is a horrifying account of wild spending by his parents, who, Portzline writes, took out loans at exorbitant rates and borrowed money against their son's future earnings. Johnson signed over power of attorney to his mother, Tina, after dropping his agent.

Here's a link to the full story.

The tale is sadly similar in some ways to the family feud that enveloped Ryan Howard of the Philadelphia Phillies.

Alec Martinez’s return to Kings lineup not imminent

By Helene Elliott contact the reporter

Kings are unsure when defenseman Alec Martinez will return

It was impossible to tell from the Kings’ morning skate whether struggling left wing Tanner Pearson will stay in the lineup against Carolina or be scratched from Thursday’s game against the Hurricanes at Staples Center, but one thing was clear: Defenseman Alec Martinez will remain out because his surgically repaired left pinky finger hasn’t fully healed.

Martinez, who was injured last Thursday while blocking a shot, skated alone, after his teammates had gone through their morning skate. Afterward, Coach Darryl Sutter said the one-week recovery period that was initially projected for Martinez by General Manager Dean Lombardi was too optimistic.

“We’ve just got to wait for the wound to heal and that’s going to take some time. It’s got to heal,” Sutter said.

“They nearly cut his finger off. So I don’t think he can play in a week .... Your fingers do have a pulse in them and it does hurt. And Marty’s tough. We’ve seen him play lots, not with little-finger injuries but with big injuries. It’s painful.

“Put the glove in there and sweat in there and you’ve got to be careful. You could start losing ground to an infection. We miss him a lot but he can’t play at 20%.”

The Kings have had to reconfigure their defense without Martinez and without Slava Voynov, who remains suspended by the NHL and now faces a felony domestic violence charge stemming from an incident involving his wife last month. Voynov has been allowed to skate at the Kings’ El Segundo practice facility but with a coach, not with his teammates. The Los Angeles County district attorney’s office announced the charge Thursday.

In the meantime, defenseman Drew Doughty’s ice time has skyrocketed to an average of 28 minutes and 56 seconds per game, second in the NHL only to the 29:13 averaged by Minnesota’s Ryan Suter.

The Kings don’t want Doughty to be playing so much, but they have few options. Sutter wore an exasperated look when asked if he was concerned about Doughty’s minutes.

“What am I going to do about it? Say yes? And not play him that much and lose?” Sutter said. “There’s not much you can do about it. Is it a good number? No it’s not. It doesn’t help Drew and it doesn’t help us.”

The fact that Doughty likes playing a lot doesn’t carry much weight with Sutter.

“How old is Drew, 24?” Sutter said, correctly. “I’d rather he was working on his whole game than trying to play the whole game. When you play that much you’re not as effective.”

Pearson, who is 0-for-November after a seven-goal, nine-point performance made him the NHL rookie of the month in October, has seen his minutes reduced lately. Sutter, however, wouldn’t say what was wrong with Pearson’s game, if anything.

“It’s not that big a deal. He may be successful now, too. It’s just that he was a hot topic because he was player of the month and had a hot start,” Sutter said. “We’ll manage his minutes a little bit better and hopefully he plays better. He’s 22 years old. He’s actually been a better player than some of our 32-year-olds.”

Kings’ Slava Voynov charged with felony in wife abuse case

By Lisa Dillman contact the reporter

Slava VoynovLos Angeles KingsIce HockeyNHL

Kings’ Slava Voynov charged with one felony count of corporal injury to a spouse with great bodily injury

Wife of Slava Voynov ‘stunned and devastated’ her explanation did not stop felony charge from being filed

After felony charge against Slava Voynov, the Kings still are not given relief in their salary cap

Kings defenseman Slava Voynov was charged Thursday with one felony count of corporal injury to a spouse with great bodily injury in connection with an incident last month at his Redondo Beach home, the Los Angeles County district attorney’s office announced.

His arraignment is scheduled for Dec. 1 in Los Angeles County Superior Court in Torrance.

Voynov, a two-time Stanley Cup winner with the Kings, was arrested Oct. 20 at Little Company of Mary Hospital in Torrance after taking his wife, Marta Varlamova, to the emergency room. He was immediately suspended with pay by the NHL and has missed 14 games, including Thursday night’s game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

"During an argument at their Redondo Beach home on Oct. 19, Voynov caused his wife to suffer injuries to her eyebrow, cheek and neck, prosecutors said," according to a statement from the district attorney's office about the alleged attack. "The injuries were serious and required medical attention at a local hospital where the defendant was arrested."

The Russian-born Voynov faces a maximum of nine years in prison if found guilty. He could be deported or have his immigration status changed on the basis of a felony conviction. Even a non-felony conviction might affect Voynov’s status, including his ability to travel back and forth to Canada for NHL games.

The district attorney's office also noted the case continues to be investigated by the Redondo Beach Police Department.

“Mr. Voynov is extremely disappointed that the district attorney’s office elected to file charges,” said Craig Renetzky, Voynov’s attorney. “Mr. Voynov maintains his innocence and looks forward to clearing his name in court. We remain confident.”

Donald Etra, a veteran Los Angeles criminal defense attorney, said the usual punishment for such a charge ranges "anywhere from probation to prison."

"There are really a wide range out outcomes in this type of situation," he said. "Anything can happen."

Renetzky previously told The Times and other news outlets he talked to both Voynov and Varlamova, using a Russian interpreter. The attorney said the injuries resulted from an accident and Varlamova was very clear Voynov did not punch her or strike her.

He noted a “misunderstanding” with police might have occurred because of language issues. Later, Varlamova, through her own lawyer, said she did not think a crime was committed.

Her lawyer, Michael Walsh, released a statement later Thursday: “Marta was stunned by the news today and she is devastated. She did not believe, and does not believe, that her husband intended to injure her and she believes he is not guilty of any crime.

"She is worried about her family's privacy....

It is unfortunate that no one seems to care what she wants, and that the authorities gave little or no weight to her view of the facts of the case. Despite this unwelcome news, she still expects her husband to be cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.”
Michael Walsh, the lawyer for Marta Varlamova -- wife of Slava Voynov -- provided the following statement to the Register regarding the news that Voynov will face charges:

"Marta was stunned by the news today and she is devastated. She did not believe, and does not believe, that her husband intended to injure her and she believes that he is not guilty of any crime. She is worried about her family's privacy and concerned that she and her family are going to be subjected to ridicule, embarrassment and hatred because of this decision.

"In fact, she has already seen that beginning to happen. It is unfortunate that no one seemed to care what she wants, and that the authorities gave little or no weight to her view of the facts of the case. Despite this unwelcome news, she still expects her husband to be cleared of any criminal wrongdoing."

Orange County Register: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Kings’ Slava Voynov faces felony domestic-violence charge

BY RICH HAMMOND / STAFF WRITER
Published: Nov. 20, 2014 Updated: 10:38 p.m.

Kings defenseman Slava Voynov has been charged with felony domestic violence, the Los Angeles County district attorney’s office announced Thursday.

NAM Y. HUH, AP

Kings defenseman Slava Voynov has been charged with one felony count of “corporal injury to spouse with great bodily injury,” the Los Angeles District Attorney’s office announced Thursday afternoon.

Voynov was arrested Oct. 20 in Torrance after an incident involving his wife, Marta Varlamova, but had not been charged with a crime until Thursday. Voynov’s arraignment is set for Dec. 1 in Torrance.

According to the district attorney’s news release, Voynov, 24, faces a possible sentence of nine years in prison. Voynov, a native of Russia, might also face deportation if he is convicted.

Voynov’s lawyer, Craig Renetzky, said in a written statement: “Mr. Voynov is extremely disappointed that the district attorney’s office elected to file charges. Mr. Voynov maintains his innocence and looks forward to clearing his name in court. We remain confident.”

Police officials had not previously shared details about the case, but in a news release Thursday, the District Attorney’s office said: “During an argument at their Redondo Beach home on Oct. 19, Voynov caused his wife to suffer injuries to her eyebrow, cheek and neck, prosecutors said. The injuries were serious and required medical attention at a local hospital where the defendant was arrested, prosecutors added.”

Voynov and Varlamova were together at Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Torrance early on Oct. 20, hours after the incident at their home, when both were interviewed by Redondo Beach police and Voynov was arrested on suspicion of domestic violence.

Through his lawyer, Voynov claimed the incident was an accident. Varlamova’s lawyer, Michael Walsh, essentially agreed and said Varlamova did not believe Voynov had intended to hurt her and did not want him to face charges, and that the couple had not separated.

Neither lawyer has provided details about how Varlamova might have suffered her injuries. Walsh did not immediately return a call Thursday afternoon seeking further comment.

Asked how Varlamova suffered her injuries, Renetzky said, “That’s what the trial is going to be about. We intend to put on a full defense. We intend to fight these charges all the way through and we believe that Mr. Voynov is going to be exonerated of these allegations. ... We are ready to go to trial today.”

Voynov skated at the Kings’ training facility in El Segundo with assistant coach John Stevens. Per the terms of his month-long suspension, Voynov has been able to skate with team employees during non-practice hours, but cannot participate in any official team activities.

In a statement, the Kings said: “We maintain our support of the NHL’s indefinite suspension of Slava Voynov. As an organization we will continue to monitor the developments of the legal proceedings and work in partnership with the NHL to determine the proper course of action in the future.”

Voynov, 24, is one of the Kings’ top defensemen and was a member of their two Stanley Cup championship teams (2012, 2014). He was suspended by the NHL (with pay) almost immediately after his arrest.

Voynov’s salary continues to count against the Kings’ salary-cap total, a source of frustration for team management.

In a statement, NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said: “We are aware of the actions taken today in California, which we will review and evaluate before making any decisions. Until further notice, the current terms of Mr. Voynov’s suspension remain in place.”

Orange County Register: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Pearson might get chance to play out of funk

November 20th, 2014, 12:59 pm ·
- posted by RICH HAMMOND

The Kings didn't do any line rushes in Thursday's morning skate, leaving open the question of who will be scratched from the lineup for tonight's game against Carolina.

During Wednesday's practice, the Kings had four skaters -- Jeff Carter, Dwight King, Tanner Pearson and Tyler Toffoli -- rotating on the second line, which led to speculation that Pearson, the 22-year-old rookie who has struggled recently after a brilliant start, might be scratched.

The Kings held an optional morning skate, but Pearson came off the ice a few minutes before Andy Andreoff and Jordan Nolan. Typically, the last players off the ice are the ones scheduled to be scratched.

In any event, there's unanimous agreement that Pearson's level of play needs to rise.

Pearson scored seven goals in his first eight games, but has now gone 11 consecutive games without a goal and has been a non-factor in many of those games.

"I think I just kind of got away from my game," Pearson said after today's morning skate. "My game is a lot about forechecking and winning battles. When I'm not winning those battles, I'm not really being productive. I have to get back to that."

Coach Darryl Sutter, who critiqued Pearson's "three-zone" game on Wednesday, went a little softer today.

"It's just a hot topic because he was the (rookie) of the month and had a good start," Sutter said. "We'll manage his minutes a little better, and hopefully he plays better. He's 22 years old. He's actually been a better player than some of our 32-year-olds."

Orange County Register: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Darryl Sutter has reluctantly conceded defeat in the battle to keep Drew Doughty's minutes down, it seems.

Sutter recently expressed concern that Doughty, who is averaging 28 minutes, 56 seconds per game -- the second-highest average in the NHL -- will eventually wear down because of the increased on-ice time.

Asked Thursday if he still had concerns, Sutter said, "What am I going to do about it, say yes and not play him as much and lose? There's not much you can do about it. Is it a good number? No, it's not. It doesn't help Drew and it doesn't help us."

Managing the minutes of defensemen has been exceedingly difficult for the Kings this season. They've had injuries to Alec Martinez, Jake Muzzin and Robyn Regehr, plus the suspension of Slava Voynov.

At this point, the Kings are giving significant time to Brayden McNabb, who was the No. 7 defenseman at the start of the season, and Jamie McBain, who they signed out of unemployment nine days ago.

Doughty's average ice time (28:49) ranks behind only Minnesota defenseman Ryan Suter (29:13), and Doughty is far ahead of the No. 3 man on the list, Ottawa's Erik Karlsson (27:40).

"I feel good out there," Doughty said this week. "I'm not getting tired. I feel great out there, to be honest. It's the best I've felt in a long time. I feel like I'm playing very well both ways. … I love it. I really, really love it, and I hope they don't bring (minutes) down, because I love it."

Told that Doughty enjoyed the big minutes, Sutter said, "How old is Drew, 24? I'd rather he work on his whole game than trying to play the whole game. When you play that much, you're not as effective."

Already this season, Doughty has reached the 30-minute mark in ice time in nine games. That's eight times in his last 17 games. In his first 443 NHL games, Doughty played at least 30 minutes only eight times.

To be certain, 30 minutes is an arbitrary figure -- there's scant difference between 30 and 29, for instance -- but it is considered an iron-man standard for NHL defensemen, and Doughty is earning that designation.

Doughty has never averaged more than 26:24 per game, which he did in the lockout-shortened 2013 season. When he was a Norris Trophy finalist in 2009-10, he averaged only 24:58.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Kings defenseman Alec Martinez will miss his third consecutive game with a finger injury, and while Martinez did another conditioning skate Thursday, it’s not yet known when he will return to the lineup.

General Manager Dean Lombardi recently pegged Martinez’s recovery time at “one week,” which would indicate a possible return for Saturday’s game at Dallas, but Coach Darryl Sutter downplayed that idea.

“We’ve just got to wait for the wound to heal, and that’s going to take some time,” Sutter said. “I know Dean said it was a week, but...it’s got to heal. They nearly cut his finger off, so I don’t think I could play in a week.”

Martinez suffered the injury to his left pinkie finger during the second period of last Thursday’s game against Dallas, and required a minor surgical procedure the next day. Martinez apparently suffered significant damage to the skin and nail bed near the tip of the finger.

Martinez didn’t talk to reporters before or after his skate, but wore only a small bandage on the finger and indicated that it was doing better.

Still, the Kings won’t rush things. As Sutter pointed out, beyond the risk of re-injury, Martinez must be mindful of infection. Plus there’s the issue of pain, gripping a hockey stick and other related concerns.

“Your fingers do have a pulse in them, and it does hurt,” Sutter said. “Marty is tough. We’ve seen him play, not with little-finger injuries but with big injuries. So it’s painful.”

The Kings also remain without defenseman Slava Voynov, who will miss his 14th consecutive game because of suspension.
L.A. Kings down Carolina Hurricanes as Tanner Pearson ends goal drought

By Elliott Teaford, Daily Breeze
Posted: 11/20/14, 10:24 PM PST | Updated: 1 min ago

Los Angeles Kings goalie Jonathan Quick, right, makes a save on a shot by Carolina Hurricanes center Elias Lindholm, center, as Kings' Drew Doughty, left, defends during the third period of an NHL hockey game, Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014, in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Danny Moloshok)

Tanner Pearson chipped the icicles off his hockey stick Thursday at Staples Center. The rookie left wing ended an 11-game goal-scoring drought with a deft swat of the puck that propelled the Kings to a grinding 3-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes.

So great was Pearson’s slump that he went from playing on the Kings’ most effective line, to sitting on the bench and watching for extended stretches, to nearly sitting in the press box and eating popcorn by the fistful as his teammates faced the Hurricanes.

It’s often that way with gifted young players, with their production ebbing and flowing. Kings coach Darryl Sutter hinted that a night in the rafters might not be such a bad thing, although he didn’t mention the 22-year-old Pearson by name.

Sutter didn’t pull the trigger Thursday, but Pearson did. Pearson’s goal gave the Kings a 3-2 lead only minutes into the second period and they held it the rest of the way against the Hurricanes. The Kings’ victory was their third in a row after a two-game losing streak.

Relieved? Yes, Pearson was relieved.

“Whenever you go into a drought, and I haven’t played my best hockey as of late, definitely this game helped a lot,” said Pearson, whose goal was his eighth of the season but his first since he scored twice in a 5-2 victory Oct. 26 over the Columbus Blue Jackets.

“Playing with ‘Rick’ and ‘Cliffy’, they’re going to be in (opponents’) faces. They’re both forechecking kinds of guys. ‘Rick’ can make some really good plays and ‘Cliffy’ and I have to go to the net and, hopefully, good things happen, and tonight it did.”

Pearson spoke of Mike Richards and Kyle Clifford, his linemates. Pearson hasn’t played with Tyler Toffoli and Jeff Carter for several games, since Sutter benched Pearson and Toffoli and broke up That 70s Line for the second half of a 6-5 shootout loss Nov. 12 to the Ducks.

“Everyone’s going to go through slumps,” Kings forward Trevor Lewis said of Pearson. “I think he did a great job of just working hard and going to the net. You never know what is going to happen. He did a good job, and he always works hard.”

Pearson’s superb hand-eye coordination was evident on his goal. Carolina goalie Cam Ward made an initial save, but couldn’t secure the puck, which dropped from his left shoulder toward the ice. Pearson then smacked the puck out of midair and into the back of the net.

The goal capped a three-goal flurry in less than three minutes to start the second period. After Jarret Stoll (power play) scored for the Kings in the first period and Jeff Skinner countered for the Hurricanes, Lewis and Carolina’s Eric Staal (power play) scored in the opening minutes of the second.

Pearson then put the Kings ahead to stay 3-2.
Los Angeles Kings player Slava Voynov charged with felony domestic violence

By Larry Altman, Daily Breeze

Posted: 11/20/14, 1:40 PM PST | Updated: 6 hrs ago

Slava Voynov

Los Angeles Kings defenseman Slava Voynov was charged Thursday with felony spousal abuse stemming from an alleged attack on his wife at their Redondo Beach home last month.

If convicted, the suspended hockey player could face up to nine years in state prison, prosecutors said.

"If somebody violates the law and is violent with their spouse or cohabitant, if we believe it occurred and we believe we can prove it, we have an obligation to file charges and to vigorously pursue justice," said Deputy District Attorney Frank Dunnick, who will prosecute the case.

Voynov, 24, is scheduled for arraignment on one count of corporal injury to a spouse on Dec. 1 at the Torrance courthouse. He was charged under his full name, Vyacheslav Leonidovich Voynov.

Voynov’s wife, Marta Varlamova, was devastated by the news, said her attorney, Michael Walsh, in an email. She did not want to see her husband prosecuted, he said.

"Marta was stunned," Walsh said. "She did not believe, and does not believe, that her husband intended to injure her and she believes that he is not guilty of any crime."

Police and prosecutors have not disclosed how the injuries occurred. A District Attorney’s Office statement Thursday said the charges stemmed from an argument at the couple’s home on Oct. 19.

"Voynov caused his wife to suffer injuries to her eyebrow, cheek and neck," the statement said. "The injuries were serious and required medical attention at a local hospital where the defendant was arrested."

Voynov’s attorney, Craig Renetzky, who said the injuries were the result of an accident, said Voynov is “looking forward to his day in court.”

"Mr. Voynov is extremely disappointed that the district attorney has elected to file charges and Mr. Voynov maintains his innocence," Renetzky said. "He is looking forward to clearing his name in court."

Police arrested Voynov when he took his wife to the emergency room at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Torrance about 1 a.m. Oct. 20. Hospital officials summoned police, suspecting Varlamova had been a victim of domestic abuse.

Late the night before, officers had responded to a report of a woman screaming near the couple’s home on Avenue C, but could not locate anyone.

Voynov was arrested at the hospital and released on bail. National Hockey League Commissioner Gary Bettman immediately suspended him from the league.

“We are aware of the actions taken (Thursday) in California, which we will review and evaluate before making any decisions,” said Bill Daly, the NHL’s deputy commissioner. “Until further notice, the current terms of Mr. Voynov’s suspension remain in place."

Varlamova, who has a young daughter, moved back in with her husband after his arrest. She is worried about her family’s privacy and concerned they “are going to be subjected to ridicule, embarrassment and hatred because of this decision” and have already seen that happening, Walsh said.

"It is unfortunate that no one seemed to care what she wants, and that the authorities gave little or no weight to her view of the facts of the case,” Walsh said. "Despite this unwelcome news, she still expects her husband to be cleared of any criminal wrongdoing.”

Dunnick said he would not disclose whether he would call Varlamova to the witness stand to testify if the case goes to trial.

“It’s not uncommon for the victim to oppose charges being brought or oppose the prosecution of their spouse,” he said. "While we always try to take into account the victim’s request, our ultimate goal is to make sure the community is safe and our victim is safe."

The Los Angeles Kings, who played the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday at Staples Center, issued a statement saying, "We maintain our support of the NHL’s indefinite suspension of Slava Voynov. As an organization, we will continue to closely monitor the developments of the legal proceedings and work in partnership with the NHL to determine the proper course of action in the future."

November 20 postgame notes

Staff

- With the win, Los Angeles improved to 34-27-10 all-time against the Carolina/Hartford franchise, a record that includes a home mark of 21-11-3. The Kings have won a franchise record four consecutive home games in the series since a 3-2 setback at Staples Center on December 8, 2005.
- Los Angeles improved to 4-3-2 against the Eastern Conference and 2-2-2 against the Metropolitan Division.
- With a 10-2-1 home record, the Kings have the most home points (21) and wins (10) in the NHL. The best home start in Kings history through 13 games was in 1992-93 (12-1-0).
- Los Angeles is 6-for-12 on the power play over the last three games.
- Nine of the last 11 games between the two teams have been decided by one goal.
- Drew Doughty's string of playing at least 30 minutes ended at four games. He has logged at least 30 minutes of ice time in six of the last eight games.
- With their assists tonight Drew Doughty (0-3=3 in the last three), Jake Muzzin (0-4=4 in the last three) and Justin Williams (0-3=3 in the last three), extended their assist streak to three games. They tie the longest assist streak posted by a King this season (six times, last: Muzzin, 1-4=5; Nov. 6-11). Also, Muzzin has tied his career-long assist streak (set earlier this year). Muzzin has nine points (1-8=9) in the last six games.
- Drew Doughty has five points (1-4=5) in the last five games.
- Mike Richards played in his 199th consecutive game, and Darryl Sutter coached his 199th regular season game with the Kings.
- Marian Gaborik has 22 points (10-12=22) in 20 games against Carolina.
- Jarrett Stoll scored his second PPG of the season. He has three points in the last three games.
- Jonathan Quick picked up his 10th win of the season, stopping 25-of-27 shots. He has not lost a game in regulation in his last seven appearances (5-0-2) and has posted a .935 SV% and 1.94 GAA during that span.
- Trevor Lewis tied Nathan Gerbe and Elias Lindholm with a game-high six shots on goal.
- Los Angeles attempted 62 shots (39 on goal, 13 blocked, 10 missed). Carolina attempted 51 shots (27 on goal, 12 blocked, 12 missed).
- The Kings won 37-of-65 faceoffs (57%). Among regular performers, Mike Richards won 11-of-14, Anze Kopitar won 7-of-16, Jarret Stoll won 10-of-19, and Jeff Carter won 9-of-16.

The Kings are scheduled to practice at Toyota Sports Center at 11:00 a.m. Friday before traveling to Dallas.

This is an LA Kings Insider project where we track offensive zone entries by the Kings during 5-on-5 play. The shots generated total includes all shots on goal, shot attempts that miss the net and shots that are blocked. The overall goal of this is to have a statistical way of examining whose play is helping to generate the Kings’ offensive attack. Failed attempts include being turned away by the defense, turnovers and when the play goes offsides. Controlled entries are when the puck is carried or passed successfully over the blue line. Successful entries include all controlled entries and times the puck is dumped in. Keep in mind there are a lot of spreadsheets, official and unofficial scoring information and algorithms trying to make this work in concert with the subjective nature in the evaluation of play.

Staff

Dustin Brown, on even strength lines being used on the power play:

It's just being ready when your name's called. It's one of those things where we're struggling on the power play, so as a result you have a lot of different guys going in different situations. It's an opportunity for guys to kind of grab hold.

Brown, on the team's ability to respond quickly to goals against:

I think it's just a good response from our team. I think it changes the momentum pretty quickly there when they get a goal and we get a goal right back. I think the goals we gave up tonight probably are ones we didn't want to give up, but to have a response like that's good.

Brown, on whether the win sets a tone for the road trip:

I think it's always important getting a win before you go on the road, just from a morale standpoint. It keeps us in good spirits. Now we've got to be prepared to go.

Brown, on dominating possession in what developed into a close game:

I thought we played a good game. I think again I thought we were a little sloppy in the first. We gave up a few too many chances I guess throughout the game...as of late we've been relying on one line or two lines on any given night, and I thought tonight we had four solid efforts from the lines and the D were strong.

Brown, on what improved from the previous meeting in Carolina:

Our whole game, pretty much. For us, I think it just comes down to our readiness and our intensity, quite honestly. When we have that going for us, our team's really hard to beat. But in Carolina we weren't very good.

Brown, on his assist on Jarret Stoll's goal:

It was off the power play, so I threw it to Stick on the half wall and he threw it right back which got all four of their guys kind of moving, and Stolly kind of popped into the pocket there at the right time.

Tanner Pearson, on the win:

I think we wanted to finish strong at home. I think we did a good job. Obviously the power play started us off. We just went from there.

Pearson, on scoring his goal 37 seconds after Carolina tied the game:

I think anytime you give up a goal, you want to get it back as quick as possible. Whether it's five minutes or whatever, you always want to try and regain that lead. I just whacked it in I guess.

Pearson, on what he saw on his goal:

I didn't know if it was going in off [the goaltender's] shoulder from Rick's kind of shot. I just hadn't gotten one for a while, so I just tapped it home.

Pearson, on whether he was relieved to score:

Yeah, I think whenever you kind of go in a drought, and I obviously haven't played my best hockey as of lately, but definitely this game helped a lot.

Pearson, on whether changing lines or a mental adjustment helped his game:

I think both. I think playing with Rick and Cliff, they're both going to be in their face and forechecking kind of guys. Rick can make some really good plays and I think Cliffy and I can go to the net and hopefully something happens. Which today, it did.

Pearson, on whether he had to remain patient during a scoring drought:

Yeah, for sure. I think that kind of stuff comes with working hard and if you're not working hard, it's not going to happen. You just have to keep on going and eventually I think the bounces will start going your way again.

Pearson, on whether he played baseball as a kid:

I never played growing up. I'm Canadian.

Pearson, on Carolina's late push:

That save that Quickie made, that definitely saved the game for sure. He definitely stood tall when he needed to and it helped us get the win.

November 20 postgame quotes: Carolina

Staff

Eric Staal, on the loss:
It felt close again. It's just they did a good job the first two periods, I thought, of getting on the forecheck and making it difficult for us to get out of our end. They were real strong, using their size and strength down low taking pucks to the net. They were rewarded with a few goals that way. The third period, we got back a little bit quicker. Their natural tendency is to sit back a little bit, so we were on the attack a little bit more and had some better chances. Close game, just not quite enough.

Staal, on Los Angeles:
They were real aggressive quick. We knew that coming in. We just needed to do a better job of creating some outs and moving the puck around. You've got to credit them. They were aggressive and they were in your face and they were fast. I'm sure they remember the last game we played them in our rink. Tonight, they were better and they were rewarded with the win tonight.

Brett Bellemore, on their game:
As a whole, our game plan was just to get in behind their D. I mean our forwards, we can really work them and use our speed to keep it off the walls and use their skill.

Bellemore, on defending against Los Angeles:
They come hard, obviously. They're hitting. They're pinning. They're working. They're using their bodies, obviously they're a big team. It's tough to contain. But as the game went on, we were back to using our speed and I think that helped a little bit.

Bellemore, on Jonathan Quick's save on Elias Lindholm late in the game:
Obviously Quick is a great goalie. He's a champ, right? You've got to go up on him and he's pretty good down low and he had a good glove there.

Bill Peters, on defending against Los Angeles:
We had a hard time handling their size and strength on the walls. They wore us out in the D-zone. They were heavy. They were a big, heavy team in the offensive zone. We spent too much time in there tonight.
November 20 postgame quotes: Darryl Sutter

Staff

On the degree of improvement from their last game against Carolina:

We were good last time we played 'em, too. If the guys that traveled with us remembered and watched the game, we were good in Carolina, too.  
[Reporter: In what way was it different tonight?] They scored three in Carolina, we scored three in Los Angeles. You know what? The power play scored a big goal, we probably got away – we took four penalties in the offensive zone. The last one they scored on, that's not a good thing, but we scored right after it also to make it three-two, so that's the difference in the game.

On how Jonathan Quick was able to “come through in the clutch”:

Didn't have a lot of work tonight.

On utilizing even strength lines on the power play:

We didn't do that tonight.

On what he’s liked about the power play:

You've got to keep it simple, and what we'd like more is again, there are guys that should be out there more that should produce, so we're using other guys. I don't think it was necessarily sharp tonight. When Stolly went out there, when Jeff's line went out there, they were good.

On winning three straight before playing nine of 12 on the road:

I never looked at it like that. Tonight was the 20th game which is basically the quarter pole, so you want to see where you’re at after 20 games in terms of where the league sets up and the way the conference sets up. We've accomplished what we wanted in the first 20 and now we’ll start working on the next. [Reporter: What's the biggest thing you want to accomplish over those next 20?] Same thing we did in the first. We want to be in a playoff spot.

On the pace of the game:

I thought it was a good pace. Our team, we've got to get through one more game here in a long stretch of games in a short period of time. We're trying to use everybody, so that means everybody's got to step up and try to play the right way and keep their tempo and their pace during the game.

On teams wanting to beat the Stanley Cup champions:

Well, that would be a normal what you’d say. That's got to be part of the motivation, but we're not the same team, so it's quite a bit different right now.

Los Angeles Kings 3, Carolina Hurricanes 2
Final
Radio Feed
LA Kings Insider Preview
Boxscore
Ice Tracker
SOG: LAK – 39; CAR – 27
PP: LAK – 1/3; CAR – 1/4
First Period
1) LAK PPG – Jarret Stoll (2) (Dustin Brown, Justin Williams), 7:53
2) CAR – Jeff Skinner (5) (Nathan Gerbe, Brett Bellemore), 17:16
Second Period
3) LAK – Trevor Lewis (3) (Marian Gaborik, Drew Doughty), 0:37
4) CAR PPG – Eric Staal (6) (Jeff Skinner, Andrej Sekera), 2:21
5) LAK – Tanner Pearson (8) (Mike Richards, Jake Muzzin), 2:59
Third Period
Los Angeles Kings (10-5-4) vs Carolina Hurricanes (6-9-3)
Thursday, November 20, 2014, 7:30 p.m. PT
Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA
Referees: #23 Brad Watson, #11 Kelly Sutherland
Linesmen: #56 Mark Wheler, #55 Shane Heyer
Fox Sports West, KABC 790 AM
Kings Weekly to follow Kings Live postgame coverage
LAK starters:
LAK scratches:
CAR starters:
CAR scratches:
November 20 Kings Weekly preview

Staff

Kings Weekly Episode 6: THE GUSTL EPISODE
(sorry, no video embed is available; Click here for a preview)
-So the episode isn't "entirely" about Gustl, but rather Anze Kopitar's experience hosting the Stanley Cup in Slovenia.

Los Angeles Kings (10-5-4) vs Carolina Hurricanes (6-9-3)

Thursday, November 20, 2014, 7:30 p.m. PT
Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA

Referees: #23 Brad Watson, #11 Kelly Sutherland
Linesmen: #56 Mark Wheler, #55 Shane Heyer

Fox Sports West, KABC 790 AM

Game 20 Preview: Los Angeles vs Carolina

Los Angeles Projected Starting Goaltender — Jonathan Quick

2014-15: 16 GP (16 GS) / 9-3-4 record / 2.06 GAA / .938 Sv% / 2 SHO
Career vs Carolina: 3 (3) / 2-1-0 / 1.63 / .941 / 0
Last Game vs Carolina: 11/2/14 / 59 MP / 29-32 shots / 2-3 L
2014-15, Home: 10 (10) / 8-1-1 / 1.42 / .954 / 2
Carolina Projected Starting Goaltender — Cam Ward
2014-15: 12 GP (12 GS) / 6-5-1 record / 2.57 GAA / .903 Sv% / 1 SHO
Career vs Los Angeles: 5 (5) / 3-0-2 / 1.75 / .936 / 0
Last Game vs Los Angeles: 11/2/14 / 60 MP / 30-32 shots / 3-2 W
2014-15, Away: 5 (5) / 2-3-0 / 3.24 / .866 / 0

Carolina Hurricanes v Los Angeles Kings

Los Angeles has lost 3-2 to the Hurricanes on November 2, have won three consecutive home games in the series to tie a franchise record. Los Angeles hasn’t lost on home ice to Carolina since December 8, 2005, when Erik Cole scored twice and Justin Williams added a goal as the Hurricanes won 3-2 over a Kings team that used goals from Jeff Cowan and Eric Belanger. Los Angeles is 3-3-2 against the Eastern Conference and 1-2-2 against the Metropolitan Division. With an 8-2-1 home record, the Kings have the most points (17) and wins (eight) in the NHL. … Drew Doughty has earned at least 30 minutes of ice time in six of the last seven games and ranks second in the NHL with an ice time average of 28:56. Ryan Suter of Minnesota leads the league with a 29:13 time on ice average. … With 199 career goals, Dustin Brown is one goal shy of 200. … Anze Kopitar has points in two straight games and seven points (3-4=7) in the last five games. He has three multi-point efforts in his last five games. … Jeff Carter has five points (2-3=5) in the last five games. … Jake Muzzin has assists in two straight games and eight points (1-7=8) in the last six games. … Drew Doughty has four points (1-3=4) in the last four games. … Mike Richards is scheduled to play his 199th consecutive game tonight. … Darryl Sutter will coach his 199th game with the Kings tonight. … Marian Gaborik has 21 points (10-11=21) in 20 games against the Hurricanes. … In 265 games with Carolina (2003-09), Justin Williams totaled 201 points (81-120=201). He had 18 points (7-11=18) during the Hurricanes’ 25-game march to the 2006 Stanley Cup and represented the Eastern Conference at the 2007 All-Star Game. … In 206 games with Carolina (2009-13), Jamie McBain totaled 75 points (19-56=75).

Carolina Projected Lines
Marian Gaborik – Anze Kopitar – Trevor Lewis
Dwight King – Jeff Carter – Tyler Toffoli
Dustin Brown – Jarret Stoll – Justin Williams
Kyle Clifford – Mike Richards – Jordan Nolan
Jake Muzzin – Drew Doughty
Brayden McNabb – Matt Greene
Robyn Regehr – Jamie McBain
Jonathan Quick

Martin Jones

Level of confidence in projected lines: C. The above lines are derived from what was used as practice yesterday; no line rushes were held today. If Tanner Pearson plays, it’s possible that Dustin Brown or Justin Williams moves up to first line right wing to open a spot, Trevor Lewis drops down to right wing on Richards’ line, and Pearson moves onto Stoll’s line. He could also reunite with Jeff Carter and Tyler Toffoli, with Dwight King dropping to Stoll’s line. Or none of these scenarios will take place, hence, the “C” level of confidence. Jonathan Quick is expected to start in goal.

Notes and milestones: Los Angeles is 33-27-10 all-time against the Carolina/Hartford franchise, a record that includes a home mark of 20-11-3. The Kings, who lost 3-2 to the Hurricanes on November 2, have won three consecutive home games in the series to tie a franchise record. Los Angeles hasn’t lost on home ice to Carolina since December 8, 2005, when Erik Cole scored twice and Justin Williams added a goal as the Hurricanes won 3-2 over a Kings team that used goals from Jeff Cowan and Eric Belanger. Los Angeles is 3-3-2 against the Eastern Conference and 1-2-2 against the Metropolitan Division. … With an 8-2-1 home record, the Kings have the most points (17) and wins (eight) in the NHL. … Drew Doughty has earned at least 30 minutes of ice time in six of the last seven games and ranks second in the NHL with an ice time average of 28:56. Ryan Suter of Minnesota leads the league with a 29:13 time on ice average. … With 199 career goals, Dustin Brown is one goal shy of 200. … Anze Kopitar has points in two straight games and seven points (3-4=7) in the last five games. He has three multi-point efforts in his last five games. … Jeff Carter has five points (2-3=5) in the last five games. … Jake Muzzin has assists in two straight games and eight points (1-7=8) in the last six games. … Drew Doughty has four points (1-3=4) in the last four games. … Mike Richards is scheduled to play his 199th consecutive game tonight. … Darryl Sutter will coach his 199th game with the Kings tonight. … Marian Gaborik has 21 points (10-11=21) in 20 games against the Hurricanes. … In 265 games with Carolina (2003-09), Justin Williams totaled 201 points (81-120=201). He had 18 points (7-11=18) during the Hurricanes’ 25-game march to the 2006 Stanley Cup and represented the Eastern Conference at the 2007 All-Star Game. … In 206 games with Carolina (2009-13), Jamie McBain totaled 75 points (19-56=75).
Anton Khudobin

Notes and milestones: Lines via Curtis Zupke of NHL.com … Alexander Semin and John-Michael Liles are expected to be scratched, while Jordan Staal is out with a broken leg. … Eric Staal (294-405=699) is one point shy of 700 in his career. … Rob Hainsey is expected to play in his 100th game as a Hurricane. … Eight of the last 10 meetings between the two teams have been decided by one goal. … Justin Faulk ranks second amongst NHL defensemen with 10 points (2-8=10) in November. … Carolina ranks second in the NHL with a 53.8% faceoff win percentage. … The Hurricanes have allowed the fourth-fewest penalty minutes per game at 8.3. … Carolina has been outscored 19-11 in first periods this season. … Elias Lindholm’s father, Mikael Lindholm, totaled four points (2-2=4) in 18 games with the Kings in 1989-90.

Unclear if Pearson plays; King talks about his return

Staff

It is unclear whether Tanner Pearson, who skated as part of a four-man group at practice yesterday alongside Dwight King, Jeff Carter and Tyler Toffoli, will play tonight.

Darryl Sutter gave the impression yesterday that he was looking for more from Pearson, who has totaled one assist in his last 11 games but was the league’s Rookie of the Month in October.

"I think his whole game has to come back again in terms of the determination and the whole three-zone thing," Sutter said yesterday. "The goals are the end result of a lot of work."

Sutter also spoke about Pearson today and said that one aspect of his game that is lacking is "probably five or six years of experience."

“He’s 22 years old,” he added. "He’s actually been a better player than some of our 32-year-olds."

Today, Pearson answered questions without knowing or disclosing if he’d be in the lineup against Carolina. He left the ice at his usual time – usually an indication that he’d be in the game – though Andy Andreoff and Jordan Nolan didn’t remain out for much longer with Martin Jones.

It’s somewhat similar of a situation to King, three years Pearson’s senior.

King was scratched for the Anaheim game on Saturday before returning on Tuesday to record an assist, a plus-one rating and two hits in 15:51 of ice time in a 5-2 win over Florida.

"It was nice that they gave me an opportunity to get right back to a regular line that plays decent minutes," King said. "We had a little bit of success. Obviously a little rust off the hop, but it’s a progress and it’s a long season so I just have to keep working at it."

As for any exchange with the coaching staff prior to his scratch against Anaheim, King said, "To be honest, there wasn’t much said."

“When you sit out, you know there is more you can do. For me, I think it’s more of an effort thing, win battles, compete for second and third opportunities. Things like that get noticed, something I need to be a little better at.”

Tanner Pearson, on how the forwards can help the defense:

I think when we’re quicker out of our zone, we’re most effective challenging other teams’ D. We’ve got a pretty quick team up front. We’ve just got to get the puck out of our end and move forward.

Pearson, on the variety of players getting power play opportunities:

Yeah, obviously last year was kind of like that too. And then Gabby came in and he and Kopi and Carts kind of clicked and I think there was one point last night when they were on. I think right now our power play is moving in the right direction.

Dwight King, on whether he watches the game when he’s out of the lineup:

No, we’re actually downstairs doing the weights and whatnot – you have to do to keep conditioned. You do watch. You’re pretty much family with these guys, so you cheer them on. Obviously they had a great game, the one I watched. It was good for the boys.

King, on any motivation to beat Carolina after the earlier loss:

We don’t play them a ton, so we get our chance to solve the season record with them. It’s an opportunity for us to get better, like you said, which is the main thing. But just play a better game and show them that we’re a better team than we were in Carolina.

Martinez could miss more than one week

Staff

Alec Martinez skated for the second consecutive day, occupying the time slot in between the Kings’ morning skate and Slava Voynov’s on-ice instruction with John Stevens.

Martinez, who injured a pinky finger on a blocked shot during last Thursday’s loss to Dallas, underwent a surgical procedure the next morning that included some work done on his nailbed. It sounded painful, though it wasn’t the type of injury that was expected to sideline the defenseman for any extended length of time. In an email returned earlier this week, general manager Dean Lombardi said that he expected Martinez to miss a week of action.

Tonight’s game against Carolina will mark one week since Martinez’s finger was injured, and it doesn’t sound like his return to the lineup will take place in the immediate term.

Darryl Sutter, on whether the team is waiting to “find out” more on Martinez:

You know what? There’s nothing really to find out. We’ve just got to wait for the wound to heal, and that’s going to take some time so there’s no way of telling. It’s got to heal. He can’t take a step back by banging or anything like that. You know, I know Dean said a week, but...it’s got to heal. [Reporter: It takes its whole course of healing?] Yeah. They nearly cut his finger off. I don’t think I could play in a week. [Reporter: Not like Jose Canseco?] When you’re still walking around, holding your finger like that? I don’t think you’re going to be playing. That’s clear. You know your fingers do have a pulse in them, and it does hurt. And Marty’s tough. We’ve seen him play lots – not with little finger injuries, with big injuries. It’s painful. Put the glove in there and the sweat in there, you’ve got to be careful. Start losing ground on infection. We miss him. We miss him a lot, but he can’t play at 20 percent.

On what has been missing from Tanner Pearson’s game:

Probably five or six years of experience. It’s not that big a deal. Maybe he’s successful now, too. It was a hot topic because he was Player of the Month and had a good start. We’ll manage his minutes a little bit better, and hopefully he plays better. He’s 22 years old. He’s actually been a better player than some of our 32-year-olds.

On whether Trevor Lewis’ high shot rate influenced his placement on Anze Kopitar’s line:

No, I don’t think so. If you look at his highest shots games, he’s played 12 minutes with Gaborik and Kopitar in his season. I don’t think the shots on goal would reflect playing with close guys. [Reporter: So it’s just the traditional package that you get from him – the hustle, the work, the skating?] He’s just coming back from injuries…so if you look at the game he got hurt in, he had six shots on goal and we lost, so I don’t know what bearing it has on anything. I’d like him to get one and score.

On whether he’s “still concerned” about Drew Doughty’s heavy usage:

What am I going to do about it? Say ‘yes’ and not play him that much and lose? Not much you can do about it. Is it a good number? No, it’s not. It doesn’t help Drew, and it doesn’t help us. [Reporter: He loves it.] Well, how old’s Drew? 24? I was working on his whole game than trying to play the whole game…When you play that much, you’re not as effective.
November 20 morning skate notes

Staff

-The Kings held an optional skate at Toyota Sports Center today. The 14 players who took the ice started drills before John Stevens, Davis Payne and Bill Ranford joined them, so for several minutes the inmates ran the asylum. Because of the small numbers, no line rushes were held.

-Jonathan Quick exited the ice first; expect him to start against Carolina tonight.

-Tanner Pearson, who skated as an extra along with Dwight King, Jeff Carter and Tyler Toffoli yesterday, left the ice shortly before Jordan Nolan, Andy Andreoff and Martin Jones. No players stayed on the ice for extended work, so it's not clear which two players will sit out tonight's game. Yesterday, Nolan and Andreoff skated as part of a four-person group that also included Kyle Clifford and Mike Richards.

-Alec Martinez took the ice after the morning skate; it was his second consecutive day skating. Dean Lombardi placed the timetable for his recovery at one week. Though the injury occurred one week ago today, he’s almost certainly out for tonight's game. Saturday's game at Dallas could be a target date for his return.

-There's terrific reporting by The Columbus Dispatch's Aaron Portzline on a sad, sad story involving former King Jack Johnson. If you haven't read it yet, it's right here.

Yeo shuffles lines in search of goals

Article by: Michael Russo
Star Tribune
November 21, 2014 - 12:17 AM

PHILADELPHIA – There was a certain irony that two of the three members of the famed (and consistent) Legion of Doom line — Eric Lindros and John LeClair — were inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame before a game Wild coach Mike Yeo tossed three of his four lines into a bingo cage despite a three-game winning streak.

These days, all NHL coaches scramble lines more than yesteryear, perhaps because more players are interchangeable in today’s game because skill and speed are spread throughout a lineup and there’s fewer stereotypical checkers relegated to third- and fourth-line roles.

Case in point: the Wild’s third line against the Flyers included Thomas Vanek, who most would label a goal-scorer, speedster Jason Zucker and talented Charlie Coyle. That’s not exactly the makeup of a prototypical, shutdown checking line, which was proved with 45.4 seconds left Thursday when the line combined for Zucker’s winning goal to beat the Flyers.

Thursday morning, Yeo gave three explanations for tinkering with his second, third and fourth lines despite a run of victories.

First, the Wild’s pattern the past few years is a team that gets on winning streaks, then losing streaks, almost as if players get “stale” after they’ve won consecutive games, Yeo said. So the Wild wants to keep players “on edge.”

But most of all, Yeo said the Wild needs to score more on the road (32 goals at home vs. 20 on the road) and jump-start Vanek, who has one goal and 35 shots in 18 games (14 of those shots came in two games).

“We have to get some more scoring throughout our lineup and if that means we have to split up some lines and try some things, … we have to try to continue to get better here,” Yeo said. “Hopefully this works and if it doesn’t work, then we’ll find something else.”

As for Vanek, Yeo said, “We have to get him going,” adding that every time he has moved Coyle this season, it has been to spark another player, such as Mikko Koivu or Mikael Granlund.

“And now we put him with Thomas because we think he can help Thomas,” Yeo said.

Yeo indicated Coyle’s move from right wing to center could stick if he jolts that line into production. For one night at least, it worked. Coyle was terrific and assisted on Zucker’s first goal in 11 games.

“We don’t seem to be, right now anyway, a team that has two lines that are going to go out and just score basically every night,” Yeo said “So we’ve got to make sure that we have another line that gives us that threat. When we’ve struggled, it’s because we don’t score.”

Toughened up

Expecting the Flyers to be surly after GM Ron Hextall blasted them following Wednesday’s loss at the Rangers, and with the Wild having won at Dallas last weekend with defenseman Stu Bickel playing forward, Yeo dressed the former Gopher for a second time this season.

“I like what he brought last time we were on the road and coming in to play against a team that I think is going to be very motivated, I want to make sure our guys are ready to play a physical-type game,” Yeo said Thursday morning.

Kyle Brodziak, who once scored an overtime winner at Philadelphia, was scratched for a sixth time this season but for the first time in 11 games.

Left wing Matt Cooke (hip flexor) missed his 10th game but is on the three-game trip. Frustrated by how slow his injury has healed, Cooke hopes to begin skating early next week.

Etc.

• Goalie Josh Harding, who hasn’t played in the NHL since Dec. 31, will back up for the Iowa Wild in Rockford on Friday.

The Wild won its fourth in a row tonight here in Philly after a tremendous response to Claude Giroux’s tying power-play goal with 3:30 left.

Jason Zucker, who had no goals in the previous 10 games and no points in the previous eight, buried Ryan Suter’s goalmouth pass for the winner with 45.4 seconds left en route to a 3-2 Wild win, the team’s fourth in a row as it starts a three-game road trip that continues to Tampa Bay and Florida.

Evening, and I am going to be very quick. You can please read the gamer and notebook for the details, but I have a wakeup call in less than three hours.

Darcy Kuemper, who was so good tonight, was rewarded with his ninth win after making a season-high 37 saves behind a team that was throwing pucks away left and right in the first 40 minutes and was outshot 14-6 through one period and 27-13 through two.

On the winner, Thomas Vanek slipped a pass through Wayne Simmonds legs to Suter. He inched in and took a shot that deflected wide, but Charlie Coyle won the race to the puck to get it back to Suter, who then made a great pass to Zucker for the big goal.

Mikko Koivu didn’t play the last 18:50 because he’s sick, coach Mike Yeo said. Yeo doesn’t think it’s mumps symptoms and I saw Koivu after, and although he was unavailable to interview, he definitely didn’t have the classic swollen glands the others had. So the Wild hopes it stays that way.

Koivu was definitely noticeably off his game tonight. Just little energy and the final straw was his blue-line turnover at the end of the early third-period power play tonight. He didn’t play again. But at 1:42, Marco Scandella put the Wild up 2-1 one game after scoring the OT winner vs. Winnipeg.

The Wild missed Koivu in the circle late, especially on that late Philly power play that Giroux scored on.

Nino Niederreiter, who also scored a goal (power-play goal to snap the Wild’s 0 for 32 road PP string), did so many good plays on the shift it was ridiculous. The sequence started with him getting the puck into the zone, then he outworked two Flyers on the forecheck to gather Jared Spurgeon’s rebound.

Finally, after Mikael Granlund outworked Scott Laughton in traffic to keep a puck in, Niederreiter found it and whistled it across for Scandella. He had all the time in the world to skate to the top of the circle and unload.

Scandella made amends for a couple mistakes he made before Philly’s tying goal in the second period to make it 1-1. Not normally on the power play, he seemed unaware that Giroux was coming out of the box. Giroux took it right from him. Then in the D zone, Scandella put Matt Dumba in a bad position with a bad pass, and Dumba turned it over before Mark Streit’s goal.

Check out the game for the strange sequence involving Spurgeon that led to Giroux’s tying goal with 3:30 left.

Yeo looked smart after this one. With many folks critiquing his changing of the lines after a three-game winning streak, that newly created Vanek-Coyle-Zucker line created the winner. Coyle, at center, was real good tonight. Yeo loved Coyle’s game at both ends of the ice. He was plus-2, had six hits, had two shots, drew a penalty and assisted on Zucker’s winner.

Zucker also was good again and his hustle led to a beat-out icing and drawn penalty late in the second. Vanek had glaring turnovers (so did every teammate), but he made play and had the “third assist” on the winner.

The Wild was beyond sloppy the first two periods, but Kuemper kept the Wild in it. Finally Yeo went in between the second and third and told his team to forget the first two periods and go out and win a 1-1 game on the road there for the taking. Make a play or two, he told them, after not moving their feet or trying to make plays in the second, just “throwing it right back to them.”

“We were defending hard, we were blocking shots, guys were willing to pay the price, but I really felt like we were just playing not to lose that hockey game,” Yeo said. “I liked the way our guys came out in the third period. We really got after it.”

The Wild had 16 shots in that period.

Humorously this morning, Yeo said the Wild needs to start scoring three goals a game on the road.

“And it took all of them and it took almost the whole game to get it,” Yeo said afterward.

Kuemper was awesome and he said he knew he had to be good tonight because the Flyers were going to be hungry.

Yeo said, “He was good and I’m going to make sure he’s ready to be good for the next one, too.”

That’s it for me. Josh Harding is backing up for Iowa in Rockford on Friday, by the way.

Talk to you after practice in Tampa on Friday.

Minnesota Wild

Wild-Philadelphia game recap

Michael Russo

November 20, 2014 - 10:58 PM

GAME RECAP

STAR TRIBUNE’S THREE STARS

1. Darcy Kuemper, Wild: The goalie made a season-high 37 saves for his ninth win.

2. Nino Niederreiter, Wild: Had a goal and assist and has eight goals and 11 points in his past 13 games.

3. Jason Zucker, Wild: Scored the winning goal with 45.4 seconds left for his first goal in 11 games.

BY THE NUMBERS

0-for-32 Wild road power play snapped with Niederreiter’s team-leading ninth goal.

4 Goals (career high) in 16 games for Marco Scandella.

20 Blocked shots the past three games for Jared Spurgeon (five Thursday).

Zucker's late goal lifts Wild past Flyers, 3-2

PHILADELPHIA — After it appeared they had blown a regulation victory, the Wild players were relieved and excited to pull out a late win.

Jason Zucker scored with 45.4 seconds left to lift Minnesota to a 3-2 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday night.

"It was a little bit of relief and happy we were able to bounce back and get out of here with two points," Zucker said.

Nino Niederreiter had a goal and an assist and Marco Scandella also scored for the Wild, who won their fourth straight. Darcy Kuemper stopped 37 shots.

"I was pretty excited," Kuemper said of his reaction to Zucker's goal. "It's always exciting when you can end it in regulation. He buried it. That was huge."

Mark Streit and Claude Giroux scored for the Flyers, who lost their fourth straight. Ray Emery had 27 saves.

Philadelphia coach Craig Berube was satisfied with his club's effort.

"We played well," Berube said. "I thought we took the play to them most of the game. We made two mistakes in the third period you shouldn't make and it cost us two goals."

Scandella broke a 1-1 tie 1:42 into the final period when he ripped a slap shot from just outside of the left circle past Emery's glove hand. It look like it was going to be the winning goal for the second straight contest for Scandella, who scored the winner in Minnesota's 4-3 win over Winnipeg on Sunday.

However, Giroux's one-timer on the power play with 3:30 left in the game beat Kuemper stick side to tie it at 2-all.

The Wild then capitalized when Philadelphia couldn't clear in its own zone in the final minute and scored when Ryan Suter sent a cross-ice pass to a wide-open Zucker, who deposited the puck into the empty net past a sprawling Emery.

"I was trying to get in on the forecheck," Zucker said. "I just tried to get to the net and (Suter) made an unbelievable pass."

Said Giroux, "Of course it's a tough way to lose. We played the right way all game and gave ourselves a chance to win."

Minnesota opened the scoring with 9:01 left in the second period when Niederreiter tallied on the power play on a one-timer after receiving a cross-ice pass from Matt Dumba. Niederreiter's slap shot from the top of the right circle beat Emery, who was shifting laterally but couldn't get to the left side of the net fast enough.

The Flyers tied it 3 1/2 minutes later when Streit scored from close range after receiving a nifty pass from Vincent Lecavalier.

The Flyers lost on the second night of a back-to-back. On Wednesday, Flyers GM Ron Hextall bashed his team after a 2-0 loss at the Rangers.

Philadelphia played with more energy against Minnesota but lost again.

"If we play like that, we'll win a lot of hockey games," Berube said. "That's gotta be the focus. It's not good enough; we lost. (But) that's the way you gotta play. That's the competitiveness we're looking for, the skating, the team play, that's what we're looking for. If we consistently do that, we'll win our share of games and be right there where we want to be."

The Flyers dominated the first 1 1/2 periods and held a 21-8 advantage in shots but couldn't score. Their best chance came 5 minutes into the second period when Jakub Voracek hit the post.

Voracek later had an assist on Giroux's goal to move into the NHL lead in scoring with 27 points.

The Wild improved their road mark to 4-6-0 while getting just their second win (2-7-1) in 10 trips all-time to Philadelphia.

"I like the way our guys came out in the third period and we really got after it," Wild coach Mike Yeo said. "I really like what Darcy did tonight."

NOTES: Eric Lindros and John LeClair — two members of Philadelphia's vaunted "Legion of Doom" line — were inducted into the Flyers' Hall of Fame in a ceremony before the game. ... Philadelphia D Andrew MacDonald (lower body) and D Luke Schenn (upper body) returned after missing 10 and three games, respectively. ... The Flyers have outscored the Wild 31-15 in those 10 games in Philadelphia. ... Philadelphia D Michael Del Zotto (lower body) didn't play after suffering an injury against the Rangers on Wednesday.

Wild wins a nail-biter over Philadelphia on Zucker’s late goal

PHILADELPHIA – Kicking trash cans, slamming doors, telling players they’re “embarrassing” … mild-mannered Chuck Fletcher would probably never do what Flyers counterpart Ron Hextall reportedly did Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden.

“I usually let the coaches do that,” joked Fletcher, the Wild general manager, from the Wells Fargo Arena press box a night after Hextall lit into the struggling Flyers after an awful effort at the Rangers.

Coach Mike Yeo didn’t pull a Hextall on Thursday. He had every right to tear into his players during the second intermission for continually throwing pucks away, but instead, Yeo calmly told his group to forget the first 40 minutes and go win a road game there for the taking.

In other words, make a play.

Jason Zucker and Ryan Suter did just that. Responding to a tying goal minutes before, Suter’s goalmouth pass to a wide-open Zucker stunned the Flyers with 45.4 seconds left as the Wild took a 3-2 victory for its fourth victory in a row.

“We all realized we weren’t playing our game, we weren’t on top of it, and there’s going to be nights like that. But you’ve got to fight through it,” goalie Darcy Kuemper said after being rewarded for a season-high 37-save performance. “Guys stepped up.”

Zucker’s goal — his first in 11 games — was a marvelous answer to Claude Giroux’s tying power-play goal with 3:30 left. Kuemper had denied the Flyers’ star captain six previous times, but Giroux took advantage of breaking Jared Spurgeon’s plastic shot blocker on his left skate.

On Spurgeon’s 20th shot-block in three games and fifth of the night, Giroux’s blast snapped Spurgeon’s strap, which got caught under the defenseman’s blade. Spurgeon struggled back into position, but nine seconds later, Giroux one-timed Brayden Schenn’s pass as Spurgeon toppled over the strap.

“As soon as it hit, I felt it break and I tried to get it off, but Zucks and Suts saved me,” Spurgeon said.

Less than three minutes later, Thomas Vanek slipped a pass through Wayne Simmonds’s legs to Suter. Suter inched in and snapped a shot that deflected wide. But Charlie Coyle, who had two shots, six hits and was plus-2, beat Andy MacDonald to the puck and got it back to Suter, who quickly fed Zucker. The snakebit right wing slam-dunked the puck past Ray Emery, who had no chance.

Zucker, who also had no points in eight games, said the feeling was instant “relief.”

“Guys like that, you need them to score big goals at big times, and that was certainly a good one,” Yeo said of Zucker.

It was a big win for the Wild, which opened a three-game road trip and played the final 18:50 without captain Mikko Koivu. He never left the bench, but Yeo said afterward Koivu was sick. Yeo doesn’t think it’s the mumps filtering through the team because Koivu doesn’t have swollen glands.

After a scoreless first, Nino Niederreiter scored a second-period power-play goal to end the team’s 0-for-32 road power-play futility. After Mark Streit tied it 3½ minutes later, Niederreiter set up Marco Scandella’s go-ahead goal 1:42 into the third.

The win was well-deserved for Kuemper, who made some ridiculous saves and held the Wild in a game it was outshot 14-6 through one period, 27-13 through two.

“Coming on the road into a building with a real hungry team, I felt like I was going to have to be good,” he said.
As I tweeted this morning, I suspect the Wild will be facing a very surly Philadelphia Flyers team when Minnesota opens up a three-game roadie.

After watching his team’s uninspired 2-0 loss at Madison Square Garden (a third straight defeat), Flyers GM Ron Hextall, the former goalie who didn’t mind dropping the gloves every once in a while either, could be heard by reporters screaming at his team in the changing room. He dropped profanities, made clear the effort was “embarrassing,” and apparently slammed doors and kicked over a garbage can.

Wild coach Mike Yeo expects a motivated Flyers team tonight, and even though the Flyers don’t have the tough makeup they had in the ’80s, ’90s and even in recent years, Yeo will toss Stu Bickel, the Wild’s toughest customer, in the lineup tonight. Kyle Brodziak will be scratched.

Bickel will see shifts on the fourth line, and, most likely, Yeo will alternate double-shifting other forwards at times in the game to skate with Erik Haula and Ryan Carter.

“I liked what [Bickel] brought last time we were on the road [in Dallas] and coming in to play against a team that I think is going to be very motivated, I want to make sure our guys are ready to play a physical type game.”

The Wild is 3-6 on the road and Yeo felt that the tough element Bickel brought in Dallas may have helped in that 2-1 win and “maybe that’s something we’ll look at going forward. He did a good job and we’ll get him back in today and we’ll take it from there.”

--Tonight’s game is scheduled to start at 7:59 p.m. and 30 seconds ET.
(Returning to the hotel around 1 a.m. should do wonders for my productivity tomorrow after a 3:30 a.m. wakeup call to get to my flight to Tampa via Atlanta!!)

The reason is Eric Lindros and John LeClair, two members of the Flyers’ old Legion of Doom line, will be inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame at 7 p.m. ET. Warmups start at 7:22 p.m. The Wild will be in the locker room during the ceremony, so this will be treated by the team like a typical 8 p.m. (7 p.m. CT) game.

--Yeo is juggling his lines tonight for really three reasons:
1) He says the Wild keeps getting stalemated during win streaks (three in a row now); 2) He wants to create three scoring lines on the road (32 home goals vs. 17 road goals in 9 games); 3) To get Thomas Vanek going.

And, frankly, that’s the real catalyst to all this. Vanek has one goal. He has 33 shots (14 in two games meaning 15 in 15 others). If Vanek was doing well 5-on-5, there wouldn’t be such a need. So tonight, Charlie Coyle will slide in to center the Vanek-Jason Zucker line, Justin Fontaine will move to the Nino Niederreiter-Mikael Granlund line and the top line of Zach Parise-Mikko Koivu-Jason Pominville will stay intact.

Coyle will be Vanek’s fifth center this year. Zucker has no goals in 10 games, no points in eight. And Coyle, a minus-2 last game, had three assists in the two previous games but no goals since Oct. 23 (12 games).

Let’s go point by point as to why Yeo is juggling his second, third and fourth lines despite a three-game winning streak:

1. Yeo: “There’ve been times we’ve won games consecutively and then we almost get a little bit stale. Our staff feels there are times where you should leave it alone and there’s other times that just because you got the result that you wanted, I think you have to look at the game as a whole. We have to make sure we’re keeping the guys on edge as well.”

Basically, Yeo also said despite the winning streak, you look at each game and the Wild did have rough times, especially the past two. The first half of the game in Dallas wasn’t good. The Wild coughed up a 3-0 lead in the third Sunday against Winnipeg before winning in overtime.

2. Yeo believes Coyle’s speed and skill through the middle of the ice will help. Yeo: “We’ve got to score more goals on the road. Even the game in Dallas, we won 2-1, which is great, but you can’t keep doing that all the time. We have to win some games like that, but we have to find a way to score at least three goals on the road, so we can’t just rely on one line, maybe even two lines to do that. We have to get to some more scoring throughout our lineup and if that means we have to split up some lines and try some things, again, we’re not satisfied that we’ve won three games in a row. We have to try to continue to get better here. Hopefully this works and if it doesn’t work, then we’ll find something else.”

3. Which brings us to Vanek because point 2 wouldn’t be a problem if the Wild wasn’t having such a hard time finding him linemates that could help him score. He has made plays obviously, proven by his team-high nine assists, but he was brought here to score goals and he’s barely even attempting shots, which is unbelievably concerning to the coaching staff right now. That has been abundantly clear lately.

Yeo: “We have to get him going, and skill guys have to play with skill players. We’ve talked a lot this year about how Charlie we think there’s another level to his game, but what a great compliment to him that every time we have moved him off a line this year it’s because we’re trying to get somebody else going. We put him with Mikko because we think he could help Mikko. We put him with Granny because we think he can help Granny. And now we put him with Thomas because we think he can help Thomas. And that’s a real compliment to the player.”

So could this be permanent with Coyle?

“It could be,” Yeo said. “We don’t seem to be right now anyways a team that has two lines that are going to go out and just score basically every night. So we’ve got to make sure that we have another line that gives us that threat, gives us that possibility. When we’ve struggled, it’s because we don’t score. We’ll do the right things defensively and play the right game without the puck, but they’re not scoring when they do the other stuff, so it’s worth a try.”

And one big reason why the Wild has to try this is because Erik Haula hasn’t produced the way the Wild expected after his solid postseason. He has two goals and no assists.

-- Yeo coached LeClair briefly in Pittsburgh and says he was a class act and pro and he said he had the “misfortune” of having to play against Lindros when he played for Oshawa and Yeo Sudbury.

“He was just a man amongst boys,” Yeo said.

He was a foot taller and Yeo said, “40 pounds heavier and faster and more skilled. For somebody to be able to dominate the game the way he did both physically and skill wise, it was hard to watch playing against him, but it really was impressive. He could really take over a game in any way,” meaning he was great if you wanted to play a skating game, a skill game or a physical game, he’s just “power right through ya.”

-- The Wild will fly to Tampa right after tonight’s game to begin the father-son trip. Many of the fathers or other mentors will already be waiting for the team in Tampa, others are arriving in time for practice Friday.

I have to look it up, but the Wild has been pretty atrocious during its. I think, three prior father-son trips and one mother-son trip. You’d think it would serve as motivation. But last time the Wild did this in January 2012, the Wild got absolutely annihilated in Philadelphia and Toronto.

The Wild has previously done father-son/mother-son trips in Southern California and I think once to Chicago. Two of those came in the Doug Risebrough-Jacques Lemaire era, and I don’t think the Wild has a single point in the two done in the Chuck Fletcher era.

“What I hope and what I told our guys, that trip hasn’t started yet,” Yeo said.

“We have an opportunity to make it a special trip, but it’s not fun and it’s not special unless you win. Ideally, you go in there tomorrow and we have an opportunity to see everybody and we’re feeling good about a game tonight. All-in for this game and nothing else matters.”

I’ll have a lot more on the father-son trip in Saturday’s paper. Also, if you didn’t see my story on Zach Parise and Ryan Suter’s sorrow that their fathers can’t be on the trip, here’s that link.

-- Lastly, Matt Cooke is on the trip and will have his father-in-law tagging along with him in Florida.

The Wild misses Cooke’s hard-nosed game and frankly that fourth line was scoring every game with Cooke on it. Cooke leads the NHL in points per 60 mins (4.42). Ryan Carter’s 4.02 is third, by the way.
Cooke will miss his 10th game tonight with a hip flexor injury and just hasn’t been able to get it right. The Wild wants to get him 100 percent so he doesn’t have to deal with this all year. Cooke played on it for awhile after hurting it Game 2 in Denver. He’s obviously frustrated by the length of time out because he typically doesn’t miss games for injury, but the hope is he can begin skating after the road trip that ends at Florida on Tuesday.

Cooke feels awful for old Pittsburgh teammate and former Wild Pascal Dupuis, who will miss the next six months to treat a blood clot in one of his lungs. Cooke said he texted with Dupuis.

“Missing games are never easy,” Cooke said. “He went through a tough situation last year with his knee, and now, this, just terrible. He’s a guy that has his priorities in the right spot. As much as none of us want to step aside from our livelihood, he knows he has got to make sure he’s healthy for his wife and kids.”

Pacioretty nets a pair to lead Habs past Blues

Kelsey Patterson

MONTREAL — The Canadian Press

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Max Pacioretty scored twice to give the Montreal Canadiens a 4-1 victory over the visiting St. Louis Blues on Thursday night.

Dale Weise and Lars Eller also scored for Montreal (15-5-1). Carey Price stopped 31-of-32 shots.

Vladimir Tarasenko was the lone scorer for St. Louis (12-6-1), while Jake Allen made 26 saves in defeat.

Mirtle on the turmoil in Toronto

Pacioretty scored the winner at 7:32 of the second — his team-leading ninth goal of the year. Pacioretty got the better of Allen on the breakaway after taking a stretch saucer pass from linemate Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau from his own zone.

The Canadiens stretch their lead atop the Eastern Conference to three points. The Blues, meanwhile, have lost consecutive games after winning 10 of their previous 11.

Tarasenko brought back memories of the defunct Montreal Expos when he scored the opener at 7:45 of the first, batting the puck out of midair like a baseball slugger at the plate. The 22-year-old displayed impressive hand-eye co-ordination on the goal, which came on just the Blues' third shot on Price.

The period was played largely in the neutral zone and along the boards, and the Canadiens failed to score a goal in the first period for the 16th time this season.

After going 96:09 without scoring a goal — Montreal had not found the back of the net since the third period against Detroit on Sunday — the Canadiens scored twice in quick succession against the Blues.

Weise jumped on a defensive blunder by Kevin Shattenkirk to tie the game 1-1 at 4:50 of the second. Shattenkirk made an ill-advised pass out from behind his net that was intercepted by Weise, who patiently waited for Allen to go down before beating the Blues netminder up high for his fourth of the year.

Weise bettered his goal total from last season, when the 26-year-old scored three times in 17 regular-season games.

Pacioretty scored less than three minutes later.

In the third, after Price made back-to-back sensational saves on two different odd-man rushes 20 seconds apart, first on Jon Lehtera and then on Jaden Schwartz, Pacioretty added his second of the game on a clever scooped pass by David Desharnais.

The Habs were exceptionally well disciplined for the second game in a row, as Michel Therrien's men took no penalties against St. Louis' league-best power play on the road (30.4 per cent).

Earlier in the day, the Canadiens acquired veteran defenceman Bryan Allen from the Anaheim Ducks in exchange for Rene Bourque.

Allen has 29 goals and 106 in 716 career regular season games.

"He's a big guy with a lot of character who played for one the best Western Conference teams," Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin said before Montreal's home game against the St. Louis Blues. "I can't see why he wouldn't be able to help us here in Montreal."

Notes: Therrien made no changes to the attacking lines that lost 4-0 to Pittsburgh on Tuesday. At the blue-line, defenceman Mike Weaver was back in the lineup. The Blues came into the encounter with a league-low 1.89 goals-against-average. St. Louis had not lost a game in Montreal since 2004. Montreal is now 12-0-0 when tied or leading after two periods.
The Montreal Canadiens traded forward Rene Bourque to the Anaheim Ducks for defenceman Bryan Allen on Thursday.

It was the second trade for a veteran blue-liner in two weeks for Montreal, which dealt forward Travis Moen to the Dallas Stars for defenceman Sergei Gonchar on Nov. 11.

"Allen’s a big guy with a lot of character who played for one of the best Western Conference teams," Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin said before Montreal’s home game against the St. Louis Blues. "I can’t see why he wouldn’t be able to help us here in Montreal."

Like the Gonchar deal, the Canadiens picked up a player whose contract expires at the end of this season for one with more than one season remaining on his deal. The 34-year-old Allen earns US$3.5 million this season while Bourque is signed through next season at a cap hit of $3.3 million.

“One of our biggest strong suits is our depth on defence,” said Bergevin, who wouldn’t reveal what the trade meant for young defencemen Nathan Beaulieu and Jarred Tinordi. "Defencemen are the players who get hurt the most often. We’ve been lucky until now, but having greater depth on defence is a luxury."

Allen had one assist in six games for Anaheim this season. The Kingston, Ont. native missed 14 games with a lower-body injury.

He was picked fourth overall by Vancouver in 1998. In 716 career regular season games with Vancouver, Florida, Carolina and Anaheim, he has 29 goals and 106 assists.

“He’s a big kid, a stay-at-home defenceman,” said Bergevin. "He’s not going to run numbers. Penalty killing probably, play against the other teams’ bigger players. He brings character and grit and size on the backend."

Bourque cleared waivers and was assigned to Montreal’s AHL affiliate, Hamilton Bulldogs, on Nov. 11 after a sluggish start to the NHL season with two assists in 13 games.

Bergevin said Bourque, who joined the Canadiens on Jan. 12, 2012 in a trade from the Calgary Flames, wasn’t too distraught about leaving the organization.

“He’s going from Hamilton to Anaheim,” said Bergevin. “No, he wasn’t upset. Rene understood. He was ready to leave, ready to turn the page. I won’t be surprised if he does well with the Ducks. That’s a really good hockey team. He can produce, and I hope he does.”
Loss to Penguins shows Habs still not an elite team

Sean Gordon

MONTREAL — The Globe and Mail
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There’s a zig-zagging border between confidence and hubris; every so often life sends someone along to point out it’s within sight.

The Montreal Canadiens are still atop the NHL standings, and if it wasn’t clear that they arrived there despite being a good but not elite team, a 4-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins may go some distance to settling the question.

The 2014 Hockey Hall of Fame inductees, from left, Mike Modano, Bill McCreary, Dominik Hasek, Peter Forsberg, Line Gignac Burns (representing her deceased husband Pat Burns), and Rob Blake, take part in a photo opportunity at the Hockey Hall of Fame on November 14, 2014 in Toronto.

Every hockey season contains its lot of humbling twists and teachable moments, which is pretty much how Montreal's coach is choosing to frame it.

"A nice dose of humility," Michel Therrien said post-game. "We realize we still have an enormous amount of work to do... if we want to compare ourselves with big teams like that."

In a week that will see them match wits with a Western Conference heavyweight on Thursday (the St. Louis Blues) and a familiar rival (in Boston on Saturday), the Habs will need to cram for their next exam.

"There’s two great tests this week, obviously we failed the first one but there’s another one coming up in two days, and we’re looking to turn it around and open up some ice," said winger Max Pacioretty, who called the effort "my worst one in a while."

It might be worth noting the big winger, along with his fellow alternate captains, has been around to face the music after losses this season – admittance to the leadership group means taking the good with the bad.

The prevailing sentiment in Montreal’s expansive new dressing room was one of frustration-tinged disappointment.

A few feet away from Pacioretty, fellow alternate captain P.K. Subban struck a matter-of-fact tone as he philosophized on the outcome.

"Maybe it’s a lesson for us to learn, we need to play the system against good teams like this. I can tell you something, the Pittsburgh Penguins, or St. Louis next game or the L.A. Kings, these types of teams in the league, they’re going to come after you for 60 minutes," he said, "you have to be prepared for that, they’re going to wait for you to make mistakes, and they’re going to capitalize on it, that’s what good teams do. We’ve done it to a lot of teams this year, it’s going to happen to us too, but you have to learn from it."

So what specifically must this club learn, Mr. Subban?

Claiming “I’m no system expert,” he pointed to repeated turnovers, a lack of competitive intensity and the hunger to get to pucks, highlighting a sequence in the second period where tired players were victimized by the long change.

"Those types of mistakes will crush you. Whether you make it in the first period, or the third period, good teams will bury you on that. And those are the things we have to learn," he said. "I can tell you, I watched their team from the bench and when they get to that blue line, the puck is going behind. I can’t tell you how many times I turned to go back to get pucks, that’s what good teams do."

So the Habs know how they have to play. The tricky part is pulling it off against top teams.

The next opportunity to be judged looms on Thursday, unsurprisingly the Habs are aware of this.

“There’s no reason to be too negative to ourselves, we had some good stretches, but now we have to bounce back, we’ve got to show we’re a good team and this one was just one that caught us flat-footed,” centre Tomas Plekanec of the night that brought a six-game winning streak to a juddering halt.

Much went wrong in this game, not all of it related to the underlying problems that have been evident since the beginning of the season.

True, the power-play sucked again, going 0-for-3.

But the blue line mostly limited the damage from the Pens’ top players and kept the puck moving in the right direction. The Habs didn’t shoot themselves in the foot with useless penalties (the Pens did score on their only power-play, but it was the fourth goal). The forwards were able to unlock the Pittsburgh forecheck early, and they even managed a lively start.

On the game’s first shift Alex Galchenyuk had a partial breakaway where he inexplicably decided to dish a blind spin-o-rama pass to the slot; Jiri Sekac, the best Hab on the night by a long chalk, probably should have opened the scoring inside the first five minutes with a power move off the right wing; Pacioretty had the puck on his stick in the slot a few minutes later but saw his shot carom high off a Pittsburgh stick.

The Habs have only lost five games in regulation this season. Four of them have been by margins of four or more, the other was a 3-0 shutout to Edmonton which, paradoxically, was one of Montreal’s better all-around efforts of the early season.

The result is the result, but if 4-0 can nevertheless feel like a close-ish game, this was it.

Pittsburgh’s first three goals were the result of egregious mistakes — a bad pass from defenceman Nathan Beaulieu, and simple coverage errors from Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau and Brendan Gallagher — but the Habs piled up a series of early scoring chances and even won the possession battle against a team that’s fairly handy with the puck.

By then, the Pens were content to let the Habs fire away at Marc-Andre Fleury, who logged his 299th career win in a building where he has been largely terrible in his career.

"Montreal hasn’t been my best city. It’s nice to get it, for sure," he said.

Asked if he could remember a better run of games — the Pens are on an 11-1 string, Fleury has seven of his last nine starts, posting four shutouts — Fleury laughed.

"Maybe pee-wee? I don’t know. I don’t think I’ve had so many [shutouts] so early in the season. It’s not all about me, our team has been playing really solid defensively, not giving them too much," he said.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.21.2014
Penguins capitalize on early chances to cool-off streaking Habs

Sean Gordon
MONTREAL — The Globe and Mail
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Hard truths are plentiful in the NHL, but there’s one with particular resonance in this case: patience with mistakes, especially youthful ones, is not a luxury coaches can afford.

Well, not if they enjoy being employed.

The leash tightens when 21-year-old Montreal Canadiens defenceman Nathan Beaulieu threads a careless pass across his defensive zone and, because of the resulting interception, the puck ends up in his own net, as happened in the first period of Tuesday’s showdown with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The 2014 Hockey Hall of Fame inductees, from left, Mike Modano, Bill McCreary, Dominik Hasek, Peter Forsberg, Line Gignac Burns (representing her deceased husband Pat Burns), and Rob Blake, take part in a photo opportunity at the Hockey Hall of Fame on November 14, 2014 in Toronto

Podcast
Duhatsek on the 2014 Hall of Fame inductees

Beaulieu’s status has been cast into doubt since the arrival of veteran Sergei Gonchar via trade last week, but Mike Weaver’s last-minute upper-body problem guaranteed him a regular shift against the Pens.

It didn’t go well.

Beaulieu also found himself on the ice for Pittsburgh’s second goal, although that one, scored by agitator Steve Downie, had more to do with a bad bounce and feeble P.A. Parenteau back-check than anything Beaulieu did.

Beaulieu played only two more shifts in the period, four more in the second, and seven in the third of a game that by then was beyond the Habs’ reach and ended 4-0.

Montreal head coach Michel Therrien is notoriously intolerant of newbie mistakes, which are often in the eye of the beholder — Beaulieu’s pass in the first was ill-advised, but if teammate Dale Weise had managed to tip or kick it away, the Pittsburgh scoring chance may never have developed.

Therrien has a stock saying: The NHL isn’t a development league. Fair enough, but that statement could benefit from a little nuance.

A player might not be made into an NHLer in the big league, but he obviously can become a better one.

There’s a temptation to say the Habs, first overall heading into the night’s action, were exposed as an inferior team to Pittsburgh, and that may be true when the dust settles on the season.

But in the first period, Montreal flew out of the traps. On the first shift of the game, 20-year-old Alex Galchenyuk found himself on a partial breakaway and inexplicably decided to make a spin-around pass to the trailer (some errors in judgment are more easily tolerated, although Galchenyuk has spent his share of time in Therrien’s dog house).

Czech forward Jiri Sekac has been a revelation since emerging from a seven-game stint in the press box, and he could easily have opened the scoring when he swooped in off the right wing a few moments later; Marc-Andre Fleury, who has had considerable trouble playing in his home province, made a marvelous toe save.

Indeed, Fleury was the story in the third period as well denying Max Pacioretty from in tight and repelling an increasingly desperate Habs squad.

He was also somewhat fortunate in having Galchenyuk and Sekac find iron rather than net, but these are the kinds of breaks in-form goalies tend to get enroute to a 27-shot shutout.

By definition, winning streaks are temporary. That the Habs’ longest string of wins in four years ended at the hands of the Pens, who also had a brutal ending to a seven-game streak earlier this year in New York, is no kind of embarrassment.

They may not be the top team in the NHL standings for long, but there are sunny days ahead for the Habs and their youngsters – providing they don’t exceed their coach’s tolerance for miscues.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.21.2014
Here’s why the Habs are No. 1 in the league standings

Sean Gordon
MONTREAL — The Globe and Mail
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Look, this wasn’t supposed to happen, so anyone who claims to have predicted it is telling nose-stretchers.

Here are the somewhat shocking facts: This is mid-November, and the Montreal Canadiens are No. 1 overall in the NHL standings.

Various statistical measures suggest the Habs aren’t as good as their point total indicates, and while it’s true they’ve had more than their share of good luck, providence can’t explain everything.

Philadelphia Flyers goalie Steve Mason’s helmet is more than protective equipment. It’s a symbol of his love of both ghouls and his teammates. Airbrush artist Franny Drummond helped make Mason’s helmet design come to life. (Nov. 6)

HOCKEY

Video: NHL helmets come to life with airbrushed flair

Boston Bruins player Milan Lucic apologized for the obscene gesture he directed at Montreal Canadiens fans during last Thursday’s game. His coach Claude Julien says Lucic let his emotions get the better of him.

Video

Video: Bruins’ Milan Lucic says he regrets rude gesture

Montreal Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban says he’d “embrace” being named team captain, with Brian Gionta’s departure leaving the spot open. Subban says he’s earned respect both “on and off the ice.”

Hockey

Video: ‘I’ve earned the respect that a captain deserves:’ P.K. Subban wants to lead Habs

Montreal has won six games in a row heading into Tuesday’s home matchup with Eastern Conference heavyweight Pittsburgh, and was only really threatened in one of them – a tense 2-1 shootout victory with lowly Buffalo.

Oh, and it’s their longest winning streak in more than four years.

Teams in the East typically must clear the 92-point bar to safely ensure a playoff spot; the Canadiens are nearly a third of the way there as they near the quarter mark of the season.

All this from a team that boasts an incompetent power play (well, until last week anyway), crummy possession statistics and a suspiciously low goal differential.

“Finding ways to squeak wins out is the sign of a good team,” leading scorer Max Pacioretty told reporters after the Habs won their fourth game in six days in Detroit on Sunday.

Since the Canadiens were embarrassed in a pair of games to open the month, they have righted the ship.

The biggest difference? It’s pretty simple: scoring. Pucks are flying into the net, 23 of them in their past six games.

It’s about a balanced attack – when the quick-footed Habs forward lines are all firing, they become nearly impossible to defend – which in turn has to do with form, tactics and a roster move or two.

Bringing 22-year-old Czech rookie Jiri Sekac in from a seven-game exile in the press box has been a boon to centre Lars Eller, as has the injection of direct play from Brandon Prust, whose slogan should be Much More Than a Tough Guy.

There’s a school of thought that general manager Marc Bergevin forced coach Michel Therrien’s hand on Sekac by waiving winger Rene Bourque (which is plausible). In turn, the swift-skating right winger has forced the opposition to alter its defensive plans to account for the Eller line.

It also helps that the Habs are getting scoring from bottom-six types such as Prust and Dale Weise, and that winger Brendan Gallagher emerged from a 10-game scoring funk; the little fellow is even banking shots into the net from his knees these days.

Skillful youngster Alex Galchenyuk is blossoming (third on the team in scoring with 13 points in 19 games) and centre Tomas Plekanec is clearly thriving in a more offensive role.

Meanwhile, ace faceoff-taker Manny Malhotra has taken nearly half the defensive zone draws in the past two weeks.

Montreal is also an underrated defensive team. The Habs’ goal differential of plus-8 is skewed by data outliers. They have given up a middle-of-the-pack 47 goals this year, but 18 of them came in three losses against Tampa, Chicago and Calgary; they’ve held opponents to three or fewer goals 15 times, and to the defensive gold standard of two or fewer on 10 occasions.

“We lost our structure a little bit on the [October] road trip out west, but I feel we’ve regained it in the Buffalo game and since then,” Therrien said recently.

There is also evidence that last week’s acquisition of 40-year-old defenceman Sergei Gonchar in exchange for checking winger Travis Moen has fixed what looked to be like a structurally teetering blueline.

Whether Gonchar can really play 18 or 19 minutes a night all season remains to be seen, but icing seven defencemen has allowed Therrien to manage his veterans’ minutes and matchups, while still giving youngster Nathan Beaulieu enough ice time to be productive.

Gonchar’s arrival has also acted as a defibrillator for the Habs’ wheezing power play. In his first game, the Habs broke broke an 0-for-28 man-advantage string; in his second game, they scored three power-play goals.

The addition of Gonchar forced the separation of P.K. Subban from his regular power-play partner, Andrei Markov. Subban has responded with two goals and an assist in his past three games (he’s fifth in scoring among the league’s defencemen).

It’s not as if goaltender Carey Price has needed to wear a cape and hero leotard, either. The 27-year-old goalie hasn’t been spectacular, but he is the picture of steady excellence of late – as he likes to say, making the save at the right moment (on a breakaway against Winnipeg, say, or a bang-bang shot from the slot against Boston) is more important than how many saves you make.

Pacioretty acknowledges the Habs aren’t perfect – no trophies are awarded in November – but they are rolling. They face a stiff test this week against the Penguins, St. Louis Blues and Boston. Should they win two or more of those, it will be about more than luck.

Hockey

Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.21.2014
About last night …

Posted by Mike Boone

It's my standard line, and it bears repeating: If I bet on sports, I'd be living in a cardboard box in the Atwater Tunnel.

But I don't bet, so I'm able to seek refuge from nature's wrath in a suburban townhouse, there to contemplate the utter folly of trying to predict how your Montreal Canadiens will perform in any given game.

I'd have bet that humble abode on St. Louis winning at the Bell Centre Thursday night.

The Blues were coming off a 2-0 loss in Boston. They had outshot the Bruins 33-17, but Tuukka Rask was spectacular.

Logic would dictate the Blues bringing their A-game to Montreal.

And they did.

But Jake Allen is no Tuukka Rask. And the Canadiens, coming off a lacklustre loss to Pittsburgh on Tuesday, brought their A-plus game and became the first team in the NHL to reach, and exceed, 30 points in the standings at the quarter-pole.

In his postgame press conference, Michel Therrien talked about what he always talks about after a win: focus, attention to detail, perseverance in sticking with the game plan and managing the puck.

"If there wasn't a play to be made," the coach said, "we didn't try to make it." The Canadiens played smart in what was, given the quality of the opposition, probably their best game of the season.

And the best indicator of the intelligence with which the Canadiens approached a challenging game was a blank space on the scoresheet under the heading "Penalty Summary".

For the first time this season, the Canadiens didn't take any penalties.

This speaks to team discipline, certainly. But not being called for a single trip, hold, hook or interference also indicates the Canadiens were rarely caught in vulnerable defensive positions where committing an infraction would have been the only way to prevent a scoring chance.

And this was achieved against a team with size, speed, an abundance of skill and the unrelenting work ethic that typifies Western Conference hockey.

St. Louis had 22 hits. The Canadiens had 20.

The home team had 12 giveaways, the visitors 11.

And the Canadiens had seven takeaways to only four for the Blues.

There were brilliant individual performances:

• Max Pacioretty celebrated his 26th birthday with two goals that put him on pace to score 40. The birthday boy had five SoG, missed the net four times and had one blocked. That's 10 shot attempts. None one else on either team was in double figures.

• Carey Price was beaten for one fluke goal as Vladimir Tarasenko batted the puck out of the air and past him. But in the third period, with the Canadiens nursing a 2-1 lead and the Blues coming on strong, Price made highlight reel saves on Jori Lehtera and Jaden Schwartz — each of whom was alone and looking to pick the top corner. Moments after the save on Schwartz, David Desharnais fed Max for his 10th of the season, and that was pretty much the ballgame.

• Lars Eller scored his sixth, which puts him on pace for a career-high 24. Playing against the team that drafted him, Eller put in a succession of physical, hard-working shifts. Eller centring Brandon Prust and Jiri Sekac is the best third line the Canadiens have had since ... well, a heckuva long time.

• P.K. Subban played a superb defensive game and still managed seven shots on goal — six of which were blocked, while the other missed the net. Notwithstanding the customary anxious moments involving Tom Gilbert, I thought all the Dmen played well. They were not overwhelmed by the Blues speed, size and aggressive forecheck.

• P.A. Parenteau, benched for the latter part of the loss to Pittsburgh, responded with a sound two-way game and just a honey of a pass to spring Max for the go-ahead goal.

A perfect game for the bleu-blanc-rouge?

Nope.

The power play fired blanks on its two opportunities. And the Tomas Plekanec line each ended at minus-1 — though they had some nice puck possession shifts in the St. Louis end during the third period.

Some suggest Eller and Sekac deserve some power play time. It might be worth a look.

Do you tinker with a team has the most points in the NHL?

You do if you're Mark Bergevin. The Canadiens general manager unloaded Rene Bourque and added a veteran defenceman in Bryan Allen. In this trade and the deal that sent Travis Moen to Dallas for Sergei Gonchar, Bergevin has shed players with the 2015-16 season remaining on their contracts, thus freeing up the salary cap space the Canadiens will need with Alex Galchenyuk and Brendan Gallagher coming off their entry-level contracts.

Also, Bergevin and his coach believe you can't have enough depth on D — especially since the absence of injuries on the back end is unlikely to last through a gruelling 82-game schedule.

The brain trust evidently has decided that Nathan Beaulieu and Jarred Tinordi need more seasoning. This is the patient Detroit approach to player development, and Bergevin pointed out that Tomas Plekanec spent three seasons in the AHL before joining the Canadiens full-time in 2005-06.

That was one season after the last time the Canadiens beat St. Louis on Bell Centre ice.

Canadiens trade Rene Bourque to Ducks for defenceman Bryan Allen

Posted by Stu Cowan

Canadiens fans won’t have Rene Bourque to kick around anymore.

General manager Marc Bergevin announced after 5 p.m. Thursday that he had traded Bourque to the Anaheim Ducks in exchange for defenceman Bryan Allen.

Allen, 34, has played six games with the Ducks this season, posting one assist while averaging 18:12 of ice time. He missed 14 games with a lower-body injury. In 716 career regular-season games in the NHL, the 6-foot-5, 223-pounder has 29-106-135 totals, along with 837 penalty minutes. Allen was selected by the Vancouver Canucks in the first round (fourth overall) at the 1998 NHL entry draft. During his NHL career, he has played for the Canucks, Florida Panthers, Carolina Hurricanes and the Ducks.

“He’s a big kid, stay-at-home defenceman,” Bergevin said during a 6:30 p.m. news conference at the Bell Centre when asked to describe Allen’s game. “He’s not a kid that’s going to run numbers. Penalty-killing, probably, play against the other team’s bigger players and, again, that’s going to be up to Mike (Michel Therrien) and his coaching staff to see what’s the best fit for him in our hockey club. But he brings character and grit to our team, and size on the back end.”

Bourque, who had only two assists in 13 games with the Canadiens this season, had been sent down to the AHL’s Hamilton Bulldogs. In four games with the Bulldogs, the 32-year-old Bourque had two goals and two assists.

Allen is in the final year of a three-year, $10.5-million contract with a $3.5-million salary-cap hit. Bourque has this season and next left on a six-year, $20-million deal with a $3.33-million salary-cap hit each season, although his actual salary is $2.5 million. Bourque will join former University of Wisconsin teammate Dany Heatley in Anaheim.

In 68 games last season with the Ducks, Allen had no goals, 10 assists, 75 penalty minutes and was plus-20 while averaging 17:33 of ice time.

Allen and Bergevin were actually teammates with the Vancouver Canucks for a brief time in 2004.

When he met with the media Thursday evening, Bergevin again repeated his mantra that a team can never have too many defencemen.

He added that Allen plays a similar style to young Canadiens defenceman Jarred Tinordi, although Allen has much more experience and has been playing for one of the top teams in the Western Conference. Bergevin said Allen would join the team in Boston, where the Canadiens face the Bruins Saturday night.

When asked what the trade means for the future of Tinordi and Nathan Beaulieu, another young defenceman, Bergevin said that he’s not necessarily finished dealing and that he’s always looking to improve his team.

When asked if Bourque was disappointed to learn about the trade, Bergevin said: “He’s going from Hamilton to Anaheim,” drawing laughs from the media.

By trading Bourque and Travis Moen to Dallas earlier this month, Bergevin has saved just over $5.1 million on the salary cap for next season.

“It’s part of the process, it’s part of the equation as we move forward,” Bergevin said about clearing salary-cap space.

Alex Galchenyuk, Brendan Gallagher, Nathan Beaulieu and Michael Bournival all become restricted free agents after this season.

As for Bourque, Bergevin said that he wishes him the best in Anaheim.

“He wasn’t doing cartwheels on the way down (to Hamilton), that’s for sure,” the GM said. “But Bourkey took it in stride. He knew he could have done better, he knew that he had to step up his game. He didn’t blame anybody but himself, and I think for me that was a good sign. He didn’t challenge me. I said, ‘Bourkey, this is the way it is now. You need to be better, you need to be more consistent,’ and he says, ‘I agree, Marc, I will go down there and I’ll make sure I’m back.’ And I said, ‘That’s all I hope … and I hope you go down there and you do well.’

“Now, when I did make the trade, he didn’t do cartwheels, he did somersaults when he went. Like I said, he went from Hamilton, which is not the NHL, to Anaheim.

“He’s going to a place where I think he could produce, and I hope he does.”

In Anaheim, Ducks GM Bob Murray told reporters: “Bourque will be coming to Anaheim and will get a decent look at a spot. With some the things that have went on, I wasn’t happy with our forwards. I like his size and skating. We’re not moving well enough.

“(Bourque) has also proven he can score in the playoffs, if you get there. I liked that as well.”

Mike Weaver will be game-time decision as Habs face Blues

Posted by Stu Cowan

The Canadiens held an optional morning skate as they got ready to face the St. Louis Blues Thursday night at the Bell Centre (7:30 p.m., CITYM, RDS, TSN Radio 690).

P.K. Subban and Andrei Markov took the morning off, while Mike Weaver did skate, but will be a game-time decision with an upper-body injury.

"It's going day by day and I'll be a game-time decision tonight," Weaver told reporters in Brossard after the morning skate. "I'm getting close and obviously no one wants to be sitting out and watching. I'm trying to get back as soon as possible and we'll see what happens tonight." 

The Canadiens and Blues are both coming off shutout losses Tuesday night, with the Canadiens losing 4-0 to the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Blues losing 2-0 to the Boston Bruins.

Surprise visit from @CanadiensMTL PK (@PKSubban1), Gally, and Prust at #Alouettes practice this morning! pic.twitter.com/vZoDBs1R5A
— Montreal Alouettes (@MTLAlouettes) November 20, 2014

"St. Louis has been a solid, structured team for a number of years now," Canadiens goalie Carey Price said after practice Wednesday. "We're definitely going to stay within our system and stay patient, because once we start opening up and making mistakes, that's what a team like St. Louis thrives on.

P.A. Parenteau knows a lot about playing against the Blues from his days in the Western Conference with the Colorado Avalanche.

"I'm used to playing against them over the years," Parenteau said. "They skate a lot and they have a lot of talent in that group. They have excellent defencemen. They're a complete team, so we'll have to be ready. It's a big test for us."

Lars Eller was selected by the Blues in the first round of the 2007 NHL entry draft (13th overall) before being acquired from the Canadiens, along with Ian Schultz, in exchange for goalie Jaroslav Halak in June 2010.

"I think over the last couple of years they've been a very tight defensive team," Eller told reporters after Thursday's morning skate. "They've got a good system, they skate a lot, and they're strong. There are a lot of good things you can say about them so we better capitalize on the opportunities we get tonight. They play simple and they're just a really good overall team. They're definitely a team we want to measure ourselves with."

Canadiens forward Max Pacioretty is celebrating his 26th birthday on Thursday.

(Montreal Gazette file photo/John Mahoney)

Max Pacioretty addresses the media prior to the game against the Blues.

WORDS FROM THE ROOM -> http://t.co/LPkhzzsH #gohabsgo
— Canadiens Montréal (@CanadiensMTL) November 20, 2014

Canadiens vs. Blues preview

PAT HICKEY

MONTREAL GAZETTE

Exam week continues: This week is seen as a series of tests for the Canadiens, who still had the best record in the NHL (14-5-1) following Tuesday night’s 4-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins. After failing the first test on home ice, next up are the Blues, who had problems of their own on Tuesday. The Blues went into Boston with a 9-1 record in their previous 10 games, but dropped a 2-0 decision to the Bruins.

Stingy defence: When a team is having trouble scoring goals — the Canadiens rank 21st in the NHL in goals scored this season — the last team you want to face is St. Louis. The Blues’ goaltending duo of Brian Elliott and Jake Allen have a combined goals-against average of 1.89, which explains why they had no problem dealing away former Canadien Jaroslav Halak at the trade deadline last season. A week ago, we saw Carey Price at his best as he allowed only five goals in four games and was named the NHL’s second star of the week. But Tuesday’s debacle against the Penguins showed that even the best goaltenders are vulnerable when they don’t get support from their teammates. The Canadiens have lost only five games this season but, when they lose, they lose big. They have been shut out in three of their five losses and have been outscored 25-3.

Mr. Excitement: Vladimir Tarasenko may not be the NHL’s leading scorer, but he leads the league in highlight-reel goals. The 22-year-old Russian is enjoying a breakthrough season with 10 goals and 11 assists in 18 games while playing on a line with Jaden Schwartz and Jori Lehtera, a Finn who was Tarasenko’s linemate with Sibir Novosibirsk in the KHL.

Saving energy: After Tuesday’s loss to the Penguins, coach Michel Therrien put his players through a light workout on Wednesday morning in Brossard. There was off-ice work on the adjoining soccer field, followed by 36 minutes on the ice. Therrien said he’s trying to keep his players fresh as they go through another stretch in which they play four games against quality opponents in six nights. The Canadiens’ week wraps up with back-to-back road games Saturday in Boston and Sunday against the Rangers in New York.

Injury update: Defenceman Mike Weaver wasn’t at practice Wednesday and he remains day-to-day with an upper-body injury. That means the Canadiens will probably go with six defencemen and they’ll be looking for a better performance from youngster Nathan Beaulieu. Michael Bournival, who is out with a shoulder injury, has resumed skating on his own, but is another week or two away from playing. The Blues are disgustedly healthy.

OTTAWA – Pekka Rinne cannot play every night through the course of an 82-game season.

Predators coach Peter Laviolette called November's schedule "tough" with games every other day, even though there are no back-to-back situations. That was one factor in the decision to give backup Carter Hutton his third start Thursday against the Senators.

"We have some home games coming up," Laviolette said. "This was an opportunity to slot him in and give him another go."

Hutton was 0-2 going into the game against the Senators, losing a tight 2-1 overtime game against Chicago on Oct. 18 and suffering a 3-1 loss to Winnipeg on Nov. 4.

"The coaches and players have a lot of confidence in Carter," Laviolette said. "He won a lot of games last year and this is a good spot for him."

Hutton had 16 saves in the 3-2 loss to Ottawa going up against Senators backup Robin Lehner, who had 33 saves.

"When I'm not playing that often, I have to be sharper," Hutton said. "I settled in, they capitalized. They have some good players and Lehner did a good job of keeping it at two tonight."

Rinne entered Wednesday's games with the most wins in the NHL (12). His save percentage (.930) and goals-against average (1.92) ranked sixth among goalies with more than five appearances.

Power play goal: The Predators have been working with different looks on the power play the last three games in hopes of improving the 24th-ranked unit in the NHL.

Shea Weber's slap shot goal in the first period was a rocket that picked the corner behind Lehner. It gave the Predators power-play goals in back-to-back games.

"We're working on it," Laviolette said. "There's no real silver lining in a loss. They moved it around and the goal was nice."

Weber's power play group was the second on the ice for that opening power play. Weber and Roman Josi were paired at the blue line with Colin Wilson, Mike Ribeiro and Craig Smith skating at forward.

Josi assisted on Weber's goal and has seven points in his last seven games (two goals and five assists).

There were four forwards on the other group. Taylor Beck — who scored on the power play against Toronto — set up in front of the net with Filip Forsberg and Calle Jarnnak at the circles. Defenseman Seth Jones and James Neal were at the blue line.

Jokinen on the board: Olli Jokinen's first goal of the season, in the third period, was his first as a Predator and his first since April 5 of last season — a span that lasted 21 games.

"It'd be a lot nicer to win for sure, you play to win the game," Jokinen said. "I'm not going to lie to you, it's nice to score. It's been a while."

Jokinen has centered Derek Roy and Matt Cullen the last two games.

Struggle in second: The Predators had outscored opponents 17-7 in the second period going into Thursday's game. That trend was bucked against with the Senators, who won the second period 3-0.

"It was a tough period — not a good period for us," Laviolette said.

Jokinen said there were too many turnovers during the scoring run and the Predators stopped skating.

"I think the first we played smart, we played the way we've been playing on the road," Jokinen said. "The second period we were just flat."
Predators fall as Senators surge in second period

Eric Stromgren, estromgren@tennessean.com 11:43 p.m. CST November 20, 2014

OTTAWA – Momentum can shift quickly in hockey, and the Predators were on the wrong side of it in the 3-2 loss to Ottawa on Thursday night.

The Senators erased a 1-0 deficit by scoring three straight goals during a rough second period for Predators backup goalie Carter Hutton.

"In this league you give up three, it's frustrating," Hutton said. "I'm a competitive person and I want to be able to help my team win games when called on. Tonight I didn't get the job done."

Before Bobby Ryan started Ottawa's scoring on the power play with 13:43 left in the second period, Hutton lost his helmet after was bowled over by Clarke MacArthur and Shea Weber.

"They played well in the second period, we were watching and our push wasn't enough in the third," Predators forward Olli Jokinen said.

Alex Chiasson put the Senators up 2-1 on a tip-in six minutes later, and Jared Cowen beat Hutton with a clean shot two minutes after that.

Predators coach Peter Laviolette questioned Chiasson's goal and how close he set up to Hutton to tip Cody Ceci's shot.

"They banged him (Hutton) around a bit to be honest with you," Laviolette said. "He's sitting on our goaltender's head, literally sitting his head, and his head snaps to the side. I don't know."

TENNESSEAN
Predators' Carter Hutton: 'I have to be sharper'

The Predators scored on the power play for the second straight game with Weber's first-period goal and mounted a rally in the third when Jokinen scored his first goal of the season.

The second period breakdown showed a team that won 9-2 in Toronto two days earlier can look human and lose with a lapse of effort.

"I think there has been a certain way we've been playing this year and there's a reason why we are in the top in the standings," Jokinen said. "Tonight we did 40 minutes, 30 minutes, something like that. It's not enough."

Tennessean LOADED: 11.21.2014
Hutton to start for Predators in goal against Senators

OTTAWA — Carter Hutton will make his third start of the season in goal for the Central-Division leading Predators Thursday night against the Senators.

Predators coach Peter Laviolette called this month’s schedule "tough" with games every other day, even though there are no back-to-back situations. That was a factor in the decision to give Hutton the start.

"We have some home games coming up," Laviolette said. "This was an opportunity to slot him in and give him another go," Laviolette said.

The puck drops between the Predators and Senators at 6:30 p.m.

Laviolette said he does not want "anybody sitting too long," and felt Hutton has played well in both of his appearances this season.

TENNESSEAN

Predators buying into Peter Laviolette’s approach

Hutton played in the 2-1 overtime loss to Chicago on Oct. 18 and the 3-1 loss to Winnipeg on Nov. 4. He has a .935 save percentage and a goals against average of 1.95.

"We're confident that he'll come out and give us an opportunity to win the game," Laviolette said.

The Senators will start backup Robin Lehner in goal. He has three wins in six appearances this season. He has a save percentage of .913 and a goals against average of 2.96.

Nashville defeated Ottawa 3-2 in the season opener at Bridgestone Arena on Oct. 9, and Laviolette said the Senators are a dangerous team that can strike quickly.

"I thought it was a hard-fought game," Laviolette said. "We knew the first couple of games were going to be tough to start the year, and I thought our guys did a pretty good job in that game. With that being said, we have to make sure we have the same intensity and good decision-making on the ice."

The Predators can take over the top spot in the Western Conference Thursday night with a win and an Anaheim (27 points) regulation or overtime loss to Vancouver.

The Predators are tied for second in the Western Conference standings with Vancouver and Calgary at 26 points.

The Predators have played 18 games, which is the first tiebreaker in the standings over Vancouver (19 games) and Calgary (20 games).

Here’s how the Predators lines looked at morning skate Thursday at Canadian Tire Centre:

Forwards
Forsberg-Ribeiro-Neal
Wilson-Jarnkrok-Smith
Cullen-Jokinen-Roy
Nystrom-Gaustad-Beck

Defense
Josi-Weber
Volchenkov-Jones
Ekholm-Ellis

Goalies
Hutton
Rinne

Extras: Bourque, Bartley, Fisher (injured reserve).

Tennessean LOADED: 11.21.2014
EDMONTON, Alberta — Patrik Elias had gone 17 straight games without scoring a goal and it appeared as if the Devils’ all-time scoring leader’s drought had reached 18 in a row when he failed to be credited with a goal in Winnipeg.

His luck changed long after the team’s 3-1 loss in which Martin Havlat had the only Devils goal. The official scorer changed the goal and gave it to Elias.

The longest goal-scoring drought of his career was over.

“I didn’t know it all along. I knew after I saw it on the replay on the scoreboard, but before that I didn’t know,” Elias said Thursday. “(But) it looked like it might have gone off Marty’s skate. He’s a good guy and he knows I need it more right now.”

Havlat told officials that it was, indeed, Elias’s goal.

Even if Havlat hadn’t been Elias’s good friend, he would’ve admitted it wasn’t his goal. That’s just hockey etiquette.

“I do it every time,” Mike Cammalleri said. “I’m a big believer in karma. I believe whoever gets it should be credited with it.”

Elias admits it has taken some of the pressure off.

“A little bit. I want to score. I’m put in those positions. When it’s not happening you just have to keep working. But, at the same time, you want it to happen,” Elias said.

“It doesn’t matter how you score. I had quality chances before in some games and couldn’t bury it. Hopefully this lucky goal will turn it around for me. Sometimes that’s all you need to get yourself going. That’s what I’m hoping for.”

It appears Elias will center a line with Adam Henrique at left wing and Havlat on the right side against the Edmonton Oilers Friday night.

Henrique returned to the lineup from a lower body injury Tuesday night, but centered a line with Tuomo Ruutu and Damien Brunner until late in the game. Now Henrique will move to the wing.

“It’s Adam’s second game back. We haven’t had him in, it feels like 2-3 weeks,” coach Pete DeBoer said. “I liked him in the middle last game for a bunch of reasons. One was to keep him moving. On the wing there are more stops and starts. In the middle of the ice you’re moving more. You’re more in constant motion.

“He’s looked better in practice. I think he’s got a little more jump than he had prior to the first game he played. I think he’s ready to do some of the stuff that wingers need to do there from a stress point of view on his leg.”

Elias likes the idea.

“We’ll see if it’s going to last,” Elias said. “If it does, we have to be productive. The production might not happen right away, but we know we can do it together. Having Marty there, too, we can make it work. If we don’t score, we at least have to create chances and give this team confidence and momentum by the way we play.”

Now that Elias has scored a goal, he needs to continue to produce because the Devils are hoping to turn the road trip around.

“Look at these three games. They’re not going to be easy by any means,” he said. “We have a couple of young teams (Edmonton and Calgary). They’re skilled and they’re fast. And then you have Vancouver. We need to try and get all three wins here and get ourselves back into the mix.”
Devils coach Pete DeBoer talks about the urgency to start winning

EDMONTON, Alberta — The pressure is on to start winning and Devils coach Pete DeBoer says the time is now.

The Devils will play the second game on their 4-game western Canada road trip Friday night against the Edmonton Oilers at Rexall Place.

“We obviously have to start winning some games,” DeBoer said after practice Thursday. “It’s one thing to play 55 good minutes, or a solid effort. But we’ve got to turn that into points. It’s that time of year. We’re right in the thick of things. We have to start putting some points on the board.”

The Devils are 11th in the Eastern Conference with an 8-9-2 record. They are two points behind the eighth-place Maple Leafs for a playoff spot.

“Expectations are high. We all understand that,” DeBoer said. “No one has higher expectations than us or this group. Nobody here is happy about where we’re at. We’ve also been around enough seasons to know that it takes 20-30 games to kind of find your identity and yourself.

“The important thing for us is, one, we have to find what that consistent identity is and, two, bring it to the rink every night. We’re working through that. We’re not there yet.”

They have dealt with injuries, but…

“There are all kinds of excuses you can make. The bottom line is everybody is in the same boat,” DeBoer admitted. “You see a lot of teams kind of finding their way right now. We’re not the only team. But there is some urgency here to get it figured out.”

Cory Schneider will make his 20th straight start in goal, breaking the record Martin Brodeur set in 2001-02 for the start of a season.

“Game to game,” DeBoer said. “Schneider tomorrow and we’ll go from there.”
Mark Fayne says it will be 'real weird' facing Devils for 1st time

EDMONTON, Alberta — Mark Fayne said he sensed the Devils had plans to get younger on defense in a hurry when their contract offers last summer weren't very enticing.

Fayne wound up signing a 4-year, $14 million contract with the Edmonton Oilers.

"I felt they kind of had plans for the future already and they had some guys they were invested in," Fayne said Thursday after the Oilers practiced at Rexall Place.

What does he think of the Devils' young defense?

"It's worked for them in the past. They've got great leaders in Andy (Greene), Sal (Bryce Salvador) and Zid (Marek Zidlicky. I think if you pair those guys up with any of them, and Gei (Eric Gelinas) has been around long enough now, I think they'll be alright."

Fayne said he had hoped to come back to the Devils but "I started realizing" two weeks before free agency that they did not want him back except at a bargain price.

"[We were] not as close as I would've liked," Fayne said. "All off season I was planning on (coming back to the Devils). They really started talking about two weeks before (July 1) and that's kind of when I started seeing the writing on the wall that it might be time to move on."

Fayne will face his former club Friday night.

"It will be real weird definitely having (old) friends on the ice," he said.

His father, Mark Sr., is visiting him in Edmonton for the week.

Fayne lives near where construction has begun on a new arena in downtown Edmonton.

"I've seen some models. It's supposed to be amazing. It's close to my apartment," he said. "It's going to have a practice rink in it like Columbus. They're already doing the infrastructure."

The arena is scheduled to open for the 2016-17 season.

Fayne said he is enjoying playing in Edmonton.

"It's a good change of pace. We're not off to the start we wanted to have, but I think we have enough talent that we should be doing a lot better than we are," he said. "I don't even think we've played a full great game yet. I know we can do it. It's just figuring out how to do it."

"It's a younger team. When stuff started to get a little hectic in Jersey we had older guys who could anchor that down. Here it's not as many. I think I have to be one of those guys now."

He was attracted to Edmonton by the role he was promised and said it was also encouraging to see that several young Oilers prospects have multi-year deals.

"It might not turn around right away, but it's definitely a place that can get hot quick," Fayne said.
EDMONTON, Alberta — The Devils practiced at Rexall Place Thursday afternoon and it appears Damien Brunner will not play Friday night against the Edmonton Oilers.

It looks as if Jacob Josefson will go back in and Adam Henrique will skate with Patrik Elias and Martin Havlat.

Brunner and Jordin Tootoo were the extra forwards.

Jon Merrill and Peter Harrold were the spare defensemen.

Devils' lines:

Mike Cammalleri-Travis Zajac-Jaromir Jagr
Adam Henrique-Patrik Elias-Martin Havlat
Tuomo Ruutu-Jacob Josefson-Michael Ryder
Dainius Zubrus-Stephen Gionta-Steve Bernier

Devils’ defense:

Andy Greene-Damon Severson
Eric Gelinas-Marek Zidlicky
Seth Helgeson-Adam Larsson

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.21.2014
PHILADELPHIA — When Eric Lindros and his parents seemed to be in a Hatfields and McCoys feud with Flyers management, a lot of the bickering was over the handling of his concussions.

Lindros, despite being a giant-sized NHL superstar in his heyday, was concussed at least six times during his nine seasons as a Flyer from 1992-2001, and the last still is hard to watch because a headshot unleashed by Hall of Fame defenseman Scott Stevens was and remains one of the most ferocious ever captured on tape.

On May 26, 2000 at Wells Fargo Center, then called First Union Center, the Flyers hosted the Devils in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals.

The Devils were up 1-0 almost midway through the first period when Lindros picked up the puck on the Flyers side of the red line after a Devils turnover.

With a head of steam, Lindros started a 1-on-4 charge through the middle of the ice past the red line and into Devils territory when he unwisely made a slight right turn.

Stevens, like Lindros blessed with good size, made a beeline toward Lindros from the right, stuck out his left shoulder and ...

BAM!

Stevens’ shoulder nailed Lindros’ head, which snapped back.

Lindros immediately dropped into a fetal position, then lay there motionless for more than a minute. It seemed longer.

Looking out of it, Lindros was helped to his feet and slowly skated off the ice with teammates John LeClair holding him up to his right, Adam Burt to his left.

A diagnosis soon confirmed that this hit was the sixth concussion for Lindros.

The Devils wound up winning the game 2-1, then beat the Dallas Stars in six games in the Stanley Cup Finals with Stevens winning the Conn Smythe as playoff MVP.

Lindros never played another game for the Flyers. He missed the start of the next season recovering from Stevens’ hit, then when cleared to play, he held out and demanded a trade due to his feud with the Flyers.

Almost 14 years later, Lindros will be inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame on Thursday along with his former Legion of Doom linemate John LeClair.

He’s back on good terms with the Flyers, but something good did come from his concussions, which raised awareness for a growing problem in the NHL.

Eventually, the NHL added tougher rules to punish headshot offenders and a better policy to test for concussions.

"What a legacy to leave," Lindros said with sarcasm. "On a serious note, things have improved, but there is still a long way to go. I think it's gotten better. It's been talked about for a long time. There has been greater acknowledgement and more of a spotlight on them now. Unfortunately that has to do with some of the more prominent players being affected by concussions."
EDMONTON, Alberta — There have been a modest number of boos when Devils coach Pete DeBoer’s name is announced before games at Prudential Center.

But Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said Thursday that DeBoer remains the right coach for this team at this time.

“Yes,” Lamoriello told NJ Advance Media.

Does he think DeBoer and his coaching staff are doing a good job?

“That’s a very difficult question to answer. If I didn’t think they were, then I would be doing something else,” Lamoriello said. “All of us feel we can do better.

“They’re working at it and doing everything they can. They want to win, just like the players want to win. I don’t think it’s a lack of effort right now on either part. It’s getting things going in the right direction and getting on a roll. We have to find a way on one night to not just have the penalty-kill without the power play. Or on another night have just 5-on-5 and nothing else. We’ve got to get our collective game together. We’ve shown that we can do it. It’s just doing it on a consistent basis.”

How vital is this western Canada trip to the Devils’ chances this season, and perhaps DeBoer’s comfort level?

“There is no question the last four or five games we have played we could’ve won three or four of them. But we haven’t,” Lamoriello said. “We have to get over that ‘could have’ and do it.

“Right now you can’t look beyond the next game that you’re playing. I think that has to be the focus. We’re one under .500. The key is to get to .500 and then work from there. That has to be the approach.”

That next game is Friday night at Rexall Place against the Edmonton Oilers.
EDMONTON, Alberta — Will Ryane Clowe, sidelined with what seems to be another concussion, play another game for the Devils this season?

Will Clowe ever play in the NHL again?

Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello told NJ Advance Media Thursday that he doesn't know.

“In situations like this, you don’t know,” Lamoriello said. “He’s feeling much better, but right now he cannot play. Hopefully he can.

“A lot of players have a series of concussions of different levels and they’re playing. I’m not saying that should be the case here.”

Clowe had two concussions last season. At the very minimum he had one serious concussion prior to signing with the Devils and likely had more. So wouldn’t it be just too dangerous for the left winger to play again, considering that this would be at least his fourth concussion?

“That would not be a decision that I could make, nor would I have the ability to make. That would come from doctors and Ryane himself,” Lamoriello said. “This is a medical decision. A doctor and player’s decision.

“As I’ve said all along, I’m not a doctor so I don’t like to make any presumptions unless I have all the information.”

Clowe suffered the latest injury in a Nov. 6 game against the St. Louis Blues when he was hit in the side of the head. He has missed the last six games and is not on the trip with the Devils.

When the Devils signed Clowe to a 5-year, $24.25 million contract in July of 2013, he wanted to prove that concussions would not be an issue going forward. But that, of course, hasn’t been the case.
EDMONTON, Alberta — Dainius Zubrus remains the favorite target of barbs in the Devils’ dressing room. That is because the Lithuanian forward doesn’t seem to mind and the jabs are done with affection.

But the move from the Devils’ first line to fourth line, with stops in between, could have been a cruel joke to someone with thin skin.

Not for Zubrus, who has played the last five games at left wing with Stephen Gionta and Steve Bernier.

“I don’t look at it as the fourth line. I like playing with Bernie and Gio,” Zubrus said. “In Washington we probably played 15 minutes. I know I did, so I don’t look at what line it is. I want to play and I’m fine with the players I’m playing with right now.

“I realize there are a lot of good players here, so it’s not easy getting ice time. Anytime we were out there together, we created some chances and played in their end a lot of times."

Through the years, the most successful Devils teams have had strong fourth lines. The Crash Line with Mike Peluso, Bobby Holik and Randy McKay, along with the Ryan Carter-Gionta-Bernier line in 2012 are among the best examples. Another line that had moderate success in 2008-09 was Zubrus, Holik and Mike Rupp.

So will this line turn out to be as successful?

“I think we’ve played pretty well. We’ve had some chances pretty much every game that we’ve played together,” Zubrus said.

Coach Pete DeBoer was always a Carter booster, but when the Devils did not sign him during training camp and Carter left for the Minnesota Wild, the Devils looked for the right replacement through the first 14 games of the season.

Zubrus could be it.

“He’s versatile. I don’t know if this is a season-long solution, but right now I like the reliability of what that group gives me,” DeBoer explained. "I like the fact I feel comfortable putting them out late in games, to start periods, after goals-for or against. You know what you’re going to get."

Zubrus hasn’t viewed it as a demotion.

"Over the years I’ve kind of learned that it’s out of my control. I don’t control these things. Coaches do and they decide," he said. "If I play a lot, if I feel in the rhythm and the team wins, I don’t care what line you want to name it. I feel like I contributed and that’s the whole point."

DeBoer hasn’t been hesitant in giving that trio extra ice time.

“I wouldn’t call it our fourth line. A lot of nights they’ve been our second or third line,” DeBoer said. “I’ve been a proponent that we have to be a four-line team. When we’ve played our best games it’s been when we’ve been able to roll four lines. That means guys have to play in different roles.

"Him playing with those guys has got him back to the strengths of his game, which are north-south, winning battles and doing things like that."

Where does Zubrus think he is best suited?

“I don’t try to change my game too much. Honestly, whether I play with Trav (Zajac) and Jags (Jagr) or Patty (Elias) and Marty (Havlat), I make minor adjustments but nothing drastic. It’s not like: ‘Now I’m a power forward.’ Or: ‘now I’m a finesse forward’ or something silly like that.

“I’d like to get more offense out of myself and I know the chances are there. I just want to play."
The Devils know that talk not backed up by actions won't do them any good. They've been talking about putting together consistent, 60-minute performances for much of their first 19 games, but the execution still isn't there.

With losses in six of their past eight games, including a road-trip-opening 3-1 loss in Winnipeg on Tuesday night, they've fallen to 8-9-2 for the season and desperately need a win over the Oilers to keep their trek through Western Canada from becoming a nightmare journey.

"We, obviously, have to start winning some games," Devils coach Pete DeBoer said after Thursday's practice at Rexall Place. "It's one thing to play 55 good minutes or have a solid effort, but we've got to turn that into points. It's that time of year."

Despite the team's recent slide, general manager Lou Lamoriello believes the players are responding to the coaching staff and believes they will turn things around.

"I feel that [the coaches] have got the ability and we've got the ability with the players and we've got to get more consistent in certain areas," Lamoriello said. "One of our Achilles' heels was penalty killing and right now that's one of our assets [killing off 16 power plays in a row]. In one stretch our power play was there. In another stretch, we were scoring 5-on-5. We have to get everything together."

If the Devils wait much longer to get it together, however, they could find themselves out of the playoffs for the third consecutive season.

"No more excuses," said goaltender Cory Schneider, who will make it 20 consecutive starts to open the season, surpassing Martin Brodeur's team record. "The first quarter of the year is basically over and we know what we have, we know what we're going to have going forward, so we've got to make it work. … We've got to start making that push here in the middle of the season to get ourselves in position."

Although it sounded as if this was a theme of a recent team meeting, the players said that was not the case. It's something no one has to tell them with their upcoming schedule.

The Oilers are struggling overall at 6-11-2, but are 6-2-1 against Eastern Conference teams. After Edmonton, the Devils visit the surprising Calgary Flames (12-6-2) on Saturday and a solid Vancouver Canucks team (13-6-0) on Tuesday to finish off their trip.

"We've still got a tough three games here," center Patrik Elias said. "We've got to get rolling. We're putting ourselves behind the 8-ball. You know how hard it is to catch up always looking from the back. We don't want to be in that position again."

The Devils felt they never really recovered from going 1-5-4 in their first 10 games last season. Now, despite starting this season 3-0-0, a regulation loss tonight would leave them with one point fewer after 20 games than the 19 they had at the same point last season (7-8-5).

"There's a little bit of a feeling of urgency just because we don't love or have full confidence in our game just yet," left wing Mike Cammalleri said. "We're not jumping out there and saying, 'We know what we're going to deliver as a group and on most nights that's going to deliver us the result we want.' We haven't really done that, so we're working hard on that and we want to get to that as quick as possible because we're a mature enough group to know that if we get to that, then the results will take care of themselves.

"But, we've got to get there. Enough of this talk about it. We've got to get there."
Devils’ Clowe “feeling a lot better”, seeing specialist in Boston area; Appears Salvador will be OK

Posted by Tom Gulitti

It’s been two weeks since left wing Ryane Clowe left the Devils’ 4-3 loss in St. Louis after taking three different blows to the head in the first period.

Because of Clowe’s history of concussions – this would be his third in a little more than a year with the Devils and his fourth in a year and a half overall – he and the Devils are understandably taking the cautious approach. It remains unclear whether Clowe, 32, will play again this season – or ever again.

“It’s just waiting to see what the doctors say,” Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said today. “In these situations, it’s up to the doctors and him.”

The positive is Clowe is “feeling a lot better.”

“He felt much, much better right away,” Lamoriello said. “But, there’s no indication with these things. I keep saying it: I’m not a doctor and I’m not the player, so you don’t ask these questions. You just let it be.”

Clowe again has been visiting with the Boston area concussion specialist that oversaw his recovery this summer from a March 31 concussion that ended his 2013-14 season. And, as Lamoriello did this past off-season, he is giving Clowe space to handle his recovery in the way he’s most comfortable.

“You have to,” Lamoriello said. “He’s dealing with his physicians and that’s the best way to do it.”

Lamoriello said the team is still in the evaluation stage with the lower-body injury Devils captain Bryce Salvador suffered on Nov. 10.

“He’s still going through examinations,” Lamoriello said this afternoon. “In fact, as we speak, he’s at a doctor’s office.”

Lamoriello said Salvador’s current ailment is in no way related to the inflamed torn hip labrum that ended his 2013-14 season and that it does not appear to be anything serious.

“All indications are he’s going to be fine,” Lamoriello said.

Defenceman Jon Merrill practiced again today, but it appears the Devils will hold him out for at least one more game as he makes his way back from a sore hand/arm that resulted from a slash he took on Nov. 1 against Columbus.

Lamoriello said Merrill will play, “whenever it’s right.”

“He’s shooting, he’s doing different things, but we’re going to make sure,” he said. “He wants to play, but we’re going to make sure.”
Lamoriello believes in DeBoer, staff, players to get Devils on course; Gomez could get chance soon

Lamoriello said after training camp that Gomez, "has shown he can still play on the same line (especially if Adam Henrique and Patrik Elias play on the same line) and indications are that Lamoriello has been trying to make a move to open up a contract spot for him.

Gomez could get chance soon

As the Devils prepare to continue their four-game road trip through Western Canada Friday night in Edmonton, general manager Lou Lamoriello is back in New Jersey after returning from the Hall of Fame inductions and GM meetings in Toronto earlier this week.

Lamoriello might still join the team on the trip at some point, but for now is staying back in New Jersey and keeping an eye on things from there. He's seen the team drop six of its last eight games, including a 3-1 road trip-opening loss in Winnipeg on Tuesday, to fall to 8-9-2 for the season.

Lamoriello usually evaluates by 10-game segments of the schedule and the Devils are nearing the end of another one – and the unofficial quarter mark of their season – with Game No. 20 Friday night.

Although the Devils are struggling again to score – their average of 2.42 goals per game is a smidge above their 2.40 average from last season – and win consistently after a 3-0-0 start, Lamoriello believes the players are still responding to head coach Pete DeBoer and his staff and expressed faith they will turn things around.

"I feel that (the coaches) have got the ability and we've got the ability with the players and we've got to get more consistent in certain areas," Lamoriello said via telephone today. "One of our Achilles' heels was penalty killing and right now that's one of our assets (killing off 16 power plays in a row). In one stretch our power play was there. In another stretch, we were scoring 5-on-5. We have to get everything together."

Lamoriello said, "I believe that" the team will get it together, but also admitted, "I don't have a crystal ball."

After a promising first week of the season, the Devils have had some good stretches within games but have struggled to put together complete efforts consistently, and, thus, have just five wins in their last 16 games.

Since their first two games – a 6-4 win in Philadelphia and a 5-1 victory at Florida – they've scored more than two goals in regulation (without the help of an empty-net goal) just four times and won only one of those games (1-2-1).

"It's always a concern when you don't win and you don't score," Lamoriello admitted. "Then, you look at the chances. We're getting chances. But, still the bottom line is scoring and winning and right now the coaches are doing what they can and we can't look back. We've just got to get ready to play tomorrow night. That's the only thing you can do. You can't dwell on certain things."

While DeBoer continues to search for offensive production from more than one line at a time, center Scott Gomez also is waiting back in New Jersey, hoping the Devils will sign him. Gomez, who had two goals and an assist in three preseason games, has continued to practice with the team when it is home, but is not permitted to travel because he is not under contract.

With DeBoer often talking about the need to get three scoring lines going, Gomez could help in that area (especially if Adam Henrique and Patrik Elias play on the same line) and indications are that Lamoriello has been trying to make a move to open up a contract spot for him.

Lamoriello said after training camp that Gomez, "has shown he can still play."

When I asked Lamoriello today if he thought Gomez could help the Devils offensively "right now", he replied cryptically, "You never know. We'll see how things transpire. You never know."

Although it would seem there is already an opening for Gomez with left wing Ryane Clowe out indefinitely with what is likely to be another concussion, Lamoriello said last week that Clowe's and Gomez's situations are not connected.

Lamoriello seems to be looking to shed a contract rather than simply putting Clowe on Long-Term Injured Reserve, which would allow the team to exceed the salary cap by Clowe's cap hit ($4.85 million) if needed, but not save the organization any actual dollars in salary.

With No. 1 goaltender Cory Schneider starting all of the team's game so far – he will make it 20-for-20 Friday night to surpass Martin Brodeur's record of 19 consecutive starts to begin the 2001-02 season – the Devils have been rotating Scott Clemmensen and rookie Keith Kinkaid as their backup.

Lamoriello said that rotation will continue as the season progresses to make sure whichever goaltender is backing up is game sharp if needed.

Clemmensen, 37, and Kinkaid, 25, swapped places again on Monday with Clemmensen returning from a two-week stint in Albany and Kinkaid returning to the AHL team after backing up Schneider for seven games.

Kinkaid relieved Schneider in two of those games, but hadn't seen any game action in nine days when the Devils returned him to Albany on Monday.

"He hasn't played in a few weeks, Kinkaid, and it would be unfair to throw him in a game after not playing," Lamoriello said. "Clemmensen had played back-to-back games over the weekend (with Albany) and played very well. And, we'll do that switch again. It's just to keep them fresh, so when they're asked to play they're ready to play. There was nothing (Kinkaid) did or didn't do. If he had played during the stretch, he might still be here. But they've got to play. You can't sit on the bench, especially when you're a young player.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
"No more excuses" for Devils; They need to start winning now

Posted by Tom Gulitti

By this point in their season, the Devils know that talk not backed up by actions doesn’t do them any good.

They’ve been talking about putting together consistent, 60-minute performances for much of their first 19 games, but the execution still isn’t there. So, as they approach the unofficial quarter mark of their season with Friday night’s game in Edmonton, they know what they say now matters little.

With losses in six of their last eight games, including a 3-1 loss in Winnipeg Tuesday night, they’ve fallen to 8-9-2 for the season and desperately need a win over the Oilers to keep this four-game grip to Western Canada from becoming a nightmare journey.

“We, obviously, have to start winning some games,” Devils coach Pete DeBoer said after today’s practice at Rexall Place. “It’s one thing to play 55 good minutes or have a solid effort, but we’ve got to turn that into points. It’s that time of year. We’re right in the thick of things and we have to start putting some points on the board.”

That was the common theme in the Devils’ locker room today. If they wait any longer to start playing better, they could find themselves out of the playoff mix for the third consecutive season.

“No more excuses,” said goaltender Cory Schneider, who will start his 20th game in a row Friday. “The first quarter of the year is basically over and we know what we have, we know what we’re going to have going forward, so we’ve got to make it work. We’re just a little too up and down. We’ve got to start making that push here in the middle of the season to get ourselves in position.”

Although it sounded as if this was a theme of a recent team meeting, the players said that was not the case. It’s something no one has to tell them with their upcoming schedule.

The Oilers are struggling overall at 6-11-2, but are 6-2-1 against Eastern Conference teams. After Edmonton, the Devils visit the surprising Calgary Flames (12-6-2) on Saturday and a solid Vancouver Canucks team (13-6-0) on Tuesday to finish off their trip.

“You sense it,” center Patrik Elias said. “We’ve still got a tough three games here. We’ve got to get rolling. We’re putting ourselves the eight ball. You know how hard it is to catch up always looking from the back. We don’t want to be in that position again.”

The Devils felt they never really recovered from going 1-5-4 in their first 10 games last season. Now, despite starting this season 3-0-0, a regulation loss Friday would leave them with one point fewer after 20 games than the 19 they had at the same point last season (7-8-5).

And they’d be chasing again just to get back in the playoff race.

“That’s what we don’t want to do," Elias said. "We played pretty well towards the end of the year, but it’s too competitive, too tight to have those (negative) streaks as much as we do.”

“There’s a little bit of a feeling of urgency just because we don’t love or have full confidence in our game just yet,” left wing Mike Cammalleri said. “We’re not jumping out there and saying, ‘We know what we’re going to deliver as a group and on most nights that’s going to deliver us the result we want.’ We haven’t really done that, so we’re working hard on that and we want to get to that as quick as possible because we’re a mature enough group to know that if we get to that, then the results will take care of themselves.

“But, we’ve got to get there. Enough of this talk about it. We’ve got to get there.”

So, the Devils feel like they’re capable of getting there, but just haven’t yet?

“I guess that sounds accurate, but it sounds lame too,” Cammalleri said. “It’s not easy league either. There’s another NHL team on the other side that’s doing the same thing. They’re trying to beat us. But, we’d like to play better. We think we can play better.”

Despite their recent struggles, the Devils are only two points out of a playoff spot. That’s nothing to be satisfied with, though.

“Expectations are high. We all understand that,” DeBoer said. “No one has higher expectations than us or this group here. So, there’s nobody here that is happy about where we’re at. We’ve also been around enough seasons to know that it takes 20-30 games to kind of find your identity in yourself. The important thing for us is we have to find, one, what that consistent identity is and bring it to the rink every night. We’re working through that we’re not there, yet.”

Yes, the Devils have had their share of injuries with Cammalleri (suspected concussion), Adam Henrique (leg muscle pull), Martin Havlat (lower body), Ryane Clowe (suspected concussion) and Jon Merrill (sore hand/arm) all missing at least six games.

But, the Devils are close to full strength now and injuries are not a crutch they can afford to lean on.

“There’s all kinds of excuses you can make,” DeBoer said. “The bottom line is everybody’s in the same boat. You see a lot of teams kind of finding their way right now. We’re not the only team. But, there’s some urgency here to get it figured out.”

The Devils had the day off from practice Wednesday, but had an off-ice workout in the gym and a meeting before they did this year’s team-bonding competition – a bowling tournament.

The players, staff and coaches were split into teams of four and each team rolled three games. The winning team was backup goaltender Scott Clemmensen, goaltending coach Chris Terreri, assistant coach Tommy Albelin and equipment manager Rich Matthews.

“This team must not have very good bowlers because we were not a very good team,” Clemmensen quipped.

Henrique boasted that he was “the high scorer.” He posted a three-game average of 141. Damien Brunner rolled the high game with a 178.

The overwhelming consensus was that Schneider was the worst bowler on the team, but Schneider actually offered up that information himself, too.

“I think I was the worst one,” said Schneider, who was teamed with Damon Severson, Eric Gelinas and Marek Zidlicky.

“We played conservatively,” Schneider joked. “It doesn’t work in bowling.”

Zidlicky walked by at that moment and just shook his head.

Schneider later said, from growing up in Massachusetts, he is more used to candlepin bowling, which uses a much smaller ball with no holes and narrower pins.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
Looks like Devils wil use Henrique and Elias on same line Friday; Schneider to start again

Posted by Tom Gulitti

After they practiced on the same line again today, it appears Adam Henrique and Patrik Elias will get their wish to play on the same line when the Devils take on the Edmonton Oilers Friday night at Rexall Place.

Henrique and Elias also practiced on the same line – with Martin Havlat as the right wing – Monday, but Devils coach Pete DeBoer opted to use them on separate lines in Tuesday night’s 3-1 loss in Winnipeg with Henrique playing his first game back from a leg muscle pull.

Part of the reason was DeBoer was trying to get three scoring lines going, so he had Henrique at center with Tuomo Ruutu and Damien Brunner on his wings for most of the night. Deboer also felt that would be easier for Henrique to come back from his injury at center than on the wing.

“I liked him it the middle last game for a bunch of reasons,” DeBoer said. “One of them too was keep him moving. On the wing, there’s more stops and starts and things like that, which would stress them. In the middle of the ice, you’re moving more. You’re more in constant motion.

“But, he’s looked better in practice here. I think he’s got a little bit more jump than he had prior to his first game he played and I think he’s ready to do some of the stuff that wingers need to do from a stress point of view on his leg.”

Elias and Henrique are definitely excited about the idea of being linemates.

“Because when we play together we created a lot,” Elias said. “The majority of the games we played well together. We understand at the same time what Pete is trying to do.”

Still, it’s clear Henrique and Elias would like to play together and it appears that will happen Friday.

“Let’s hope so,” Elias said. “And let’s hope that we’ll create chances. We’ll be buzzing, hopefully.”

In 19 games together last season when Elias was the center and Henrique was the left wing, Henrique had nine goals and 10 assists and Elias had four goals and 15 assists. When DeBoer put them together for the Devils’ 1-0 loss to St. Louis, they generated numerous good scoring chances with Michael Ryder, who was the right wing on the line, getting seven shots on goal.

But, Henrique got injured in the third period of that game and then at out the next six before returning Tuesday night.

“We’ve played well together,” Henrique said. “Before I got hurt there, we played so good that one game. It was kind of like a teaser. Hopefully, we can find that again right away and produce offensively.”

Elias is hoping that ending his goal-less drought at 17 games with his power-play goal Tuesday night will change his scoring fortunes. He hadn’t scored since the season opener in Philadelphia and, like pretty much everyone else, didn’t know he was going to get credit for the goal Tuesday.

It was originally credited to Havlat, who appeared to jam his stick under Michael Hutchinson after the Jets rookie goaltender dropped Elias’ backhand shot. The scoring was changed after the game to give Elias credit. It appeared either Hutchinson or defenseman Zach Bogosian might have knocked the puck in instead.

“I didn’t know,” Elias said. “Marty kind of went in there. It looked like the goalie or the defenseman might have knocked it in. I’ll take it.”

“I’ll take it. Maybe my luck will turn around now.”

Cory Schneider will start in net for the Devils again Friday, making it 20 in a row to begin the season and eclipsing Martin Brodeur’s team record of 19 consecutive starts to open the 2001-02 season.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014

It appears that will be the line Friday, but DeBoer wouldn’t commit to any lineup changes today.

“We practiced with some different lines today,” he said. “We’ll see tomorrow morning.”

It looks like the same six defensemen will play, though, with Jon Merrill not quite ready to return from his hand/arm injury.

DeBoer admitted “it was difficult” to take Josefson out of the lineup Tuesday night because of how, but also noted that Josefson, like a lot of other forwards, had not been producing offensively (No points in his last nine games).

“He had played well,” DeBoer said. “Again, we’re looking for some production, too. It’s not enough for guys just to play well. It’s the same as our points (for the team). And that’s not just Jo. That’s everybody. But, we get kind of caught up in, ‘Oh, he played great.’ But, if you go 10 games without a point, everybody has to ramp up the production.

With Henrique shifting from center to left wing, that opened up a spot in the middle for Jacob Josefson, who was a healthy scratch Tuesday. Josefson practiced today on a line with Ruutu and Ryder on his wings.
Mark Fayne could sense he wasn’t in Devils’ plans before he signed with Oilers

Posted by Tom Gulitti

Former Devils defenseman Mark Fayne plans to get together with some of his old teammates, including good friend Andy Greene, tonight before facing them for the first time Friday night as a member of the Edmonton Oilers.

Fayne, who signed a four-year, $14.5 million contract with the Oilers as an unrestricted free agent on July 1, admitted it’s going to be strange playing against the Devils.

“Definitely tough having no friends on the ice,” Fayne said.

Fayne said he never got close to re-signing with the Devils this past summer.

“Not as close as I would have liked,” Fayne said.

Fayne said he could sense the team was looking to move forward with some of the younger defensemen in the organization.

“I felt that they had kind of plans for the future already and some guys they already had a lot invested in,” Fayne said.

Fayne said contract talks with the Devils didn’t really get under way until midway through June.

“All offseason I always planned on (coming back to the Devils) and they really started talking about two weeks before (free agency) and that’s kind of when I started seeing the writing on the wall that they had a lot that they were invested in and it might be time to move on,” Fayne said.

Fayne said his agent continued to talk to the Devils after that, but he could tell from the Devils’ offers they weren’t as committed to bringing him back.

“They were both real good about it, but I guess not seeing eye to eye,” Fayne said.

Fayne said he was surprised with how young the Devils defense is right now, though, with four age 24 or younger.

“But, it’s worked for them in the past,” Fayne said. “And they’ve got a great leader in Andy and Sai (Bryce Salvador) and Zid (Marek Zidlicky). I think if you pair those guys up with any of them and (Eric Gelinas) has been around long enough now, I think they’ll be all right.”

After talking with the Oilers, Fayne felt they were a good fit for him.

“I talked to (management) and the staff and I had an in-depth conversation with them about what my role would be here and how I’d be used,” he said.

“I liked the situation. I felt comfortable with it and also I thought that signing a longer-term deal with a team like this where they have star power on long-term deals, it might not turn around right away, but it’s definitely a place that can get hot quick.”

Although the Oilers are in last place in the Western Conference with a 6-11-2 record and just 14 points, Fayne, 27, can see the potential they have.

“I think right now it’s just consistency, whether it’s a period or a game,” he said. “We’ve played great periods. I don’t think we’ve even played a full great game, yet. I know we can do it. It’s just figuring out how to do it. It’s a younger team, so we don’t have those driving forces when things start getting a little hectic. In Jersey, we had the older guys that anchored that down. Here, it’s not as many, so it’s just an adjustment. I think I’ve got to be one of those guys now.”

Playing in Edmonton is a lot different than playing for the Devils, mostly because of the travel.

“From a hockey standpoint, obviously, the travel is a bit different,” he said. “Longer road trips and longer homestands instead of popping in and out every other night. But, it’s good. It’s a good change of pace. We’re not off to the start we want. I think we have enough talent that we should be doing a lot better than we are.”
Henrique back with Elias and Havlat for Devils’ practice today in Edmonton

Posted by Tom Gulitti

Adam Henrique is back on a line with Patrik Elias and Martin Havlat for the Devils’ practice today in Edmonton as the team prepares to face the Oilers Friday night.

Henrique, Elias and Havlat also practiced together Monday in Winnipeg, but head coach opted to put Michael Ryder back with Elias and Havlat for most of Tuesday’s 3-1 loss to the Jets. Henrique played most of that game at center on a line with Tuomo Ruutu and Damien Brunner on his wings before joining Elias and Havlat late in the third period.

With Henrique back with Elias and Havlat, Jacob Josefson, who was a healthy scratch Tuesday, is centering Ruutu and Ryder. The other two lines are the same.

Jordin Tootoo and Brunner are the extra forwards.

The defense pairs remain the same with Jon Merrill and Peter Harrold as the fourth set.

Here is the breakdown of the players practicing today at Rexall Place.

Forwards: Mike Cammalleri-Travis Zajac-Jaromir Jagr; Adam Henrique-Patrik Elias-Martin Havlat; Dainius Zubrus-Stephen Gionta-Steve Bernier; Tuomo Ruutu-Jacob Josefson-Michael Ryder; Jordin Tootoo, Damien Brunner.

Defensemen: Andy Greene-Damon Severson; Eric Gelinas-Marek Zidlicky; Seth Helgeson-Adam Larsson; Jon Merrill-Peter Harrold.

Goaltenders: Cory Schneider, Scott Clemmensen.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
Fan voting for 2015 NHL All-star Game open

Posted by Tom Gulitti

Fan voting for the 2015 NHL All-Star Game in Columbus opened at noon today online at NHL.com/vote and via mobile phones. The interactive ballot features all 700-plus active NHL players.

The 2015 NHL All-Star Game is scheduled for 5 p.m. (ET) on Sunday, Jan. 25 at Columbus’ Nationwide Arena. The game will be telecast on NBCSN in the U.S.

All-star voting concludes Thursday, Jan. 1, with the top six vote-getters by position – three forwards, two defensemen and one goaltender – set to take part in the 2015 NHL All-Star Game. The full roster of players will be determined by the National Hockey League.

Fans will be permitted to select as few as one player for each of the three positions and a maximum of six players per ballot. The maximum number of ballots cast per day for each user is 10.

The ballot page at NHL.com/vote will include a leaderboard of the top vote-getters as well as trending players. Vote totals will be posted to NHL.com every Tuesday, starting Nov. 25.

The Devils are scheduled to practice at 1:30 p.m. today in Edmonton (3:30 New Jersey time). I’ll have a report from there when they take the ice at Rexall Place.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
John Tavares willing to sacrifice scoring for team wins

Updated November 21, 2014 1:22 AM
By ARTHUR STAPLE  arthur.staple@newsday.com

It may seem as though John Tavares isn't producing up to his recent high standards through 18 games, and technically, that viewpoint is correct. His 18 points, heading into Friday night's game against the Penguins in Pittsburgh, has Tavares a bit off his 18-game starts the previous two seasons.

But would you trade 10 more points from Tavares for, say, four fewer wins from a team that's off to its best start by far since Tavares arrived?

"The goal is to win and you make those sacrifices to win," Tavares said. "I still think I've been able to produce at a pretty good rate so far. Like I've always said, I'm never really satisfied, so there's always room to do more and produce more.

"Do I think I could be better than where I'm at now? Sure. But we're playing good hockey, we're doing the right things and we've got a good group where everyone contributes. We need everyone to have success."

The Islanders do need everyone. The lack of team success in five of Tavares' first six seasons underscores how much this team needed to increase its depth around its star, how much help Tavares needed -- and, in turn, how much Tavares could improve his play without the puck and in his own zone to become a better-rounded superstar.

IslandersVideo series: Islanders' last season on Long Island

"His shift times are down and he's playing well defensively. Those are two big areas for me," Jack Capuano said of Tavares, whose average shift time is 56 seconds this season, down from 57 seconds a season ago. "Knowing him like I do, I'm sure he's a little frustrated with his production. But he's generating chances. And I know this: John Tavares will always put the team first."

Sidney Crosby will line up against Tavares the next two nights. The Penguins' captain leads the league with 26 points and his team is rolling through the early portion of this season.

Tavares surely would love to be up there in the scoring chase rather than sitting in an eight-way tie for 18th in scoring (tied with teammates Brock Nelson and Kyle Okposo).

But the biggest difference for this team is the Islanders' results through 18 games. Their fast start (12-6-0) trumps any feelings of point-scoring inadequacy.

"As far as where I'm at, I'm just trying to generate opportunities, a lot of focus on trying to be better defensively," Tavares said. "I feel like my game has come a long way in that area. When you're good defensively, it does seem to lead to offense."

Notes & quotes:Johnny Boychuk (lower body) practiced fully Thursday and should be ready to play Friday night. Boychuk missed most of the second period of Tuesday night's 5-2 win over the Lightning. . . . Michael Grabner (hernia surgery) also practiced and traveled to Pittsburgh with the team. He could be activated off injured reserve for the game. In order to make room for Grabner, the Islanders would need to waive someone off the active roster.

BUFFALO — Mother Nature has given the Rangers an extra day off.

On Thursday afternoon the NHL postponed Friday’s game between the Rangers and the Sabres at First Niagara Center in Buffalo due to the massive snowfall in western New York. The Sabres beat the Sharks there on Tuesday night as the storm began, but since then, several suburbs have received upwards of six feet of snow with two more feet expected to accumulate by early Friday morning.

"Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday’s game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres has been postponed," an NHL statement read.

The Blueshirts were set to fly to Buffalo at 3 p.m. on Thursday, but were told when they left the practice ice in Greenburgh to wait until the league’s decision. The game couldn’t be moved to Saturday since the Sabres are scheduled to play in Washington.

“There’s nothing (the league) can do. This is people’s security,” Alain Vigneault told reporters in Greenburgh. “We can’t be frustrated with anybody. You have to do the right thing here.”

Vigneault recalled having a game canceled due to snowfall when he was a coach in the Quebec junior league at the junior level when snow was “above the garage” at “seven or eight feet.”

Built myself a bench to take a break. The bad joke here is to say that I am in my usual spot sitting on the bench!! pic.twitter.com/OVxT0bfP1C

— Martin Biron (@martybiron43) November 20, 2014

“You just pop open an extra bottle of wine and get through it,” Vigneault said laughing. “Nothing to do, keep warm by the fire.”

The last time the Rangers had a game postponed by weather was Jan. 10, 1998 in Montreal. That game wasn’t made up until March 12. The Blueshirts will have an off day on Friday and resume practice on Saturday in Westchester before taking on the Habs at Madison Square Garden on Sunday.

Marty Biron, former goaltender for both the Rangers and Sabres, says the league made the right decision by postponing Friday’s game.

Biron, who lives in the Buffalo suburb of East Aurora, shared several pictures of the huge snowdrifts outside of his home.

"Since Monday night I’ve been out there (shoveling) at least a dozen times if not more, it’s just crazy," Biron said. "I retired so I didn’t have to play hockey anymore and now these are all the things you don’t miss when you played hockey. You usually had someone else to do it.”
Friday's Rangers-Sabres game in Buffalo postponed due to snowstorm

BY Stephen Lorenzo
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Thursday, November 20, 2014, 3:18 PM

Friday's game between the Rangers and Sabres has been postponed.

"Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday's game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres has been postponed," a statement from the NHL read.

As of now, no makeup date has been announced.

Dan Boyle winced at the question, because he knew he couldn't give the answer about his injured hand that he would like to.

"It's better than it was, but it's still not where I want it to be," Boyle told The Post after Thursday's practice. "So, just making do with what I've got going on."

Boyle broke his right hand blocking a shot during the season opener on Oct. 9. He returned to the lineup on Nov. 14 against the Avalanche, and Wednesday's 2-0 win over the Flyers was his fourth game back. He and the Rangers will miss their game that was scheduled for Friday in Buffalo but was postponed by severe snow.

There are times Boyle clearly favors the hand, his low-hand for his right-handed shot, and he knows these things are happening — even if he can't stop them.

"I know I'm doing a lot of things that are subconscious, I'm not doing them on purpose," Boyle said. "It's a body that's protecting itself. It's not something I'm thinking about, it's just the body finds ways to protect itself from uncomfortable positions or situations. ... Sometimes I find myself doing things and putting myself in positions that are not normal.

"But I don't want to sit here and make excuses. It is what it is."

Boyle's shot was supposed to be a big help to the power play, and he had four on net in six attempts Wednesday.

"It's not where it needs to be, let's put it that way," he said. "I've got some room to improve."

Forward Lee Stempniak returned to practice after missing Wednesday's game with a stiff lower back. He said it was the first time he had dealt with that injury, and he didn't do any one thing to prompt it.

"Just a few days leading up to that, it was getting worse and worse, not getting any better," Stempniak said. "So hopefully I turned the corner and on the way to recovery."

Coach Alain Vigneault called Stempniak "day-to-day," but expected he would have been ready if the Rangers were playing on Friday.

Vigneault said Henrik Lundqvist was scheduled to get the start in nets in Buffalo, following up a shutout from his backup, Cam Talbot. It's likely Lundqvist will start Sunday at the Garden against the Canadiens.

Vigneault was asked if he remembered any time when he had seen 7 feet of snow, which was what had been dumped on parts of Buffalo over Tuesday and Wednesday.

Vigneault recalled a time coaching juniors in Prince Edward Island, in Canada, when he got snow "above the garage." He said they didn't move for two days, and the league's schedule was cancelled for three or four days.

"It is what it is, just pop open an extra bottle of wine," he said jokingly. "Not that big of a deal. Stay warm by the fire."
It's one of those cliched statements that is especially overused in hockey.

"For all teams," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said Thursday, "you need your top performers to perform."

That was in response to a question about center Derek Stepan, one of those "top performers." Since returning from his broken left leg suffered in training camp, Stepan has played seven games, none of them more assertive than Wednesday night in a 2-0 win over the Flyers at the Garden.

"It's so hard to continually string together games when you're 10 games behind most," Stepan said. "So as you get further into the games, you feel more comfortable coming back into the rink ready to go, mentally and physically."

Physically, Stepan looks fine, having played 20:37 Wednesday, the most of any Rangers forward. That included 3:34 on the power play, on which he collected an assist on a sweet pass that helped set up a Rick Nash goal, along with 1:53 on the penalty kill.

What most impressed Vigneault was the 15:10 Stepan played at even strength. His line with Chris Kreider and Marty St. Louis matched up against the Flyers' top-heavy unit that contains Claude Giroux and Jakub Voracek.

"That's one of the best lines in hockey right now," Vigneault said. "I think he did real well."

This is not the first time Stepan has had to come back to the Rangers after missing training camp. He was absent from preseason workouts last year because of a contract negotiation. But back then, he was skating and working out. This time, he was forced to sit around for two and a half weeks before he could even begin a rehab routine.

"That takes a toll," Stepan said. "You have to put in a lot of work, and you have to recover. You have to have that balance of not killing yourself, saving some energy for the game, but still putting in the work, getting yourself back into shape. It's a very different situation."

With Stepan back in the lineup, it also seems as if the Rangers (8-7-4) are in a very different situation than they were just a few days ago. That's when they still were reeling from a 5-1 drubbing at the hands of some old friends on the Lightning on Monday night. But after a complete performance against the Flyers, the dogma of the room has become consistency.

"I don't think we need — no, I know we don't need — another lesson," Vigneault said. "We're very, very aware of the consistency that we need from shift to shift, from game to game. This is too good of a league to do what we've been doing so far."

Vigneault also said he believes he hasn't seen the best yet from the 24-year-old Stepan.

"Step, being still a very young player, there is room for improvement there," Vigneault said. "He should be on the upswing, and I do expect him to be on the upswing."

After a game like Wednesday's from Stepan and his teammates, the same could be said about the Rangers.
Rangers game vs. Buffalo Sabres postponed

By Brett Cyrgalis
November 20, 2014 | 3:27pm

The extreme weather conditions in Buffalo postponed the Rangers-Sabres game that was scheduled for Friday night at the downtown First Niagara Center.

The Rangers practiced at 1 p.m. on Thursday at their Westchester facility, but were told by the league to hold their scheduled 3 p.m. flight until they got word on status of the game. Just after 3 p.m., the league announced the game was postponed, with no makeup date yet confirmed.

“There’s nothing the league can do,” coach Alain Vigneault said. “We can't be frustrated with anybody. You have to do the right thing here.”

The game couldn’t be pushed back until Saturday, when the Sabres are supposed to be in Washington to take on the Capitals. This was the first of four matchups between the two teams this season, and the first of two in Buffalo. The Rangers’ next scheduled game in Buffalo is March 14.
Hextall rips Flyers after Rangers loss: ‘F—ing embarrassing’

By Justin Terranova
November 20, 2014 | 10:36am

Losing to the Rangers hasn’t gotten any easier for Ron Hextall.
The first-year Flyers GM furiously berated his team after a 2-0 loss to the Rangers at the Garden on Wednesday night.
“Are you f—ing kidding me? That’s f—ing embarrassing! Jesus f—ing Christ!” Hextall could be heard screaming at his players in the locker room, while goalie Steve Mason was interviewed by reporters.
The loss dropped the disappointing Flyers to 7-8-2.
“Yeah, yeah, that bothered me a lot. I didn’t think … we didn’t come out hungry enough. We didn’t play well. We gotta be a lot better than that,” a calmer Hextall would tell reporters later.

Rangers right wing Lee Stempniak said his back was feeling better and before Friday night’s Rangers-Sabres game was postponed due to the extreme snowfall in the Buffalo region, said he expected to be available to play.

But Stempniak actually had other, more pressing concerns. Stempniak grew up in the southern Buffalo suburb of West Seneca, N.Y., one of the hardest hit by the lake-effect snow which, in some areas has been above six feet.

Stempniak’s parents still live in West Seneca and his brother lives north of the city. The lake-effect snow has been very specific in where it has hit the hardest. So the area south of Buffalo is where the huge snowfall amounts typically are while north of the city has seen, in some areas, just a three-inch dusting.

“I just talked to my parents,” Stempniak said. “My mom got stuck at work in the city. She works midnights. My parents live south of the city in West Seneca, my brother lives north of the city so my mom is with my brother now and she’s been there for two days and there’s minimal snow. My dad had four or five feet. It was like a dusting north of the city. It was really a specific band of lake-effect snow. My dad said he was outside for eight hours yesterday snow blowing and made one length of the driveway. One width. It was snowblower wide and that was it.

“IT’s pretty extreme so early,” Stempniak added. “I was worried about my parents. I just wanted to make sure they’re OK. I’m glad my mom wasn’t stuck at work for long. My dad’s by himself. He hasn’t left the house in about two days other than to shovel. I’m sure he’s getting a little stir crazy but I’m sure he’s all right.”

That area received another two feet or so of snow today.

“My dad he couldn’t get out of the house,” Stempniak said. “Couldn’t open the garage door, couldn’t get out the front door or the back door. Said the snow itself was up to his chest and parts where there were drifts it was six feet high. It’s pretty amazing. I can’t believe we’re getting more snow.”

As for his back, Stempniak said, “Hopefully we’ll see how I feel tomorrow but it’s a lot better today than the last few days. I’ve never had it before. I don’t know what caused it. For a few days leading up to that, it was getting worse and worse. Hopefully I’ve turned the corner on the way to recovery.”

Stempniak missed Tuesday’s practice and then could not play in Wednesday’s 2-0 win over the Flyers.

Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said he was waiting for word from the NHL prior to today’s practice as to whether the team would indeed be going to Buffalo or not. During practice he hoped to get word on whether the game was on or not.

The difference, Vigneault said, was in the way he would have structured today’s practice. It was a quick, 35-minute practice with mostly work on the power play. Had Vigneault known the game was definitely off, “We would have gone a little longer and a little harder.”

The Rangers will not practice on Friday (just as they won’t face the Sabres) and will resume skating on Saturday before hosting the Canadiens on Sunday.

But Vigneault quickly said there was no frustration with the league over the wait. The Rangers were informed right around 3 p.m. - when their team flight was scheduled to depart for Buffalo - that the game had been postponed.

“Oh, no, there’s nothing they can do,” Vigneault said. “This is the weather. This is people’s security. They’re just checking with everybody concerned. From the Buffalo team. I think the governor. Everybody that’s involved. They’re dealing with seven feet of snow. Can we get in there? Can we get out after the game safe? You can’t be frustrated with anybody. You’ve got to do the right thing here.”

Prior to taking the Rangers’ job, Vigneault coached both in Montreal and Vancouver. So he was asked whether he’s seen a snowstorm like the one hitting Buffalo now.

Yes, Vigneault, said. While he was coaching junior hockey in Prince Edward Island (from 2003-05).

“What’s seven feet of snow like?” Vigneault said. “I was in P.E.I. when I was coaching in juniors, we had sort of the same thing. There (in Buffalo) it’s the lake. In P.E.I. it’s the ocean. A storm came in and there was snow above the garage so you’re thinking seven, eight feet. Didn’t move for two days. Everything was cancelled. But P.E.I. and Buffalo, I’m thinking Buffalo can get things done quicker. It’s a small little Canadian city.”

Vigneault was also asked whether being in the midst of that type of snowfall is scary.

“It is what it is,” Vigneault said. “Pop open an extra bottle of wine. Nothing to do. Keep warm by the fire.”

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
Rangers game in Buffalo postponed

Posted by Andrew Gross

The NHL has just announced around 3 p.m. that Friday night’s Rangers-Sabres game in snowbound Buffalo has been postponed due to the extreme weather conditions in and around the region.

The Rangers team flight had been scheduled to depart this afternoon at 3 but the players were told as they came off the ice following today’s 1 p.m. practice that the NHL still had not made a decision as to whether Friday night’s game would be played.

The players were told to stay at the team’s practice facility in Greenburgh, N.Y. until a decision.

The game could not have been moved back a day to Saturday because the Sabres are scheduled to be in Washington.

The Sabres did get their game in against the Sharks on Tuesday night at First Niagara Center on the first day of the massive storm.

Some areas, particularly south of Buffalo, have received more than six feet of snow. Downtown Buffalo, where the First Niagara Center is, has not been so buried but snow continued Thursday afternoon and a lake-effect snow warning was in effect until 1 a.m. Friday.

In the NFL, it’s expected the Jets and Bills will not be able to play Sunday at Orchard Park, N.Y., about eight miles outside Buffalo.

“Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday’s game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center, NHL Game No. 291, has been postponed,” the NHL said in a release announcing the postponement. “A makeup date will be announced as soon as it can be confirmed.”

Per the Rangers, the last game in team history to be postponed was Jan. 10, 1998 against the Canadiens at Montreal due to the weather conditions. That game was finally played on March 12, 1998.

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.21.2014
NHL postpones Rangers game in Buffalo on Friday

By ANDREW GROSS
STAFF WRITER |
The Record

GREENBURGH, N.Y. – While the Rangers and Sabres practiced on Thursday, NHL representatives were conducting extensive discussions with officials in Buffalo and both clubs, all the while keeping a sharp eye on the weather report.

In the end, the league made the same decision the NFL did a little bit later Thursday afternoon. The NFL announced Sunday’s Jets-Bills game would be moved to a neutral site. The extreme snowfall in the Buffalo region made it unsafe to host a sporting event.

So tonight’s Rangers-Sabres game has been postponed with no makeup date yet announced.

“There’s nothing they can do,” Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. “This is weather. This is people’s security. You can’t be frustrated with anybody. You’ve got to do the right thing here.”

Downtown Buffalo, where the First Niagara Center is located, has not been as severely impacted as the southern regions and the Buffalo airport remained open. But transportation around the area, particularly for fans trying to get to the game, remains treacherous.

As of Thursday afternoon, when an additional two feet of snow fell in some areas, 10 local residents had been killed in the storm. Areas south of Buffalo have reported about six feet or more of snow.

Rangers right wing Lee Stempniak grew up in a suburb south of Buffalo, West Seneca, among the hardest hit by the unrelenting lake-effect snow.

“I just talked to my parents,” Stempniak said after practice, his first after missing Wednesday’s 2-0 win over the Flyers and Tuesday’s skate with lower-back tightness. “My mom got stuck at work in the city. She works midnights. My parents live south of the city and my brother lives north of the city so my mom is with my brother now and she’s been there for two days and there’s just minimal snow.

“My dad had four or five feet,” Stempniak added. “My dad said he was outside for eight hours yesterday snow-blowing and he made one length of the driveway. It was snow-blower wide and that was it. I was worried about my parents. I just wanted to make sure they’re OK. My dad’s by himself. He hasn’t left the house in about two days other than to shovel. I’m sure he’s getting a little stir crazy.”

This marks the Rangers first postponed game since Jan. 10, 1998 at Montreal, also due to snowfall, which eventually was played on March 12, 1998.

“Since I’ve been here this will be the first one,” said Derek Stepan, who grew up in Hastings, Minn., and went to the University of Wisconsin. “But every year I feel like we get stuck in Buffalo overnight. We play the game but it snows while we’re there. But I’ve never had a situation where we’re not going somewhere because of the snow.”

Defenseman Marc Staal grew up in Thunder Bay, Ont., in the western part of that province and north of Lake Superior.

“I don’t think we’ve gotten anything like what Buffalo’s gotten,” Staal said. “It’s crazy. Nothing like five feet. We’ve had years where we’ve gotten a lot of snow but never all at once like that.”

The Rangers practiced at 1 p.m. and their team charter flight was scheduled to depart from Westchester County Airport at 3 p.m.

But as the players left the ice, they were told to remain at the team’s practice facility until the league made a decision. That came shortly after 3 p.m. The Sabres are supposed to play at Washington on Saturday, so the Rangers-Sabres game could not be delayed a day.

The Rangers face the Canadiens on Sunday night at Madison Square Garden.
Snowstorm forces postponement of Rangers-Sabres game in Buffalo Friday night

Updated November 20, 2014 10:37 PM
By STEVE ZIPAY  steve.zipay@newsday.com

The extreme snowstorm that has crippled the Buffalo region forced the NHL on Thursday to postpone Friday night's game between the Rangers and Sabres. It had not been rescheduled as of Thursday night.

"Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday's game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center has been postponed," the NHL said.

The last Rangers game postponed because of weather was on Jan. 10, 1998, against the Canadiens in Montreal. It was played March 12, and the Rangers lost, 4-1.

The Rangers received word after practice at the Madison Square Garden Training Center in Greenburgh. The team flight had been scheduled to depart at 3 p.m., but players, coaches and staff were held at the rink until the league's decision.

The Rangers will not practice until Saturday, when they will prepare to host the Canadiens on Sunday.

"You can't be frustrated," coach Alain Vigneault said during the wait. "There's nothing they can do. Everybody's concerned, from the Buffalo team to the governor. You're dealing with seven feet of snow. Can we get in there? Can people come to the game? Is it safe?"

Some areas, notably south of Buffalo, were under 6 feet of snow and more was falling Thursday. Downtown had less accumulation, but a lake-effect snow warning was in effect into Friday.

"It's pretty extreme for so early in the season," said Rangers forward Lee Stempniak, a native of West Seneca, New York, a Buffalo suburb.

The lives of his parents, who reside there, have been disrupted, he said. His father had plowed a path with a snowblower, but otherwise "he hasn't left the house," Stempniak said. He said his mother, who had been stranded at work downtown for a short time, is staying with his brother.

Vigneault recalled a similar situation when he was coaching juniors in Prince Edward Island, Canada.

"In Buffalo, it's the lake; in PEI, it's the ocean -- a storm came in and there was snow above the garage, seven or eight feet," Vigneault said. "Everything was canceled for three or four days.

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"It is what it is: you just pop open an extra bottle of wine . . . not that big of a deal. You keep warm by the fire."

No game tonight … but Live Chat today at noon

21 November 2014, 3:12 am by Carp in Hockey Live chat New York
Rangers NHL Rangers Report - 3 Comments

LOCAL SNOWEMBER AERIAL GEE

Still awaiting a makeup date for that Rangers-Sabres game which was supposed to be tonight, but had to be postponed because of the weather disaster in the Buffalo area.

Meanwhile, the Rangers get an unexpected day off—they were smart enough to stay at the practice rink until they got the word from the NHL Thursday—and they go back to work with a practice Saturday, then host Montreal Sunday.

Before that, we have a lot to discuss, so we’ll do our weekly Live Chat at noon today. Be there. Or else.

GREENBURGH – The Rangers got an unexpected day off when the NHL on Thursday postponed their game in snow-buried Buffalo Friday.

The team practiced at its facility Thursday, but waited to get word from the league before heading to Westchester Airport and the team charter jet, which probably could have gotten to Buffalo’s airport without problem since that part of the area was not hard hit.

But later in the afternoon the NHL made the determination to postpone. No makeup date was immediately set. It is the Rangers’ first weather-related postponement since Jan. 10, 1998 in Montreal.

The Rangers will return to the ice for practice Saturday then host Montreal Sunday.

“I was waiting to get an answer before practice,” Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. “I was waiting during practice because if we (knew) we wouldn’t have played we would have gone a little longer and a little harder, give them a day off tomorrow, come back and practice (Saturday) and play Montreal (Sunday).”

Asked if he would be OK with the decision to postpone, Vigneault said, “There’s nothing they can do. This is the weather, people’s security ... everybody concerned, from the Buffalo team to the governor, everybody involved. Dealing with seven feet of snow ... can we get in there, can people get to the game, is it safe, etc., etc., etc.? We can’t be frustrated. We’ve got to do the right thing.”

Vigneault laughed when asked if he’d ever experienced anything similar.

“In PEI (Prince Edward Island), when I was coaching in junior, we had sort of the same thing,” he said. “(In Buffalo) it’s the lake, in PEI it was the ocean. A storm came in and there was snow above the garage. So you’re thinking seven, eight feet? Didn’t move for two days.

Asked if it was a scary situation, Vigneault said, “It is what it is. Just pop open an extra bottle of wine. Not that big of a deal. Keep warm by the fire.”

Rangers winger Lee Stempniak – whose back was feeling better after missing Wednesday’s win over Philadelphia – is from the greater Buffalo area.

“I just talked to my parents,” Stempniak said. “My mom got stuck in the city. She works midnights in Buffalo. My parents live south of the city, West Seneca. My brother lives north of the city. My mom is with my brother now, been there for two days, and there’s minimal snow, where my dad had four or five feet. It’s a really specific band of lake effect snow.

“My dad said he was outside for eight hours (Wednesday), snow blowing, and made one length of the driveway, one width of a snowblower wide, and that’s it. So he’s in lockdown there.”

Now he won’t even have a game to watch until Sunday.

Here’s the official announcement from the NHL:

FRIDAY’S NY RANGERS AT BUFFALO GAME POSTPONED

NEW YORK (Nov. 20, 2014) – Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday’s game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center, NHL Game No. 291, has been postponed.

A makeup date will be announced as soon as it can be confirmed.

Senators secure victory over Predators behind Robin Lehner’s goaltending

KEN WARREN

More from Ken Warren

Published on: November 20, 2014 Last Updated: November 20, 2014 11:34 PM EST

Senators 3, Predators 2

An Ottawa Senators goaltender stole another victory. The opposition offered up a rusty, rarely used back-up in their net.

Ho hum. What else is new?

The Senators’ 3-2 victory over the Nashville Predators Thursday night was all about the spectacular play of goaltender Robin Lehner – who stopped 33 shots at the Canadian Tire Centre – and taking advantage of the holes in Carter Hutton’s game.

“It was some outstanding play by our goaltender that got us the win,” said Senators coach Paul MacLean. “I thought he was very good. He made a couple, at least three (saves) that I remember that could have been goals. And the reason we won the game was because he played goal the way he did.”

Bobby Ryan, Alex Chiasson and Jared Cowen – with his first of the season – scored in an 8:07 span in the second period to account for the Senators’ offence.

Shea Weber scored early in the first period and Olli Jokinen scored early in the third for the Predators.

Lehner was at his best at the beginning and at the end. He stopped 15 of 16 shots in the third period to hold off a late push by the Predators, who came into Ottawa having won five of their previous six games, including a 9-2 romp over the Toronto Maple Leafs on Tuesday.

While No. 1 goaltender Craig Anderson had played the previous three games and seven of the previous nine for the Senators, it was an impressive bounce back for Lehner, who hadn’t tasted victory since Oct. 28.

“I felt good,” said Lehner. “It’s always a little bit uphill when you let in a goal early, but I thought the whole team, especially in the second period, bounced back and kept it a little more simple. It felt solid overall.”

The Predators offered up a gift, of sorts, giving Hutton only his third start of the season – and first since Nov. 4 – in place of all-star Pekka Rinne, who has registered all 12 of Nashville’s victories this season. It marked the ninth time in 18 games that the Senators have seen a back-up.

Early on, the Senators failed to take advantage, testing Hutton with only four shots in the opening 25 minutes of the game.

Then came the offensive burst. Ryan, on a power play, beat Hutton high over his blocker. Chiasson deflected a Cody Ceci shot past the Predators’ netminder on a play that might very well have been offside. Cowen beat Hutton with a low wrist shot from the faceoff circle.

“(The defence) has been contributing, but maybe not getting the points,” said Cowen. “Maybe with the points we can be better, but I think we’ve been fine on the blueline. I would rather be safe than risky. I think we’re coming together now.”

Everything, of course, looks great when the goaltender repeatedly bails out his teammates in times of trouble.

The Senators have outshot their opponents only three times in 18 games, but they own an 8-3-2 when they’ve been outshot. Despite ranking 28th in shots allowed per game – only Buffalo and Colorado are worse – the Senators rank 12th in the league in goals against.

After desperately clinging to the lead while being outshot 16-3 in the third period Thursday, MacLean will have a word or a thousand to his players about shooting more, particularly on odd-man rushes. And about having better starts.

“It was ugly,” Ryan said of the Senators’ opening 20 minutes. “(Lehner) did a good job of giving ourselves an opportunity to put ourselves back in it. There was optimism being down only 1-0 (after the first period). We were able to right the ship and turn it around a little bit.”

GAME FILE

WHY THEY WON: They took what the Predators gave them – a rusty, rarely used back-up goaltender named Carter Hutton – to score three times midway through the second period.

CHEERS: Robin Lehner, Senators: He didn’t look like a guy who hadn’t played in two weeks. Lehner was at his best in the third period, particularly in the final minutes, as the Predators pressed hard to tie the game.

JEERS: Missed two-on-ones, Senators: The Senators could have made life much, much easier for themselves by burying one of the countless odd-man rushes they had. Mike Hoffman and Clarke MacArthur were among those guilty of not shooting when they had the chance.

COWEN CLOSE CALL: Seconds before Alex Chiasson tipped Cody Ceci’s shot to give the Senators a 2-1 lead, Jared Cowen kept the puck alive inside the Predators blueline. Or did he? Replays appeared to show the puck had left the zone.

SCOUT’S HONOUR: Kudos to the Senators for making 14-year-old Jonathan Pitre an honorary scout Thursday. Pitre, who suffers from a rare genetic disease which makes it difficult to walk, eat and breathe, had previously told The Citizen that he wanted to be involved in sports as a scout or sportscaster.

ROUGH RETURN: Colin Greening, playing in only his fifth game of the season and first since Nov. 9, took a cross-checking penalty 1:49 into the game. Shea Weber took advantage, blasting a slapshot past Lehner on the ensuing power play.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.21.2014
In his time with the Ottawa Senators, winger Daniel Alfredsson was many things.

Among them, he was the player expected to instantly transform a pedestrian forward line into something resembling a legitimate second line. It was always Alfredsson who was plucked off the Jason Spezza line to fix up another unit.

These days that responsibility falls to winger Bobby Ryan. Like Alfredsson, Ryan is comfortable on the first line – in his case, alongside centre Kyle Turris and left-winger Clarke MacArthur. But when head coach Paul MacLean wants to establish a second line, it tends to be Ryan who is assigned the task of kick-starting Mika Zibanejad, for example.

When that mixture didn’t work, Ryan was shifted last night onto a new line with centre David Legwand, whose most recent goal was Oct. 18 vs. the Columbus Blue Jackets, and winger Colin Greening, who has been out of the lineup most of the season (rookie Curtis Lazar is injured, opening the door for Greening).

If this newly formed trio seems a bit of a patchwork quilt, a veteran centre not known for his offensive production, a big, up-and-down the ice winger in Greening, plus a scoring winger in Ryan . . . well, Ryan is used to it from his days in Anaheim with the Ducks.

“I’ve always been in the role of going up and down (the depth chart), and that’s OK with me,” Ryan says. “If I can get those guys going as well as myself at the same time, I’d be pretty happy.”

With four goals in his first 16 games, Ryan has not had the start he was hoping for, but with only periodic time on the Turris line, he has not had the scoring chances he did last season.

“They might be trying to get me going, too,” Ryan says. “Obviously you know what he’s trying to do with a couple of guys (namely Legwand and Greening), he’s trying to spark them. Sometimes that’s all it takes, a new look.”

The new-look line didn’t have much going in the first period, but then neither did any of the Senators early in their first home game since the Western Canada trip, mustering four measly shots on the Predators backup goalie Carter Hutton. (Or, as MacLean referred to him, “the other guy,” not Pekka Rinne).

Legwand and Greening were seated on the bench when Ryan scored his fifth of the season, on a second-period power play, Ryan snapping a wrist shot past Hutton from near the top of the faceoff circle. It was a huge goal, to get the home team going.

“When you get one on the power play, I think everyone takes a sigh of relief because there’s a crutch there,” Ryan said. “Right after that, everything started to go right for a while.”

Soon afterward, Alex Chiasson and Jared Cowen had staked the Senators on a second-period power play, Ryan snapping a wrist shot past Hutton from near the top of the faceoff circle. It was a huge goal, to get the home team going.

“When you get one on the power play, I think everyone takes a sigh of relief because there’s a crutch there,” Ryan said. “Right after that, everything started to go right for a while.”

Soon afterward, Alex Chiasson and Jared Cowen had staked the Senators to a 3-1 lead as the home team showed its appreciation for the Predators decision to rest Rinne.

In the third period, the Ryan line had a couple of chances, including a Greening-Ryan two-on-one that resulted in a lot of ice chips but no goal. No harm done, in a 3-2 Senators victory with Ottawa goaltender Robin Lehner stealing the show.

JOHNSON BANKRUPTCY

The story of Jack Johnson’s bankruptcy only broke Thursday morning in the Columbus Dispatch, so after the morning skate, Ryan hadn’t heard the gruesome details of his friend’s proceedings.

According to the story, Johnson of the Blue Jackets has debts that could be as high as $15 million, largely because his own parents spent and borrowed large sums against his name and income.

Ryan did say it’s critical that NHL players get advice, especially when so many young players are coming into the league and making big bucks.

“You’ve got to keep a close eye on the people that are handling it for you, that’s why I think it’s more and more important to have people you trust around you and not just hire somebody,” Ryan said. “Guys tend to rely on parents to make those decisions, which is fine when you’re young but as you get older, I think it’s important to do the research into the people that are going to be handling your money.”

GUITAR FOLKS

Away from the rink, Ryan still loves to tinker with an acoustic guitar, a habit he picked up in Owen Sound as an 18-year-old junior hockey player.

“There wasn’t a whole lot going on in Owen Sound,” Ryan says, so, Ryan and teammate Trevor Lewis bought guitars and learned how to play.

Mostly, Ryan plays Neil Young songs these days, but “a bit of everything.”

A couple of years ago, Ryan played a charity gig with his former Anaheim teammate Joffrey Lupul, now a member of the Toronto Maple Leafs.

“We played five, six songs – he sang, I just did the rhythm guitar and the strumming,” Ryan said.

Referring to himself as a “bonfire” performer, Ryan keeps guitars at his different residences, including his parents’ place in New Jersey. For the record, he owns one Gibson guitar, two Yamahas and one Takamine.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.21.2014
To paraphrase an old Eagles tune, there was a new Kid Line in town Thursday.

With 19-year-old rookie Curtis Lazar nursing an undisclosed minor injury, 21-year-old Mika Zibanejad stepped into his spot on a line with Mike Hoffman and Mark Stone against the Nashville Predators.

Coach Paul MacLean says the Senators were simply being “precautionary” with the Lazar ailment, making sure it didn’t develop into something bigger.

Looking down the road, however, the move allowed the Senators the opportunity to see what they can do with the roster in the event Lazar is loaned to Canada’s world junior team in about four to five weeks.

In an interview with the Citizen about Senators prospects last week, Senators assistant GM Randy Lee said that the organization has not ruled out such a move.

“It’s a conversation we will definitely have,” Lee said.

Lee says the Senators approach has always been to think big picture. In this case, would Lazar’s long-term development be enhanced by spending a couple of weeks playing alongside and against the best junior talent in the world?

There’s no rush to make that decision now, but rest assured that Canadian coach Ben Groulx is paying very close attention.

ALL ABOUT ROBIN (AND LENNOX) LEHNER

Senators goaltender Robin Lehner is a changed man. That’s what happens when there’s a newborn around. “It’s obviously different,” Lehner said about the Oct. 30 birth of his son, Lennox.

“Everyone who is a father knows. People, before I got Lennox, told me life is going to change. It took one day and I realized what they were saying. It’s different. Things change and there’s something else that’s more important than you. You just want to the best you can off the ice, but on the ice, too, and try to provide for your family.”

FISHER CLOSES IN ON RETURN

Mike Fisher was originally hoping that he could return from his ruptured Achilles in time to join the Predators in time for Thursday’s homecoming against the Senators. “I feel good, I’m getting close,” he said, following an extended skate with fellow Nashville scratches Thursday afternoon at Canadian Tire Centre. After talking with Erik Karlsson and others who have been returned from Achilles injuries, he’s heeding the advice to not rush back too soon. “I’ve got a few buddies, who don’t play in the league, who have done it, and I talked to a few other guys who have friends that have done it in the league and the whole thing is just ‘take a little bit extra time than you think’ because once you get into a game you can get tired pretty easily.”

As for one of the biggest off-ice stories in Nashville – Carrie Underwood’s pregnancy – Fisher was tight-lipped. Underwood is due to give birth to a boy at some point in the spring, but the actual expected date is a closely guarded secret. “One day closer, today,” Fisher said.

MORE MURRAY TRIBUTES

Predators winger Matt Cullen, who had an impressive spring fling with the Senators back in 2010, is full of praise for Senators GM Bryan Murray in his colon cancer battle. “He did a lot for me, I tell you that,” said Cullen. “As my coach in Anaheim a long time ago, it was one of the very best years of my career and then he brought me here (to Ottawa) and that helped my career a lot, too. What a guy. One of the best guys in the game.”
The Ottawa Senators have announced they’ve hired Jonathan Pitre to the team’s pro scouting staff, starting with tonight’s game against the Nashville Predators.

General manager Bryan Murray noted that the recent articles on Jonathan, 14, in the Citizen showcased the boy’s “desire to be a scout, his courage and infectious personality.”

At 5:30 p.m. Bryan Murray, along with assistant general managers Pierre Dorion and Randy Lee are to formally welcome Jonathan to the Senators’ staff by signing a one-day ceremonial contract with the club.

Jonathan will have a tour of the CTC before spending a portion of the game with Dorion scouting the play of both the Sens and the Predators.
Senators goalie Robin Lehner juggling fatherhood, consistency between the pipes 0

Ottawa Senators

Prior to Thursday, little Lennox Lehner had yet to see his dad come home from work with a victory smile on his face.

In fact, Robin Lehner's season took a turn for the worst since the arrival of his first born on Oct. 30.

Before becoming a 23-year-old father, the Senators goalie had a 3-0-1 record and had allowed a total of nine goals. After the birth, Lehner lost two games, surrendering nine in the process.

Things were going to change against the Predators, Lehner quietly predicted following the morning skate.

"I'm not going to say it's a distraction, but it's obviously different, like everyone that's a father knows," Lehner said when asked about the altering of his daily routine. "Before I got Lennox, people always said things are going to change, and I'm like ya, ya. They say wait.

"It took one day and I realized what they were saying, it's different. Things change. There's something else that's more important than you. You just want to do the best you can off the ice, but also on the ice, because you're trying to provide for a family. That's obviously a little more pressure, too."

Lehner would never use fatherhood as an excuse. As he noted, the Senators were bad as a team Nov. 1, a 4-2 loss in Beantown. He was not happy with his next start, either, a 5-3 defeat at the hands of the Leafs.

On the morning of that one, players from both teams visited the War Memorial to pay tribute to slain Cpl. Nathan Cirillo. It was emotional.

"It was a special day for us," said Lehner. "I felt a little shaky that game, I didn't feel like I was fully prepared. That's on me. It's what it is. It's not an excuse."

The two sub-par performances, combined with Craig Anderson's stellar play, has once again put Lehner in an official backup role. After spending most of his life as a starter, he's still trying to get used to being No. 2.

And now, he's also learning how to become a dad.

"Absolutely it's different," said Lehner. "It's a good different. It's new, so it's about me adapting to it. You adapt to every situation in life. Sometimes it takes just a little bit of time.

"My wife does a great job with him. I try to be involved a lot too. It's very special. It's a great thing for both of us and we're very happy."

No doubt Lennox will have a giggle when he sees his dad's victory smile.

STARTS AND STOPS

At 35, Olli Jokinen suddenly has a long flowing mane. Why? "When you get older you try to look as young as possible," said the Nashville centre. "The longer hair gives you that younger look. My wife tells me every day to cut it. If I don't score any time soon it could come off." Any point would be big for Jokinen, who went without a goal or an assist in the Predators first 18 games ... One of Bryan Murray's finest trades remains as a Florida GM, when he acquired Jokinen and Roberto Luongo without giving up much.

"He was very helpful to me. He cares about his players," said Jokinen, who was "sad" when he first learned Murray is battling cancer. "Hopefully he can beat this thing. You never know. Wish him all the best." ... Early in the day Lehner was asked about being at the target end of Shea Weber's famous point blasts (which should be illegal, by the way). Said Lehner; "I don't really notice who is on the ice. I guess I'll feel it when he shoots it at me."

Aside from the multiple times he had to ask reporters "what time is tonight's game?" when he was the Senators' starting goalie, my most memorable Dominik Hasek moment occurred the night we were at the same Christmas house party. I saw the Dominator in the kitchen by himself, staring intently at the microwave. Suddenly, the timer went off and a big smile crossed his face. He opened the door, reached in, and pulled out his glass of red wine. Different dude, on and off the ice ... The pink tie I wore to the game was wrinkled. Tried to iron it out, but I stopped when I smelled burning flesh ... You'd think playing in his 500th game might get Clarke MacArthur a little more respect than to be called a "diver." ... In his 300th game, Zack Smith was once again an impact player. Had to do with him back at centre, no doubt.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
Predators’ Mike Fisher close to making season debut 0

BY DON BRENNAN, OTTAWA SUN
FIRST POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 07:07 PM EST | UPDATED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 10:58 PM EST

Mike Fisher and other Predators scratches had just put in an extra hour of ice time at Canadian Tire Centre Thursday morning.

Fisher was telling two patient Ottawa reporters he’s close to returning from a ruptured Achilles, but he could barely get through a sentence without coughing.

"I've been skating since October," he said, before breaking into another fit. "Still haven't stopped smoking though."

A joke, of course. The only stick the clean-living Fisher touches has a blade on the end. And he can't wait to use it in an NHL game again.

Fisher, who tore his Achilles in half while training five months ago, had targeted Thursday’s game as his return. He had to settle for having dinner with his parents Jim and Karen, who drove in from Peterborough, and visiting with his brother Bud, at Chris Neil’s new restaurant/bar, Central Bierhaus, the night before.

"I want to make sure it's feeling real good. Give it a little bit extra," Fisher said of the injury. "And the team is playing great. It's been fun to watch. Little pressure off me to get back."

Fisher and his wife Carrie Underwood are expecting their first child, but they're not saying when.

"One day closer today," cracked Fisher. "We're excited. It's going to be fun."

While his contract is up after this season, the 34-year old is also keeping mum about his future plans. Could this be the last season for one of the most popular Senators ever?

"Who knows?," said Fisher. "Right now I don't feel like it is, no. I want to win and I feel like we've got a good young group. It's fun to be a part of and I still enjoy it. We'll see."

As for the cough, Fisher says he gets that around the start of every hockey season. It's probably the one thing about the game he won't miss when he retires.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
In a classy move Thursday, Ottawa Senators GM Bryan Murray announced the new addition of Jonathan Pitre to the team's scouting staff.

Pitre, 14, who suffers from Epidermolysis bullosa (EB), a rare and incurable disease signed a one-day ceremonial contract with the club.

The Sun's Tony Caldwell was on hand, see his photos below.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
Senators winger Bobby Ryan warns fellow NHLers to be smart with cash

BY DON BRENNAN, OTTAWA SUN
FIRST POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 05:02 PM EST | UPDATED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 05:06 PM EST

Know, and make sure you can trust, the people with access to your money.

That's the lesson young hockey players can learn from the case of Jack Johnson, the Columbus Blue Jackets defenceman who, despite having earned more than $18 million over his nine-year career, has filed for bankruptcy.

A story in the Columbus Dispatch by Aaron Portzline details how Johnson lost almost all his cash after a string of risky loans at high interest rates, defaults on those loans and three lawsuits.

"I'd say I picked the wrong people who led me down the wrong path," Johnson told Portzline. "I've got people in place who are going to fix everything now. It's something I should have done a long time ago."

The article goes on to say that sources indicated some of those "wrong people" were Johnson's parents, Jack Sr. and Tina Johnson.

Senators winger Bobby Ryan, who has known the Johnson family and been friends with Jack Jr. for a long time, was taken aback by the news Thursday. While declining to speculate on Johnson's situation, Ryan did acknowledge there comes from it a strong message to all players.

"You've got to keep a close eye on the people that are handling (your money) for you," said Ryan. "That's why I think it's more and more important to have people you trust around you, and not just hire somebody."

"In this economy everybody is trying to get their hands on something. Don't know if that's the case in his situation but I pay a mindful eye to it. I think most players should."

"A lot of people tend to rely on their parents to make those decisions, which is fine when you're young, but as you get older I think it's more and more important to do the research and homework on the people that are going to be handling your finances for a long period of time."

"The league is getting younger, and a lot of times it's just overwhelming for young guys."
Paul MacLean was forced to shuffle his deck Thursday night.

Though winger Curtis Lazar was on the ice with the scratches after the morning skate, he wasn't healthy enough to suit up against the Nashville Predators.

That meant winger Colin Greening, a scratch for three straight games, returned. Lazar shouldn't be out long, but the Senators' coaching staff didn't want to take any chances.

"He's not going to be available but that's just for precautionary reasons. He has a minor (injury) that we don't want to grow into something bigger so we're going to be cautious with him," said MacLean.

Sitting Lazar meant changes. Mika Zibanejad, who had been moved to the wing, played between Mike Hoffman and Mark Stone.

One of the biggest switches was putting Zack Smith back at centre. More recently he has been playing on the wing and hasn't worked for him.

"This is a hard league to learn in. If you're trying to learn a position in this league it's a difficult chore," said MacLean. "Moving back and forth gives him a little bit comfort. When we move him back (to centre) he's more comfortable.

"He's learned more about when to go and when to stay as a winger. Getting him back in the middle it's important we have his tenacity and grit through the middle of the rink."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
As the Legacy of Eric Lindros Comes to a Close, So Do Memories

Marcus Hayes, Daily News Sports Columnist

POSTED: Friday, November 21, 2014, 3:01 AM

"I WAS conflicted," said Michael Sabatina.

Everyone was, all the time, it seemed, when it came to Eric Lindros.

Everyone still is.

It is a disease that affects the legacy of most Philadelphia stars, even upon their enshrinements. Name them: Donovan McNabb, Allen Iverson, Mike Schmidt; and, of course, the Big E.

When the largest Eric Lindros controversy engulfed a tottering Eastern Conference power, Sabatina sensed angst between his team and his hero. And he was just 11.

He was not a typical 11-year-old; but then, Flyers fans aren't typical, are they?

They might not be typical, but they are informed and they are passionate and they are loyal. Only, this conflict - Fragile Superstar vs. Stubborn Establishment - presented no clear protagonist. Everybody lost.

Lindros and his parents lost when they accused the team of medical malfeasance, when, really, it was an honestly bungled diagnosis. Bobby Clarke and the Flyers team that he helped build - first as its greatest center, then as its general manager - could not win. They chafed under Lindros' accusations, rightly considered heretical.

It diminished everyone.

That, along with a litany of other bizarre episodes, defined Lindros' 8-year run as the face of the Flyers as much as his 659 points (and 946 penalty minutes) in 486 games.

Most of the narrative of the absurd was ignored last night, when Lindros and linemate John LeClair saw their names lifted to the rafters and added to the Flyers Hall of Fame.

For the principals, the narrative remains a raw reality.

Significantly, Clarke did not attend last night. He told the Daily News he harbored no ill will, but, once Lindros declined a 1-year, $8.5 million offer in 2001 and forced Clarke to trade him, Lindros essentially ceased to exist for him.

Appropriately, Lindros' parents did not participate in the ceremony. Earlier, they declined an interview request from the Daily News, saying that they preferred Eric have this moment to himself.

Sadly, when Lindros thanked a group of medical personnel who kept the Flyers healthy in his day, he pointedly did not mention John Worley. Worley was the trainer who, after a game in Nashville in April 1999 diagnosed Lindros' collapsed lung as a rib injury. As fate would have it, Worley attended last night's game . . . as the Wild's trainer.

"I think time dilutes most feelings," Lindros said before the game. "Life's short."

Apparently, time does not dilute all feelings. In hockey, wounds run deep. So do memories.

Joe Deeney was 21 in 1992, when the Flyers traded a franchise's worth of assets to acquire the rights to Lindros, the giant young centerman with soft hands and love for contact. More than 2 decades later, Deeney recalls the thrill of the promise that Lindros brought as the Super Mario era neared its apex.

"It was like turning the page on the old regime," Deeney said. "We were going to start off new, with a player who was as good as Lemieux, or so we were told."

A decade later, for some, Lindros was a pariah; for some, but not for all. He had won the Hart Trophy in 1995 as a 22-year-old, had been to six All-Star Games and pushed the team to the 1997 Stanley Cup finals.

"I was sort of disappointed in Clarke, the way he treated him at the end," Deeney said.

It was a night for both Lindros and LeClair, two-thirds of the Legion of Doom line that carried the Flyers to the finals. Mikael Renberg, who skated the wing opposite LeClair, presented each with their bulbs.

But, really, any tension in the Wells Fargo Center was spent on Lindros. There were a few LeClair No. 10s, but No. 88 jerseys were everywhere. Even anthem singer Lauren Hart wore one.

Sabatina was wearing his second one; this one, of course, much bigger. He was wearing his first one in 2000, when his dad brought him from their home in Glen Mills to see Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals. In that game, Scott Stevens clobbered Lindros at center ice.

"I was at the game where Stevens leveled him. I cried and I cried," Sabatina said. "My dad was telling me it was a legal hit, and I was crying, saying it wasn't."

It has Lindros' fourth concussion in 5 months, an unthinkably brutal aggregation these days. Concussions ultimately cost Lindros his career. He says he suffers no ill effects.

Certainly, he sounds fine. Now 41, he carries a few extra pounds. His curly hair is high and tight and gray on the sides.

LeClair has well-earned laugh lines around his eyes.

Flyers players wore 10/88 patches on their uniforms, but each player probably should have had his own night, individually. Nevertheless, they worked together seamlessly, as always.

Before the game, the team set up a carpeted presenting area at center ice. The current Flyers watched in uniform from their bench.

LeClair's mother, his wife and their three kids sat on one side of the presenting area. Lindros' wife and 4-month-old son sat on the other, along with team president Paul Holmgren and former teammates Shjon Podein and Eric Desjardins.

Lindros and LeClair accepted applause and the accolades in tandem as endless video montages recalled their glory days.

No one booed.

"It's a complex situation. He deserves some absolution," Sabatina said. "The fact is, he's the second-best center this franchise has ever had. People need to come to grips with that. There's nobody on this roster now, or will ever be, a player as dominant as he was."

Deeney agreed. Without Lindros' induction, there was no way he would watch a game against an unremarkable Minnesota team.

"I specifically came for this," Deeney said.

So did Sabatina, now attending law school and living in Wilmington, Del.

"I wouldn't come to this particular game, but it was Lindros, you know?" Sabatina said. "When I was a kid, he was the be-all and end-all of Flyers hockey. I had his poster all over my room. I had his jersey. I went to the Flyers carnival, twice. I had pictures with him and myself."

Most fans have granted Lindros the absolution he deserves.

The principals in the equation are less forgiving.

Eric Lindros still plays hockey from time to time. That's a nice thing to think of: Eric Lindros, playing hockey again. He doesn't have to be the marauding, seething supertrain he was during his early and prime years with the Flyers, before the concussions began. He just has to be out there on a rink somewhere, maybe on a frozen pond near his Toronto home, his body thicker, his hair thinner, just skating with a hockey stick in his hands.

It's a satisfying image, and Thursday was a night for such thoughts. The Flyers inducted Lindros and John LeClair into their Hall of Fame before a 3-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild, and the ceremony was heavy with nostalgia for and memories of the franchise's teams in the mid- and late 1990s. Nobody does history like the Flyers do, and the presentation, with its familiar faces (Mikael Renberg, Eric Desjardins, Shjon Podein) and sentimental video montages, made the days when Lindros was the NHL's fiercest and most fearsome player feel as if they lasted forever.

"That's the thing about pro sports," Lindros said. "You're not looking at a real long time period. You're looking at a very short, intense moment, and some people are fortunate to stay 20 years in an organization. When you do have a real strong feeling, you cherish it."

But that's the thing about those days: They didn't last forever. They didn't really come close. Lindros was intimidating and entertaining, and he was incredibly productive, averaging a Flyers-record 1.36 points per game, but he played just 486 games for them. That's fewer than six full seasons. The Flyers reached the playoffs with Lindros for the first time in 1995, when they advanced to the Eastern Conference finals and he won the Hart Trophy as the league's MVP. Next season, they were the best regular-season team in the Eastern Conference. In 1997, they reached the Stanley Cup Finals. And on March 7, 1998, the Penguins' Darius Kasparaitis concussed Lindros with an open-ice check, and nothing was the same.

That concussion was the first of six that Lindros suffered over a 27-month period - a succession of head trauma that shortened his time in the league and that renders the controversies and questions that swirled around him here so silly in retrospect. If Lindros' game softened in 1999 and 2000, if he wasn't the same physical force he had been, the present-day appreciation for a single concussion's effects makes his decline nothing if not understandable.

By the time the Flyers traded Lindros to the New York Rangers in 2001, the shadow of Scott Stevens was still chasing him all over the ice, even chasing him out of his natural position of center.

"I played my best hockey here, and the last time I played here, when I was with New York, I didn't have the confidence heading through the middle of the ice," he said. "That's essentially why I moved to the wing. I didn't feel comfortable."

These were things he could not say then, not at a time when a concussion was hardly considered a decent excuse for missing a shift, let alone for wondering whether a player's career might be in jeopardy. For all the strides that professional sports leagues have made in researching and treating concussions, the NHL provided a perfect reminder Thursday afternoon of how far it has yet to go.

The league filed a motion in Minnesota federal district court to dismiss a class-action lawsuit filed by several ex-players who are experiencing post-concussion symptoms. As part of their filing, the NHL's attorneys argued that even in the late 1980s and early 1990s - before the discovery of chronic traumatic encephalopathy and the connection between head injuries and long-term, debilitating brain conditions - there was enough public information available for players to "put two and two together."

Lindros said he had not read either the lawsuit or the league's motion. He has shown no lingering effects from his concussions. He is fortunate, and he knows it.

"I think you're looking at a different era," he said. "Every so often things change. Communication improves. Sensitivity to certain issues improves. What used to be accepted and the norm in previous times is clearly not now. I really think the should-have-known, should-have-done-this, should-have-done-that - you just hope overall that people are healthy and are living lives to their fullest.

"There is a lot more to life after hockey."

It's the sort of realization that comes only with time. Eric Lindros is 41 years old and married, and he has a 4-month-old son, and someday he will hold his son's hand as the boy wobbles on a pair of ice skates for the first time, and he won't be thinking about what else he might have accomplished with the Flyers. That's the thing about fatherhood, about life after hockey. When you have a real strong feeling, you cherish it.
Renberg thrilled to join his "Legion of Doom" teammates

FRANK SERAVALLI, Daily News Staff Writer seravaf@phillynews.com

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MIKAEL RENBERG stepped onto the ice and the "Legion of Doom" was together once more for the first time since 1997.

The thing is, Renberg wasn't planning on being in South Philadelphia last night. He received the Flyers' invitation for the Hall of Fame induction ceremony for linemates Eric Lindros and John LeClair and decided he couldn't make it.

Like scores of other teammates and close friends, Renberg was busy. Living in his native Sweden, Renberg has two children, a job as a broadcaster on Swedish TV and is closing in on finishing a professional degree to become a physical therapist.

"But then Eric sent me an email and said he really wanted me to come," Renberg said. "I just couldn't say no then."

Renberg, 42, received an ovation and roar second only to last night's honorees as he presented Lindros and LeClair with their Hall of Fame busts at center ice.

"It was great," Renberg said. "It brings back a lot of memories. It was great for me to see them and see everyone - Eric [Desjardins], Shjon Podein. It was great playing here."

"I texted my mom and said I wish I was 15 years younger, so I could redo my career."

The "Legion of Doom," a nickname coined by minor league call-up Jim Montgomery after the popular WWF wrestling tag-team duo, was one of the most feared in hockey for a period of years.

Sure, they had Hart Trophy winner Lindros and 50-goal scorer LeClair, but Renberg was often the overlooked member of the trio. Opposing defensemen often mentioned how physically draining it was to go up against the speedy Swede in the corners for three straight periods.

On most shifts, with those three players barreling down the ice, defenses were just lucky to ice the puck or shoot it out of play (without penalty then) to live for another shift.

"I think one thing that both 'E' and I appreciate more than a lot of people do is so many of the little things 'Renny' did that made everything so much easier for us," LeClair said. "There wasn't a guy that forechecked harder than 'Renny' that I have ever played with in my life. His passion for the game and how hard he went every shift and how when we were losing or we were needing a goal or something, he would get that game face on. He was as talented as anyone I ever played with."

In 201 regular-season games from 1995 through 1997, the "Legion of Doom" racked up 305 goals and 361 assists for 666 points.

In only 37 games during the lockout-shortened 1994-95 season, when Lindros won the Hart, they tallied an incredible 80 goals and 96 assists.

"Mikael was just as big a part of the line as Johnny or I was," Lindros said. "It took all three of us to do something. I certainly don't forget what Mikael Renberg was all about, that's for sure."

The "Legion of Doom" was disassembled in 1997, not long after the Flyers drowned in a sea of red in Detroit during the Stanley Cup finals, when he was traded to Tampa Bay for Chris Gratton. He was traded back to the Flyers in 1998-99, for the exact same deal, but the line was never reunited.

Keith Jones, Mark Recchi and Dainius Zubrus could never re-create the same magic as Renberg with Lindros and LeClair.

As with Lindros, Renberg's career was cut short by injury. He was diagnosed with a sports hernia in training camp one year, but somehow managed to play in the Opening Night lineup - before his abdominal muscle ended up completely tearing off the pubic bone.

Renberg left the NHL in 2004 at age 32. He continued playing in Sweden until 2009.

"One year when I was done playing, I did nothing - and I didn't like that," Renberg said. "I didn't know if it was Tuesday or Saturday half the time. So, I decided to get an education."

In 2 months, Renberg will become a physical therapist, where he will work in Stockholm. Television was only a part-time gig for him.

All these years later, it's hard to imagine the "Legion of Doom" lasted only parts of three seasons. It felt like so much longer. It is even more impressive, given the random nature of today's NHL lines and how quickly they are broken up during games and rough stretches.

The "Legion of Doom" defined much of Renberg's NHL career, even though he was a point-per-game rookie in 1993-94 before LeClair arrived via trade from Montreal. Years later, he has no illusions his name could have been on that banner last night with his linemates if his groin stayed intact.

"I'm really proud of my career. I had a good career, but I was not as good as John and Eric," Renberg said. "They were superstars. I'm happy with what I did, but I was not as good as them."

CLAUDE GIROUX glided through the congratulatory handshakes at the Flyers' bench and smacked himself on the shin pad with his stick.

His third-period, power-play one-timer was, finally, an outlet of pent-up frustration.

On Wednesday night in New York, his lifeless Flyers made Rangers backup Cam Talbot look like Henrik Lundqvist. Talbot pitched just the fourth shutout of his career, sending general manager Ron Hextall on a postgame tirade in the locker room at Madison Square Garden.

Last night, despite a significant, 27-13 shot advantage through two periods, Giroux and the Flyers' suddenly stymied offense couldn't break Minnesota's Darcy Kuemper.

Before Giroux's game-tying strike with under 4 minutes to play, the Flyers' only goal of the contest came off the stick of defenseman Mark Streit.

Both Giroux and the Flyers collectively exhaled.

The only problem was they exhaled too soon, so caught up in solving Kuemper that they lost sight of the goal. There were still 3 minutes and 30 seconds left to battle for at least one point in the standings.

That's when Jason Zucker swooped in with 46 seconds remaining and tapped a goal past Ray Emery, gutting the Flyers with a 3-2 loss on the night they celebrated the induction of Eric Lindros and John LeClair into the team's Hall of Fame.

It was just the Flyers' second regulation loss to Minnesota in 10 games (7-2-1) at Wells Fargo Center since the Wild franchise joined the NHL in 2000.

"We battled hard. We were down. We got a pretty big goal there," Andrew MacDonald said. "Then it seemed like we took our foot off the pedal a little bit there in the last minute. Then it was over."

The shocked Flyers have now lost four in a row for the first time since Oct. 11-17 last season, just after Craig Berube took over as head coach from Peter Laviolette.

They have been outscored, 15-8, during their four-game skid. Not even Ron Hextall's wrath could awaken their suddenly staggering offense.

Yes, Jake Voracek has now registered a point in every game this season (16) in which the Flyers have scored at least one goal. The trouble is that the Flyers' top line hasn't gotten much help in the scoring department. It has been feast or famine.

"It's a tough way to lose," Giroux said. "We played the right way all game."

Still, the NHL is a results-oriented business, and the Flyers' secondary scoring hasn't been chipping in. R.J. Umberger hasn't scored in 10 games, ditto for Sean Couturier. Matt Read has one goal in his last nine.

Even Wayne Simmonds, the team's leading goal-scorer last season, has just one tally in his previous seven contests - same for Vinny Lecavalier. Lecavalier's line at least created scoring chances last night, something that hasn't been seen in weeks.

Streit called last night a "baby step in the right direction" after Wednesday's abysmal loss in Manhattan - though it still wasn't good enough to win.

"We played well," coach Craig Berube said. "If we play like that, we'll win a lot of hockey games. That's got to be the focus. That's the competitiveness that we're looking for, the skating. If we consistently do that, we'll win our share of games."

Del Zotto out

Defenseman Michael Del Zotto missed last night's game with a "lower-body" injury, suffered in the third period of Wednesday night's loss in New York when he dove to block a shot.
Flyers lose 4th straight on late goal by Wild

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

POSTED: Friday, November 21, 2014, 1:08 AM

One night after the Ron Hextall Gotham City Address, the Flyers responded.

They hustled after loose pucks, swarmed the net, and didn't let Minnesota have many quality scoring chances in the first two periods Thursday.

But it didn't matter because they had a late defensive breakdown that led to their fourth straight loss.

Jason Zucker got behind Luke Schenn and banged in the winner from point-blank range with 45.4 seconds left, lifting the Wild to a 3-2 victory and ruining a feel-good atmosphere created by pregame festivities honoring Eric Lindros and John LeClair at the Wells Fargo Center.

Minnesota goalie Darcy Kuemper made 37 saves and was the best player on the ice.

"We played the right way the whole game, and it's a tough way to lose," Claude Giroux said.

With 3 minutes, 30 seconds left, Giroux had tied it with a power-play goal from his office, the left circle. Giroux one-timed a backhand pass from Brayden Schenn past Kuemper while the Wild were shorthanded because Nate Prosser had closed his hand on the puck.

The Flyers, coming off a listless, 2-0 loss in New York that triggered Hextall's postgame outburst, have allowed eight power-play goals in their losing streak.

Kuemper, 24, who made his first career appearance against the Flyers, improved to 9-5. The 6-foot-5 goalie took a 2.03 goals-against average into the night.

Defenseman Marco Scandella scored on a slap shot from the top of the left circle, firing the puck past goalie Ray Emery's glove and giving the Wild a 2-1 lead with 18:18 remaining.

The Flyers had tied it on Mark Streit's goal with 5:29 to go in the second period. Vinny Lecavalier kept the puck in the zone and made a great feed to a streaking Streit, who scored from the slot.

"I tried to jump into the play and create some offense," Streit said after scoring his third goal of the season.

Minnesota was badly outplayed in the first half of the game but managed to take a 1-0 lead on its first road power-play goal of the season.

Nino Niederreiter took a pass from Matt Dumba and scored on a one-timer from the right circle. It was Minnesota's first road power-play goal in 33 chances this season.

It was also the eighth power-play goal surrendered by the Flyers in the last 14 opportunities by opponents.

The Flyers outshot the Wild, 14-6, in a scoreless first period. It was scoreless only because Kuemper was flawless. He was at his best late in the period, stopping Giroux from point-blank range, then making a diving save on Andrew MacDonald.

Kuemper made a great save on Matt Read's rebound attempt with 16:17 left in the second to keep the game scoreless. At that point, the Flyers had outshot the Wild, 20-6.

Before the game, coach Craig Berube said he expected a "very good effort" after Hextall's blowup with the team the previous night in Madison Square Garden, and he got it.

"If we play like that, we'll win our share of hockey games - that's the focus," Berube said.

Before the game, Berube backed up Hextall's sentiments.

"He was upset and he has every right to do that," Berube said. "We played a team in our division - a rivalry team like that - and there's just not enough guys competing and playing hard enough. It's upsetting. It's upsetting to everyone in the organization. Players, too. If they're not furious with themselves, there's a problem."

"He gave us a message, and the team needed it," said Streit, who, along with his teammates, sat on the bench and tapped their sticks on the sidewalk in appreciation as Lindros and LeClair went into the Flyers' Hall of Fame before the game. "We weren't initiating the play [Wednesday]. We were hesitating and not executing, and the breakouts weren't good."

Berube tinkered with his lower lines. Scott Laughton, in his second game since being promoted from Lehigh Valley, was moved from the fourth to third line, centering R.J. Umberger and Lecavalier. Center Pierre-Edouard Bellemare dropped down to the fourth line.

Laughton, 20, had a strong game and increased his chances of staying with the Flyers for a while, maybe even for good.
Full transcript: Eric Lindros, John LeClair Hall of Fame speeches

Frank Seravalli
POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014, 10:12 PM

Below is a transcript of the Flyers' Hall of Fame induction speeches by Eric Lindros and John LeClair on Thursday night:

LINDROS: What a thrill to be back. Good evening. It's nice to be back in the rink that we had such a good time playing in, and playing for you. Before we got started tonight, just a quick shout-out to Gordie Howe and wishing him a speedy recovery. Mark's dad is in a real battle, and I think everyone can join in wishing the best. We received word in September from Paul Holmgren about this evening, and we couldn't be more honored and grateful to be part of the tradition of the Flyers Hall of Fame.

LECLAIR: We'd like to start off by thanking the Flyers organization, especially Mr. Snider, Bob Clarke and Paul Holmgren. They always gave us their best to provide a quality team and gave us every opportunity to win. We will be forever incredibly proud and honored to have played for the Philadelphia Flyers, and we thank you for that opportunity.

LINDROS: We'd also like to acknowledge some of the coaches, some names that will ring a bell: Bill Dineen, Terry Murray and of course Roger Neilson. Wonderful trainers in Jim Evers, Harry Bricker, Rock Oratorio, Jim McCrossin and Pat Croce – these are the guys that work tirelessly to ensure that we players are in the best position to play, every night, night after night. So thank you.

LECLAIR: There's also many people behind the scenes that were instrumental in making our time here in Philadelphia run smoothly, and we'd like to thank the entire Flyers staff for that, especially Joe Kadlec, Barry Hanrahans, Jack Hill and Jill Lipson. Eric and I have been blessed to play with so many great players, great people and just great friends of ours. It would be challenging to name them all, but there's just a few special ones who couldn't make it here tonight that we'd like to recognize – Kevin Dineen, Craig MacTavish, Dave Babych, Rod Brind'Amour, Luke Richardson, Rob DiMaio, Trent Klatt and Joel Otto.

LINDROS: We'd like to thank all the coaches that had a big impact on my hockey development – my high school coach Reg Gendron, and my college coach Mike Gilligan. I'd also like to thank my agent throughout the year, Lewis Gross. I'm fortunate to be able to call all three of them lifelong friends. I'd also like to thank my friends and family for their tremendous support, especially my parents, whose unconditional love and sacrifices made it possible for me to achieve my dream. I know if Dad was here tonight, he'd be as proud as my mom is right there. Tonight's honor is as much yours as it is mine. To my three children, who I often refer to as my greatest hat trick ever – Mackenzie, Cal and Jagger – I want to thank you for never, ever letting hockey define me. Instead I've always been first and foremost your dad who happens to play hockey. As happy a moment as this is for me this evening, it pales in comparison to how happy you guys make me each and every day. I'm so proud of you guys. To my incredible wife Tina – there's no shot that I'm standing here today if it wasn't for your guidance and support. I'm lost without you. There's no way to say it but simply, you're the best. I love you. To the best fans in the NHL – you guys are awesome, Philadelphia. Win or tie, you were always behind us and that's what I loved about playing here – you didn't accept losing. You demanded the best from your team, and that relentless enthusiasm and passion for the game was a contagious energy I felt every time I stepped on the ice, and I want to thank you for that. Lastly, throughout my career here at the Flyers, I was always asked the same question over and over again – is Eric the reason for your success? And my answer is, and always will be, yes, of course. Big E raised my game to another level, and the fact of the matter is, he raised everybody he ever played with. He made their game better too. The seven years we were able to play together was an unbelievable ride, and I've been fortunate enough to play with one of the best NHL players to ever lace them up. Thanks E. We loved winning together, and hated losing even more. I gave Philly my best hockey; I hope you feel the same way too. I had a blast. Thanks everybody.

PHILLY FANS: We'd like to acknowledge some of the coaches, some names that will ring a bell: Bill Dineen, Terry Murray and of course Roger Neilson. Wonderful trainers in Jim Evers, Harry Bricker, Rock Oratorio, Jim McCrossin and Pat Croce – these are the guys that work tirelessly to ensure that we players are in the best position to play, every night, night after night. So thank you.

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LINDROS: And we're blessed to have some here tonight – obviously Ron Hextall's in the house, Craig Berube behind the bench. Terry Carkner, Eric Desjardins, who obviously is going in the Hall of Fame in February… Shjon Podein, and I think later on we just might see Mikael Renberg.

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Eric Lindros and John LeClair were inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame on Thursday, and during a stirring, 30-minute ceremony, both said the fans pushed their careers to a higher level.

"You guys are awesome," LeClair told the standing fans before a banner with his name and his former linemate's was raised to the rafters. "You didn't accept losing."

LeClair, 45, then thanked the fans for "the continuous energy" they gave him.

Lindros, 41, had a similar theme.

"Night in and night out, you brought passion to the Wells Fargo Center," he said.

Lindros, who wished hockey legend Gordie Howe a speedy recovery when he was first introduced, added that wherever he went off the ice, the fans' "energy was fantastic. It was everywhere."

After a video montage of the two star forwards was shown, Lindros and LeClair spoke and received numerous standing ovations. Former teammates Shjon Podein, Eric Desjardins, and Mikael Renberg were at the ceremony.

Renberg, the third member of the Legion of Doom line, presented Lindros and LeClair with their Hall of Fame busts, and club president Paul Holmgren presented them with paintings of themselves.

LeClair, who scored 333 of his 406 career goals with the Flyers, called his three children "my greatest hat trick ever."

In a news conference before the ceremony, Lindros was asked about his onetime frosty relationship with the Flyers, especially former general manager Bob Clarke.

"Time dilutes most feelings," he said.

Clarke was in Florida and did not attend the ceremony.

Defencemen return

Defencemen Andrew MacDonald and Luke Schenn returned to the lineup Thursday and were paired.

MacDonald had missed 10 games with a knee injury, while Schenn had missed three games with a shoulder ailment.

Michael Del Zotto was sidelined by an unspecified injury suffered Wednesday in New York, and Carlo Colaiacovo came out of the lineup.
Finally, Lindros gets the recognition that he deserves

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PHILADELPHIA — He has always been the center of attention — a title he didn’t seek and a crown that often seemed to be a burden.

But as he sat back in his chair with his buddy, Legion of Doom linemate and co-inductee into the Flyers Hall of Fame John LeClair sitting off to his side, Eric Lindros finally looked comfortable in the role of central figure.

"It is what it is, right?" Lindros asked about the hype that always seemed to surround him. "What are you going to do?"

As he answered, LeClair had this look of incredulity spread across his face.

"I always wondered what hype he did not live up to," LeClair said. "I mean, he won a Hart Trophy. He scored 100 points. I never got that. He had the respect of his teammates and carried the Flyers for ... however many years he was here. I just never got it. When you’re his teammate, he went above and beyond. He was one of the greatest players to play."

But the legacy and the relationship between Lindros, the Flyers and their fans has always been a complex one, speckled with injuries, bruised egos and hurt feelings.

Finally Thursday night, it seemed like there was appreciation of what Lindros was — one of the cornerstone players in franchise history, a defining player at a time when the club really needed it — instead of what he didn’t achieve (a Stanley Cup) or the controversy that his exit caused.

"You just go play hockey," Lindros said. "You go play hockey and do you your best with it. We didn’t have a great team the first couple of years, but we did get better and from (his third year) on, I thought we had quality teams."

They did. The Flyers reached a Stanley Cup Final in 1997 and two other Conference Finals (1995 and 2000). They were consistent contenders and a must-see attraction.

Both he and LeClair played in what was termed by a questioner Thursday night as “the dead puck era” — a time when clutching and grabbing robbed the sport of its offensive style. That makes Lindros’ four seasons of over 40 goals as a Flyer look more remarkable with every passing year.

In many respects, the timing for Lindros and his legacy was all wrong. He was billed as the next Wayne Gretzky or Mario Lemieux when both players were still dominating the league. That was an unfair burden for anyone to carry. His style was so unlike either one of them that he could never carry that level of artistry.

The trade that sent Lindros to Philadelphia was able to set up the Quebec franchise for a couple of Stanley Cups after they moved to Denver. The trade was made to bring the franchise back to life after several playoff misses at a time when Ed Snider was looking to build a new arena.

The fact that the Flyers didn’t win a Cup with him was due to factors that were largely out of his control. The Red Wings and Devils were the two teams that owned the era, and they were teams that were deeper in their lines and had better defensive units. While the second line had Rod Brind’Amour on it, they never were as deep as Detroit, New Jersey or Colorado, for that matter. And ultimately, Philadelphia never had that Cup-winning caliber goaltender. The Devils had Martin Brodeur. The Avalanche got Patrick Roy. The Flyers tried Garth Snow and an older Ron Hextall.

And then, there was this simple fact: Lindros was a concussion victim in a time before the awareness of the subject became a fashionable cause to take up and before we knew the exact long-term damage that repeated blows to the brain could cause.

His style of play, and the fact he never held his head up going through the middle of the ice, was a large part of the reason for the concussion problems. But the fact that he didn’t “suck it up” was somehow looked down upon in many circles within his sport. Now he would receive more empathy and likely better care.

The irony was Thursday, the NHL filed a motion to dismiss a class action suit by several former players to look into the issue.

"You are looking at a different era," Lindros said. "Things are changing. Communication improves. Sensitivity to certain issues improves. What used to be accepted and the norm in previous times is clearly not now."

"You just hope overall that people are healthy and are living lives that are whole. There’s a lot more to life after hockey. You’ve got a long way to go."

There are still some honors that he should receive down the road. A ticket to the Hockey Hall of Fame should be one. His number 88 hanging in the Wells Fargo Center rafters would be another.

But Thursday night was a good step for Eric Lindros, and for all of us to remember what he was, and not what he wasn’t.


757452 Philadelphia Flyers
GM wants more consistency, better starts

PHILADELPHIA – When the echoes from Ron Hextall’s post-game rant on Wednesday night had finally faded, some calculated analysis set in.

Prior to Thursday night’s game against the Minnesota Wild, the Flyers had a sub-.500 record, something not acceptable to the team’s general manager.

A day after the Flyers’ uninspired 2-0 loss at the New York Rangers, Hextall discussed some of the aspects of his team’s shortcomings to date.

Two things stood out: First, after Jake Voracek and Claude Giroux, the Flyers haven’t been getting enough help from their secondary players.

And second, the Flyers have been “chasing” too many games to Hextall’s liking. Through their first 17 games, the Flyers had scored first only five times (a 4-0-1 record), while in the remaining games where an opponent scored first, the record was an abysmal 3-8-1.

Clearly, the Flyers need more from former 20-goal scorers like R.J. Umberger and Matt Read, who had a combined total of three goals through mid-November.

“I think that’s fair to say,” Hextall said on Thursday afternoon. “Guys like that need to give us more. We need a little bit more from quite a few guys.

“For the most part, the effort this year has been good but the consistency has to get better.”

That’s where the slow starts come in. As of Wednesday, the Flyers had been outscored 18-15 in the first period this season. That puts Philadelphia in a huge hole because their record when trailing after one period is a horrid 1-7-1.

“I think we need to change our mentality a little bit,” Hextall said. “We seem to be playing from behind a lot. We have to change that. We have to go out and get leads. Play from above rather than below.

“We seem to be chasing a lot of games. Some games we play well for 40, 50 minutes and then we fall off. We’ve got to become more consistent as a team. Part of that is a learning process. The players have to demand it out of each other as well.”

For the second straight year, it appears the Flyers are going to have to chase a playoff spot all the way to the finish line.

“We’re no different than a lot of teams, trying to find consistency,” Hextall said. “There are no easy games anymore. If you’re not consistent over the course of the season, it’s really hard to make the playoffs.

“We have to become a more consistent team in terms of performance. We’ve got a good group for the most part, but games like last night (at New York), those are not acceptable.”

Coach Craig Berube might be one of the biggest beneficiaries of Hextall’s state-of-the-team address.

Someone with some clout is helping him deliver the message.

“Guys have to step up,” Berube said before the Wild game. “We have not had enough guys step up.”

Short shots: Andrew MacDonald returned to action for the first time since Oct. 22, as did Luke Schenn (shoulder). Michael Del Zotto (lower body injury) was a scratch.

Flyers Saturday
What: Columbus Blue Jackets at Flyers.
When: 7:05.
Philadelphia Flyers

Rob Parent: Lindros deserving of a higher Hall than this

By Rob Parent, Delaware County Daily Times

POSTED: 11/21/14, 12:57 AM EST | # COMMENTS

PHILADELPHIA >> Before the busts were unveiled, before the old acquaintances were remembered, there was another melding of memories behind a microphone.

Eric Lindros and John LeClair reeled in the years Thursday night by pouring out the feelings, managing to do so without the tears.

They were inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame, and would be joined on the ice in due course by Mikael Renberg, their cohort on what probably for a short time was the greatest of any Flyers line, and certainly the one with the best name.

"Legion of Doom." Sold a lot of T-shirts, anyway.

"Could have been a lot worse," LeClair quipped.

Perhaps that could be an epitaph for their time together here, and maybe that is what this induction ceremony, which also included former teammates Shjon Podein and Flyers inductee-to-be (later in the season) Eric Desjardins, essentially represented.

Could have been a lot worse.

It’s debateable whether the way the Legion of Doom and Co. were swept by the Detroit Red Wings in the 1997 Stanley Cup finals clouded their legacies. It certainly didn’t dim their humor.

"Obviously, it was nice we gave Detroit that confidence to become a dynasty," LeClair deadpanned. "That wasn’t the intent."

But it’s seriously difficult to deny that what took place over the next three years, a series of concussions and in-fighting with management, caused Lindros’ tenure here to come crashing down before its time, and before his Flyers teams had the chance to fulfill all expectations.

LeClair never said much about all that as it was happening. But on this for-old-time’s-sake occasion, it seemed the right time for him to lobby for the defense.

"I always wondered what hype he did not live up to," LeClair said of Lindros.

"I mean, he won a Hart Trophy. He scored 100 points. I never got that. He had the respect of his teammates and carried the Flyers for five years or however many years he was here ... When you’re his teammate, he went above and beyond. He was one of the greatest players ever to play."

Maybe he should re-record that testimony for posterity ... or for the Hockey Hall of Fame selection committee.

Given the numbers, Lindros’ appointment with destiny in a Toronto museum should be a no-brainer. So the question remains, is all that other stuff from his Philadelphia divorce still impacting his candidacy for a Hall of Fame of much greater importance?

Maybe that will be a debate for another day. But LeClair doesn’t think it’s worth the time.

"I think it’s an easy case," LeClair said about Lindros’ Hockey Hall of Fame candidacy. "When you look at Eric when he played, he was dominant. When you compare some of the players that have gotten in that played with him, it’s not even close."

Referencing their opponents then, he added, "Every time they had to play against Eric they knew they were playing him two or three days ahead of time and they were ready, because he was just a dominant force out there and they had to be ready."

Lindros has the numbers: 372 goals and 865 points in 760 games. His points-per-game average of 1.36 while with the Flyers is easily No. 1 in club history, and it was No. 5 at the time in league history. He has been bypassed by the HHOF committee for the past three years. And John LeClair doesn’t get it.

"You can go through all the statistical stuff with the goals per game and all that other stuff ... he blows other guys away," LeClair said.

Urged on by a questioner, Lindros returned the compliment, noting LeClair’s 406 goals and 819 points in 967 career games are worthy of consideration.

"When I would get hurt, Johnny really stepped in and scored a lot of goals at big times," Lindros said. "If you look at that point in time, from ’92 to the (1996) World Cup, I don’t think there was a better player. I think there’s absolutely a strong case."

Since 333 of those LeClair goals came with the Flyers, the natural assumption would be that Lindros had a lot to do with them. LeClair pointed that out during the ceremony.

Of course, the trade of niceties was perfectly appropriate. It was their special night, one in which two great careers with this team were being celebrated.

The question of whether one of them deserves a greater reward elsewhere should get a closer look.

Delaware County Times LOADED: 11.21.2014
Philadelphia Flyers

Despite better effort, a fourth straight loss

By Rob Parent, Delaware County Daily Times

PHILADELPHIA >> The Flyers played like a home team should Thursday night, adopting an aggressive and physical posture, defending their territory while shooting at the other guys at will.

All of which couldn’t prevent a 3-2 Wild victory at the Wells Fargo Center.

So make it four losses in a row for the Flyers which leaves one question in tow: Was this at least a sign of better things to come?

“It was a lot better,” usually harsh team critic Wayne Simmonds said. “It sucks because that’s four in a row now, but I thought we played a much better game. I thought we played 60 minutes. We didn’t get the two points, but I thought we played better.”

Keeping that same refrain, head coach Craig Berube added, “We play like that, we’ll win a lot of hockey games. That’s got to be the focus. It’s not good enough (because) we lost, but that’s the way we’ve got to play ... as far as speed and the team play, that’s what we’re looking for.

“If we continue to do that we’ll win our share of games and we’ll be where we want to be.”

The Flyers weren’t where they should have been on the game-winning goal, however. And it was a pair of defensemen just returned from the ranks of the injured that was the collective reason for that.

First, Andrew MacDonald fell down behind the Flyers net and lost the puck. It went the way of Minnesota’s dangerous Ryan Suter, and when Luke Schenn looked away and therefore lost track of Jason Zucker, Suter rifled a pass across to him and Zucker stuck the puck behind goalie Ray Emery for the game-winner with 45 seconds left in regulation.

The Flyers were able to put some waning-seconds pressure on the Wild, but they couldn’t do anything then to prevent their little streak of misery from being extended. But what’s it say about their current lot when playing better stirs their dormant juices of optimism?

Asked about the double boo-boo on the gamewinner, Simmonds said, “That’s the breaks sometimes. We just have to keep going and focus on the process. We had opportunities. We got a lot of shots and the opportunities were there.”

So although this latest slip-up keeps the Flyers (7-9-2) stationary in the standings, it should have at least done something for their hockey mojo. The Wild (11-7) were outplayed for long stretches and despite Minnesota being hard to handle in the third, the Wild were outshot by 39-30.

Yet against the re-patched Flyers defense, the Wild made those shots count.

“If of course it’s a tough way to lose,” Claude Giroux said. “We played the right way all game and gave ourselves a chance to win. I think a lot of improvement from the last few games.”

With sharp goalie Darcy Kuemper looking on top of things, the first period went by without incident despite a 14-6 Flyers shots edge.

The Wild gained the upper hand at 10:59 of the second period, however, when Nino Niederreiter scored on the power play for a 1-0 Minnesota lead.

That lead didn’t last long, however, as Vinny Lecavalier made a fake and snuck a nice pass to a sneaking Mark Streit, who cut through the slot and beat Kuemper to tie the game at 14:31.

Just after a Wild power play had expired early in the third, however, Niederreiter teed up a slapshot by Marco Scandella, and he beat Emery past his glove for a 2-1 Wild lead.

All seemed relieved when, working on the power play, Giroux bombed a shot that tied it all up with 3:30 left.
Flyers' HOF party spoiled with 4th straight loss

E-mail Tim Panaccio

November 21, 2014, 12:00 am

When your hockey club loses four games in succession, it’s not always easy to find positives.

For Flyers coach Craig Berube, the last time he went four losses in a row without earning at least a point (overtime or shootout), was after he took over for Peter Laviolette in the fall of 2013.

Thursday’s 3-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild at Wells Fargo Center was tough to digest given the Flyers’ Hall of Fame festivities should have made this a perfect evening.

The effort was far better than the no-show performance the night before against the Rangers in New York.

Still, to battle back to tie -- which the Flyers did -- yet lose in the final 45.2 seconds (see Instant Replay), shouldn’t happen. At that point, your team has to get the game into overtime.

“We didn’t let our guard down,” Berube said. “We played well. We took the play to them most of the game.

“It’s not good enough, we lost. But that’s the way we got to play. That’s the competitiveness we are looking for.”

Jakub Voracek said the Flyers were victimized by two bad bounces on Jason Zucker’s game-winner that began with what appeared to be a bad carom off a shot into the back boards.

Then Andrew MacDonald briefly got the puck, fell and lost it.

Ryan Suter sent it across the slot and that’s where Zucker finished at the net on Ray Emery as Luke Schenn was out of position.

Ironically, both Schenn and MacDonald were both playing their first games back off the injured list.

“MacDonald had the puck turned back into the play and should have turned up,” Berube said. “The play was in our end and Luke lost his man going to the net.”

The Flyers put 39 shots on Darcy Kuemper, who seldom sees more than 24 a game. The Wild are a scrappy, defensive team as evidenced by 24 blocked shots.

Kuemper probably stole a point for coach Mike Yeo.

“Of course it’s a tough way to lose,” said Claude Giroux. “We played the right way all game and gave ourselves a chance to win. I think a lot of improvement from the last few games.”

Giroux’s line had 13 shots -- seven by the captain himself.

It’s the fourth time the Flyers have had 39 or more shots. They are only 1-2-1 this season when that occurs.

“We played the right way and had a lot of chances to score and defensively we played well too,” Giroux said. “It’s obviously frustrating for them to score there in the last minute.”

Minnesota came into the game having not scored a single power-play goal (0 for 30) on the road this season.

The Wild ended that streak at 10:59 of the second period on Marco Scandella’s shot from the top of the left circle before Giroux re-tied it on a one-timer during a power play in the final five minutes.

When asked whether this felt like a four-game losing streak because a couple of the games were competitive, Streit wasn’t so sure.

“That’s just not how you are going to be a good team in this league. It’s one step, a baby step. We have to build on that positive and come back Saturday and put that same effort in.”

Among the bright spots? Voracek, who saw his 10-game point streak ended against the Rangers, picked up an assist.

Voracek has not gone more than one game without a point all season.

“They have a tough team and play good defense,” Voracek said. “Tough game to lose, but we got to shake it off.”

Ten observations from the Flyers’ 3-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild (see Instant Replay).

1. Scott Laughton, in his second game with the Flyers, played on a line with two struggling teammates: R.J. Umberger and Vinny Lecavalier. But they were a pleasant surprise. Laughton was aggressive and smart in his 10:53 of ice time, and helped start the play that resulted in Mark Streit’s second-period goal that tied the game 1-1.

2. After an entirely flat effort a day earlier against the Rangers, the Flyers actually hit the ice with intensity Thursday. They won 63 percent of the faceoffs in the first period, led in shots 9-3 and — with the exception of a few sloppy turnovers — generally outplayed the Wild, despite going scoreless through the first 20 minutes.

3. The Flyers’ penalty kill has not been good lately. The team has allowed eight power-play goals in its last four games. No matter how good your 5-on-5 play is, numbers like that won’t win you many games.

4. The Flyers did a great job with the Eric Lindros-John LeClair Hall of Fame presentation (see story). Bringing the duo’s former teammates — especially remaining third of the Legion of Doom Mikael Renberg — was a nice touch. The Wells Fargo Center also played Lindros and LeClair highlights during stoppages of play, much to the appreciation of the crowd.

5. Ray Emery wasn’t at his best. He had a relatively strong first period, but slowed down as the game progressed. That was particularly apparent on Marco Scandella’s third-period marker ... he could have (should have?) stopped it.

6. Though the penalty kill wasn’t great Thursday, it was incrementally better. Important to note, though, that the small improvement could be chalked up to the return of Luke Schenn. He takes a lot of flack, but he was absolutely missed on the PK. His return allowed coach Craig Berube to split up Braydon Coburn and Nicklas Grossmann, who had struggled when on the ice together. Both players had better outings.

7. After a rather strong (albeit uneventful) first period, the Flyers saw their energy dip dramatically in the second and third periods. Though it could have been fatigue, they seemed somehow disinterested in the game after its first 20 minutes.

8. Lecavalier had arguably his best outing in a while. He was strong, as previously noted, playing alongside Laughton and Umberger, and it was a nice decision to pass to set up Streit’s second-period goal.

9. Good to see Claude Giroux hit the back of the net at a key time for the Flyers. Also good to see the team keep up its power-play success at home, in the midst of a rough stretch of games. Believe it or not, the Flyers are second in the league in power-play percentage on home ice. They are, however, 24th on the road.

10. It should be noted: The Flyers were not without their chances. They were not without their really good chances. There were a handful that would have gone in in the first period alone if not for Wild goalie Darcy Kuemper. Kuemper stopped 37 of 39 Flyers shots.

On a night when John LeClair and Eric Lindros were inducted into the Flyers' Hall of Fame, the Flyers lost their fourth consecutive game.

Despite all the good vibes, energy and nostalgia the evening presented, the Flyers were unable to harness it into a positive during a 3-2 loss to the Minnesota Wild.

This losing skid matches the Flyers' four-game winless skid to start the season, except they still earned two points back then by losing twice in shootouts.

Jason Zucker won it with 45.2 seconds left in regulation on a play that began with a bad carom off the back boards.

Marco Scandella's third-period goal at 1:42 broke a 1-1 tie but Claude Giroux's power-play one-timer re-tied it at 16:30.

Ray Emery made his second start in three games and finished with 27 saves while the Flyers welcomed back defensemen Andrew MacDonald and Luke Schenn to the lineup.

MacDonald missed 10 games with a sprained right knee while Schenn missed three with a left shoulder injury.

Notable goals
Mark Streit's first goal in 12 games gave the Flyers a 1-1 tie in the second period. Vinny Lecavalier made it all possible by faking a shot from atop the right circle and instead lining a pass into the slot for Streit to bury on goalie Darcy Kuemper.

Goalie report
Wild goalie Kuemper, who came into the game with a 2.03 goals against average, made life tough on the Flyers with 37 saves. Emery could have been more alert on the winning goal as the play went across the entire slot.

Power play
The Wild were 1 for 5. The Flyers were 1 for 3.

Penalty kill
Some nice work this game from Zac Rinaldo and Chris VandeVelde. The reappearance of MacDonald and Schenn on defense meant less time on the ice for Braydon Coburn, who was split up from Nicklas Grossmann during the penalty kill. Coburn had been on the ice for seven power plays in the previous three games, all losses. The D-pairs were Grossmann and Schenn, Coburn and Nick Schultz, plus Coburn and MacDonald.

Shorthanded
Sean Couturier got a gift turnover in the high slot in the second period and instead of rushing the net with Kuemper, he got fancy and took himself out of scoring position on his poor attempt from the left post. Still not thinking as an offensive player.

Injuries
VandeVelde suffered an apparent injury in the third period. There was no medical update.

Guests
In the press box was former Legion of Doom linemate Mikael Renberg, along with defenseman Eric Desjardin and forward Shjon Podein. All were teammates of Flyers Hall of Fame inductees Lindros and LeClair.

Absent
Bob Clarke was in Florida and missed the Hall of Fame ceremonies.

Scratches
Defensemen Michael Del Zotto (lower body) and Carlo Colaiacovo (healthy); forward Jason Akeson (healthy).

Up next
The Columbus Blue Jackets revisit Wells Fargo Center on Saturday. The Blue Jackets began the Flyers' current losing streak last week in Philly.
Eric Lindros and John LeClair were inducted into the Flyers' Hall of Fame before the team's game against the Minnesota Wild just as they should have been: together.

The dynamic duo that made up 2/3 of the Flyers' imposing "Legion of Doom" line of the 1990s was honored in front of a full house at the Wells Fargo Center — including former teammates not limited to Sjohon Podein, Mikael Renberg and Eric Desjardins, who will get his own turn to be honored Feb. 19.

Each player was given a chance to address fans before posing for photographs and being presented with paintings to take home. A highlight video played to the Foo Fighters' "Times Like These" and "All My Life."

The night marked a chance for the two players to reflect on their time in Philadelphia.

"It was great," LeClair said. "They always made you feel welcome, especially here. The support was second to none. We always felt that support. They always believed in us. It was great."

To see the ceremony, watch the video above.

Tim Riday

November 20, 2014, 1:45 pm

Flyers-Wild: 5 things you need to know

7 p.m., CSN

The Flyers (7-8-2) wrap up their back-to-back set Thursday evening against the Minnesota Wild (10-7-0) at the Wells Fargo Center.

Here’s what you need to know before puck drop:

1. Honoring Lindros and LeClair

This night belongs to two of the Flyers’ all-time greats.

Eric Lindros and John LeClair will be inducted into the Flyers’ Hall of Fame in what is sure to be an emotional pregame ceremony.

Lindros recorded 290 goals and 659 points as a Flyer, while LeClair registered 333 tallies and 654 points. The duo spent nearly six seasons together playing on the same line in Philadelphia, so it’s fitting the duo will enter the Flyers’ HOF together.

Mikael Renberg, who played with Lindros and LeClair on the famous ”Legion of Doom” line, flew in from Sweden earlier this week and will be present at the ceremony, which starts at 7 p.m. Lindros, LeClair and Renberg combined for 255 points – a club record – in the 1995-96 season.

"John, Mikael and I were a pretty special group," Lindros said (see story). "We set up one another and we certainly enjoyed playing with one another and being together on and off the ice. It really was a special group to be involved with."

2. GirouxGate Take 2

So much for Claude Giroux missing Wednesday’s game against the New York Rangers.

After general manager Ron Hextall said he expected Giroux to be sidelined for at least two games with a lower-body injury, the Flyers’ captain made a surprise appearance at Madison Square Garden and logged 25:45 in ice time, most among Flyers forwards.

Giroux said he felt good on the ice after the game. Aside from Steve Mason’s play in net, Giroux’s effort with linemates Jakub Voracek and Brayden Schenn was the only positive head coach Craig Berube could take away from Wednesday’s ugly 2-0 loss to the Blueshirts.

"Our first line competed," Berube said (see story). "They played hard and they played well. I didn’t see much after that except our goalie [Steve Mason]. He played a helluva game."

The shutout loss saw Voracek’s 10-game point streak come to an end. Schenn’s career-best five-game point streak was also snapped.

3. Injuries

Michael Raffl (lower-body) is out for the Flyers, but Hextall said defensemen Andrew MacDonald (lower-body) and Luke Schenn (upper-body) have a chance to play against the Wild. Both MacDonald and Schenn took part in Thursday morning’s optional skate.

Michael Del Zotto exited Wednesday’s loss with a lower-body injury after colliding with Rangers defenseman Dan Girardi in the third period. His status is unknown.

For the Wild, defenseman Jonas Brodin (illness) remains sidelined. Minnesota held Brodin out of practice Wednesday in an attempt to rid their locker room of a bacterial virus that has claimed four blueliners this season. Matt Cooke (lower-body) hasn’t played since Nov. 4. He’s on injured reserve.

4. Keep an eye on …

Flyers: After starting off the season red-hot, Wayne Simmonds has cooled down dramatically over the past few weeks. The 26-year-old has just two goals and three assists in his last 10 games overall. Maybe a return to the Wells Fargo Center will help. Simmonds has recorded six of his seven goals and 10 of his 12 points at home. Squaring off against Minnesota should spark the gritty forward as well. He had a pair of goals and an assist in two games against the Wild last season.

Wild: Prepare to see the No. 20 often on Thursday night. Ryan Suter leads all NHL players in average ice time per game with 29:13. The 29-year-old is perhaps the most fit defenseman in the entire league and takes pride in his heavy workload. He has a heavy point shot on the power play and has no problem moving forwards from the front of the net on the penalty kill. He enters Thursday with one goal, eight assists, a plus-10 rating and just 12 penalty minutes in 17 games. If he can provide a little more offense, I wouldn’t be surprised to see Suter in the running for the Norris Trophy.

5. This and that

- The Flyers and Wild split their two games last season with each team winning on home ice.
- The Flyers own a 7-1-1 all-time home record against Minnesota.
- The Wild lead the NHL in fewest shots against per game (23.7) and rank second in shots for per game (33.1).
- Voracek has recorded at least one point in every home game this season, posting five goals and 15 assists in nine games at the Wells Fargo Center.
- Zach Parise’s 18 career goals against the Flyers are the most against any team he has faced.

Fittingly, LeClair and Lindros enter Flyers’ HOF together

E-mail Tim Panaccio
November 20, 2014, 12:00 pm

John LeClair (left) and Eric Lindros made up two thirds of the Flyers’ famous “Legion of Doom” line. (AP)

Eric Lindros said he had pretty much pushed that February night in 1997 when “The Legion of Doom” set a Flyers franchise record with 16 points to the back of his mind.

John LeClair got excited when someone mentioned it to him.

Then again, how could LeClair, who arguably possessed the hardest shot of any left wing in Flyers history, forget his record performance against Montreal?

That night, he tallied a career-high four goals and posted six points during a 9-5 victory at what was then the CoreStates Center (Wells Fargo Center).

“I remember the third period,” LeClair recalled. “E [Eric] scored a goal from the goal line at the end. It felt like everything we shot went in. Every pass was on the stick. It felt like one of those games that everything just went perfectly right.”

LeClair had been traded from Montreal a few seasons earlier, so the game meant more to him than others. Lindros said whenever the Flyers met Les Canadiens, he let LeClair dictate the game.

“Any time that we were playing against Montreal, you just basically grab hold of Johnny’s belt and you knew it was going to be a good night,” Lindros said. “I haven’t thought of that night in a long time. That was extremely special.”

Thursday night at Wells Fargo will be a rather special night, too, as LeClair and Lindros are inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame (see story).

Mikael Renberg, the fleet-footed right wing on the Doom line, flew in from Sweden on Tuesday, and will be present as well.

Who would have ever guessed it would happen with the way things ended for Lindros after the 1999-2000 season amid yet another concussion and his subsequent holdout the next year? Given the organizational dysfunction between himself and the club, followed by a forced trade to the Rangers, who would guess that No. 88 would be so honored by the Flyers?

“Greatly honored,” Lindros said. “I mean, Philadelphia is where I played my best hockey as a pro. I really enjoyed it. There were countless moments that I recall and have extremely fond memories of. It was a great environment to play in.”

Bob Clarke and Ed Snider forgave him years ago. Time heals all wounds and when Lindros appeared in the Alumni Game during the 2012 Winter Classic, he drew the loudest ovation.

Hockey fans in general and Flyers fans specifically, have come to recognize what he suffered through as a player and now view him in a very different light than they did more than a decade ago before the term “post-concussion syndrome” even existed.

“So much of what occurred was so long ago,” Lindros said. “We’re looking at fourteen almost fifteen years now. It was a real honor to be invited back to that outdoor game and I had a great time at it.

“It was a great time to catch up with some of the guys I played with. I’ve been going to the alumni game for a while now and the golf outing in the summer. It’s a great group to be around. It was what it was and it is what it is.”

It seems apropos that the two of them enter together. They were linemates for five and a half years as Flyers.

LeClair had 333 goals and 643 points as a Flyer — third all-time for a left wing. Lindros also is third all-time at center with 290 goals and 659 points.
Ron Hextall uses colorful language on Flyers after ugly loss to Rangers

Staff
November 20, 2014, 9:30 am

To some, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result each time.

Going by that definition, a Flyers fan must be insane every time he or she turns on the television to watch the team play the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

That scenario played out again on Wednesday night and guess what? The Flyers lost their ninth straight regular season game at The Garden, this one a listless, uncompetitive 2-0 defeat to the Rangers in a contest that wouldn't have been anywhere near that close if not for the superb goaltending of Steve Mason, who made 32 saves.

Not pleased with what he saw, Flyers general manager Ron Hextall reportedly went insane all right.

Hextall reportedly went into the Flyers’ dressing room following the loss and scolded the team for its lifeless effort and lack of pushback with a tirade that could be heard by nearby beat writers waiting to get in to talk to players.

Some first-hand accounts:

Hextall teed off on team after game: “Are you [bleeping] kidding me!.” He and Berube very upset w/lack of pushback, emotion, competitiveness
— Tim Panaccio (@tpanotchCSN) November 20, 2014

Ron Hextall can be heard screaming from changing room. “That's f---ing embarrassing! Jesus f---ing Christ!” and slammed door.
— Frank Seravalli (@frank_seravalli) November 20, 2014

To paraphrase, Hextall bluntly asked if the team had a good joke for him and then he broke the Third Commandment.

It wasn’t like it was unwarranted. The Flyers totally deserved the tongue-lashing they got from their general manager.

From almost the second the puck dropped, the Rangers basically toyed with the Flyers, controlled all facets of the game and made things look way too easy.

It was total domination by the Rangers, who fired off ten-bell chance after ten-bell chance against Mason, who, to his credit, responded with almost every answer he possibly could, despite the fact Braydon Coburn, his own teammate, ran him over near the end of the second period in a play that was a microcosm of the Flyers’ night.

Mason had no real shot on either of the Rangers’ goals.

On the opening tally in the first period, Wayne Simmonds was out of position and allowed Rangers defensemen Kevin Klein to take a pass from Carl Hagelin and blast a one-timer from the slot top-shelf past Mason.

Rick Nash’s power-play slam dunk in second period came after the Rangers easily passed the puck around and through a lackadaisical Flyers defense, specifically Coburn and Nick Grossmann.

That was more than enough for New York on Wednesday.

That’s also now seven goals given up in the last nine times the Flyers have been on the penalty kill. All seven of those power-play goals allowed have come with Coburn on the ice since he returned on Nov. 8.

The Flyers now have the league’s worst penalty kill with a 71.4 percent “success” rate.

Survey says that’s not good and needs to be fixed pronto. The hope is that getting penalty killers Luke Schenn, Andrew MacDonald and Michael Raffl back in the lineup soon will help the struggling unit.

Rangers goalie Cam Talbot made 31 saves for his fourth career shutout. But unlike Mason, Talbot really wasn’t tested all much until the Flyers pulled the goalie with less than four minutes to go in the third period.

And to make matters worse, Flyers defenseman Michael Del Zotto left in the third period with a lower-body injury and didn’t return.

We won’t have to wait long to see how the Flyers react to the berating they got from their boss for their brutal effort. The Minnesota Wild comes to South Philly Thursday night.

Reminder if you have tickets for Thursday night’s game: If you haven’t heard, there will be a pregame ceremony to induct Eric Lindros and John LeClair into the Flyers Hall of Fame. That ceremony will start at 7 p.m. and the game is expected to start somewhere around 7:45 p.m.

John LeClair and Eric Lindros will be inducted into the Flyers’ Hall of Fame on Thursday night. (AP)

They had not been to the playoffs in five years, and in his first year of coaching the Flyers, the arrival of John LeClair and Eric Desjardins had already transformed the club in several ways.

That’s when Terry Murray decided to create a new line for Eric Lindros with LeClair and Mikael Renberg.

“They had chemistry almost immediately in two or three games,” Murray recalled. “They dominated with their confidence. They literally carried us on their backs at times.”

They were big forwards. Power forwards with LeClair and Lindros doing the heavy lifting while the Swede, Renberg, gave them the speed and skill on the wing to create.

Thursday night at the Wells Fargo Center, two-thirds of arguably the second-greatest line in Flyers history (with the first being Bill Barber-Bobby Clarke-Reggie Leach) will be inducted into the Flyers’ Hall of Fame.

In 1995-96, Murray’s second season, the line that was already known as the “Legion of Doom” was well on its way to becoming part of NHL folklore.

The trio would amass a club record 255 points — 97 for LeClair, 115 for Lindros and 43 for Renberg — that season.

“Those numbers speak to the dominance they had in all areas of the ice,” Murray said. “It wasn’t just off the rush or the power play, they played in the hard areas in front of the net and in the corners.

“They created so much just out of recovering pucks with their power and size. A combination of all those things enabled them to put those kinds of points up.”

The Legion of Doom was simply unstoppable from the dots to below the goal line and, especially, in front of the net.

“They made passes and Lindros would throw a seven- or eight-foot harder than anyone I ever saw,” Murray said. “LeClair would handle it like most people would take a 30-foot pass. His hands were so soft. He could get that quick shot under the crossbar in one motion.”

It’s fitting that LeClair and Lindros go into the Flyers’ Hall as a duo, given they spent almost six years together in orange and black.

“They were a great tandem who played together a few years and the friendship and bonds that build when you have that kind of success with players,” current general manager Ron Hextall said. “They have a link there that makes it appropriate going in together.”

Hextall was the Flyers’ goaltender during much of their span.

“They were power players in tandem,” Hextall said. “I think about being a defense pairing and going up against Lindros and LeClair. Talk about a challenge. It was huge, and they were both great players.

“Straight-line players, but power, power players. You look at power duos. Maybe [they are] the greatest of all time, in terms of power forwards as a tandem.”

So good they were that during the 1996-97 season — Murray’s best with the Flyers when they went to the Stanley Cup Final against Detroit — the Legion of Doom twice broke the club’s 1983 franchise record for points by a line in a game. (It had been 14 by Darryl Sittler’s unit with Barber and Ilkka Sinisalo.)

On Feb. 6, 1997 against Montreal at what was then called the CoreStates Center, the Legion of Doom had 16 points with LeClair scoring a career-high four goals and amassing six points. Renberg had five points that night after earning just four points during the entire month of January.

“John had a great slap shot,” Hextall said. “He had an absolute cannon. … I don’t know how many [slap shots] you get away with these days. But he was still that big brute in front of the net that could bang rebounds home and tip pucks.

“Renberg wasn’t together with them as long as those two were together. … He did a good job. Two power players and then the complimentary piece was speed, and Renny had the speed.”

And Lindros?

Murray, who would lose his job after losing the ’97 Cup Final, said he doesn’t blame Lindros for being fired and to this day prefers to recall the times he spent going over to the center’s condo and playing pool with him.

“What I recall most about these players were they were all good people,” Murray said.

With the induction of Peter Forsberg to the Hockey Hall of Fame this week, there’s ample reason to believe that Lindros, whose career numbers were very similar to Forsberg’s, will also be selected in the years to come.

Forsberg, who averaged 1.25 points a game, and Lindros, who averaged 1.14 points, were the centerpieces of the largest trade in NHL history, and their legacies as players were born after it.

Forsberg’s one significant edge over Lindros? He won two Stanley Cups.

While some would point to all the injuries — particularly concussions — that caused Lindros to miss more than two years of his career, people forget that Forsberg himself was thwarted by foot injuries late in his career. Lindros actually played more games (760) than Forsberg (708).

“Eric didn’t have the Cups, but has the MVP, the points and everything else as a dominant player of his era,” Murray said.

“I’d like to think he’s a Hall of Fame player. And I’d like to be able to someday say to people, ‘I coached a Hall of Famer in Eric Lindros.’”

NEW YORK – Flyers general manager Ron Hextall either can’t remember the last time he read his club the riot act or simply won’t say.
The 2-0 loss to the Rangers on Wednesday night at Madison Square Garden was actually worse than the 4-0 loss in Chicago in October (see story).
At least, the Flyers tried out there.
“That [loss] bothered me a lot,” Hextall said of this game. “I don’t think we came out hungry enough. We didn’t play well. We need to be a lot better than that.”
Asked about his hollering at the club, he denied it.
Goalie Steve Mason actually stopped his interview with the media to look over his shoulder at the commotion coming from behind the changing room where the team was when Hextall was yelling.
“I was very disappointed,” is all Hextall would say.
Wayne Simmonds said Hextall had their attention.
“For that (Hextall yelling) to be happening, we have to be playing pretty badly,” Simmonds said. “We didn’t play too well the last three games or even before that and you gotta realize we’re professionals and know what we did wrong. We didn’t show up tonight.”
Flyers coach Craig Berube said Hextall had every right to be upset.
“He’s probably not very happy after that performance,” Berube said. “I don’t blame him. It’s not a good game.”
The Flyers had three days off and looked lethargic in losing their third straight game.
“Our first line, competed,” Berube said of hurting Claude Giroux’s unit with Brayden Schenn and Jakub Voracek.
“They played hard and they played well. I didn’t see much after that except our goalie [Steve Mason]. He played a helluva game.”
Del Zotto injured
Michael Del Zotto collided with Dan Girardi in the third period and has a lower-body injury, Hextall said. He may or may not play against Minnesota on Thursday night.
Laughton’s debut
Rookie Scott Laughton played for the first time as a Flyer in two years. He had just 12 shifts and seven minutes of ice time.
Earlier this month, Hextall said if Laughton was going to be here, he needed to be playing more than 10 minutes a night.
His call-up came because Giroux was not expected to play this game or Thursday’s against the Wild.
“Scott Laughton, for the ice time he got, he did his job,” Berube said.
Laughton thought he did, “an OK job.”
“I thought I skated well,” he said. “It seemed late, we poured it on a little bit, 6 on 4 and 6 on 5. Our first line did a real good job. Every scoring chance we got, [Cam] Talbot stood tall and handled it.”
Flyers drop fourth straight, fall to Wild

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 1:02 a.m. EST November 21, 2014

PHILADELPHIA — Considering the Flyers had to watch their general manager go on a profanity-laden tirade a night earlier, similar energy was expected out of those on the ice against the Minnesota Wild.

There are stabilizing factors in hockey, though, like a hot goalie and an active defense. The Flyers ran into both against the Wild and lost 3-2.

They've now lost four consecutive games in regulation for the first time since the second week of coach Craig Berube's tenure.

Things didn't seem to be that bad from the start, really. On the scoreboard, they were outshooting the Wild, it's just that they weren't very good quality shots. Those that were, missed the mark.

Plenty of times the Flyers had goalie Darcy Kuemper out of position and either shot it back into him or hit a post.

They should have had a multiple-goal lead after the first period, but Minnesota's goalie stood on his head to keep his team in it. By the second period, when the Wild had a better effort, the Flyers seemed to lose some shine.

They gave up a few chances to the Wild and Ray Emery looked good even though there were big gaps between the shots he faced. He finished the night with 27 saves.

The only one he had no shot at was Minnesota's only goal. It came at 10:59 of the second period on the Wild's third power play of the game. The Wild hadn't scored a power play goal on the road in their first 32 man advantages this season, but Nino Niederreiter changed that. He took a pass from Mathew Dumba and one-timed the cross-ice offering past Emery.

Just after the goal, Minnesota got another opportunity on the power play and the Flyers killed it off. The momentum finally carried over into something tangible.

Rookie Scott Laughton went in on the forecheck and forced a loose puck. It snuck out to Vinny Lecavalier found some room and deked around a defender to feed a streaking Mark Streit for his third goal of the year.

The goal, which snapped a scoreless drought of 108:53 for the Flyers, seemed to give them life. They just couldn't beat Kuemper again despite ripping off three quick shots before the period expired.

In the third period the Flyers had to begin by killing off the remainder of a Nick Grossmann tripping call, that really appeared to be Jason Zucker losing an edge. After the Minnesota man advantage expired, the cashed in on the momentum they'd created.

Marco Scandella ripped a slapshot from the point that beat Emery up high to give Minnesota the lead.

The Flyers had chances to get back in it, but fell back into the traps of the first period when they had their shots blocked and missed the target with their shots.

Claude Giroux tied the game with 3:30 to go in the game when the Flyers were on the power play. Jake Voracek tossed a pass to Brayden Schenn, who fed Giroux for his sixth goal of the season.

The momentum couldn't be carried over, though, when the Flyers had an ill-timed defensive breakdown. Zucker scored with 45.4 seconds left to give the Wild a fourth consecutive win.

Emery was pulled after the goal, but the Flyers couldn't get the puck behind Kuemper again. He had 37 saves in his ninth victory on the year.

Courier-Post LOADED: 11.21.2014
PHILADELPHIA — Eric Lindros is feeling just fine.

He lives up in Toronto, is working for an online company doing some marketing for clothes and he still laces up the skates and plays on a regular basis.

The effects of concussions, which effectively ended his career, don’t haunt him like they do Chris Pronger or former Boston Bruin Marc Savard.

"I think things have gotten better. I think things still have a ways to go," Lindros said. "I played my best hockey here and from the last time I played here, and of course in New York, I didn’t have the confidence of cutting through the middle of the ice. That’s essentially why I moved to the wing, I didn’t feel comfortable."

Thursday night Lindros and John LeClair were inducted into the Flyers’ Hall of Fame. Lindros, who began his NHL career with the Flyers and played 486 of his 760 games in orange and black, was too busy meeting up with old friends and preparing for a pregame ceremony to know what was happening in the legal world of concussions.

A group of former NHLers, which did not include Lindros, filed a lawsuit against the league in November 2013 over how it handled concussions to players prior to 1997. Thursday the league fired back with its delayed response, saying that there was enough information available back then via the media.

Court filings, which were published by TSN, say "publicly available information related to concussions and their long-term effects, coupled with the events that had transpired – i.e., the players incurring head injuries – should have allowed (players) to put two and two together."

Lindros, who had plenty of concussions including four major ones, disagrees, calling it a "different era."

"What used to be accepted and the norm in previous times is clearly not now," said Lindros, whose younger brother Brett retired because of post-concussion syndrome. "I really can’t get the ‘should have known’ issue. You just hope overall that people are healthy and are living lives that are whole. There’s a lot more to life after hockey. You’ve got a long way to go. It’s nice to be one, or as full as you can be."

Lindros and LeClair were certainly enjoying their lives in hockey Thursday during a 30-minute ceremony where they were given paintings of themselves and busts were revealed for the team’s Hall of Fame.

About 15 years ago, when Lindros was at odds with the organization mostly over his concussion treatment, but also a collapsed lung, the idea of a Hall of Fame night might have been laughed at because of the amount of bad blood there was.

"I think time dilutes most feelings," Lindros said. "Life’s short, and I think that can be said for both sides of the equation. When (Flyers president Paul Holmgren) called (to tell me I was going into the Flyers Hall of Fame), it caught me off guard. (John and I) got chatting and we said, ‘Let’s go into this together.”

• MacDonald, Schenn return to action: Defensemen Andrew MacDonald and Luke Schenn both returned to action against the Minnesota Wild. MacDonald had missed 10 games with an injured right knee. Schenn missed three with a left shoulder injury.

"It would have been nice to be able to get them more time, but looking down the road we don’t have much time," coach Craig Berube said. "We play every other day. They want to play and they’re ready. I trust the way they feel and they’re good players. They’re gonna help us."

The returns came just in time. Michael Del Zotto suffered a "lower-body injury" in Wednesday’s loss to the New York Rangers and didn’t suit up.

• Empty netters: Former teammates Shjon Podein, Eric Desjerdins and Mikael Renberg were at the ceremony to honor Lindros and LeClair. Desjerdins will go in the Flyers’ Hall of Fame Feb. 19. … Thursday’s game against Minnesota closed out the fourth of 14 sets of back-to-back games for the Flyers this season. … The team is off Friday and will face the Columbus Blue Jackets Saturday.
5 things to watch in Game 18: Minnesota Wild at Flyers

Source: Courier-Post 

Tonight: Minnesota Wild at Flyers

Site: Wells Fargo Center

Time: 7:00 p.m.

TV: Comcast SportsNet

Radio: 97.5 FM, The Fanatic

Records: Flyers (7-7-2), Rangers (7-7-4)

ALSO: Flyers to induct Eric Lindros, John LeClair to team’s Hall of Fame

FLYERS PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

10-Brayden Schenn, 28-Claude Giroux, 93-Jake Voracek

24-Matt Read, 14-Sean Couturier, 17-Wayne Simmonds (A)

18-R.J. Umberger, 78-Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, 40-Vinny Lecavalier

36-Zac Rinaldo, 49-Scott Laughton, 76-Scott Laughton, 76-Chris VandeVelde

Defensemen

8-Nick Grossmann & 32-Mark Streit (A)

55-Nick Schultz & 5-Braydon Coburn

47-Andrew MacDonald & 22-Luke Schenn

Goalie

29-Ray Emery

Injuries

D-Michael Del Zotto (lower-body injury, day-to-day)

LW-Michael Raffl (right knee injury, out six weeks)

C-Ryan White (pectoralis surgery, injured reserve)

MORE FROM FLYER FILES BLOG

WILD PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards

11-Zach Parise, 9-Mikko Koivu, 29-Jason Pominville

22-Nino Niederreiter, 78-Pierre-Eduard Bellemare, 40-Vinny Lecavalier

36-Zac Rinaldo, 49-Scott Laughton, 76-Scott VandeVelde

Defensemen

8-Nick Grossmann & 32-Mark Streit (A)

55-Nick Schultz & 5-Braydon Coburn

47-Andrew MacDonald & 22-Luke Schenn

Goalie

35-Darcy Kuemper

Injuries

D-Jonas Brodin (mumps, injured reserve)

LW-Matt Cooke (lower-body injury, injured reserve)

FIVE THINGS TO WATCH

1. One would think that “quick healer” Claude Giroux would play tonight after his miraculous recovery from a left ankle injury. Tuesday night GM Ron Hextall said Giroux would miss two games and Wednesday night Giroux had a season-high 25:44 of ice time in a 2-0 loss to the New York Rangers that had Hextall pretty fired up.

“I guess we’ll see,” Giroux said when asked about his status for tonight.

2. Eric Lindros and John LeClair will be inducted into the team’s Hall of Fame tonight. The pregame ceremony is expected to last about 45 minutes, so the first drop of the puck will be more like 7:50 p.m. Lindros had 659 points in 486 games played with the Flyers. LeClair’s career in Philly was 643 points in 649 games.

3. Minnesota is riding high on a three-game victorious streak. Even though they’re doing well, they mixed up lines in Wednesday’s practice, putting Charlie Coyle on a line with Thomas Vanek and Jason Zucker.

“They have to be strong defensively,” coach Mike Yeo told the Star Tribune. “But obviously, we want that line to go out and create offense for us. We want three lines we can really count on to go out and bring offense to us, and we think that gives us the opportunity.”

4. Don’t be surprised if Wayne Simmonds finds the back of the net tonight against Minnesota. One of the team’s emotional leaders, in addition to being an alternate captain, Simmonds was pretty hard on himself in a game in which no one played well. He has 11 points in 15 career games against Minnesota.

“It doesn’t matter where they put me,” Simmonds said. “It’s my responsibility to come and play. That’s my job. I wasn’t good tonight. I wasn’t good the last couple games and I put the onus on myself to turn it around.”

5. Because of the back-to-back, Ray Emery will probably get the start for the Flyers. He has a 4-1-1 record in six career games against Minnesota with a 2.29 goals-against average and .917 save percentage. Expect Darcy Kuemper to go for the Wild. He has never faced the Flyers in his young career, but has a stellar 2.03 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in 14 games this season.

Courier-Post LOADED: 11.21.2014
Flyers tie game late, then lose to Minnesota Wild in final minute | Rapid reaction

PHILADELPHIA — The celebration of two Flyers greats going into their Hall of Fame was a lot of fun for everyone.

The game?

Not so much.

The Flyers were very good at times but lost again, falling 3-2 to the Minnesota Wild to stench a feel-good evening at Wells Fargo Center that began with a 30-minute pre-game ceremony for Eric Lindros and John LeClair.

A lot of Flyers fans showed up wearing vintage No. 88 and 10 jerseys, then what was left of the crowd booed at the final buzzer.

This is four regulation losses in a row for the Flyers, their longest streak since they dropped four in a row early into the 2013-14 season shortly after Craig Berube replaced Peter Laviolette as head coach.

The Flyers dominated the first two periods, but Minnesota goalie Darcy Kuemper put on a show in a 37-save victory.

Down 2-1 late, the Flyers tied the game 17:30 into third on a power-play goal by Claude Giroux, but Matt Zucker beat Ray Emery in scoring the game-winner at 19:15.

THE GOOD

• The Flyers’ top line combined for 13 shots on net despite being shut out for the second game in a row. Giroux had a game-high seven, Jakub Voracek had five and Brayden Schenn had one.

• C Scott Laughton, bumped up to the third line after making his season debut on the fourth Wednesday, looked good playing with slumping wingers Vinny Lecavalier and R.J. Umberger. Laughton had three shots and won four of six face-offs in 10:53 of ice time.

• D Mark Streit scored 14:31 to end a Flyers scoreless streak at 108 minutes, 53 seconds. His six shots on net were second to Giroux’s seven.

THE BAD

• The Flyers took six penalties and were shorthanded five times.

• LW Matt Read had just two shots on net and now has just one goal in his last 11 games, two in 17 for the season.

• Andrew MacDonald and Luke Schenn returned from injuries to play together as the third-defense pair. Both were minus-2 on after being on the ice for the Wild’s third-period goals. Before the game winner, MacDonald had a giveaway and Schenn lost his man, the goal scorer.

• The Flyers allowed the first goal for the 13th time in 18 games.

FIGHTS

• None.

INJURIES

• Flyers: RW Chris VandeVelde suffered a lower-body injury on his first third-period shift and didn’t return. He’s listed day-to-day. … D Michael Del Zotto (lower body) missed his first game after being injured in the third period of Wednesday’s game. … LW Michael Raffl (right foot) missed his sixth game. He resumed skating this week but still is weeks away from returning to game action. … C Ryan White is on LTIR recovering from August surgery to repair his left pectoralis muscle. He started skating last week, but is expected to be sidelined at least until late December/early January. … D Kimmo Timonen is on LTIR due to blood clots and out indefinitely.

• Wild: LW Matt Cooke (lower body, IR) missed his 10th game; D Jonas Brodin (illness, IR) missed his fourth game.

HEALTHY SCRATCHES

• Flyers: RW Jason Akeson; D Carlo Colaiacovo.

• Wild: C Kyle Brodziak.

THE WEEK AHEAD

• Saturday: Columbus Blue Jackets at Flyers, 7 p.m.

• Monday: Flyers at Islanders, 7 p.m.

• Wednesday: Flyers at Detroit Red Wings, 7:30 p.m.

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.21.2014
PHILADELPHIA — Eric Lindros looked a little bigger, a little older and very comfortable standing at center ice with John LeClair at his side.

Flyers fans cheered like it was 1997 when two of the league's greatest power forwards led a Stanley Cup Finals run.

Fittingly, their induction Thursday night into the Flyers Hall of Fame included an on-ice appearance by their Legion of Doom line's third member.

Mikael Renberg traveled from Sweden to take part in a 30-minute ceremony before the Flyers-Minnesota Wild game at Wells Fargo Center, and he had the honors of unveiling the Hall of Fame busts.

Lindros seemed to be loving the moment, while LeClair appeared to get emotional.

"I felt like you gave you my best hockey and I hope you felt the same," LeClair told the crowd, which responded with more cheers.

Several of their old Flyers teammates were on the ice for the ceremony, as were their families — a wife and three children for LeClair, a wife and newborn son for Lindros.

The ceremony began with Lindros wishing a speedy recovery to NHL legend Gordie Howe, who recently had a stroke.

Former Flyers defenseman Eric Desjardins, a teammate to Lindros and LeClair, also was on hand for the event. He's scheduled to be inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame before a game on Feb. 19.
Flyers Hall of Fame night: Q&A of Eric Lindros, John LeClair opening up, sharing laughs

PHILADELPHIA — Eric Lindros and John LeClair, Legion of Doom linemates in the 1990s and Flyers Hall of Famers as of Thursday, answered questions for 20 minutes before the pre-game ceremony at Wells Fargo Center.

Here’s the entire Q&A:

Q: Do you guys feel as if you’re attending a wake? You’re both in suits.

Lindros: “We were just talking about the last time we had suits on together. It’s been a while. Maybe my wedding?”

LeClair: “I think that was the last time.”

Q: A lot of the fans attending tonight’s game saw you guys play together, if you could say something to them, what would it be?

LeClair: “For me, it was great. They always made you feel welcome, especially here. The support was second to none. We always felt that support. They always believed in us. It was great.”

Lindros: “They know hockey here. They know the ins and outs of the game. They know when things are going well and when they’re not. They know, in some cases, really definitively why. As vocal as they are, it’s great when things are rolling, and it’s a real pick-up-your socks when things aren’t going so strongly. They’re true fans.”

Q: When you return to the Wells Fargo Center, do you miss playing?

Lindros: “I still play a little bit. I love the game. I think the game is just a beautiful game. It’s terrific. It’s a chance to catch up with people, everything to being on the ice to everything that takes place off the ice. I think it’s the best sport.”

LeClair: “For me, it was awesome. I loved playing. I don’t miss it so much, I miss a lot of the other stuff that’s not actual playing stuff than I do playing. But when you come here and you see the rink and see guys getting ready to play like that, it’d be fun to go out there and skate and play and get back into it.”

Q: With the rule changes that eliminated clutching and grabbing, what kind of production would your line have in today’s game?

Lindros: “I don’t know if you count it like that. I think we could adapt to the rule changes. That said, I went to the pregame skate today and I saw Minnesota cruise around, and puck-handling skill and output shots - everything’s getting better and better. But with the rules changes, I think we could have adapted. I don’t see why we wouldn’t.”

LeClair: “Yeah, the game changed during the time that we played a little bit, through the time we were there. But like Eric said, the guys today, the speed of the game and the skill level, it’s much different than when we played.”

Q: Is there a favorite goal or two that you guys produced together?

LeClair: “Every winning goal. That was about it.”

Lindros: “I don’t know if there’s one in particular. I think anytime we played Montreal and this guy, he would just wake up with a smile. It was always fun to be part of those games when Johnny was wound up to go against his former team.”

Q: John, make a case for Eric being inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. If someone asked if you if he should be in, why?

LeClair: “What was fun sometimes was, we would get to a faceoff, and Eric would just say, ‘take off.’ And he’d hit the puck, instead of trying to win the faceoff, he would hit it forward and just go. I think the first time we tried it, it worked, and it was kind of like, ‘oh my’. It didn’t always work.”

Lindros: “Our ‘Omaha’ didn’t fly, but some did turn out, I guess.”

Q: Eric, given how your career ended, how do you view the league is handling concussions now?

Lindros: “I think things have gotten better. I think things still have a ways to go. I played my best hockey here and from the last time I played here, and of course in New York, I didn’t have the confidence of cutting through the middle of the ice. That’s essentially why I moved to the wing, I didn’t feel comfortable. Concussions in general, I think they’re being, and it’s unfortunate that a lot of the larger-name players are affected by them, but it brings a spotlight to them, if that could be a silver lining. It’s gotten better. Is there a ways to go, is there more research to be done? And where’s the collaboration and the research with all this? Are we implicating efforts in the Northeast - is everyone talking? What’s happening with this? I think there’s a lot of people that want to do the right thing, I’m just not sure that we’re on the same page in terms of sharing ideas.”

Q: The NHL filed a motion today to dismiss the class-action suit filed by players. Have you heard that?

Lindros: “I had not heard that, and I actually had not read the suit that was filed.”

Q: When they say that players should have put 2 and 2 together in terms of head injuries, you didn’t have the knowledge of what concussions were to the extent of today, right?

Lindros: “I think you’re looking at a different era. I think every so often things are changing. Communication improves. Sensitivity to certain issues improves. What used to be accepted and the norm in previous times is clearly not now. I really can’t get the ‘should of known’ issue. You just hope overall that people are healthy and are living lives that are whole. There’s a lot more life after hockey. You’ve got a long way to go. It’s nice to be one, or as full as you can be.”

Q: Flyers fans loved your old line, the Legion of Doom. What does that line mean to you guys and how often do the three of you talk? What is just a hockey line or did you become close and stay close because of that line?

LeClair: “I think that’s one of the reasons why we were successful as a line. I think we were all pretty close. We see (Mikael Renberg) once in a while. We still talk with Renny. E and I talk a bit.”

Lindros: “Renny lived across the street from me and two and a half blocks from Johnny, so we were all in the same area. We’d see each other.”

Q: And now?

Lindros: “Well, Renny’s in Sweden!”

Q: But do you still consider yourselves close?

Lindros: “I think we’ll always be close in that sense.”

LeClair: “It was a great bond. I mean.”

Q: How about the name of your line, Legion of Doom. Did you guys like the name?

Lindros: “We had fun with it.”

LeClair: “Yeah, it could have been a lot worse, I guess. I know (former Flyers center) Jimmy Montgomery still wants credit for it.”

Q: John, make a case for Eric being inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. If someone asked if you if he should be in, why?

LeClair: “I think it’s an easy case. I think when you look at Eric when he played, he was dominant. When you compare some of the players who have gotten in that played with him, it’s not even close. When players were getting ready to play, they weren’t saying, ‘Oh my God, I’ve got to play against so and so or so and so.’ Every time they had to play against Eric, they knew they were playing him two or three days ahead of time and they were ready because they knew that he was just a dominant force out there and they had to be ready. You can go through all the statistical stuff with the goals per game and all that other stuff. I think, what, is he third for points per game? ... His comparison blows a lot of guys out of the water.”

Lindros: “That’s exactly what I told you to say. Very well done.”
Q: Eric, before John arrived in trade, you had a lot of success playing on lines with Rod Brind’Amour, Mark Recchi, Brent Fedeyk as well. When John came in, how did he change the chemistry of the line?

Lindros: “Big body that can skate, finish. That’s what really got things going in practice. Not just going through a drill, but when you’re gonna go through all these regroups and go back in on a 3-on-2 to end it, well, let’s make sure we score. That’s where Johnny was so focused and strong with finishing things off. It was great. I think we should also point out that Mikael Renberg is a huge part of this (Legion of Doom line as the right wing). Mikael Renberg was a fantastic player in his own right. He had a great shot. He did everything that you could ever ask of a winger or a player on your team. To have him consistently with us and on our line, we can’t say enough about him. One of the fiercest forecheckers you’d ever come across. Very fast. Great hockey sense and a terrific guy to be around.”

Q: Eric, John just campaigned for you as a Hockey Hall of Famer. Can you do the same for John? He has more than 400 career goals.

Lindros: “When I would get hurt, Johnny really stepped in and scored a lot of goals at big times when it looked like our team didn’t have what we’d say was our normal roster. Johnny would really step up. ... I think Johnny should be (a Hall of Famer). I do. I think if you look at that point in time from ‘92 to the World Cup. I don’t think there was a better player in the ’96 World Cup...maybe the goaltender, but we don’t count them! ’96 World Cup, that’d be it.”

LeClair: “Who won that?”

(Note Lindros played for Canada, Lindros for the United States)

Lindros: “We got you in Salt Lake (in the 2002 Winter Olympics).”

Q: The 1997 Stanley Cup Finals, losing four in a row to the Detroit Red Wings, had to be disappointing. In the years since when you watched Detroit end up winning three Cups in 11 seasons, did that change your perspective at all to thinking, ‘Maybe we went up against the dominate organization in 10-15 year stretch?’

LeClair: “It didn’t make it any easier. We lost four straight. We felt pretty good about our season that year. Obviously it was nice we gave Detroit that confidence to go become a dynasty.”

Lindros: “That wasn’t the intent. They truly haven’t thanked us.”

Q: Do either of you have aspirations to get back into hockey down the road, perhaps work in the front office?

LeClair: “Not right now. For me, it’s nice to be able to be flexible if my kids need me or if I chose to do something and want to see my kids play and go visit them I can do that. I enjoy that a lot right now. In five or six years when they’re out of school and doing their own thing, maybe, but not right now.”

Lindros: “No, not at all. I think life is good. I love hockey for what it is and I play hockey all the time, but in terms of going back to the front office, no not at all.”

Q: To each of you, what do you most appreciate about the other, perhaps a skill that may have been underappreciated or something about someone’s personality or competitiveness?

Lindros: “Johnny’s ability to score from the craziest of angles, to find loose pucks, when you thought the play was 85 percent done, and not just to find pucks but do something with them. Another thing that people overlook sometimes is John’s ability to pass the puck. John could pass he puck extremely well. I think people overlook that.”

LeClair: “For me, it was Eric pushed you so hard. You wanted to be better because you wanted to be able to keep up. And to be able to play with him, you had to push yourself because he was that good. And he would yell at you in practice, ‘Come on, you’ve got to go harder.’ Or if we were doing a skating drill, he’d be like, ‘Come on, we’ve gotta lead. You try to catch him and he was always leading the pack and always pushing guys that you’ve got to expect more out of yourself.”

Lindros: “Rod Brind’Amour was a big part of that, too, as far as pushing the envelope on how far we could get things moving. So it was a good group and a good balance that resulted in you being in better shape.”

Q: Eric, looking back now, do you think you at all were demised by the hype you received for several years?

Lindros: “I think there was a misconception of why I said no to Quebec (after being drafted by them in 1991 and forcing a trade in 1992) and there was maybe some misinformation on the subject But apart from that, you just go play hockey. You go play hockey and do your best with it. Listen, we didn’t have a great team the first couple of years, but we did get better and from my year three on, I thought we had quality teams.”

Q: But beyond wins and losses, had to deal with glare every day?

Lindros: “Well, it is what it is, right? What are you gonna do?”

LeClair: “What I always wondered if what hype did he not live up to. I mean, he won a Hart Trophy. He scored 100 point. I never got that. He had the respect of his teammates and carried the Flyers for five years or however many years he was here. How many?

Lindros: “Eight.”

LeClair: “I just never got it. When you’re his teammate, he went above and beyond. He was one of the greatest players to play. I never got that.”

Q: Eric, what do you view as the highlight of your career? For John, it has to be winning the Stanley Cup in Montreal. When you look at your career, what is it?

Lindros: “I don’t know it’s one thing. Probably the whole picture and having a chance to play what you think is very well at very times. I don’t know if you’ve ever gotten into a spot where you just feel like things are rolling.

Reporter shakes head no.

Lindros: “You’re not feeling it? That’s too bad. You just get into this wonderful feeling that you always remember.”

Q: And when was that for you, Eric?

Lindros: “When we were rolling in the mid-’90s. We had extremely strong teams and it felt good to come to the rink. It felt good to be part of the club. In all facets, we had wonderful times, wonderful teammates. We had guys with different characteristics, different personalities. We had a really good group.”

Q: What do you guys expect from the ceremony?

LeClair: “I think on our end it’ll be short. I think it’s nice. The Flyers always do things first class, so I think it’s going to be great.”

Lindros: “Yeah, we’ve had a lot of friends in town and family in town, and it’s a nice time to look back and say thanks and to celebrate that window. That’s the nice thing about pro sports. You’re not looking at a real long time period. You’re looking at a very short, condensed, intense moment and some people are fortunate to stay 20 years in an organization, some people go back and forth. When you do have a really strong feeling of feeling things are really rolling, you cherish it.”

Q: Eric, given the way your time with the Flyers ended, did you wonder if this night would have occurred?

Lindros: “I think time dilutes most feelings. Life’s short, and I think that can be said for both sides of the equation. When (Flyers president Paul Holmgren) called (to tell me I was going into the Flyers Hall of Fame), it caught me off guard. (John and I) got chatting and we said, ‘Let’s go into this together.”

Q: Now that this night is happening, Eric, does it bring you any closure?

Lindros: “Closure? I don’t know if you at it in terms of closure. I think the outdoor game (in 2012) was more of a sense then of moving forward or crossing the hurdle in terms of being part of it again. It feels good.”

Q: You guys had some of your best years during the clutch-and-grab era of the ’90s when scoring was down. Do you think doing well in those seasons should strengthen your Hall of Fame credentials?

Lindros: “It is a lot more wide open (now). Later on in our careers, there were power plays where if you didn’t have your power play rolling ... You were getting five or six a night. It kind of went from that, then as players adapted to the rule changes, then the four-line experience really started to occur. Because before you could get away with playing your power-play guys all the town and your penalty-killing guys as well, and then you basically ran three lines., I felt, on the teams I was with.”

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.21.2014
Greetings from the press box: Ray Emery in net, Andrew MacDonald returns on Flyers Hall of Fame night

PHILADELPHIA — The night after goalie Steve Mason was great and most of his teammates were awful in a 2-0 Flyers loss to the Rangers at Madison Square Garden, backup Ray Emery will be in net for Thursday's night's home game against the Minnesota Wild.

Meantime, defenseman Andrew MacDonald will return from his injury and blueliner Luke Schenn probably will be back, but defenseman Michael Del Zotto won't play after suffering a lower-body injury in the third period of Wednesday's game.

The start time for the Thursday night's game will be pushed back to around 7:50 p.m. due to a pre-game ceremony in which Eric Lindros and John LeClair will be inducted into the Flyers Hall of Fame.

Emery was very good early in the season starting four games in a row while Mason was struggling, but he stopped just 22 of 28 shots last Saturday night in a Flyers' 6-2 loss at Montreal.

MacDonald will play after missing 10 games with a knee injury. Schenn, out three games with a shoulder injury, is expected to suit up as well, assuming he feels OK during the pre-game skate.

"It would have been nice to get them a little more (practice) time ... but they want to play and they're ready," Flyers coach Craig Berube said.

If MacDonald and Schenn both play, they'll be together on the third pair.

The Flyers go into the game with a three-game losing streak, while Minnesota is on a three-game win streak.

The Flyers haven't loss four games in a row in regulation since October 2013, shortly after Berube replaced Peter Laviolette as head coach.

Here are the projected lineups:

**FLYERS**
Forward lines
10 Brayden Schenn, 28 Claude Giroux, 93 Jake Voracek
24 Matt Read, 14 Sean Couturier, 17 Wayne Simmonds
18 R.J. Umberger, 49 Scott Laughton, 40 Vinny Lecavalier
36 Zac Rinaldo, 78 Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, 76 Chris VandeVelde
Defense pairs
8 Nick Grossmann, 2 Mark Streit
55 Nick Schultz, 5 Braydon Coburn
47 Andrew MacDonald, 22 Luke Schenn
Goaltender
29 Ray Emery

**WILD**
Forward lines
11-Zach Parise, 9 Mikko Koivu, 29 Jason Pominville
22-Nino Niederreiter, 64 Mikael Granlund, 14 Justin Fontaine
26-Thomas Vanek, 3 Charlie Coyle, 16 Jason Zucker
18-Ryan Carter, 56 Erik Haula, 21 Kyle Brodziak
Defense pairs
20 Ryan Suter, 46 Jared Spurgeon
6 Marco Scandella, 39 Nate Prosser
2 Keith Ballard, 55 Matthew Dumba
35 Darcy Kuemper
Pittsburgh Penguins

Pens move on with, without Dupuis

By Joe Starkey
Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014, 11:48 p.m.
Updated 6 hours ago

There is a cold reality to professional sports. The Penguins felt the full chill Thursday morning at Consol Energy Center. They officially began life without Pascal Dupuis, at least six months because of a blood clot in one of his lungs.

At the same time, Dupuis isn't going anywhere.

The first thing that struck me upon entering the arena was that, as players went through their on-ice paces, Dupuis sat in the stands chatting with general manager Jim Rutherford. Turns out the club plans to keep Dupuis involved, and not just on the periphery.

Early next week, coach Mike Johnston said, "We're going to put together some sort of job description."

Who could argue with that? Dupuis has a unique presence that can only help. The man sweats positivity.

"You know when you come to the rink in the morning how Duper's going to be," veteran forward Craig Adams said. "When you get on the plane, you know how he's going to be. Not a lot of ups and downs with him. Mostly up all the time. I can't say that for all of us."

On the ice, the Penguins will need a winger at some point. They are one injury away from a serious depth problem. The good news is Rutherford does not need to take immediate action. The team is winning. Blake Comeau and Nick Spaling will play on the top two lines for now. Beau Bennett is a logical candidate to move up if more skill is needed, although he and Brandon Sutter have established a wonderful connection on the third line.

Rutherford isn't the type to sit on his hands. Sooner or later, you have to figure the Penguins will strike.

In the meantime, a more pressing question came to the surface Thursday: How, if at all, is this team better prepared than last year's to cope without Dupuis' day-to-day presence?

Dupuis can only lend so much if he isn't in the room every day. What happens to the personality of this team without him?

Only time can tell, of course, but my initial feeling is that this club is much better prepared than last year's. Something was amiss last season. Morale wasn't as high as it should have been for a 109-point team. Sidney Crosby and Brooks Orpik conceded after the season that the fun factor had diminished.

Orpik said, "We let the pressure get to us."

This group emits a different vibe. Rutherford, upon taking the job, said he wanted "louder voices" in the room. Then he went out and found some veterans with presence in the likes of Comeau, Spaling, Christian Ehrhoff, Steve Downie and Patric Hornqvist, who reminds some people of Dupuis in terms of his relentlessly cheerful demeanor.

I asked Adams if this group is better equipped to deal with Dupuis' absence.

"That's hard to say," he said. "We can't replace him. But, as far as the personality of this team, I think maybe with the guys we've brought in, we're a little bit more upbeat this year."

Asked to expound upon some of the new guys, Adams said, "We brought in some guys who've been around and are professionals. You know what they're going to bring every day. You can rely on them. Not that we didn't have that before with the guys who left us this summer. But it just seems like the personalities have meshed well so far this year."

"Hopefully the guys can continue to enjoy one another."
New assistant Agnew has Pens' PK, defense among league's best

By Josh Yohe
Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014, 11:15 p.m.
Updated 6 hours ago

New Penguins coach Mike Johnston is receiving plenty of attention these days for leading the team to a 13-3-1 record. Rick Tocchet, a high-profile assistant and mastermind of the NHL’s top power play, is enjoying supreme popularity, too.

Riding under the radar is another assistant who, according to the Penguins, deserves plenty of credit for their eye-popping start.

Gary Agnew might have been saddled with the toughest job of all.

The longtime assistant works with the penalty-killing unit and the team’s defensemen. Players in these respective units were fiercely loyal to former assistant coaches Tony Granato (penalty kill) and Todd Rierden (defensemen).

“It probably wasn’t real easy at first for Gary,” defenseman Paul Martin said, specifically noting the penalty killers, who enjoyed annual success under Granato.

“It can be a hard thing. There has been some compromise in that maybe he brings something to the table that can be effective, (but) there are some things that we won’t like as a killing unit. Some things we didn’t think were beneficial for the way we play or the personnel that we have. With the guys we have, we’ve come to an understanding, an agreement.”

The compromise is working.

After a bad first week, the Penguins’ penalty killing has been superb. The unit ranks fourth in the NHL with an 88.4 percent kill rate. Since Oct. 18, the Penguins have killed 52 of 54 penalties.

The defense has been solid overall. It has permitted just 35 goals, the fewest amount of goals allowed in the NHL.

While many are quick to credit goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury with this statistic — his numbers speak for themselves — others believe Agnew deserves some of the credit.

Agnew is a disciple of St. Louis coach Ken Hitchcock, whose specialty long has been a suffocating defense.

After being fired from St. Louis’ staff last spring — the Blues were considered among the favorites to land the Stanley Cup before falling to Chicago in the first round of the playoffs — Agnew found another job with the Penguins and brought his defensive philosophies, which finally are being accepted.

The philosophy of the penalty kill is different now more than the system.

“There’s less aggression from us,” center Brandon Sutter said. “We’re more patient. There is less running around for the forwards. We’re willing to let teams set up.”

So far, so good.

“Gary’s been really good,” Sutter said. “He’s such a fun guy to be around. He keeps us loose.”

Agnew is all business about his defensive beliefs, though.

“When it comes to his system and his way of playing, he’s pretty cut and dry,” Sutter said. “He knows this system.”

Agnew said his new team has been a delight to deal with and if there was resistance to learning his way of penalty killing and playing defense, it hasn’t been a problem.

“It’s not that things are that different from last year,” Agnew said. “It’s just a commitment to playing on the right side of the puck and on the right side of the man.”
Penguins notebook: Fleury awaits word on when he'll vie for 300th victory

By Jason Mackey
Thursday, Nov. 20, 2014, 7:33 p.m.
Updated 5 hours ago

• Would Penguins coach Mike Johnston really pass on a chance to get goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury win No. 300 and instead play him on the road on the second leg of back-to-back games? It's highly doubtful, but when presented with the chance, Johnston didn't proclaim Fleury the starter for Friday's game against the Islanders at Consol Energy Center, saying only that, "We will split the weekend with our goaltenders." Fleury will soon become the 31st goalie in NHL history to win 300 career games and the fourth to do it before his 30th birthday. The win would be Fleury 12th of the season. He's 11-3 with a 1.98 goals-against average and a .930 save percentage. "I'm not going to make a big deal out of it," Fleury said. "I'm proud. I'm happy. I think it's pretty cool. But it's two points in the standings, and that's what matters."

• Johnston said playing the Islanders in back-to-back games will serve as a playoff preview of sorts. The Penguins have twice played back-to-backs. Both sets, however, featured different teams on each night. "You have a chance to prepare for a team, play a game and react to how you've played and what you need to do the next day," Johnston said. "You know they're going to react, and they're going to have some things that they're going to adjust in their game plan. I look forward to these two-game series that we have because it does give us a chance in the busy schedule that we have to see simulate playoff action."

• With Pascal Dupuis sidelined, forward Beau Bennett will replace him on the second power-play unit. The Penguins were on the man-advantage Tuesday for one penalty and scored 28 seconds in, which gave little indication what the second unit would look like. Bennett will join linemates Steve Downie and Brandon Sutter and defensemen Paul Martin and Christian Ehrhoff.

Simon Despres is 6 feet 4, 214 pounds, and willing to put every inch and ounce into his work.

He skates well, has a nice shot and can handle the puck. Just might have made a pretty fair power forward. And probably came closer to being one than many people realize.

For while he is a defenseman with the Penguins now, when he was a boy, Despres’ hockey idols all played up front.


Their influence was evident in Despres’ play in his formative years.

“I made the team as a defenseman when I was a kid,” he said. “And they put me at forward because I was always in the other end.”

Despres recalls spending two years there before his father, convinced that Despres was a better defenseman than forward, intervened and got his son switched to the position he now plays. It’s tough to argue with his dad’s judgment, because Despres was good enough on defense to be a first-round draft choice in 2009.

He and veteran Rob Scuderi have formed an effective pairing in recent weeks and figure to be together when the Penguins face the New York Islanders tonight at Consol Energy Center.

Part of the reason they’ve meshed, Scuderi said, is that they communicate well.

“He’s really listened,” Scuderi said. “We’re just helping each other right now. I’m not saying that I tell him everything to do. We just talk about things, each shift.

“I think we do have a bit of a natural chemistry, which is great, but we still have to work on it.”

Much like his pairing, Despres is a work-in-progress.

Former coach Dan Bylsma never seemed to have much confidence in him, but Despres is playing regularly under coach Mike Johnston.

Although his 14 minutes of ice time per game is the lowest average among Penguins defensemen, it’s worth noting that, when Olli Maatta rejoined their lineup Tuesday in Montreal, Robert Bortuzzo, not Despres, was a healthy scratch.

And it wasn’t because Bortuzzo had been playing poorly, or because his physicality and defensive work weren’t appreciated.

Despres didn’t get on the score sheet against the Canadiens, and his offensive totals this season — one goal and four assists in 17 games — are modest, but don’t reflect his potential as a points-producer.

“He’s got a lot of offensive upside,” Scuderi said.

Despres knows that better than almost anyone, but said being sound in his own end is his top priority.

“I definitely have the skills set to put up numbers, but, right now, I’m focusing on playing defensive hockey,” he said. “My goal is not to put up points every game.

“My goal is to shut the other team down and move the puck to the forwards, because we have good forwards. The points will come eventually.”

Scuderi noted that Despres no longer holds onto the puck for an extra second or two, hoping for the chance to make a play that simply isn’t there.

“This year, you can see that he’s getting rid of it,” he said. “If he doesn’t have a play and he can’t come back to his partner, he chips the puck out.
Penguins Notebook: Idled Dupuis might get new role and title

November 21, 2014 12:00 AM
By Jenn Menendez / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Pascal Dupuis sat in the stands to take in the Penguins practice Thursday, one day after revealing he will miss the next six months of hockey because of a blood clot in his lungs.

By next week, he will have a new role, and perhaps, a new title.

Coach Mike Johnston stressed after practice that he wants Dupuis heavily involved with the team while he undergoes treatment. Johnston plans to put together a job description by next week, meet with Dupuis and see how the veteran responds to it.

"As a coaching staff, we want him to be very involved in the team over the next six months," Johnston said. "Certainly, from the perspective of keeping him up to date with what we're doing and how things are going."

Johnston did not elaborate on the possible new role, presumably because he, the coaching staff and front office still are determining what role might be most mutually beneficial.

"Maybe even a possibility of getting him more involved, not as a coach, but still be involved in helping us a team as we move forward through these next few months," Johnston said. "He has some time available, so I think we can use him wisely."

Waiting for their turn

Beau Bennett has moved onto the No. 2 power-play unit where Dupuis often skated. There, Bennett has joined his regular linemates, Brandon Sutter and Steve Downie as well as defensemen Paul Martin and Christian Ehrhoff.

"I think it's kind of a good fit for him," Sutter said. "I know he's a pretty talented kid. He's pretty good with the puck, and it works good that he, I and Downie play together five-on-five and power play. So, it makes it easy."

Bennett, who had a strong game in Montreal earlier this week, is looking forward to his unit's first crack at a power play. He was slated to skate in Dupuis' spot Tuesday, but the unit never got an opportunity.

"We haven't really gotten a shot at it yet. The first game I was on there, we scored in the first 30 seconds. Hopefully, we get a couple of chances this weekend to capitalize," Bennett said.

Period of evaluation

Johnston will continue to evaluate who might be the best fit to replace Dupuis on the top line with Sidney Crosby and Chris Kunitz.

Blake Comeau took Dupuis' spot Tuesday.

"I thought Blake had a good game the other night. He added a physical presence to the line. He can hang onto the puck down low in the offensive zone. Sid and [Kunitz] can get open for him," Johnston said. "But, like [with] any combination, you need a series of games to see how it's going to work. So we'll watch it over a few games and see if we need to tweak that a little bit."

It's like the playoffs

The Penguins will play a true home-and-home series against the New York Islanders tonight at Consol Energy Center and Saturday night at Nassau Coliseum. Johnston said he will use the opportunity to simulate the playoffs.

"In my mind, you treat it like a playoff series," Johnston said. "It gives you a chance during the year to simulate playoff action. You play a game and now you react to how you play and what you need to do the next day."

Johnston said he will use both goaltenders in the series, but did not disclose who would start which game.
November 21, 2014 12:00 AM
By Shelly Anderson / Post-Gazette Sports Writer

BOSTON — By scoreboard standards, finding the winner’s in last night’s season opener between the Penguins and the Boston Bruins was easy. On the home side, a four was lighter; on the visitor’s side, a three was showing.

The Bruins, who twice trailed by two goals, capped their comeback when Ray Bourque sent a 40-foot slap shot past goalie Denis Herron at 14:28 of the third period. The goal was assisted by Rick Middleton and Dave Silk. Bourque took Silk’s pass from the left boards just as he sped across the blue line in the middle of the ice. He then uncorked his blistering shot that flew by Herron’s left pad.

But all was not as dark for the Penguins as it would appear. There were some winners — namely center Mario Lemieux. It didn’t take long at all — one second shy of three minutes, to be exact — for him to make his presence felt in the National Hockey League. He scored the first shot of his professional hockey career.

“It took a lot of pressure away from me,” said Lemieux, the first player chosen in the amateur draft. “Now that’s it, it’s over, and I’ll be more relaxed on the ice.”

After the game, the Penguins announced they had acquired defenseman Randy Hillier from the Bruins for a fourth-round draft choice in 1985. Hillier, 24, was Boston’s fourth pick in the 1980 entry draft. He had three goals, all scored last season, and 30 assists in his 21/2 years with Boston. He will be with the Penguins for their next game tomorrow night in Montreal.

“I’m very, very happy,” said Hillier, who wasn’t one of the Bruins’ 20 uniformed players last night. “I was impressed [with the Pens]. They’ve improved a lot over the year. Speaking as a Bruin, we really thought they’d improved a lot. I think they’re going up. It looks like they’re going up and I’m happy to be a part of it.”

Lemieux set out quickly to begin quieting his doubters. No one had to hold his hand, and certainly no one held him back as he poked the puck away from Bourque, an All-Star defenseman, at the blue line, drew goalie Pete Peeters out of the net by faking a forehand shot, then shifted the puck onto his backhand and slid it into the open side of the net.

Lemieux, who had 133 goals and 149 assists in junior hockey last season, picked up his second NHL point on an assist in the second period. Warren Young took the pass at 16:49 and scored his second goal of the game to put the Penguins up by two, 3-1. Right winger Rick Kehoe also had an assist on the play.

Earlier, at 13:53 of the first period, Young had put the Penguins ahead, 2-0, when he scored on assists from center Ron Flockhart and right winger Wayne Babych, a newcomer who came from the St. Louis Blues in Tuesday’s waiveer draft and met the Penguins in Boston.

The shots on goal were even at 12 after the first period, but Boston overwhelmed the Penguins in the second period, getting off 14 shots to the Penguins’ five. The Bruins scored their first goal at 8:35 of the period as center Tom Fergus made good on assists from right winger Nevin Markwart. The Bruins pulled within one, 3-2, when center Ken Linseman scored on a power play at 18:56. Left winger Terry O’Reilly and Bourque got the assists.

Boston returned for the third period untamed. Mike O’Connell scored just 38 seconds into the period on a power play to tie the game, 3-3. Right wing Rick Middleton and left wing Dave Silk assisted.

Meanwhile, the Penguins offense continue to struggle in the final period, failing to get a shot on goal the first nine minutes and 44 seconds. For the game, Boston had 36 shots on goal, the Penguins 27.

“We played very well in the first period,” Lemieux said. “But in the second and third … we didn’t work as hard as the first period. I don’t know why, but we’ll just have to make an adjustment.”
Sharks fall to Panthers 3-2 in shootout

By Ross McKeon Updated 11:50 pm, Thursday, November 20, 2014

The Sharks managed a point by scoring a late goal in regulation but fell victim to the Panthers in a shootout, 3-2, Thursday night.

Logan Couture was the only San Jose shooter to solve Florida goalie Roberto Luongo in the shootout. Luongo denied Joe Pavelski and watched as Brent Burns rang a drive off the post. Nick Bjugstad scored the deciding goal, beating Antti Niemi in the third round.

"Obviously it didn’t look too good with 30 seconds left so we’ll take the point," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said. "We would have preferred two, tried to find a way to get that in the shootout, but couldn’t get it."

The road-weary Sharks were appearing at home for a league-low sixth time and have now dropped four of six at SAP Center. A crowd of 17,331 attended, marking the second non-sellout early on.

Florida outshot San Jose 3-2 during a scoreless overtime when the Sharks had to kill 1:49 of a Panthers power play that carried over from the third period.

"The penalty kill did a tremendous job," McLellan said. "I wasn’t overly pleased with the penalties we took — holding in the offensive zone, stick in the neutral zone, a tripping penalty we probably didn’t need to take."

Patrick Marleau tied the game with 33.1 seconds left in regulation. With Niemi pulled for an extra attacker, Marleau’s one-time snap shot off a pass from Joe Thornton beat Luongo.

The Panthers’ goalie had denied Marleau just minutes earlier on a penalty shot attempt awarded after Florida defenseman Brian Campbell thwarted a breakaway with a slash from behind.

But it was another night in which the San Jose offense disappeared. It managed only two shots in the third period. And the Sharks have now scored only nine goals in their last six games.

"We have the ability to create a lot of offense, and tonight we didn’t," winger Tommy Wingels said.

"I think we had our chances again," Marleau added. "We have to find a way to get them in the back of the net."

The Sharks held a 2-1 lead through 40 minutes on the strength of a pair of goals by Bjugstad.

With the scored tied 1-1, Bjugstad stepped into a slap shot from the top of the left circle to enable the Panthers to convert 1:27 into their second power play of the game late in the middle period.

Bjugstad’s sixth goal in seven games, after going without one for the season’s first 10 contests, whistled by Burns’ failed attempt to block the shot before beating Niemi at 15:56.

The Sharks had tied the game earlier in the period as Couture converted on San Jose’s first power play of the game. Luongo made two right pad saves on San Jose left winger Pavelski, but Couture tapped in the loose puck in the crease at 6:19.

It took Florida only one shot and 24 seconds to break on top. Bjugstad had a free stick, with San Jose defenseman Justin Braun nearby, to direct his first of the night past Niemi, a shot that changed directions from the right faceoff circle.

"We get scored on on the first shot of the game coming home from that long road trip, and we could have responded differently," McLellan said. "At least we responded positively."

Briefly: Marleau appeared in his 400th consecutive game. ... Right wing Adam Burish, left wing John Scott and defenseman Matt Irwin were healthy scratches.

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Rewind: Sharks know there's work to be done

Kevin Kurz
November 20, 2014, 11:30 pm

SAN JOSE – The Sharks seem well aware that their current homestand and next few weeks are crucial, after they've played so-so hockey over the first quarter of the regular season.

That didn't generate a win on Thursday night against Florida, as the Panthers left the Bay Area with a 3-2 shootout victory.

Opening a stretch of six in a row at SAP Center on Thursday night, the Sharks showed some slight signs of improvement from a few of their poor road efforts in the last week, but it wasn't enough to earn the victory.

“The point is great but we're not happy with where our game is at and that's probably the biggest thing we'll take from tonight,” Tommy Wingels said. “We're a better team than we showed. Guys, including myself, can bring a lot more, and need to bring a lot more if we're going to have success.”

The Panthers took a 1-0 lead on the first shot of the game just 24 seconds into the first period, but encouragingly the Sharks didn't cower, and eventually tied the score on the power play in the second period. After 40 minutes, San Jose had 25 shots to just 15 by Florida, but trailed 2-1 after Nick Bjugstad blasted one in on a man advantage at 17:23 of the middle frame.

In the third, the offensive push from San Jose wasn't there until Antti Niemi was pulled for an extra attacker, allowing Patrick Marleau's goal to force overtime and earn the Sharks a point in the standings.

San Jose had just three shots on goal in the final frame, despite trailing 2-1 for most of it. It didn't help that the Sharks had to kill off a pair of minor penalties before Marleau squeezed a shot inside the far post at 19:26.

"We get scored on in the first 30 seconds on the first shot coming home from that road trip, we could have responded differently. At least we responded positively," Todd McLellan said. "I thought we found our game after that. We're pretty good through about 36 minutes, and then they scored (Bjugstad's second goal) and I thought after that, well into the third period, we were kind of on our heels. Maybe the fear of losing crept in a little bit. Got desperate at the end, and scored."

Marleau's marker was officially his first even strength goal since Oct. 18 and just his second in the last 17 games. Logan Couture, who entered with just one assist in his last six games, tied the game in the second period with a power play goal.

McLellan switched up his top two lines before the game, putting Marleau on the Joe Thornton-Tomas Hertl line, and Couture between Joe Pavelski and Matt Nieto.

How did that go?

"We got goals from Cooch and Patty, which was something we desperately needed," said the coach.

"I thought when you look at Patty's game, he was much more aggressive tonight than he has been with his speed. He drew a penalty shot. Had some chances. Was physically involved. Those are positive signs. Cooch looked more like Cooch should, with some of the shooting attempts that he normally gets. From that perspective it was positive, but we still can polish things up."

Couture wasn't nearly as enthused.

"We didn't score even strength, so there ya go," he said of the switch, factoring in that Marleau's goal came during a six-on-five situation due to the empty net.

"We've got to find a way to score even strength. It's been too few and far between for most of the season. We've got to figure that out."
SAN JOSE – Make it three of the Eastern Conference’s lowliest teams that have swept the season series from the San Jose Sharks.

On Thursday at SAP Center, the Sharks fell 3-2 in a shootout to a Florida Panthers club that entered the night in seventh place in the Atlantic Division, ahead of only the atrocious Sabres, who skated past the Sharks for the second time this season on Tuesday night in Buffalo.

The Columbus Blue Jackets, who occupy the Metropolitan Division basement, also swept the Sharks in a two-game season series.

Patrick Marleau helped the Sharks earn at least one point in the standings, tying the game late with goalie Antti Niemi pulled for an extra attacker. After failing to convert on a penalty shot earlier in the final frame, and with his club not generating much of anything in the offensive zone, Marleau snuck a shot inside the far post at 19:26, set up by Joe Thornton.

The Sharks successfully killed off a Marc-Edouard Vlasic high-sticking penalty late in regulation that carried over into overtime, but Nick Bjugstad’s wrist shot in the shootout gave Florida the win.

The Sharks played just their sixth home game, falling to 2-3-1 at SAP Center. They are 10-9-3 overall, and have lost five of their last seven.

Bjugstad led the Florida offense with two goals, while Jonathan Huberdeau added two assists and drew two penalties in regulation.

The Panthers have won seven of their last eight against the Sharks, including four in a row in San Jose. They beat the Sharks on Nov. 11, 4-1 in Florida.

San Jose registered just three third period shots, with one of them was Marleau’s penalty shot with less than seven minutes to go in regulation.

Florida led 1-0 after one before the teams traded power play goals in the second period.

First, San Jose tied the score on Logan Couture’s first goal in eight games. Joe Pavelski hammered away at a centering pass from Marleau, and Couture charged in to poke in the rebound at 6:19.

The Sharks seemed to gain some energy following the goal, but couldn’t find a way to take the lead. Instead, a Tommy Wingels holding the stick minor resulted in Florida regaining a 2-1 advantage.

Bjugstad was given time to wind up from the top of the circle, and blasted a slap shot cleanly past Antti Niemi at 17:23. Brent Burns was closest to the play, unable to pressure Bjugstad or get in front of the puck.

Bjugstad also scored Florida’s first goal just 23 seconds into the game, tipping a Dmitry Kulikov point shot through Niemi before the home fans had a chance to get dry from the downpour outside.

For the first time this season, Marleau and Thornton skated together on a line, with Tomas Hertl as the right wing. Couture centered Pavelski and Matt Nieto.

On defense, Burns was paired with Scott Hannan rather than Mirco Mueller, who was with Jason Demers.

The Sharks gave up just one first period goal through their first 12 games. Since then, they’ve allowed 11 in their last 10 games.

For the second time this season, the game was not announced as a sellout.

The Sharks had sold out 205 straight regular season and playoff games before Oct. 25 vs. Buffalo.

Special teams

The Sharks were 1-for-3 on the power play, while Florida was 1-for-5.

San Jose had been just 1-for-13 with a man advantage over its previous five games.
SAN JOSE – It’s finally over.

The Sharks’ stretch of 16 of their first 21 games on the road – the most road-heavy schedule in NHL history to start a season – is now a thing of the past, as San Jose will enjoy 11 of its next 13 games and 21 of the following 30 at SAP Center.

They are just 2-3-0 on home ice this season, but haven’t played more than two straight games here between some lengthy trips. Last season, the Sharks owned the best home record in the Western Conference, going 29-7-5.

“Collectively, this is an important chunk of games for us,” Todd McLellan said. “This is a really important time for our team, and we have to elevate our play. It has to be better than what it’s been to this point in the season. We get an opportunity to do it here at home.”

The Sharks’ play so far this season has been decidedly inconsistent, as they sit just 21st overall in the NHL with a .524 points percentage. They enter Thursday’s matchup with Florida with regulation losses in four of their last six games, including a 4-1 defeat to the Panthers in Florida on Nov. 11.

“The only game on the seven-game trip that they played well from start to finish was a 2-1 win over Tampa Bay on Nov. 13, and they’re coming off of a 4-1 loss to Buffalo – easily the worst team in the NHL this season – on Tuesday.

“A lot of road trips early in the season. It’s tough to do all those time zones, and all that travel, but it’s not an excuse,” Jason Demers said. “I think we had a lot of games that we didn’t play the way we should have, but that’s how it goes and that’s what happens. It’s a nice homestand, so we have to get all the points we can right now.”

The biggest question may be, are the Sharks’ issues the result of a lack of practice time, or are they not hungry enough?

McLellan weighed in.

“Any athlete that doesn’t get that opportunity to go out and work on his game and polish it up eventually is going to get a little bit rusty.

“That being said, practices don’t often improve the passion level or the compete level. That you bring on a nightly basis. If your skill set is starting to dwindle or of we’re in the wrong spots and not being able to do some of the things we want to do as a team, that’s practice. The commitment to your game and the drive and the passion, that’s an every day thing. You should be able to do that year-round without any practice time.”

A fair evaluation of the team is perhaps still elusive after so many frequent flier miles and so few practices. The next several weeks should provide more definitive answers.

Demers said: “I think the guys in here are refreshed to be home. We’ve got to take advantage of these home games and start piling on the wins.”

SAN JOSE – There are a number of Sharks players currently riding the Struggle Bus, but two of the more notable names are forwards Patrick Marleau and Logan Couture.

Marleau has zero even-strength goals in his last 16 games (and just one on the power play), while Couture registered just one power play assist over the final six games of the team’s just-completed road trip.

For the first time this season, the two will start the game on different lines against Florida on Thursday at SAP Center. Marleau will be with Joe Thornton and Tomas Hertl, while Couture will center Joe Pavelski and Matt Nieto.

“We’re going to split them up and give them some different linemates,” Todd McLellan said. “For both of them, they are extremely talented players. They are playing with a high level of frustration right now in their game.

“They, and we, have to ask them why. … Can they be cleaner and more involved around the net a little bit more and coming through the neutral zone with the puck? Yeah, they certainly can. Hopefully shuffling the lines and [playing] here at home will make them more productive players.”

Marleau, who has five goals and 11 assists in 21 games, was asked what has to happen to get some of the team’s top scorers going again.

“Puck has to go in the net. Basically, the chances are there and we just have to find a way to get it across the line,” he said. “When they usually go in, they start going in in buckets. We’ve just got to make sure we don’t get frustrated and down ourselves, and keep working for those opportunities.”

The Sharks bottom two lines look to be James Sheppard skating between Tommy Wingels and Barclay Goodrow, while Andrew Desjardins, Tye McGinn and Tyler Kennedy will start as a fourth line. Scott Hannan will draw back in on defense, paired with Jason Demers.

Antti Niemi will play for the first time since Nov. 15 in Columbus, after rookie Troy Grosenick made the first two starts of his NHL career in the last two games.

In his last two appearances, Niemi has stopped 58 of 61 shots for a .951 save percentage and 1.52 goals-against average. He’s 1-3-0 in his career against the Panthers, with the lone win coming while he was still with Chicago.
Tye McGinn  Barclay Goodrow  Matt Nieto  Tomas Hertl  Sharks  
Probable lines  
Penalty kill: 76.9 percent (24th)  
Power play: 16.4 percent (21st)  
Goals

Panthers  
Penalty kill: 83.9 percent (9th)  
Power play: 22.7 percent (7th)  
Goals per game: 2.62 (16th)  

Vitals

the offseason. (2g, 10a). Jokinen signed as an unrestricted free agent with the five assists over that span, and is Florida's leading scorer with 12 points four games with a goal in Los Angeles on Thursday. He has one goal and Panthers: Jussi Jokinen. The Pa

Marleau began the season with four goals in his first five games, but has a power play goal called out by Todd McLellan after Sunday’s loss for producing just one time leading scorer was seemingly called out by Todd McLellan after Sunday’s loss for producing just one power play goal – and zero at even strength – over his last 16 games. Marleau began the season with four goals in his first five games, but has just one assist and a -4 rating over his last six.

Panthers: Jussi Jokinen. The Panthers’ forward extended his point streak to four games with a goal in Los Angeles on Thursday. He has one goal and five assists over that span, and is Florida’s leading scorer with 12 points (2g, 10a). Jokinen signed as an unrestricted free agent with the Panthers in the offseason.

Vitals  

Sharks  
Goals per game: 2.62 (16th)  
Goals-against per game: 2.62 (16th)  
Power play: 22.7 percent (7th)  
Penalty kill: 83.9 percent (9th)  

Panthers  
Goals per game: 2.19 (28th)  
Goals-against per game: 2.50 (11th)  
Power play: 16.4 percent (21st)  
Penalty kill: 76.9 percent (24th)  

Probable lines  
Sharks  
Tomas Hertl – Joe Thornton – Patrick Marleau  
Matt Nieto – Logan Couture – Joe Pavelski  
Barclay Goodrow – James Sheppard – Tommy Wingels  
Tye McGinn – Andrew Desjardins – Tyler Kennedy  

Marc-Edouard Vlasic – Justin Braun  
Mirco Mueller – Brent Burns  
Scott Hannan – Jason Demers  
Antti Niemi (confirmed starter)  
Troy Grosenick  
Panthers  
Jonathan Huberdeau – Nick Bjugstad – Brad Boyes  
Jussi Jokinen – Vincent Trocheck – Jimmy Hayes  
Tomas Kopecky – Rocco Grimaldi – Scottie Upshall  
Tomas Fleischmann – Derek MacKenzie – Shawn Thornton  
Willie Mitchell – Aaron Ekblad  
Brian Campbell – Colby Robak  
Dylan Olsen – Erik Gudbranson  
Roberto Luongo  
Al Montoya  

Injuries/Scratches  
Sharks: Raffi Torres (right knee), Mike Brown (left hand) and Alex Stalock (lower body) are out.  
Panthers: Dave Bolland (lower body) and Brandon Pirri (concussion) are on injured reserve. Sean Bergenheim (lower body), Dmitry Kulikov (knee) and Aleksander Barkov (illness) are day-to-day.  

Season/All-Time series  
The Panthers skated to a 4-1 win over San Jose a little more than a week ago on Nov. 11 in Florida. Four different Panthers scored goals, while 2014 number one overall draft pick Aaron Ekblad notched a pair of assists. Roberto Luongo beat Antti Niemi in goal, with the latter allowing four goals on 30 shots.  
The Sharks are 10-9-8 all-time against the Panthers, while Florida is 6-1-0 in the last seven head-to-head matchups.  

Odds and ends  
*Rookie Troy Grosenick started the last two games for San Jose in goal (1-1-0), his first two NHL starts.  
*Florida has recorded three straight wins at SAP Center.  
*The Sharks recorded a franchise-record 29 shots on Roberto Luongo in the third period of a Sharks-Panthers game on March 18, 2014, but lost 3-2.  
*Luongo is currently tied with Roy Worters (1925-37) for 13th among all-time NHL goaltenders with 67 shutouts.  
*San Jose has already played 39 percent of its road games.  
*Tommy Wingels is fifth in the NHL in hits with 73.  
*Panthers defenseman Brian Campbell played 20 games for the Sharks in 2007-08, recording 19 points (3-16-19).  
*Campbell has played 239 consecutive games dating back to Mar. 23, 2011.  
*The Panthers have recorded 19 goals in their last five contests, including a season-high six on Sunday in Anaheim.  
*Aaron Ekblad ranks first in scoring among rookie defensemen and third in ice time (21:46 per game).  

Quoteable  
“Just dumb hockey. You don’t win at any level playing like that and you don’t beat any type of team playing like that.” – Todd McLellan, after Tuesday’s loss in Buffalo  
MONTREAL • The right wing spot on the Blues’ line centered by Paul Stastny was labeled a “platoon” position before Thursday’s game in Montreal.

Magnus Paajarvi was in the lineup against the Canadiens, taking the place of Joakim Lindstrom, who was a healthy scratch for the first time since joining the Blues this season.

Paajarvi suited up for the seventh time this year and just the second time in the Blues’ last eight games. He has only one point, an assist, but head coach Ken Hitchcock said that he was deserving of the opportunity.

“He’s got a tremendous attitude here in the last three or four weeks in getting better in his game,” Hitchcock said. “He’s an interesting guy. He put in all this work in the summer to really develop and become strong. He just went right off the charts on the fitness test, but he hasn’t been able to move that into his play.

“But in the last two or three weeks, he’s really showed a high level of determination at practice, a high level of playing through people offensively and defensively, and he’s earned the right to start playing again. Until somebody really grabs that spot, we’re going to continue to platoon people.

“(Chris) Porter is going to get an opportunity here on the weekend to see what he can do. We’re not really settled in some of those guys because nobody’s really grabbed certain spots. We’re looking for somebody to grab it and Magnus has really put the effort to move up to the next level, so we’re excited to take a look at him.”

Paajarvi, 23, is in his second year with the Blues after arriving from Edmonton in the trade for David Perron. He agreed with Hitchcock that his play has improved lately.

“It’s been working,” Paajarvi said. “It’s hard to go in and out of the lineup, but I’m trying to focus on what I can do, and what they tell me to do and bring it together. I’m heavy on the puck, and I want the puck, I kind of feel like I want to do the stuff that I’m good at. Hopefully I can keep it going, take more responsibility and grab this thing.”

Through 17 games, Lindstrom has three goals and no assists while averaging 11 minutes, 51 seconds of ice time per game.

“He’s in a productive role and we want to see a little bit more production,” Hitchcock said. “He’s played OK, and he’s done a really good job on the power play. But at the end of the day, when you’re in that position, we just need some more production ... and we’ll look for people who can get it done.

“He’s going to get another opportunity to play right away. It’s not that we’re unhappy with it. But when you’re in that position, you get a chance to play in all the power plays, you get to play in a top-six or top-nine role ... you’re looking for a little bit of production.”

**BLUENOTES**

• Hitchcock will be away from the Blues today as he travels to Drayton Valley, Alberta, for the funeral services of his mother-in-law, Maryanne Kelepouri, who passed away unexpectedly last week. He will return to the team for Saturday’s game in Ottawa.

• Healthy scratches Thursday were Lindstrom, Porter and defenseman Chris Butler.
The three-goal difference was the Blues' largest margin of defeat since Oct. 23, and following a 2-0 loss to Boston Tuesday, one kept the team winless in the first two games of its four-game road trip.

"Really from the red line back, I think the first two games of this road trip we haven't been near as good as we have all year, and that's really hurt us," Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said. "I think that's the big thing. We've made some casual puck plays and they've ended up in the back of our net and I think that's kind of the wake-up call we've gotten in these last two games."

The Blues will be off today before playing back-to-back afternoon games Saturday in Ottawa and Sunday in Winnipeg.

The club perhaps welcomed a trip Thursday to Montreal's Bell Centre, where it had won in its last four trips. But that was the case on Tuesday, too, when the team visited Boston with a streak of six consecutive wins. In the end, the games in Montreal and Boston proved to be similar.

The Blues continue to get no offense — especially on the road — as the last three road games this season the Blues have 15 goals, and after Thursday's goal by Tarasenko that line now has 11 of them.

"To me, unless we clean up our own end, it doesn't matter how many goals we score," Hitchcock said. "We've got to clean up our own end."

The new issue that has cropped up on this road trip is the Blues' defensive coverage problems. The Canadiens were free and clear in the offensive zone Thursday, capitalizing on 11 giveaways.

There was a mess on every aisle, but the turnover that will get the most attention was the one by Kevin Shattenkirk in the second period, tying the game 1-1.

The game had started smoothly for the Blues.

They jumped out to a 1-0 lead on Tarasenko's 11th goal of the season, set up by Lehtera and Schwartz. Lehtera sent a pass in front of the net to Tarasenko, whose initial shot was rejected by Montreal goalie Carey Price. The rebound popped up and Tarasenko whacked it in out of mid-air 7:45 into the first period.

The goal continued what has been an incredible yet nauseating storyline for the club, as it marked another trio of points for the STL Line. That ran their streak to 36 points in their last 10 games together, accounting for 11 of the team's 15 goals on the road this season.

Blues goalie Jake Allen, playing in front of family and friends Thursday, kept it a 1-0 lead at the intermission, stopping Montreal's eight shots. In seven starts this season, he has allowed just two goals on 64 shots (.969 save percentage).

But as the Blues' defenseman did, he appeared to clip Allen, who fell awkwardly and left the net open as a result.

"It was a play that I've probably made 100 times," Shattenkirk said. "He just gets a stick in the right spot. I think even still at that point, I come out to stop the shot and get in the way and I clip Jake. So, really just feel bad for Jake for taking him out of the play. It's a tough one."

As a result, Weise had his fourth goal of the season and the Blues had themselves a tied game at 1-1.

But that didn't last long, as less than three minutes later the defense broke down again. Barret Jackman pinched on a play, leaving Jay Bouwmeester alone in the defensive zone.

Montreal's P.A. Parenteau sent a stretch pass through Bouwmeester, whose attempt to knock it down failed, and onto the stick of Pacioretty. He beat Allen through the legs for the first of his two goals and a 2-1 lead with 12:12 minutes left in the second period.

The Blues were clearly rattled after the give-me goal by Weise and the quick strike by Pacioretty. They had nine giveaways through two periods and deservedly trailed 2-1.

"We gave them some opportunities that we shouldn't have and they capitalized," Allen said. "They have quick defensive team, so we definitely have to learn from it."

The Blues made a push in the third period, but Price, who finished with 31 saves, made two early ones on Lehtera and Schwartz.

Then, six minutes into the frame, Pacioretty took a pass from David Desharnais and beat his defender, T.J. Oshie, back in the zone before slipping his second of the game past Allen. Later, former Blue L.A. Eiler added the Canadiens' fourth goal of the game, registering his sixth of the season from the high slot.

"There's going to be mistakes," Blues defenseman Alex Pietrangelo said. "We're more worried about the coverage in our end and finding ways to get the puck into the (offensive) zone and playing in the o-zone. When we're spending less time in our d-zone, that's when we're creating the most offense. We've got to find ways to get out of coverage quicker and certainly that's going to help us."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.21.2014
The Blues had one goal on just six shots after the first period, but they led 2-1 through 7:45 into the first period. The rebound popped up and Tarasenko whipped it in out of mid-air 7:45 into the first period.

The goal continued what has been an incredible yet nauseating storyline for the club, as it marked another trio of points for the STL Line. That ran their streak to 36 points in their last 10 games toget

The two games actually proved to be similar. The Blues continue to get no offense — especially on the road — from any other line than the STL line of Tarasenko, Jaden Schwartz and Jori Lehtera. In eight games away from Scottrade Center this season, the Blues have 15 goals and after Thursday’s goal by Tarasenko, that line now has 11 of them.

That was the old news.

Another issue that has cropped up on this road trip is the mental breakdowns by the defense. On Tuesday, it was Ian Cole, who fed a puck to Boston’s Patrice Bergeron for a 1-0 lead. On Thursday, it was Kevin Shattenkirk, and he wasn’t alone.

But first, the game started smoothly for the Blues. They jumped out to a 1-0 lead on Tarasenko’s 11th goal of the season, set up by Lehtera and Schwartz. Lehtera sent a pass in front of the net to Tarasenko, whose initial shot was rejected by Montreal goalie Carey Price. The rebound popped up and Tarasenko whacked it in out of mid-air 7:45 into the first period.

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Price, who finished with 31 saves, made two early in the third period on Lehtera and Schwartz, to preserve the one-goal lead.

Then, six minutes into the frame, Pacioretty took a pass from David Desharnais and beat his defender, Oshie, back in the zone before beating Allen for the second of his two goals.

Later, former Blue Lars Eller added the Canadiens’ fourth goal of the game, registering his sixth of the season from the high slot.

Stastny’s line, including Oshie and Steen, were on the ice for three of the four goals against.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.21.2014

But as the Blues’ defenseman did, he appeared to clip Allen, who fell awkwardly and left the net open as a result.

As a result, Weise had his fourth goal of the season and the Blues had themselves a tie game at 1-1.

But that didn’t last long, as less than three minutes later, the defense broke down again. Barret Jackman pinched on a play, leaving Jay Bouwmeester back alone. Montreal’s PA Parenteau sent a stretch pass through Bouwmeester, whose attempt to knocked it down failed, and onto the stick of Pacioretty. He beat Allen through the legs for the first of his two goals and a 2-1 lead with 12 1/2 minutes left in the second period.

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St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.21.2014
MONTREAL • After being selected by the Blues in the second round of the 2008 NHL draft, goaltender Jake Allen spent the next two seasons of his career with the Montreal Juniors of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

The club played at the Verdun Auditorium — less than five miles from where Allen will get the start for the Blues tonight against the Canadiens at the Bell Centre. Not only did Allen play nearby, he's from Fredericton, New Brunswick, which is about 500 miles away.

"It's sort of something I've been dreaming of," Allen said. "Montreal was the closest team to me growing up and you always saw them on TV, and fortunately for me, I got to play junior hockey here and see a lot of Canadiens' games. So to actually set foot in this barn and taken on the Canadiens, it's going to be something special."

Blues coach Ken Hitchcock acknowledged earlier in the week that when the club mapped out the goalie assignments, it was with Allen's ties to Montreal in mind.

"He's earned the right to play here," Hitchcock said. "He's more than earned it with the games and the starts he's given us. He's given us quality performances every night.

"If he continues to progress and play, he's going to be a really good goalie in this league. I think he's like rest of us, we're really looking forward to having him play (Thursday)."

Allen will have a large contingent of close ones in the crowd at the Bell Centre tonight, including his grandmother, Judy Banks; his parents, Kurt and Susie Allen; and his brother and sister, Jordan and Taylor Allen.

"My grandmother is coming for her first game, her NHL game ever, so that's good," Allen said. "This is the first time my parents have ever seen me start a game. They've been to a couple of games where I backed up, but never actually been to a game where I've started. They'll all be here — it's going to be pretty exciting for them."

Allen admitted that he'll have a few butterflies.

"I'm sure after warm-ups, I'll get a couple, but that's normal," he said. "I'm just excited to get another start in. But to have it at the Bell Centre is a little more special."

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TONIGHT'S PROJECTED LINEUP

Forwards
Patrik Berglund-David Desharnais-PA Parenteau
Alex Galchenyuk-Tom Plekanec-Brendan Gallagher
Brandon Prust-Lars Eller-Jiri Sekac
Drayson Bowman-Manny Malhotra-Dale Weise

Defense
Andrei Markov-PK Subban
Alexei Emelin-Sergei Gonchar
Nathan Beaulieu-Tom Gilbert
Goalie
Carey Price

***

PAAJARVI PROMOTED

Blues winger Magnus Paajarvi will be in the lineup tonight, replacing Joakim Lindstrom. Paajarvi will step right into Lindstrom's spot on the right side of center Paul Stastny and Alexander Steen.

Paajarvi will be playing his seventh game of the season. He has one assist.

"He's got great speed, he's got a tremendous attitude here in the last three or four weeks in getting better in his game," Hitchcock said. "He's an interesting guy. He put in all this work in the summer to really develop and become strong. He just went right off the charts on the fitness test, but he hasn't been able to move that into his play.

"But in the last two or three weeks, he's really showed a high level of determination at practice, a high level of playing through people offensively and defensively, and he's earned the right to start playing again. Until somebody really grabs that spot, we're going to continue to platoon people."

Lindstrom will be a healthy scratch for the first time since joining the Blues this season. Through 17 games, he has three goals and no assists in 11.51 of ice time per game.

"He's in a productive role and we want to see a little bit more production," Hitchcock said. "He's played OK, and he's done a really good job on the power play. But at the end of the day, when you're in that position, we just need some more production ... and we'll look for people who can get it done.

"He's going to get another opportunity to play right away. It's not that we're unhappy with it. But when you're in that position, you get a chance to play in all the power plays, you get to play in a top-six or top-nine role ... you're looking for a little bit of production."

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MULLER IN MONTREAL

First-year Blues assistant coach Kirk Muller has been a popular person at the Bell Centre the past two days, exchanging pleasantries with building personnel and plenty of others.

Muller played four seasons in Montreal (1991-95) and scored the game-winning goal in the 1993 Stanley Cup-clinching game, the last of the Canadiens' 24 championships. He returned for five seasons as an assistant coach (2006-11).

"It's a special building," Muller said. "Just the city, the enthusiasm of what it means to the whole province, the passion for hockey. They love the opponents as well, believe it or not. They just enjoy the game. I had some great wonderful memories here and it's just a great atmosphere to be a part of.

"There are a few employees that have been around since the days of the old Montreal Forum. Whether it's the Zamboni driver or the guys that work in the stands, there's a real pridefulness of it all. You get to know them on first-name basis, so a lot of familiar faces. I think if you win a Cup somewhere, you always have that cherishable memories in the back of your mind that everyone seems to not let go."

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ODDS & ENDS
• The family matter that led Hitchcock to be away from the Blues recently was the unexpected passing of his mother-in-law, Maryanne Kelepouris. After tonight's game, Hitchcock will fly to Edmonton and drive to Drayton Valley, Alberta, for services. He will return to the Blues in time for Saturday's game against Edmonton.

• Both the Blues and Montreal are coming into tonight's game off shutout losses. The Blues fell 2-0 to Boston, while Montreal was blanked 4-0 by Pittsburgh, snapping the Canadiens' six-game winning streak.

• Former Blues' first-round draft pick Lars Eller, traded to Montreal in the Jaroslav Halak deal, has scored five goals this season. Four of them have been game-winners.
Pacioretty's 2 goals lift Canadiens over Blues 4-1

The Associated PressNovember 20, 2014 Updated 5 hours ago

MONTREAL — Max Pacioretty believes the Montreal Canadiens made a big statement by beating a Western Conference powerhouse.

Pacioretty scored twice, and Carey Price made 31 saves to lead the first-place Canadiens to a 4-1 victory over the St. Louis Blues on Thursday night.

“We had stretches where we’ve struggled to score goals, and we came in and scored four against a team that doesn’t give up many,” Pacioretty said. “That really helps the confidence.”

The Blues had won 10 of 12 games. St. Louis, second in the Central Division and two points from the Western Conference lead, is a stingy club that came in with an NHL-low 1.89 goals-against-average.

“It shows that we can play with the big boys in the West,” Pacioretty said. “They’re a great team over there, and hopefully we opened a few eyes.”

Dale Weise and Lars Eller also scored for Montreal.

Vladimir Tarasenko was the lone scorer for St. Louis. Jake Allen stopped 26 shots in defeat.

Pacioretty netted the winner at 7:32 of the second — his team-leading ninth goal. He got the better of Allen on a breakaway after taking a stretch pass from linemate Pierre-Alexandre Parenteau from his own zone.

“That was an amazing pass,” said Pacioretty, who added his second of the game in the third period. “I just had a feeling that it was going to land right over. Passes don’t get much softer and nicer than that. I credit my first goal to (Parenteau) completely.”

The Canadiens (15-5-1) stretched their lead atop the Eastern Conference to three points. The Blues have lost consecutive games after winning 10 of 11.

Montreal coach Michel Therrien was reluctant to give too much importance to the victory.

“It was a great challenge,” he said. “This is one of the elite teams in the NHL — really well balanced, and they play really well defensively. It’s the kind of game that can give you a lot of confidence.

“But it’s a little early to make statements.”

Tarasenko scored at 7:45 of the first period, batting the puck out of the air. The goal came on the Blues’ third shot.

The period was played largely in the neutral zone and along the boards, and the Canadiens failed to score a goal in the first period for the 16th time this season.

After going 96 minutes, 9 seconds without scoring a goal — dating to the third period against Detroit on Sunday — the Canadiens scored twice in quick succession against the Blues.

Weise jumped on a defensive blunder by Kevin Shattenkirk to tie it 1-1 at 4:50 of the second. Shattenkirk made an ill-advised pass out from behind his net that was intercepted by Weise, who waited for Allen to go down before beating him high for his fourth goal.

“It’s a nice bounce for me,” Weise said. “Just standing there, throw your stick out front and it hits you. I made a little pump fake, and then saw he took his goalie out. I tried to get in there as quick as I could.”

Weise scored only three times in 17 games last season.

Pacioretty scored less than three minutes later.

In the third, after Price made back-to-back sensational saves on two odd-man rushes 20 seconds apart, first on Jori Lehtera and then on Jaden Schwartz, Pacioretty added his second of the game off a pass by David Desharnais.

The Canadiens were well disciplined for the second straight game, taking no penalties against St. Louis’ NHL-best road power-play unit (30.4 percent).

“We made some puck errors that ended up in our net,” Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said. “We made a big push when it was 2-1 — we got all the scoring chances. Their third one really took the wind out of our sails. We made some casuals plays, and they ended up at the back of our net.

“Montreal has speed, and they really took advantage of our mistakes. They scored on their opportunities, and we missed on ours.”

Earlier Thursday, Montreal acquired veteran defenseman Bryan Allen from Anaheim for Rene Bourque.

NOTES: Earlier Thursday, Montreal acquired veteran defenseman Bryan Allen from Anaheim for Rene Bourque. ... Canadiens D Mike Weaver was back in the lineup. ... The Blues came in with a league-low 1.89 goals-against-average. ... St. Louis hadn’t lost a game in Montreal since 2004. ... The Canadiens are 12-0 when tied or leading after two periods.

Spark missing, Bolts let Leafs off hook

By Erik Erlendsson | Tribune Staff Erik Erlendsson on Google+
Published: November 20, 2014  |  Updated: November 20, 2014 at 11:52 PM

TORONTO — The Lightning like to play with speed and execution. They did neither on Thursday.

Stuck in neutral for most of the game, Tampa Bay paid for it in a 5-2 loss to a struggling Toronto team in front of an announced crowd of 19,089 at Air Canada Centre.

“We executed like it was the first day of training camp and it clearly showed,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. “We couldn’t make a 10-foot pass, we couldn’t break out. We play a speed game, that’s what puts teams on their heels and we were in quicksand all night. When you are playing slow and not executing, you are in trouble and that’s what happened tonight. We laid an egg.”

Tampa Bay has lost consecutive games in regulation for the first time this season and has lost three of the past five. Ben Bishop allowed a season-high four goals and had 16 saves.

“They didn’t have many (shots), but when they did, they capitalized and that was the difference in the game,” Bishop said.

The Maple Leafs entered having been outscored 15-4 in the previous two games and having lost three straight games that had the wolves circling early in the week. The Lightning failed to take advantage and let Toronto dictate play, though the Lightning played into that situation while falling to 2-3-1 in the past six.

“When you don’t stick to what your team is good at and you try to play a different type of game, you are not going to be rewarded,” captain Steven Stamkos said. “We knew they were going to be good tonight and they were better than us tonight. Not to take anything away from them, but we were not good.”

“We’ve been on a good run because we stick to our team structure and stick to what our strengths are as a team and when we get away from that, we are just an average team in this league.”

The Leafs struck first when Daniel Winnik beat Eric Brewer on an icing call and fed David Clarkson in the slot for a one-timer 1:29 into the game.

Tampa Bay had the chance to build momentum after killing off a 5-on-3 Toronto power play — the third consecutive game the Lightning have killed off a lengthy two-man disadvantage — and scored short-handed as Alex Killorn tallied for the third consecutive game with 1:10 left in the first period.

But that didn’t carry over into the second as former Lightning forward Richard Panik took advantage of a Matt Carle turnover in front of the net and beat Bishop 2:45 in.

“I thought I saw a couple of their guys pretty low and thought if I got it by them, we could beat two guys with a pass,” Carle said. “Just a soft play and it’s unfortunate that when that happens as a defenseman, it usually ends up in the back of your net.”

The Leafs scored two more times by the end of the period as James van Riemsdyk beat Bishop off the rush at 12:31 and again down low with a power-play goal off a rebound at 15:15.

Stamkos scored his 13th of the season at 15:47 of the third with Bishop pulled for an extra attacker to make it 4-2 before Roman Polak scored into an empty net with eight seconds left.

“It’s not good enough. The (loss Tuesday) on the Island wasn’t good enough and it wasn’t again tonight,” right wing Ryan Callahan said. “We have to respond, and I think this group in here does that.”

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 11.21.2014
Bolts Notes: Hedman joins morning skate; Connolly returns

BY ERIK ERLEDNSSION
Tribune staff
Published: November 20, 2014 | Updated: November 20, 2014 at 11:37 PM

TORONTO — The Lightning added some color to their morning skate Thursday when D Victor Hedman jumped on the ice wearing a red jersey.

Out since fracturing a finger on his right hand Oct. 18, Hedman took another step closer to returning as he participated in the morning skate, taking part in some drills and shooting for the first time.

“It felt pretty good … but it's still healing, so it doesn't mean that I'm getting closer to returning,” said Hedman, who had three goals and seven points in four games before the injury. “But it felt good to take some shots, obviously.

“It's been four weeks since Hedman had surgery to place pins in the right pointer finger, with the recovery period estimated at 4-6 weeks. No exact date has been set for Hedman's return to the lineup, but there is a chance he could play before the team ends a three-game homestand Nov. 29 against Ottawa.

“At least another week, week-and-a-half to two weeks,” Hedman said. “I'm very excited about that, but moving forward it's just going to be fun to skate with the team and participate in the drills I can and keep working hard off the ice to stay in shape. It's been a tough four weeks, but the team has been playing well, so that makes it easier.”

But what about his fashion statement Thursday, wearing the red jersey and matching red socks with blue pants?

“I don't know if I'm a big fan of the red socks and the red jersey,” captain Steven Stamkos joked. “But it was good to see him out there and I can totally sympathize with what he is going through right now.”

Stamkos broke his right leg in November 2013.

“I remember my first practice when you are out there with the guys, just to be out there with the full team, that slowly means you are getting there. … But he's close, and that's nice to see.”

Including the game in which Hedman was injured, Tampa Bay is 11-4-1 without their top defenseman.

“He's a top-10, top-five defenseman in this league, and we've weathered this storm without him,” Lightning head coach Jon Cooper said. “But we can't go on much longer. He's a big part of our team.”

Connolly returns

RW Brett Connolly returned to the lineup Thursday after missing three weeks with a leg injury suffered Oct. 24 in Winnipeg. For Connolly, who was playing top-six minutes at the time of the injury, it's been a long wait to return and he knows with competition to get into the lineup he needs to pick up where he left off before his injury.

“I'm excited to be back in the lineup, try to have a good game and getting back into a routine,” Connolly said. “You have to be on your toes. … We have a lot of guys pushing for ice time. There are a lot of guys pushing for spots and that's eventually going to get us more wins than not, and that's a good thing.”

Panik settles in

There has been plenty of panic around the Leafs after embarrassing back-to-back losses to Buffalo and Nashville. Former Lightning wing Richard Panik has been in the center of it as he tries to settle in with a new team and new city.

A second-round pick by Tampa Bay in 2009, Panik was placed on waivers and claimed by the Maple Leafs at the start of the season. He faced his former teammates for the first time Thursday night, picking up his fourth goal of the season in the second period.

“It's going to be interesting, exciting to play against them,” Panik said. “Hopefully things will be better for us than them.”

In 18 games with the Leafs, Panik has three goals, four points and is plus-1 while averaging 9:03 of ice time, mainly on the fourth line. He logged more than 10 minutes only four times.

“I've been battling, started on the fourth line, then a couple of guys got injured and I had more opportunity, but now I'm back on the fourth line,” Panik said. “So, I'm just trying to do my thing, play hard every game and focusing on that.”

Panik had dinner with Radko Gudas, Ondrej Palat and Andrej Sustr on Wednesday night.

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Nuts and Bolts

LW Brenden Morrow and D Eric Brewer returned after being scratched on Tuesday while RW J.T. Brown and D Mark Barberio were scratched. … Cooper said C Cedric Paquetted could have played Thursday "if it was a playoff game" after he left Tuesday's game with a foot injury, but the team wanted to be cautious. Paquette participated in the morning skate. …

Tampa Bay's three shorthanded goals are tied for second highest in the league.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 11.21.2014
Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning loses to Leafs

Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer
Thursday, November 20, 2014 10:41pm

TORONTO — Captain Steven Stamkos knew the Maple Leafs would come out "hungry" Thursday night, motivated after back-to-back bad losses.

"We executed like it was the first day of training camp," Cooper said. "We couldn't make a 10-foot pass; we couldn't break it out. We play a speed game — that's what puts teams on their heels — and we were in quicksand all night. When we're playing slow and not executing, we're in trouble."

After an impressive 5-1 win over the Rangers on Monday, a victory Cooper said might have come "too easy," Tampa Bay failed to play its game on Long Island and in Toronto. And now the Lightning has one day before hosting the Wild, which embarrassed Tampa Bay 7-2 in Minnesota on Oct. 25.

"It's not good enough," wing Ryan Callahan said. "We have to respond."

The Lightning must play a lot better than it did Thursday, when it was dominated at times, including 44-24 in faceoffs. It outshot Toronto 28-21 but gave up too many great chances, and the Maple Leafs made the Lightning pay. The Lightning was so far behind, Cooper pulled goalie Ben Bishop with five minutes left, resulting in a goal by Stamkos and an empty-netter by Toronto's Roman Polak.

The Lightning was fortunate to be tied 1-1 after the first period. But it did kill off a five-on-three power play for the third straight game, and Alex Killorn scored a shorthanded goal with just over a minute left.

The Maple Leafs put the game away with three goals in the second. Former Lightning wing Richard Panik put them up for good nearly three minutes in. Defenseman Matt Carle made an awful flip pass from behind the Tampa Bay net, and Panik snatched the puck with his glove, put it down and backhanded it past Bishop.

"Just a soft play," Carle said. "And when that happens as a defenseman, it usually ends up in the back of your net."

Stamkos said when the Lightning doesn't play its game, it's just an "average team." But Cooper is confident his "(ticked) off" group will bounce back.

"Not to take anything away from them, but we weren't good," Stamkos said. "We didn't deserve anything."

Said Cooper: "We laid an egg."

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SOG — TB 8-13-7-28. Tor 9-8-4-21. PP opps — TB 0 of 3; Tor 1 of 3.

Goalies — TB, Bishop 11-3-2-2 (20 shots-16 saves). Tor, Bernier 6-5-2-2 (28-26).

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 11.21.2014
Victor Hedman takes next recovery step

Joe Smith

Thursday, November 20, 2014 7:28pm

TORONTO — D Victor Hedman took the next step in his recovery from a fractured finger Thursday, participating in a team skate in a red no-contact jersey.

Hedman, out since Oct. 18, wore a splint but took shots for the first time.

"It makes you nervous as a coach because I saw him wind up with one, and I looked right at our trainers right away and said, 'Is that allowed?' " coach Jon Cooper said.

Hedman got the clearance to shoot Wednesday and said though he was feeling better, he is still one to two weeks from returning. Saturday is five weeks since the injury, with the Lightning entering Thursday 10-4-1 without him.

"He's a top-10, top-5 defenseman in this league," Cooper said. "If you pull the top 2 defensemen from any team in this league, everybody would have issues. We’ve weathered the storm without him, but we can’t go much longer."

BACK IN: RW Brett Connolly, who missed 12 games with a lower-body injury, returned to the lineup against the Maple Leafs, joining LW Brenden Morrow and C Brian Boyle on the fourth line. RW J.T. Brown and C Cedric Paquette were scratched, along with D Mark Barberio. D Eric Brewer was back in after getting scratched the previous two games.

Cooper thought Connolly, the sixth overall draft pick in 2010, was playing the best hockey of his NHL career when he got hurt Oct. 24, "turning into the player we always thought he could be."

"I'm excited. It's been a long time coming," Connolly said. "Nobody wants to be injured. But it's part of the game and something that guys are going to have to go through, and it's my turn to do that."

ON MEND: Cooper said if Thursday were a playoff game, Paquette might have played. Paquette got hit in the foot with a shot in the first period of Tuesday's game against the Islanders and didn't return. Cooper said the puck struck Paquette in the 1-inch area of his skate not covered by a protector. "I think his pain threshold is a lot higher than a lot of players," Cooper said. "So he'll give you the 'okay.' But you talk to the doctor and he'll tell you, 'He's not as okay as you think.' Sometimes you have to protect players from themselves."

FAMILIAR FACE: Former Lightning wing Richard Panik, 23, said he's settling in with the Maple Leafs, adjusting to a busier life in the big city and the pressure that comes with playing in Toronto.

Panik, a first-round draft pick by Tampa Bay in 2009, was a victim of a numbers game with the Lightning and was claimed off waivers in October by Toronto. A regular on the fourth line, he scored the winning goal in Toronto's 5-2 victory and has four goals and one assist and is plus-2 in 19 games.

Panik said he was sad to leave longtime teammates who felt like "family." He bought dinner for D Radko Gudas, LW Ondrej Palat and D Andrej Sustr on Wednesday night.

Plagued by consistency issues in Tampa Bay, Panik said he has learned a valuable lesson. "The NHL is the best league in the world, and you've got one opportunity, and if you don't take it, you're replaced for someone else," Panik said. "You've got to show up every game of the season."
Vladislav Namestnikov featured on "Tonight Show" with Jimmy Fallon

Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer
Thursday, November 20, 2014 6:57pm

Lightning rookie center Vladislav Namestnikov may not be a household name yet, but his name earned him a mention on the "Tonight Show" with Jimmy Fallon Tuesday night.

Fallon was doing a segment on the "Pros and Cons" of Las Vegas potentially getting an NHL team. One of the reasons was "the best way to see names like Varlamov, Vladislav Namestnikov, Alexei Ponikarovsky." The con? "Besides taking an eye exam." Namestnikov (via-dih-SLAHV nah-MEHST-nih-kawv) doesn't think his name is that hard to pronounce, but got a kick out of the clip.

"It was a joke at first," Namestnikov said, smiling. "But someone sent me the video. It's pretty cool."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 11.21.2014
Lightning defense men Victor Hedman took the next step in his recovery from a fractured finger on Thursday, participating in the team’s morning skate for the first time.

Hedman, out since Oct. 18, wore a red non-contact jersey and still used a splint, but took a couple slap shots.

"It makes you nervous as a coach, because I saw him wind up with one and I looked right at our trainers right away and said, 'Is that allowed?'" coach Jon Cooper said.

Hedman got the clearance to shoot Wednesday, and said while he's feeling better, he's still a week and a half to two weeks away from returning. Saturday marks the five-week mark since the injury, and Tampa Bay is 10-4-1 without him.

"He's a top-10, top-5 defenseman in this league," Cooper said. "If you pull the top defenseman from any team in this league, everybody would have issues. We've weathered the storm without him but we can't go much longer."

More notes from morning skate: RW Brett Connolly, who missed 12 games with a lower-body injury, makes his anticipated return to the lineup tonight against the Maple Leafs, playing on the fourth line with Brenden Morrow and Brian Boyle; J.T. Brown and Cedric Paquette will be the scratches. Cooper said Paquette got hit with a shot Tuesday that went in the inch spot his skate protector didn’t cover. Cooper thought Connolly was playing the best hockey of his NHL career when he got hurt Oct. 24, "I thought he was turning into the player we always thought he could be," Cooper said. "I'm excited, it's been a long time coming," Connolly said. "Nobody wants to be injured. But it's part of the game and something that guys are going to have to go thorough and it's my turn to do that.". But with the depth of this team, Connolly will have to fight to stay in. "You got to be on your toes," he said. "We've got a lot of guys that are pushing for ice time. Lot of guys fighting for spots, and that's going to push guys to play better and be good every night, that's eventually going to get us more wins than not, so that's a good thing.". Paquette, who suffered a lower body injury in Tuesday's loss, is available, and if it were a playoff game, he might have played, Cooper said. .. Former Lightning wing Richard Panik said he's settling in okay with the Maple Leafs, though admits Toronto is much busier - with more traffic - than Tampa. He went out to dinner last night with former teammates Andrej Sustr and Radko Gudas and picked up the check. Panik said it was “sad” to leave a "family" of friends in Tampa, but learned from it. "I learned the NHL is the best league in the world, and you've got one opportunity, and if you don't take it, you're replaced for someone else."
Roller coaster ride for Leafs continues with win over Lightning

JAMES MIRTLE  
TORONTO — The Globe and Mail  
Published Thursday, Nov. 20 2014, 10:25 PM EST  
Last updated Friday, Nov. 21 2014, 1:05 AM EST

Up and down. Up and down again.  
And sometimes down, down, down… but not yet.  
Hey, it’s only November.  
Welcome aboard the good roller coaster that is the Toronto Maple Leafs, the NHL team that you’ll never quite get a handle on if you try to take stock of them night to night and week to week.

The Leafs won on Thursday, and while it was only game 20, this one was bigger than most this time of year. The barbarians were braying at the gate after three consecutive losses – including two nasty blowouts – and Wednesday’s practice turned into a media circus.

Instead, the Leafs did a very Leafs-like thing, putting together an altogether solid effort in a 5-2 win over one of the better teams in the Eastern Conference.

They even scored first, thanks to some hard work from Dan Winnik to beat an icing and a shot from David Clarkson that beat behemoth goalie Ben Bishop only a minute and a half in.

A Jake Gardiner-ism led to a shorthanded goal against late in the period, but it didn’t matter: Toronto didn’t falter.

Former Lightning youngster Richard Panik scored a pretty goal early in the second against his former mates.

James van Riemsdyk added two more late in the frame.

Just like that, it was 4-1, and it was more than enough.

“Tonight it was a team effort,” defenceman Stephane Robidas said. “Everybody chipped in. And we got a good result.”

So what does it mean?

It’s no surprise that this team is capable of playing capable hockey, of beating good teams. Heck, they’ve done it already this season. The main criticism of the Leafs isn’t that they’re as atrocious as they looked in losing 6-2 to Buffalo and 9-2 to Nashville in the past six days; it’s that they’re a distressing hodgepodge of inconsistency and skittishness and haphazard management somehow piled into one hockey team.

The elements that allow Toronto to be better than bad were all there Thursday. Jonathan Bernier played well in goal, as he tends to. The first line showed they can beat you on the rush (JVR goal No. 1) or on the power play (JVR goal No. 2).

And, unlike a year ago, the third and fourth lines chipped in with key goals.

“We played like we were supposed to,” Robidas explained. “It’s no fun for anyone whenever you get beat like that [9-2 loss to Nashville]. We’re pros. We’re proud. We just want to play at a high level and that’s what we did tonight. We’ve just got to build off that.”

“It was a good response,” van Riemsdyk said. “When things aren’t going well in this city, you’ve got a lot of over-analyzing going on. So I think it was nice for us to put that little [losing] streak or whatever you want to call it behind us.”

The Leafs finished last season with 84 points with a similar roster and wound up with the eighth overall pick and William Nylander as a result – which isn’t a terrible outcome given how he’s tearing up the Swedish league right now (14 points in 12 games as an 18 year old).

This year, they’re only very slightly better, with that improved forward depth a big reason why. A 90-point season – which is exactly what they’re now on pace for after beating Tampa – makes sense.

The problem with 90 points is this is a league where the average is now 92 and where you realistically only have a shot at a championship if you’ve got a whole lot of ducks in a row – the main one being the ability to play well defensively and drive the play to the other end of the rink.

That’s how the Los Angeles Kings won their two recent Cups. Chicago, too. And you can well expect this year’s winner to come from a similar mould.

Yes, the Leafs have the ability to look good on any given night. Almost every team in this closely contested league does. But contending teams do so far more convincingly and consistently, leaning on elite talent, depth and tactical superiority to play well – often even in losses.

A team that shows up 30 per cent of the time and is bombed out of the rink another 30 per cent of the time, muddling along winning as many as it loses on the way to 90 points, isn’t necessarily progressing in any particular direction.

Sometimes it’s simply going up and down, up and down – and crossing its fingers that that’s somehow enough.

And it’s not.

But more Nylanders would certainly help.
Maple Leafs on alert for jersey tossers

By: Curtis Rush Sports reporter, Published on Fri Nov 21 2014

The Maple Leafs are prepared to ban fans for life if they toss jerseys onto the ice.

Sweater-tossing has become something of a fad for the disenchanted hockey fan in Toronto. The incidents — at least four of them this season — have infuriated players and confounded coaches.

In the past, fans resorted to booing or putting paper bags over their heads to protest inferior play. Four years ago in December, 2010, waffle-throwing became a spectator sport for a couple of games when the Leafs were struggling in the first half of the season. An Oakville man was charged with mischief to property and banned from the ACC.

The Leafs have a longstanding policy of banning anyone who throws anything onto the ice, according to Dave Haggith, spokesperson for Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment. He said spectators can be disciplined under the trespassing guidelines set by the club, with a minimum ban of 12 months.

Haggith added the policy was put in place “to protect fan and player safety” and is intended to deter fans from interfering with the game.

One of the potential outcomes, he said, is a trespassing charge, which could lead to a ban from the building — from a year to a lifetime penalty, depending on the severity.

There are in-house announcements during the game, cautioning fans not to throw anything onto the ice. Any bans are issued by Air Canada Security, but depending on the severity of the offence Toronto police can become involved.

On Oct. 11 during a 5-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Hockey Night in Canada, a fan threw a Leaf jersey on the ice. Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby said later that “in your own rink, you don’t want to see that obviously.” He added: “But fans have high expectations here (in Toronto), and sometimes that's (jersey toss) part of it.”

A week later, with the Leafs on their way to losing 4-1 to the Detroit Red Wings, someone hurled a Dion Phaneuf No. 3 jersey onto the ice. Phaneuf told reporters after the game that it was “disappointing” to see, but allowed that fans had a right to be upset. “I think there are better ways of voicing their displeasure,” the Leaf captain said.

The third incident occurred in Buffalo last Saturday when the Leafs lost 6-2, and the fourth was Tuesday during a 9-2 loss to Nashville. Phil Kessel called that incident “classless” and said such acts disrespect the great players of the past. There were no incidents during Thursday night’s win over the Lightning.

Of course, there are times when hats are thrown onto the ice to celebrate a three-goal game, or hat trick.

“Throwing hats onto the ice after a hat trick is an accepted tradition across the league,” Haggith said in an email. “Security and game operations staff are prepared on such occasions, minimizing safety and game interruption issues.”

The last Leaf hat trick at the ACC was recorded by Kessel last Feb. 1 against Ottawa.

Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle was asked prior to the Tampa Bay game on Thursday about the rash of jersey-tossing incidents and wondered why anyone would “throw a $200 jersey onto the ice. Obviously, they’re doing it out of frustration, and we’re as frustrated as anybody.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2014
Through the ups and downs of this young season, it often looks as if the Maple Leafs haven’t learned at all from their mistakes of last year.

But there is one positive pattern: an ability to hold on to leads.

The Leafs went into the third period with a 4-1 edge over Tampa on Thursday night and emerged with a 5-2 victory, lifting the stench of a three-game losing streak in the process.

The Leafs are a perfect 7-0-0 when leading going into the third after blowing a third-period advantage 23 times last season.

“It’s a sign of growth with our group,” said defenceman Cody Franson, now on a nine-game points streak. “We talked a bit before going into the third period, that these are the areas we need to continually improve upon. We have to learn to be a better team with the lead, and keep applying pressure and not sit back and receive the third period.”

YOUR CALL!

View on Poll Daddy

When the Lightning, who offered up a moribund performance for 55 minutes, pulled goalie Ben Bishop for most of the final five minutes, the tenor of the game changed. The Leafs, who had put in a surprisingly solid performance given the week they’d had, were on their heels and Steve Stamkos scored to get Tampa within two before Roman Polak’s empty-netter restored the three-goal lead.

“We’re just keeping it simple, keeping our forecheck going,” said goalie Jonathan Bernier, who stopped 26 of 28 shots. “We spent some time in their zone. We did a pretty good job considering (it was 6-on-5) for over five minutes.”

The Air Canada Centre crowd went home happy — and everyone kept their jerseys on their backs — while Toronto rode a three-goal second period, two from James van Riemsdyk. David Clarkson and Richard Panik also scored for the Leafs in a performance good enough to make the bandwagon jumpers wonder if maybe they should put one leg back on, at least until Saturday’s game against Detroit.

“We’d love to be able to be more consistent, for sure,” said Leafs coach Randy Carlyle. “Tonight was hopefully a starting point. By no means do we think we’re over the hump. We’re going to play a Detroit hockey club that really dominated us the last time they were in this building. . . . We owe them.”

The circus atmosphere was incredible coming into the game. Which Leaf team would show up: the one that went a formidable 6-1-1 as recently as a week ago, or the one that lost three in a row, two in spectacular fashion?

“It was a good response for us,” said van Riemsdyk. “When things aren’t going well in this city, there’s a lot of overanalyzing going on. It was nice for us to put that bad spell behind us.”

It wasn’t just sports talk radio and the blogosphere wondering. There were 21 scouts or executives from 18 NHL teams taking in the action, almost double the usual amount amid pressure on GM Dave Nonis and president Brendan Shanahan to perhaps make a move or two.

“The ebbs and flows in hockey life in a market like this, and the passion that’s demonstrated, is all part of it,” said Carlyle. “If you’re not prepared to live (with) it, you’re in the wrong business. You’d drive yourself crazy.”

It was the Leafs’ 20th game and at 10-8-2 they’re tied with Ottawa for the last wild card, but Ottawa has two games in hand. Teams in a playoff spot at this point in the season usually hold on to them. That’s been the case for the last decade or so, with only three teams a year missing the post-season after holding down a berth at American Thanksgiving. Unfortunately, the Leafs have done that twice: once under Ron Wilson and last year under Carlyle.
Unpredictable Maple Leafs strike back vs. Lightning: Arthur

By: Bruce Arthur Sports Columnist, Published on Thu Nov 20 2014

It’s become like disaster tourism, now. How close can you get to the hurricane? How much can you see of the volcano as it erupts? What does Godzilla sound like, as it swallows a town? It’s coming, you know. Maybe it’ll be today.

The difference, of course, is you can observe the Toronto Maple Leafs from a safe distance. You can even become a part of the disaster, if you’re in the building. You can boo, leave early, sit quietly, throw your jersey into the fires. You will then be banned from the volcano if you do, though. You’ve been warned.

Sometimes, though, it’s just a sunny day, and everything’s fine. After the twin cataclysms against Buffalo and Nashville, Thursday night’s game against Tampa looked ominous. And then the Leafs went out and won 5-2 and it was a good day. Lately, one mistake leads to more around here, but after a Jake Gardiner giveaway that led to a short-handed goal late in the first, Toronto didn’t fall apart.

“Maybe because we didn’t change anything, we didn’t panic,” said defenceman Roman Polak, who scored an empty-netter and had one assist. “Every time it looks like they score the first goal or something (bad) happens, we kind of panic, kind of play the individual game again. And tonight we kind of stuck to the game plan, and played the team game . . . don’t grab your stick, don’t squeeze it as hard as you can, just stick with it.”

YOUR CALL!

View on Poll Daddy

“We played a fast game, hard on the forecheck, third man high, backside pressure from the forwards, the D can stand up, and we didn’t give them as much zone time,” said defenceman Stephane Robidas. “You’ve just got to go out there and play with your instinct.”

“It’s a step, the right way,” said Polak, with his serious face. “But tomorrow’s another day. It’s two points tonight, it’s one game, but we didn’t accomplish anything. It’s just a good step in the right direction. That’s all it is.”

Indeed has begun to feel very tenuous around here again, like the place has been booby-trapped. The crisis came sweeping fast on the Leafs this week, over the ridge and down into the valley, and Nazem Kadri admitted the team was “a little shaken up.”

“Yeah, definitely, that’s human nature,” said defenceman Cody Franson, who extended his point streak to nine games. “When things go bad you try and play safe. You try and not make mistakes, but you start getting into those situations — you don’t try to make plays with the puck, you just try to get rid of it. In order for our group to have success, we have to manage the puck. That’s our big thing.”

They had to avoid the wrath of another angry crowd, too, since the natives were restless, when they weren’t resting. Ron Wilson surfaced to tell ESPN’s Pierre LeBrun that the fans at the Air Canada Centre were dilettantes, that it was a morgue whose corpses came alive when something went wrong, that the fans throwing their jerseys on the ice were “despicable.” Phil Kessel said the jersey-tossing disrespected “all of the great players and the great teams they’ve had before here.”

And a Maple Leaf spokesman reminded fans that they could be banned from the ACC if they off-loaded their laundry, and used the words “trespassing charge” in conversations with media, which seemed to mean a ban from the building. It sounded like the work of a team that is feeling very, very defensive.

And then, no jerseys on the ice. No “Let’s Go Raptors!” chants, which had travelled all the way to Buffalo Saturday night, which was a new frontier in Toronto sports. After Gardiner’s giveaway, coach Randy Carlyle was asked what he was saying on the bench, and he replied, “yeah, there were a few more words than, ‘here we go again.’ ”

But Gardiner kept playing. The Leafs kept skating, got bounces, didn’t lose track of Steven Stamkos much. Tampa, like Boston last week, lamented how poorly they played — Stamkos told reporters they “didn’t deserve anything,” and coach Jon Cooper said they played like it was the first day of training camp. The Leafs, who know what Cooper means, built a 4-1 lead after two periods against the second-best team in the East.

This resulted in a polite round of applause at the end of the second period. That was it. No cheering, no thunder. It’s a morgue full of people dressed for a wedding or a funeral, sure, but it’s like these people had seen some things. The reasonable roar of relief didn’t really show until Polak’s empty-netter, after Tampa spent most of 5:32 with the net empty, scored once, and came close twice. Nobody relaxed, watching this. This was Toronto.

It’s a strange team, and a fascinating thing to watch unfold. The Leafs veer one way or another, plunge over the edge, shoot back into the air, aloft for a moment. Brendan Shanahan is watching to see who goes and who is worth fighting with, and for one game the Leafs put everything back together again. Good day.

Now everyone can wait for the next crisis, the next cataclysm, the storm to race over the ridge. It’s a nice day in the valley, but it’s quiet: too quiet. It’s coming, right? Of course it’s coming. It always does.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2014
Steven Stamkos won’t take Leafs lightly

By: Curtis Rush Sports reporter, Published on Thu Nov 20 2014

Steven Stamkos believes the Tampa Bay Lightning will see more fight from the Leafs tonight than Toronto has shown of late.

“I think sometimes this gets blown out of proportion,” the Tampa Bay Lightning superstar said of the sad fate of the Leafs, who are coming off two embarrassing losses in a row, including a 9-2 drubbing at the hands of the Nashville Predators on Tuesday.

“This is the NHL and there are some good teams in this league and you’re not going to be at your best every night,” Stamkos said.

Stamkos said both teams should be hungry tonight in the game at the Air Canada Centre (7:30 p.m.). The Lightning are coming off a 5-2 to the New York Islanders on Tuesday.

Stamkos, who is fourth in the NHL in the scoring race with 12 goals and 10 assists for 22 points, said he’s still not where he was before he broke his leg last season.

“It’s been a long process,” the 24-year-old sniper said. “It’s slowing getting there. I’m starting to get some confidence back.”

Many of the Leaf star players took the morning off as the team held an optional skate.

Leaf coach Randy Carlyle worked the team hard yesterday, and he explained that the players wanted the optional skate today, and he agreed.

If that’s what they feel they needed to get ready for tonight, Carlyle said, he was all for it. But he didn’t want to put pressure on the players to pay him back personally with a solid effort.

“Just pay back themselves,” the coach said. “Don’t worry about me. Do it for your hockey club. Do it for your teammate. Do it for our fans.”

Centre Nazem Kadri said it’s important for the Leafs to get off to a good start to get the crowd back on the Leafs’ side after the last two embarrassing defeats.

“A lot of times when you generate that first goal, your chances of winning do go up,” Kadri said, adding that mental breakdowns are behind the Leafs’ sad fate of late.

“We’re having brain cramps, or whatever the case may be. We’re working stupid as opposed to working smart,” Kadri said.

Jonathan Bernier, who will start in goal tonight, was among several players who took the morning off, along with Phil Kessel, Tyler Bozak, James van Riemsdyk, David Clarkson, Dion Phaneuf and Roman Polak.

James Reimer, who has allowed 12 goals in the last two games, was in goal at the skate and appeared to hurt himself after taking a shot in the groin area. He skated around gingerly, but shook it off and returned to the net.

NOTES: Joffrey Lupul (broken bone in right hand) and David Booth (broken right foot) are closer than Brandon Kozun (ankle sprain) in returning to action, although none of those players will be available tonight.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2014
Analytics poke hole in success of Patrick Roy, Avs

By: Ian Cooper Special to the Star, Published on Thu Nov 20 2014

For any fan of a certain age, it’s hard to hate on Patrick Roy. Four Stanley Cups, three Conn Smythes, three Vezinas, perennial all-star. . . .

So when Roy got behind the bench in Colorado after a moderately successful run as a major junior coach, it seemed like the next logical step in a nearly flawless career.

Nothing will rival Roy’s rookie campaign as a player, in which he almost single-handedly carried the Montreal Canadiens to a Stanley Cup. But — on the surface at least — his first year as a coach came close.

The Avalanche finished third overall and bested the juggernaut Chicago Blackhawks for a hard fought Central division title after a second-last finish the season before.

Under Roy’s tutelage, his young forwards blossomed into elite scorers. Equally remarkable was his rapport with his goalie. Semyon Varlamov had previously been a middling talent with a questionable future. Suddenly he looked like Saint Patrick himself between the pipes.

The hockey cognoscenti took notice and awarded Roy the Jack Adams Award for coach of the year.

While the cognoscenti were eagerly gussling their Kool-Aid, the advanced stats crowd was sounding the warning bells. Because as is becoming increasingly clear, Roy had a very lucky season.

To begin with, there were the one-goal games.

There’s a myth in some hockey circles that teams with “grit and determination” can “tough out hard games” and “pull out a win”. It’s certainly an attractive idea, and as a fan I really do wish it were true.

Roy’s Avalanche played 40 one-goal games last season, which was equal to the league average.

Fortunately for Denver’s hockey fans, the Avalanche were pure magic in those games, posting a 28-4-8 record (a .700 win percentage), which was best in the league.

But a win’s a win right? Absolutely.

The problem is one-goal games are pretty much coin tosses. Last year’s elite teams such as Chicago (.425 win percentage in one goal games), Boston (.485) and Los Angeles (.488) all earned the lion’s share of their points by drubbing their opponents.

Teams that expect to win one-goal games consistently usually find their luck turns.

Sure enough, the pendulum’s swung the other way for Colorado this season. So far, they’re posting a 4-3-5 record in one goal games, giving them the 24th-best win percentage of .333.

More problematic was the fact that Roy’s Avalanche were a terrible possession team last year, posting a Corsi For percentage during 5-on-5 play (CF%) of 47.0 per cent. Only Montreal, Calgary, Edmonton, Buffalo and Toronto were worse.

Remarkably, after losing two of their three top possession players (Paul Stastny and P.A. Parenteau), the Avalanche managed to get even worse this season (CF% of 43.6), ranking only ahead of Buffalo as of Tuesday.

Now it’s true the Avalanche blue line doesn’t have great depth, and you might be tempted to blame those atrocious possession stats on the defence men.

But for a team that boasts Matt Duchene, Nathan MacKinnon, Ryan O’Reilly, Gabriel Landeskog, Jarome Iginla and Alex Tanguay as its top 6 forwards and ranks 10th in the league in terms of 5-on-5 offensive zone faceoffs (32.7 per cent), you’d expect to see a fair number of offensive chances at least.

Somehow despite all that talent logging between 16 and 19 minutes a game, the Avalanche have managed to generate only 47.6 shot attempts per 60 minutes of 5-on-5 play this season, good for . . . 29th in the league.

That’s right — the only team in the NHL that manages to provide more boring hockey for its fans is the one that’s already wondering how many McDavid jerseys to stock in October.

Now we can split hairs here and pretend Colorado has more judicious shooters, in which case they could get away with fewer shot attempts because more of those attempts would find the net and go in.

But if that’s Roy’s philosophy, it’s clearly not working. When measured by shots that actually hit the net, the team still ranks 25th overall. And with the team posting a 5-on-5 shooting percentage of 7.86 per cent (16th), not shooting the puck often enough is an excellent road map to the league’s basement.

Colorado’s rough performance so far isn’t about lucky bounces; it’s about a lack of opportunities to score and poor team defence.

When the talent’s there and still not making things happen on the ice, it’s unfortunately time to blame the coach.

With his team sitting 24th overall, getting badly outshot on a nightly basis, and the Midas touch in one goal games suddenly abandoning him, Patrick Roy finds himself in the unenviable position of having a number of his shortcomings exposed.

Person ally, I think Colorado will improve as the season progresses, largely because they do have so much talent up front (and full disclosure: I have a wager with IJay and Phil that they’ll finish ahead of Minnesota).

But unless there’s a change in Roy’s coaching system or — more improbably — a changing of the guard behind the bench in Denver, I don’t love my chances of winning that bet.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.21.2014
No salute to fans from Maple Leafs 5

MIKE ZEISBERGER, TORONTO SUN

Maple Leafs Nov 21

The Leafs celebrate their fifth goal scored against the Lightning on Thursday night. (Stan Behal/Toronto Sun)

Was it just a way to acknowledge snapping out of a skid?

Or was it a shot at the fans and media of Toronto, who had put the Maple Leafs through intense scrutiny after being outscored 15-4 in losses to Buffalo and Nashville?

The issue at hand was the decision of the players not to do their usual victory celebration of congregating at centre ice and waving their sticks to salute the crowd after their 5-2 win over Tampa Bay on Thursday at the ACC.

Leafs players told Sportsnet after the game they just wanted to change things up in an effort to alter the team's karma after a three-game losing streak. In his post-game interview at the podium, James van Riemsdyk said there had been a lot of "over-analyzing" of the team in recent days.

You can bet that will be the case with this too.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
The Leafs also placed forward Petri Kontiola on unconditional waivers. Forward Matt Frattin, 26, cleared waivers and has been assigned to the Marlies.

Toronto signed the forward to a one-year, $1.1 million deal in the summer, but he did not make the club out of training camp and didn't appear in a regular-season game with the big club, registering just one point in 11 games with the Marlies.

The native of Finland plans to return to the Kontinental Hockey League, where he had played five seasons, once he clears.

LOOSE LEAFS

Stamkos on the Leafs' back-to-back lopsided losses: "I think sometimes it gets blown out of proportion a little bit with teams having a tough loss and everyone seems like they're going to be coming out all crazy-eyed the next game. This is the NHL. There's some good teams. You're not going to play your best every night. It's about how you respond." ... Carlyle on fans that throw Leafs jerseys on the ice: "That's their choice. Obviously, that's frustration and they're throwing their $200 jersey on the ice. I don't know what I can do or what control I have over that individual choosing to do that. We're as frustrated as anybody." ... Leafs players requested that Thursday's game-day skate be made optional: Phil Kessel, James van Riemsdyk, Dion Phaneuf, David Clarkson, Jonathan Bernier and Roman Polak were among those who did not take part ... Forward Richard Panik, drafted in the second round by the Lightning in 2009, was facing his former team for the first time since being plucked off waivers by Toronto.
Dave Hilson BY DAVE HILSON, TORONTO SUN

FIRST POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:43 PM EST | UPDATED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:48 PM EST

Finally, a fast start for Maple Leafs 1

The Maple Leafs responded to a couple of beatdowns this past week by putting forth a strong effort against the Tampa Bay Lightning at the Air Canada Centre on Thursday night.

There’s no doubt the Leafs needed to get out to a good start against the Lightning, and that they did by striking first in a 5-2 win to end a three-game skid.

After a 9-2 drubbing at the hands of the Nashville Predators on Tuesday night that followed an embarrassing 6-2 loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday, the Leafs had plenty to prove.

David Clarkson took a nice feed from the corner from Daniel Winnik and buried a shot from the slot past Lightning goaltender Ben Bishop with only 1:29 gone in the game. It was Clarkson’s sixth goal of the season.

Nazem Kadri had said during the gameday skate that “it’s not the end of the world” if the Leafs don’t score first. But clearly it does matter.

The Leafs have played 20 games this season and they have allowed the first goal 13 times. When that happens, they have lost 10 of those games. But when the Leafs score first, like they did last night, they have won all seven games.

Toronto almost got into an early hole when Valteri Filppula fired a slap shot from the point with just 19 seconds gone in the first period. But Jonathan Bernier made a nice pad save, one of many over the course of the evening, and the Leafs were up and heading the other way.

It’s hard to figure out this Leafs team, one night terrible, last night very respectable.

“We played our system,” winger James van Riemsdyk, who scored twice, said as a way to explain the victory. “That was huge to get the win.”

NOTHING TO PANIK ABOUT

Toronto did a good job of not letting the momentum go Tampa’s way after the Lightning scored a shorthanded marker late in the first. The Leafs came out hard in the second and Richard Panik converted with 2:45 gone in the period to put the Leafs up 2-1. Being that he’s on the fourth line, Panik doesn’t get a heck of a lot of playing time. But he seems to be making a home here since being picked up off waivers by the Leafs. After Trevor Smith did a great job of pressuring Bolts defenceman Matt Carle into flipping the puck out from behind his own net, Panik calmly gloved it, put it down on the ice and slid it past a sprawling Bishop. The winger now has more goals for the Leafs — four in 19 contests — than he did in 50 games for the Lightning last season. It never hurts when your fourth line scores, and it helped keep the momentum going Toronto’s way.

DEFENCE FIRST

Other than when the Lightning, down 4-1, pulled Bishop with more than five minutes remaining, the Leafs did a pretty good job of getting the puck out of their own end. They made a lot of short, crisp passes and fired the puck up the boards when they had to. They got caught once or twice, like Roman Polak did in the second when he allowed a Lightning player to come off the boards and get a shot off on Bernier. That can’t happen. As well, Jake Gardiner could have done a better job on Alex Killorn’s shorthanded goal when that rushing Bolts forward fired a puck through the defenceman’s legs and past Bernier’s blocker. Gardiner should have either stepped up on the play or stepped out of the way so that Bernier had a clear view. Gardiner might have been the weak link on front of the Leafs net in the second after Bernier had made a big save but the puck was still loose … The Leafs killed off all three of their penalties and scored on one of their chances … Peter Holland seems to have gained the confidence of coach Randy Carlyle this season, getting time on both the penalty kill and power play last night … Clarkson laid a big hit on Killorn just outside the Tampa blue line in the first … Toronto just started a run through to Dec. 20 in which it plays 11 of 14 games at the ACC … Former Leaf Eddie Shack got a huge applause as he presented a Leafs jersey to member of the Canadian Armed Forces … Former Leafs coach Ron Wilson called the ACC a morgue the other day, and while it was quiet at times on Thursday, all in all, the crowd was pretty boisterous. Plenty of Go-Leaf-Go chants broke out during the game. Guess if the fans have something to cheer about, they will.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014

game point streak going … Polak scored an empty-net goal with a bouncing slapshot from his own end to make it 5-2 after Steven Stamkos had gotten the Bolts a little closer with his 13th goal of the season. Stamkos now has 10 points in his past 12 games … Mike Santorelli, who along with Leo Komarov moved up to the second line with Kadri, had a strong game at both ends and did a good job of clearing Vladislav Namestnikov out from in front of the Leafs net in the second after Bernier had made a big save but the puck was still loose … The Leafs killed off all three of their penalties and scored on one of their chances … Peter Holland seems to have gained the confidence of coach Randy Carlyle this season, getting time on both the penalty kill and power play last night … Clarkson laid a big hit on Killorn just outside the Tampa blue line in the first … Toronto just started a run through to Dec. 20 in which it plays 11 of 14 games at the ACC … Former Leaf Eddie Shack got a huge applause as he presented a Leafs jersey to member of the Canadian Armed Forces … Former Leafs coach Ron Wilson called the ACC a morgue the other day, and while it was quiet at times on Thursday, all in all, the crowd was pretty boisterous. Plenty of Go-Leaf-Go chants broke out during the game. Guess if the fans have something to cheer about, they will.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
Toronto Maple Leafs can exhale after beating Tampa Bay Lightning 0-2

steve-simmons BY STEVE SIMMONS, TORONTO SUN

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TORONTO - Randy Carlyle smiled and then he exhaled.
Or he exhaled and then he smiled.

It was difficult to tell which on a night the coach could joke about a win, joke about the pressure of Toronto hockey, about his good night-bad night hockey team, so sharp in victory, so wobbly and weak in defeat. Smile from something other than embarrassment.

No one asked Carlyle about his job security after a win.

That’s the frailty of this hockey team in search of an identity.

“We played a lot more to the structure that’s required,” said Carlyle. “And we seemed to be a lot more relaxed than we’ve been recently.”

The volume gets turned down.

For now.

At least until Saturday night against Detroit. What the Leafs needed more than anything on Thursday night was a win.

That came.

Partly because they were better.

Partly because Tampa Bay seemed to be the team in blue and white that played somewhat dazed and confused.

There was a touch of role reversal — after the two monumental defeats prior to Thursday night — but the win matters, the win changes the questions asked and mostly changes the tone of the questions. The only thing perfect for the topsy-turvy, great-when-they-win, horrible-when-they-lose-Leafs, was the two points.

The two points matter.

Now nine more home games in the next 11.

A time for this team to find themselves, not just believe in a system that isn’t complicated, but play it, respect it, embrace it. They didn’t always make the right play on Thursday night against the Lightning. But they did compete. That has to be worth something.

And in between the fresh beginning and the frantic hold-your-breath ending, they were at times the Leafs. They had a 1-0 lead and a two-man advantage in the first period and couldn’t score to make it 2-0.

And, on the power play, they gave up a shorthanded goal. That made it 1-1.

Cue the Leafs collapse — but there was no collapse. That’s a small step forward.

“There were a few words (on the bench) and they were more than here we go again,” said Carlyle of the shorthanded goal. “It was not polite.”

Nor should it have been. The Leafs are two teams in one. When they win, they outscore the opposition 45-20. When they lose, they have been outscored 42-17. They specialize in one-sided games, good and bad.

But there were enough little things in a 4-2 win to make a coaching staff smile, especially after all the hollering, meeting, horror-film watching that has been done in the past few days.

Mike Santorelli made a first-period play that will probably go unnoticed in post-game highlights and won’t make it to any boxscore. He was on the Leafs goal line. Vladislav Namestnikov was open at the goal crease, in perfect position to score.

But Santorelli knocked him down and there was no goal.

The past two games, that’s a goal. In most of the first 20 games, that’s a goal. Winning teams make those kind of plays.

The Leafs have not been making those kinds of plays for most of this season.

Tyler Bozak ended up with two assists on Thursday night going head-to-head with superstar Steven Stamkos. Stamkos scored, but Bozak and his line, including two goals from James van Riemsdyk, outscored one of hockey’s best lines.

Most important: Bozak won 22 of 30 faceoffs. Stamkos won just 31% of the faceoffs he took. The Leafs kept the puck from the game’s greatest shooter. Little things become big things — the difference between winning and losing.

Richard Panik, who started the season in Tampa, scored for the Leafs. A fourth-line goal against the first pair of Lightning defence, Anton Stralman and Matt Carle. They rarely got scored on. Stralman was on for three goals against last night.

The goal was Panik’s first of the year and, considering he plays just over 90 minutes most nights — he played 8:18 against the Lightning — he is about the Leafs’ most productive player per minute. You need contributions from the unlikeliest sources to win. Little things make a big difference: The Leafs scored four goals from three different lines.

“We found a way to win a game,” said Carlyle, who understands what is on his plate.

He watched Jake Gardiner make another dreadful giveaway for the Lightning’s first goal.

He grimaced when van Riemsdyk was unable to get pucks out of his own end in the final four minutes. Neither Rome nor the Maple Leafs will be built in a day or a night.

But at least they had a night to call their own.

One night.

One victory.

A chance to loosen the local noose.

Randy Carlyle and the Leafs can exhale.

It’s about all they can do right now.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
Stamkos not surprised by Maple Leafs' play

BY ROB LONGLEY, TORONTO SUN

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The previous time Steven Stamkos was in Toronto, he scored seemingly at will, beating the Leafs almost single-handedly with a hat trick in a 5-3 win.

The version he saw Thursday night of the team he idolized growing up barely resembled that one.

"Let’s not kid ourselves, that’s a pretty good team over there," said Stamkos, who in fairness was busy with his own game when the Leafs were blown out 9-2. “Sure there was a media frenzy the last couple of days when they had a couple of bad losses, but that happens to every team during the course of the season.

"We knew they were a better team than that. At the same time, not to take anything away from them, we were bad.”

The Lightning, playing their third game in four nights, didn’t exactly look like the budding powerhouse, the second best team in the Eastern Conference. But a good effort by the Leafs made them look even worse.

"It’s always good to get a game like that to get back on track," said Leafs defenceman, Stephane Robidas. “But it’s one game. We did a lot of good things, but we’ve got to keep building on that.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.21.2014
Maple Leafs bounce back with win over Lightning 250

rob-longley BY ROB LONGLEY, TORONTO SUN
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TORONTO - The Maple Leafs met their match Thursday night at the Air Canada Centre — and, for once, that wasn’t a bad thing.

It was the opponent, this time the much-touted Tampa Bay Lightning, that played sloppy at times and listless at others, often by the Leafs’ own efforts.

And this time, it was Randy Carlyle’s team that was on the right end of what sure felt like a lopsided result, a 5-2 victory that at least eased some of the anxiousness surrounding the Leafs following two blowout losses.

All is not right in the Blue and White world just yet, and sure it’s maddening trying to figure out what gives with this team from one night to the next.

But with a far more responsible defensive effort — including shutting down the Lightning superstar Steven Stamkos until garbage time — the Leafs were allowed to breathe again.

“The other night, it was nine goals and we were embarrassed by it and there was nothing we could do to take it back,” Carlyle said, in reference to the touchdown loss to Nashville on Tuesday.

“But we sure didn’t want something bad to happen to our hockey club and we think they were rewarded with their hard work.”

No, not much bad happened, starting with David Clarkson’s goal just 91 seconds into the game, breaking a spell that had seen the opposition score first in seven of the team’s previous eight contests.

It also didn’t hurt that the Lightning — the league leaders in goals scored — had trouble getting the puck in the Leafs zone, let alone solving Jonathan Bernier. The Toronto goalie was beaten once in the first, off a suicidal giveaway by Jake Gardiner, and once late with Tampa goalie Ben Bishop out and Stamkos banging in a rebound.

Until then, Stamkos had been stuck in neutral, in large part because of a clever matchup move by Carlyle that paid off.

The Leafs coaching staff decided that the Tyler Bozak-led first line would be best suited to slowing Stamkos and it worked to near perfection, starting with a dominant night in the faceoff circle for the first-line centre, who won 22 of 30 draws.

“When you match up with players like Stamkos, if they don’t start with the puck, it’s an advantage to you, simple as that,” Carlyle said. “If you don’t cover one of the best players in the league, they have multiple ways of hurting you.”

Certainly, the Leafs deserve credit for at least offering a competitive effort, something inexplicably missing in the two blowout losses that led to such a frenzy around the team.

When Richard Panik, claimed off waivers from the Lightning earlier in the season, gave the Leafs the lead at 2:45 of the second, the Leafs wouldn’t trail again.

James van Riemsdyk added to the dominant story of the first line with a pair of goals, including the game winner, giving him nine on the season. Both were the type of plays that can make him so dynamic offensively.

The first came off a turnover at 12:31 of the middle period when he snapped a rocket from the top of the faceoff circle that beat Bishop.

Less than three minutes later, he cashed in on a move he perfects at the end of every practice and pre-game warmup. Scooping up a puck in the blue paint, he deftly flipped it high under the bar. Suddenly the Leafs were up 4-1.

“When things are not going well, there’s a lot of over-analyzing going on,” van Riemsdyk said. “It’s nice for us to put that streak of bad play behind us and try to find some consistency.

“There were a lot of people giving their two cents, deserved or not.”

Much of it was deserved, of course, but at least the Leafs gave themselves another potential boost with a win over yet another quality opponent.

And the defensive effort was particularly strong. Carlyle said the message to his team pre-game was to limit the high-powered Lightning to 25 shots are less. They had kept them to 21 until Bishop was yanked for the extra attacker with more than five minutes left.

“Our mentality tonight was to battle,” said Bernier, who was yanked on Tuesday following three first-period goals against the Preds. “I thought we played a pretty solid game.”

Solid but not spectacular. A building block, not a finished product.

And given what happened during the two previous games, the Leafs are in no position to read anything more into this one, as impressive as it was.

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'Do it for our fans': Leafs coach Carlyle 124

BY IAN SHANTZ, TORONTO SUN

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TORONTO - Maple Leafs players asked that attendance at Thursday morning's game-day skate be optional.

Randy Carlyle granted that request.

The likes of Phil Kessel, James van Riemsdyk, captain Dion Phaneuf, projected starting goaltender Jonathan Bernier, David Clarkson and Roman Polak were all no-shows for the morning skate.

So, it was suggested, might the players reimburse their coach with a win against the Tampa Bay Lightning?

"Pay back themselves," Carlyle said. "Don't worry about me. Do it for your hockey club. Do it for your teammate. Do it for our fans."

A win would not fix all that ails this hockey club, but it would provide temporary reprieve, giving everyone inside and outside the Leafs dressing room a moment to breathe.

Two points -- even one -- certainly isn't going to come easy. The Leafs, having surrendered 15 goals in back-to-back disastrous outings, will not find solace in Thursday's opponent.

The Lightning (13-5-2) come into the Air Canada Centre near the top of the Eastern Conference heap.

Led by superstar Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay has tallied more goals than any other team (73) and carry a potent power play (sixth-best at 23.2% efficiency.)

Tampa Bay has collected points in eight of 10 previous outings.

To put it lightly, the Leafs -- with management, coaches and players all sharing the hot seat following a week to forget -- are up against it.

"All those little things are easily corrected," Carlyle said, noting issues such as "coasting on the forecheck ... coasting on the backcheck" and "not running the proper route" as a few examples.

"We can do this," the coach said. "This isn't a mountain that we're climbing, or a building that we have to push over.

"This is something that you've done all your life, and all we're expecting you to do is continue to do some of the things and do it at a higher rate, and do it more consistently."

That's not to suggest it hasn't been a pressure-packed past few days for the players, who are more than tired of fielding the difficult-to-answer questions from the media.

"Keep it light and get your mind thinking about other things than the negativity," defenceman Cody Franson said of his approach during difficult times. "When you dwell on the negative stuff, it tends to just keep following you around, so you just have to try to move forward."

Added forward Nazem Kadri: "We want to regroup and battle back and just kind of flush everything that has happened so far. We're ready to work like we know we can work."

Bernier, pulled after 20 minutes in a 9-2 pasting by Nashville two nights earlier, is slated to start for Toronto, while the Lightning are expected to go with Ben Bishop.

Stamkos, as is the case every night in any rink, will be guarded closely. The GTA native has 12 goals and 22 points in 20 games (tied with Phil Kessel for fourth in the league scoring race) and has historically torched his hometown team, putting up 26 points in 21 games against the Leafs.

Stamkos has 12 points in 10 appearances at the ACC.
Toronto Maple Leafs redeem themselves in statement win over Tampa Bay Lightning

Michael Traikos | November 20, 2014 | Last Updated: Nov 20 11:09 PM ET

TORONTO — Randy Carlyle was not looking for a miracle. He wasn’t even necessarily looking for a win.

Maple Leafs GM Dave Nonis preaching patience amid panic

After a pair of blowouts — a 6-2 loss to the comically bad Buffalo Sabres, followed up by a 9-2 loss to the Nashville Predators — the head coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs just wanted a little effort.

Play hard, he said. Play the way that you’ve played before. Don’t worry about the fans, who have become more and more restless, or the jobs that may or may not be on the line. Just play.

“Focus on the process,” said Carlyle. “Block everything else out. Block anything else that is going on and focus on the task at hand. Our task at hand is to execute and play a game where this hockey club shows it can play with speed, transition the puck and forecheck. Do all those little things and don’t focus on the big picture right now.

“There’s been a lot of things said and a lot of things done in the last little while. Focus on the small things that you can control. This isn’t a mountain that we’re climbing or a building that we have to push over. This is something you’ve done all your life.”

It sounded simple. And in Thursday night’s 5-2 win against the Tampa Bay Lightning, it sort of was.

Against a very good opponent, the Leafs did not quite look like the team that had defeated the Boston Bruins 6-1. But they certainly looked better than the one that lost their last two by a combined score of 15-4. They skated, made crisp passes and took nothing for granted. They played the way they had a week ago when no one was talking about job security or breaking up the core.

In the process, every Leafs fan went home wearing the jersey they arrived with.

“Imagine that,” said Cody Franson, who picked up an assist to extend his point streak to nine games with 11 points in that span. “You have to take it with a grain of salt and keep moving forward. That’s the only way we’re going to get out of this.”

What this means going forward is unknown. The Leafs, who have been wildly inconsistent all season, would not surprise anyone if they go on another three-game winning streak. Then again, it also would not be surprising if they lost 9-2 to the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday.

For now, it appears that Carlyle’s job is safe. This was a statement game. If the players had wanted to, they could have turned in another lackluster effort and essentially had their head coach fired. But after repeatedly saying that they had not quit on Carlyle, they went out and proved it against the Lightning.

“I thought it was a good response for us,” said forward James van Riemsdyk, who scored twice. “When things aren’t going well in this city, you got a lot of over-analyzing going on. So I think it was nice for us to kind of put that streak, or whatever you want to call it, behind us. And now we have to try to find some consistency.”

From the beginning, this was a team seeking redemption. The Leafs scored 1:25 into the first period when David Clarkson one-timed a pass in the slot from Daniel Winnik. It was Clarkson’s sixth goal in 20 games, surpassing the five that he scored last year and putting him on pace for 25 on the season.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/Darren Calabrese

There were bumps along the way. As Carlyle said, the problems with this team — the constant giveaways, the defensive errors, the inability to play high-energy hockey for 60 minutes — cannot be fixed overnight. And with 1:10 remaining in the first period and the Leafs on the power play, the same problems surfaced.

Jake Gardiner turned the puck over and then accidentally screened Jonathan Bernier on the ensuing shot as the Lightning tied the game. With the way things had gone recently, you sort of expected the mistake to snowball. Instead, the Leafs stuck to their game plan and took a 4-1 lead on goals from Richard Panik and James van Riemsdyk, who scored his eighth and ninth of the season.

There were a few nervous minutes at the end, as Tampa Bay pulled their goalie with 5:32 remaining and scored and Toronto managed just four shots on net in the entire third period. But Roman Polak sealed the victory with an empty-net goal as the Leafs hung on for a very important win.

Now, the challenge becomes replicating this effort over and over again. Or, at the very least, to ensure that when the losses do arrive, they are not as soul-crushing as they have been this season.

“We would love to be more consistent for sure,” Carlyle said after the game. “That’s a goal that we’ve set out and tonight was hopefully a starting point for us. By no means are we over the hump. We’re going to play a Detroit Red Wings hockey club that really dominated us the last time we were in this building … we owe them. And that was our message after the game.

“Our preparation starts right now for Saturday.”

Should Toronto Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle be worried about his job?

National Post Staff and Michael Traikos | November 20, 2014 | Last Updated: Nov 20 9:38 PM ET

Can head coach Randy Carlyle be blamed for the Maple Leafs recent struggles?

Following two big losses — the Leafs fell 6-2 against the lowly Buffalo Sabres on Saturday and 9-2 versus the Nashville Predators on Tuesday — the Toronto Maple Leafs bench boss Randy Carlyle has been under fire and questions about whether he can still lead this team have arisen.

However, on Wednesday, Leafs General Manager Dave Nonis said he would not make a rash decision, including whether to fire the head coach, and instead preached patience in this time of turmoil.

“You can do a lot of damage in the long-term success of your team by overreacting,” Nonis said after watching the Leafs practice on Wednesday.

But despite what the Leafs GM said, National Post’s Michael Traikos examines whether Carlyle is in jeopardy of losing his job.

Phil Kessel is hardly pursued by a rabid mob that never gives him a moment’s pause.

After the last practice before the Toronto Maple Leafs opened the season against the Montreal Canadiens, James van Riemsdyk sat in front of his locker-room stall. He was asked about the Leafs-Habs rivalry. He responded with boilerplate. The phrase “we have to take things one game at a time,” was used, and not with irony. Crash Davis would have been proud.

Brian Burke: ‘Why should Phil Kessel have to talk to these pukes every day?’

Brian Burke, his familiar shock of white hair slicked back and his tie loosened around his neck, was asked about a topic he loves to hate: When does the media frustrate you?

“Almost all the time,” he said, to laughter in the room.

Burke, 59, has spent most of his adult life around the media in various roles held around the National Hockey League. Alternately, he has been one of the sport’s most polarizing, bombastic, charming, controversial and entertaining public voices.

Read more…

It happens. Scrums with athletes are often similarly bereft of insight.

Last weekend, after the CFL East semi-final between the Montreal Alouettes and the B.C. Lions, Brandon Rutley sat in front of his stall while a few reporters waited for him to finish a phone call to his girlfriend. The Als’ running back was in tears, his still-taped left hand wiping away the moisture as he talked. The call over, he stood up, sniffled, and talked about how much the game — he ran for almost 100 yards in his first real action all season — meant to him. He had been trying for four years to do something like this, he said. A day earlier, after practice, Rutley had said he had scraped the last of his money together to make it to a CFL free-agent camp. The Alouettes signed him, then cut him in August. He only made it back to the practice roster when the starter was hurt a couple weeks later.

It was a raw human moment: a 31-year-old who had the day of his career, not long from when it looked to be over.

Such exchanges are rare, but they are worth noting when, as has happened again this week, the narrative develops that the media shouldn’t bother seeking comment from athletes because “they never say anything anyway.” The thing is, sometimes they do.

Phil Kessel is not one of those athletes who does. He sparked the latest discussion of media access to players with his terse “get away from me” blow off of TSN Radio reporter Jonas Siegel after a humiliating loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night. Former Leafs GM Brian Burke then offered that Kessel shouldn’t have to talk to the “pukes” in the press every day anyway. It is unclear if by pukes he meant specifically the Toronto press whom he can now safely ignore, or also those reporters in Calgary, where he now works. If so, awkward.

But Kessel is hardly pursued by a rabid mob that never gives him a moment’s pause. He often slips out of the locker room before reporters are allowed in, or otherwise manages to be unavailable. The Kessel Run: not just an obscure Star Wars reference. From what I’ve seen, this is generally fine with the local media. There are other players on the Leafs who are happy to talk, and no reporter has ever filed a story that hinged on a piece of insight from Kessel. It just isn’t his thing.

So, no, it shouldn’t be a franchise-enveloping crisis when the Leafs sniper occasionally refuses to offer up his bland pronouncements, but nor is it the case that media should give up on the notion of the pre- or post-game comment. Athletes are no different than politicians, with whom I have some experience, in terms of an aversion to meaningful discussion. The key difference is that players can just say nothing, while politicians will say it by using as many words as possible. Few would dispute that the vast majority of reporter-politician exchanges are not particularly fruitful, but no one argues that the media give up asking those questions. Often questions are posed that seem utterly wasted — “will you ask that minister to resign?” — because everyone knows the answer will be negative, but there is value, too, in having that on the record. Sometimes they say things that are unexpected, too. There was no politician in recent memory who had developed a more pointless relationship with the press than Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, whose ability to not answer questions — “anything else?” — was a thing to behold. And then one day last spring, he announced that he had, in fact, tried crack cocaine. He even had to prompt reporters to ask him about it. Sometimes, the routine scrum changes the story forever.

Richard Wolowicz/Getty Images

It is highly unlikely that Phil Kessel will offer the sports equivalent of that moment — “ask me that thing you keep asking me about whether I want to see the coach get fired” — but at some point he might say something surprising.

That’s really the point. The media doesn’t know ahead of time what exchanges will provide useful information. You have to see where it leads you. And, yes, though politicians are elected representatives and athletes are not, both answer in a way to a paying public. Seattle Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch has been dinged with US$100,000 in fines this week for not talking to the press, precisely because the NFL is aware that access to the media, and by extension to the public, is part of the deal.

AP Photo/J Pat Carter

Joffrey Lupul, one of the chattier Leafs, earlier this season said he knew players on opposing teams who looked forward to playing in the Air Canada Centre because all it took was an early goal to get the crowd to turn on the home team. But he also dismissed the notion that Toronto was unique in that way. “I played in Philly,” he said, grinning. Both comments, from the same scrum, gave some first-hand insight into topics endlessly debated in Toronto. Useful, in other words. At other times, access to players can result in stories that couldn’t otherwise be told: Shea Weber discussing the mechanics of his booming shot, or Ray Allen describing how his last-second three-pointer that saved the Miami Heat’s 2013 season unfolded.

Sometimes, players have stories to tell. There’s no harm in asking.

DENVER — The lingering taste of their road trip had pivoted on a fortunate slashing penalty, a herculean goal by their captain and a stingy final six minutes, so the Washington Capitals could return home with a 3-2 victory over the Colorado Avalanche in their rearview mirror and a modest two-game win streak stuffed in their pockets.

"We would've been disappointed if we lost this game," center Nicklas Backstrom said. "It would've been an unsuccessful road trip. But we won, we can say we were pretty successful."

As they neared the first quarter checkpoint of the 2014-15 season, their first under Coach Barry Trotz, the Capitals scraped together another one-goal victory away from Verizon Center and, with an approaching December featuring nine road games, steeled themselves in the escape act.

After twice watching one-goal leads disappear, forward Alex Ovechkin’s solo effort put Washington ahead for good, but it was the entire third period, in which the Capitals stumbled back onto their heels and nearly coughed up the game, that left Trotz encouraged.

"I think it’s part of the team coming together," he said. "Winning on the road, it feels like a bigger moral victory than at home. Winning on the road brings a team close together. Getting comfortable on the road is a good thing."

The comfort only arrived at the final horn, because the Avalanche ratcheted up their intensity following Ovechkin’s goal. They pulled Reto Berra late, but goaltender Braden Holtby made 10 third-period saves and, for the fifth straight game, allowed two goals or fewer.

The Capitals can keep riding Holtby beyond Thanksgiving, with Saturday’s home date against Buffalo and consecutive games against the Islanders looming before their next back-to-back, and can too lug home the lessons learned in St. Louis, Arizona and Colorado.

A 4-1 bludgeoning by the Blues opened eyes inside the locker room to the reality of how they compared to the league’s hottest team, and though the nail-biting course of an overtime win against the Coyotes and later Thursday night, closing the trip with two victories mattered more than the twisting routes taken to get there.

"It’s obviously big," Holtby said. "We want to get all the points we can possibly get anywhere. Doesn’t matter road-home. These last two games I think we played two very underrated teams. They play with a lot of speed and they’re very good. We answered it and came away with two wins."

They also emerged with contributions from two players who had struggled to find the net. Ovechkin’s second-period assist to Backstrom was the top-line’s first goal since Nov. 11 against Columbus. Forward Jason Chimera put the Capitals ahead 2-1 later that period, on a solo snipe from beyond the left faceoff dot, a moment Trotz later saw as emblematic of his team’s maintained focus.

"Jason missed two open nets basically on that bang-bang play [in the first period] and I would say earlier in the season, Chimera would be a little bit rattled for the rest of the game" Trotz said. "He didn’t. He sort of stayed with it and he got rewarded. We’re working through things. I was really happy with that."

Happier, even, because the Capitals avoided the ultimate collapse which haunted them earlier this season, even though Backstrom and Chimera’s goals were both answered. Because they had managed to win their fourth one-goal game over the past five which fit the bill, after losing six of their first seven.

"There’s a good calmness about it, and that’s what I like about our group," he said. "It’s becoming very calm in the close games. If you can win those close games, you’re going to move up the ladder."
DENVER – Two games and 30 minutes removed from the quarter mark of their 2014-15 season, the Washington Capitals (8-7-3) conclude a six-day road trip high near the Rocky Mountains, looking to head home with two victories in their pocket. Blocking the way are the hosts, the Colorado Avalanche (6-8-5), winners of two straight and rested after zero games since Saturday, and two days full off Sunday and Monday.

After a tough October, losing eight of 11 and finishing third-worst in the NHL in shots against per 60 minutes, according to War on Ice, the Avalanche have turned it around somewhat, sweeping the latter half of their New York-area road trip, topping the Rangers in a shootout and the Devils, 3-2.

“Have a little bit of background on them from being over here for a few years,” Coach Barry Trotz said. “They got off to a little bit of a rough start with the goals against there, and the adjustments they made are based on how they’re playing. We see a couple things that are a little different. We’ll focus on that, see if we can try to find some holes in that.”

The Capitals, meanwhile, have not produced a goal from their top-six over the past three games and have scored only two regulation goals in that span.

“I think tonight you’ll see, they’re going to be a run-and-gun team,” forward Tom Wilson said of Colorado. “We’re going to have to play fast with them. We don’t want to cater to their style, but we’re going to have to keep it tight and get on the forecheck and be hard on their D and make them turn it over.”

So, get on your Internet forecheck and head into the discussion thread, with the puck dropping around 9 p.m. ET. The lines, injuries, goaltending matchup and links, per usual, are below.

LINES
Forwards
Alex Ovechkin–Nicklas Backstrom–Tom Wilson
Marcus Johansson-Andre Burakovsky–Troy Brouwer
Jason Chimera–Jay Beagle–Joel Ward
Michael Latta–Evgeny Kuznetsov–Eric Fehr
Defensemen
Brooks Orpik–John Carlson
Karl Alzner–Matt Niskanen
Nate Schmidt–Mike Green
Scratches
F Chris Brown
D Jack Hillen

GOALTENDING MATCHUP
Braden Holtby (6-4-2, 2.28 GAA, .913 SV%) vs. Reto Berra (2-1-1, 2.70 GAA, .914 SV%).

Riding a hot streak of two or fewer goals allowed over four straight games, Holtby gets the nod after helping kill four second-period penalties and providing a backbone for the Capitals’ 2-1 overtime win in Arizona. Holtby has faced Colorado only once, allowing four even-strength goals in a 4-1 loss here last November.

The 27-year-old Berra, serving in place of the injured Semyon Varlamov (groin), has never faced Washington in his NHL career.

INJURIES
F Liam O’Brien (lower body)
DENVER – Over their past three games, the Capitals, hamstrung against tight-checking teams and jammed neutral zones, have scored two regulation goals. All three total goals against Arizona, St. Louis and New Jersey, including Eric Fehr’s overtime winner Tuesday night in the desert, have come from forwards on Washington’s bottom two lines: Fehr, Joel Ward and Jay Beagle. Not since the Nov. 11 win over Columbus have the Capitals’ top-six forwards produced a goal.

“I think that’s a little bit of product of the game,” Coach Barry Trotz said. “You get teams that are really focusing on shutting them down, and they’re going to get shut down in games. That’s why it’s important for us to be able to win a 2-1 game if the other team’s doing a good job shutting the big lines down.”

Indeed, the Capitals scratched their way toward two points against the Coyotes and came within an errant Braden Holtby pass of at least getting a point against the Devils. But over the past three games, forward Alex Ovechkin has managed just eight shots on net, not quite as low as his four-game, two-shots-or-fewer streak from October, but still a problem. In Arizona, three of his shots on goal came during the same power play sequence.

“We definitely have to create more chances,” center Nicklas Backstrom said. “It’s real important, that we all three work together. In this league, nothing’s going to come to you easy. You better work for it. It’s something we’ve talked about, and what our goal is. After that, hopefully create some chances. It’s really important, I think. We have to get everyone going here at the same time, not just four or five guys. It’s really important we have the whole team working together and get going.”

With big-bodied rookie Tom Wilson on the top-line right wing spot alongside Backstrom and Ovechkin, the results have been mixed. Wilson’s Corsi-for – a measurement of total shot differential, including blocked attempts – has hovered around 48 percent, according to Stats.HockeyAnalysis.com.

Like Trotz, Wilson chalked up some of his line’s recent struggles to circumstance, but saw an opportunity against what he called a “run-and-gun” Colorado team that would demand the Capitals stay tight on the forecheck and pressure Avalanche defensemen into turnovers.

“It’s been a lot of bouncing pucks, a lot of neutral zone play, a lot of collapsing down low,” Wilson said. “We’re going to work. We’re still building chemistry. We’re going to work at it tonight and hopefully get on the board.”

Color Trotz among those unconcerned with the recent dry spell.

“I think they’re too talented,” he said. “They’re going to get their looks, we haven’t had a lot of power play, that’s where they open the game up a little bit that way, haven’t had a lot of them lately, but that’s the importance of having a good system where you get contributions from everybody.

”[In Arizona] the top lines got nullified and where do your goals come from? The third and fourth line. That’s how you win hockey games. That’s how you can sustain some consistency. All of a sudden you’ve got all your top lines going and they break open and you’re getting contributions from your third and fourth, that’s how you pull away from teams.”
At 5,200 feet, Capitals focus on shorter shifts to handle Colorado altitude

By Alex Prewitt November 20 at 3:29 PM  Follow @alex_prewitt

DENVER – The Washington Capitals stood along the boards Thursday morning at Pepsi Center, their second day here in the mountains, and wondered how to handle an altitude known for shredding lungs. Should they shed all caution and skate hard? Should they coast for several line rushes and adjust?

"I don't think there's any black and white way to figure it out," forward Tom Wilson said. "You just have to grind through it and hopefully your body adjusts."

Many NHL teams encounter shortness of breath and tired legs thanks to an altitude roughly 5,200 feet above sea level. Several years ago, former Capitals center Mathieu Perreault developed headaches and needed to be scratched, defenseman Karl Alzner recalled.

"You talk about it, and guys are well aware of it," Alzner said. "You just start to figure it out during pregame skate. It's something we'll talk about before the game, keep your shifts short, stay as fresh as you can."

Really, visiting teams can't do much more. The Capitals hadn't discussed it as a group, but Coach Barry Trotz planned to mention his philosophy of cutting ice time by around 25 percent.

"If you're going 45 seconds, bring it down to 35 or somewhere in there, and you should be fine," Trotz said. "It's those long shifts when you get caught out there. It's the offensive player mentality, when they're out there for 45 and they've got one more rush in them and then they're stuck in their end, a minute and a half later, you're sucking for air. That's one thing you have to adjust here, especially when you're in and out."

Against a speedy and rested Avalanche team that hasn't played since Saturday, the Capitals know they may be in for a burner. They have lost four straight against Colorado dating back to Dec. 15, 2009, including two here. But practicing Wednesday at the University of Denver helped acclimate the players to the environment, as did Thursday’s skate at the game rink. Former coach Adam Oates also heavily stressed handling the altitude effects during his tenure, so many of the current Capitals were aware.

"You definitely notice it," Wilson said. "It's not a myth. You notice it out there. Yesterday at practice a couple guys got a practice under their belt, that definitely helps. But at the end of the day we're professional athletes. We'll adapt to it and adjust to it."

Said center Nicklas Backstrom: "When you just pop into town, you can feel it right away. But we were here yesterday too. It probably helps a little bit."

DENVER – This was not how he expected the season would unfold, because who forecasts such unpredictability? “Definitely isn’t the way I drew the year up,” Eric Fehr said, “but that’s the way things go.”

Which perhaps made Tuesday so welcome for the Capitals forward, who scored the winning goal in a 2-1 overtime victory over Arizona. With less than two minutes until a shootout, Fehr positioned himself just outside the crease. He read the angle off defenseman Brooks Orpik’s shot perfectly, and when the puck caromed off Coyotes goaltender Mike Smith’s pads, Fehr slapped it into the net.

He was a fourth-liner that night, a right-winger beside Evgeny Kuznetsov and Chris Brown. This season, his 10th in the NHL, Fehr has also been a top-line winger, a puck-cycling center, among the Capitals’ best possession-based forwards, an anti-bullying children’s author, scratched three times, challenged by Coach Barry Trotz to offer more and now, on at least one occasion, a hero.

“I definitely wanted to contribute and when you’re playing less minutes, it’s more difficult to contribute, but you have to find a way,” Fehr said. “I was obviously real happy with the end result.”

The route, however, had proved twisting. This season, no Washington forward has skated with more than two other forwards for longer than 70 minutes at even strength, except Fehr, who has skated with four: Joel Ward, Jason Chimera, Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom. In this regard, this season has unfolded similar to last season, with Fehr deployed in varying, unfamiliar circumstances.

“I think it’s been a little difficult for him, but at the same time I want Eric to be going through some of those difficulties,” Trotz said. “I think there’s a level of ability in his game that he hasn’t tapped into yet and by moving him around and making it a little difficult at times, I think it forces him to find other ways to contribute, and when you do that you become a more complete player, you become a very valuable piece to all that.

“I think his game needs sometimes, the fourth line, they play with a bit more urgency, sometimes you’re on the checking line, sometimes you’re on the scoring line, and you have to figure out that role, how you’re going to be able to figure it out. I think he’s a very intelligent player. By putting him in different roles and having him try to figure it out, it’ll help him in the long haul. Now, it’s probably difficult for him, but I think in the long haul it’s going to help him a lot.”

Trotz brought up Fehr’s reputation when he entered the NHL as a “slick-hand goal-scorer,” one season removed from 111 points in the Western Hockey League, including 59 goals. And with the Capitals, Trotz seemed content serving as Fehr’s agent of chaos, trying to tap into different styles, seemingly part of his mission to make the team “comfortable when it’s uncomfortable.”

“He’s got good hockey IQ, he’s got a big body. I think he can be able to play almost every style that you want,” Trotz said. “I think instead of settling on one style, and just using one asset, I think he can use more of his toolbox to be more effective. He’s learning that on the fly a bit.”

During the preseason, Fehr found himself studying video of all three forward positions in Washington’s new system, though once games began, he needed to dial it back. He may scroll through assignments and routes in his head during warm-ups, but once the puck drops, he wants to rely on reactions. The most difficult part of switching positions, he said, is the lack of routine and the increased risk of thinking too much on the ice.

“It’s definitely a good asset to have,” Fehr said of his versatility. “It makes it easier to put you into different positions and into the lineup. At the same time you do get moved around a lot, so it’s tough to get consistency. It’s just something I’ve had for the last year or two, and I’ve kind of grown into that role. As I continue with that role, I get more comfortable with it, find more ways to be effective.”
**Pregame primer: Caps look to finish strong**

**November 20, 2014, 2:00 pm**

News and notes as the Capitals [8-7-3, 19 points] prepare to face the Colorado Avalanche [6-8-5, 17 points] tonight at the PepsiCenter in Denver [9 p.m., CSN]:

**Rested vs. weary?:** The Avs have not played since beating the Devils in New Jersey on Saturday. The Caps are playing their final game of a three-game road trip that started with a 4-1 loss in St. Louis on Saturday, followed by a 2-1 overtime win in Glendale, Ariz., on Tuesday.

**Trending:** The Caps have lost four in a row to the Avalanche and have not won in Denver since a 6-1 blowout back on Dec. 15, 2009, when Caps rookie center Andre Burakovksy was 14 years old.

**Goalie matchup:** Look for Braden Holtby [6-4-2, 2.28 GAA, .913 SP] to get the call for the Caps. Holtby has won three of his last four starts and has allowed just six goals in that span [1.49 GAA, .949 SP]. Holtby needs two wins to pass Pat Riggin [67] for sixth place on the Caps’ all-time win list among goalies.

With former Caps G Semyon Varlamov sidelined with a groin injury, Avs coach Patrick Roy is expected to go with Reto “Yogi” Berra [2-1-1, 2.20, .914]. Berra has not played since he split back-to-back starts on Nov. 4 and 6, beating Toronto and losing to Philadelphia.

**Ovi watch:** Caps LW Alex Ovechkin has gone three games without a point and is a minus-3 in those games. After scoring five goals in his first four games, Ovechkin has just three goals in his last 14 games. He still leads the NHL with 81 shots but his 9.9 shooting percentage is his lowest since 2010-11 when he finished at 8.7 percent.

Hit man: Caps D Brooks Orpik leads all Caps and ranks seventh in the NHL with 63 hits.

**Killers:** The Caps have killed off 17 of their last 19 penalties and rank 14th in the NHL with an 82 percent success rate. The Avs’ penalty killers rank fifth in the NHL at 88.2 percent, but they are 26th on the power play at 13.4 percent. The Caps are tied for third at 24.6 percent.

Statistically speaking: The Caps’ 2-1 overtime win over the Coyotes was their first this season when tied after two periods. They have been outscored 17-10 in third periods this season. The Caps are 7-1-1 when scoring first. The Avs are 4-4-0 when they score first. The Avs are 3-0-3 when tied after two periods. The Caps have been outshot by an opponent just four times this season and are 2-2-0 in those game. They are 5-5-3 when outshooting their opponents. Colorado has been outshot 13 times this season.

**Heavy load:** Colorado D Erik Johnson logged a career-high 30:25 of ice time on Saturday night in New Jersey. It was the most minutes by an Avalanche player in a non-overtime game since March 9, 2008, when former Caps D Scott Hannan played 32:14 at Dallas.

**All-Star voting starts today:** Ready for some NHL All-Star ballot stuffing? Want to give your favorite Capitals player a chance to play in Columbus on Jan. 25? You can vote for any player in the NHL beginning today at NHL.com/vote.

Look ahead: Following tonight’s game the Caps will be given the day off on Friday, then report to Kettler Capitals Iceplex for a 10:15 a.m. skate on Saturday for their 7 p.m. game against the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night. They follow with a Wednesday night visit to Long Island and a return home for Thanksgiving and a Black Friday game against those same Islanders.

Projected lineups for tonight:

**CAPITALS**

**Forward lines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alex Ovechkin</th>
<th>Nicklas Backstrom</th>
<th>Tom Wilson</th>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus Johansson</td>
<td>Andre Burakovksy</td>
<td>Troy Brouwer</td>
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**AVALANCHE**

**Forward lines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gabriel Landeskog</th>
<th>John Mitchell</th>
<th>Jarome Iginla</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cody McLeod</td>
<td>Marc-André Cliché</td>
<td>Max Talbot</td>
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**Defense pairings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nate Schmidt</th>
<th>Mike Green</th>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Alzner</td>
<td>Brooks Orpik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jay Beagle</td>
<td>Evgeny Kuznetsov</td>
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**Starting goaltender**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Braden Holtby</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reto Berra</td>
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**Backup**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Calvin Pickard</th>
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<tr>
<td>Chuck Gormley</td>
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</table>

**Injured:**

- Brooks Laich (shoulder)
- Liam O'Brien (lower body)
- Dmitry Orlov (wrist)
- John Erskine (neck surgery)

**Scratched:**

- Jack Hillen
- Chris Brown

**Star voting starts today:** Ready for some NHL All-Star voting today? Vote for your favorite NHL player at NHL.com/vote.

**News and notes**

- Philadelphia Flyers' Kari Lehtonen was 30-25 of ice time on Saturday night in New Jersey. It was the most minutes by an Avalanche player in a non-overtime game since March 9, 2008, when former Caps D Scott Hannan played 32:14 at Dallas.

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Back in April of 2013, when the Capitals outbid a handful of other NHL teams and signed University of Minnesota junior defenseman Nate Schmidt to a two-year, $2.7 million contract, then-general manager George McPhee had big plans for the young blue liner from St. Cloud.

“We like him a lot,” McPhee said at the time. “He’s got terrific speed, the ability to run the power play. Those are pretty valuable attributes.”

Nineteen months and countless trips to and from Hershey later, Schmidt is becoming the everyday NHL player the Caps envisioned.

“Nate has gotten to a point where he’s a great skater and he’s feeling comfortable with his exits and joining the play,” Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. “I think he feels really comfortable in his own skin and that’s what you want.

“He’s an enthusiastic young man you brings energy and he plays with that real joy or spirit in the game. Right now he enjoys playing defense for the Washington Capitals.”

Entering tonight’s game at the PepsiCenter against the Colorado Avalanche, Schmidt, 23, has played in all 18 games for the Capitals and ranks first on the team with a plus-8 rating. His strong play alongside defense partner Mike Green has kept veteran defenseman Jack Hillen in the press box for 17 straight games, but Schmidt knows he could be one bad game away from being out of the lineup.

He knows this because it happened to him last season, when he was assigned to the AHL Hershey Bears three times – on Sept. 24, Dec. 15 and Jan. 21 – as the Capitals rotated 14 different defensemen in and out of their lineup.

“That’s the kind of thing that destroyed me last year,” Schmidt said. “Destroyed might be too strong a word, but … It’s one day-at-a-time for me. Right now I feel a part of this team and I can help us win in the long haul.”

The Caps had enough faith in Schmidt to give him a one-year, two-way contract worth $625,000 if he played in the NHL [a $300,000 pay cut from last season] and $110,000 if he played in the AHL [a $40,000 raise from last season]. With that in mind Schmidt came into training camp wanting to prove he belonged.

And the Caps’ new coaching staff gave him that chance.

“The biggest thing is when the coaching staff has the confidence in you,” he said. “With Mike [Green] and I, it makes a big difference when you play with a guy and you’re both on the same page and you know where your going to be at all times. It really helps me.”

Schmidt said he has spent hours working with new assistant coach Todd Rierden on aspects of his game that went unaddressed last season, mostly because he was shuttled between Arlington and Hershey.

“I’m trying to learn from what I went through last year,” he said. “I was a little more quiet and didn’t ask much. I didn’t want to get invested and then [get moved]. But I have to. With the guys here there is an enormous wealth of knowledge and I’m trying to tap into that each day.”

Schmidt said Rierden has stressed stick positioning in the defensive zone and a heightened awareness of closing in opponents before they get a head of steam toward him.

“Todd wants me to take my biggest asset, which is skating, and utilize it to where I can transition myself to offense where I can be most successful. That starts in the defensive zone, because that’s really vital to our success as a team.

“I’ve really enjoyed working with him. He’s opened my eyes to things I never thought of before.”

Postma fits role to the letter

By: Gary Lawless
Posted: 11/21/2014 1:00 AM | Comments: 0

It was just another strong game in a string of many for the 25-year-old who has finally found regular work in the NHL after being a player the organization felt was always wanting in key areas and never quite ready for prime-time work.

A swift skater with a thunder clap of a shot, Postma has picked up points at every level prior to the NHL, and in spot duty over the last few years he's always managed to show a flash here and there.

But unreliable play against the rush as well as in his own zone made him a hazard and difficult to trust.

A little faith from head coach Paul Maurice and a handy role model in Toby Enstrom has gone a long way towards sanding those rough edges off Postma's game.

"Confidence and the chance to play every night has made such a difference for me. I used to make a mistake and let it ruin the rest of my game but knowing the coach believes in me and that I'm going back out there has made a big difference for me," said Postma. "I've tried to learn a lot from watching Toby. He's got a great stick and he's always in the right position. I've been trying to do a lot of the little things he does."

Postma will never be a banger but neither was Nick Lidstrom, and the notion a defenceman has to be physical to be effective is outdated thinking.

The top asset in a defenceman in today's possession-mad NHL is the ability to retreat quickly and retrieve the puck and then efficiently move it out of the defensive zone and get his team back on the attack.

Postma has distinct talents in these areas and now that he's proven himself capable of handling sheltered third-pairing work, it might be time to give him a little more rope.

Postma has a very strong 54.8 Corsi percentage and he's scoring at a rate of 0.66 points per 60 minutes of play. The averages for third-pairing defencemen in those categories are 49.4 Corsi percentage and 0.56 points per 60 minutes of play.

Postma has one goal and two assists this season and is averaging just more than 13 minutes of ice time per game.

It all starts with belief for Postma. Belief from head coach Paul Maurice and then Postma's belief in himself.

A lack of confidence bred inconsistency into Postma's game in the past but that hasn't been the case for much of this season.

The question becomes, what could he do with a little more responsibility?

The power play has been a disaster and ranks among the worst in the NHL. Postma can move the puck, see the ice and get his shot to the net.

It's certainly time to shake up the power play. Why not give Postma more than just mop-up duty? It certainly can't hurt and if it results in some positives for the team while aiding the development of a young player, it's a move the Jets should consider.

Maurice showed his strength as an evaluator when, after just one pre-season game due to injury, he declared Postma a starting-six defender.

The same evaluation should tell him Postma is a fit for the power play and that he deserves a another push up the depth chart.

Winnipeg Jets

Ugly wasn’t enough
Jets stuck to their game plan, but came up a goal short

By: Ed Tait

They did greasy, just as planned. They did ugly, by design.

But what the Winnipeg Jets didn’t do Thursday night in a 4-3 loss to the Detroit Red Wings was stick to the defensive blueprint they had religiously followed through most of the first quarter of the 2014-15 NHL season.

The Jets gave up a two goals in the span of 130 seconds in the final seven minutes -- as well as a 2-zip advantage in the second -- in dropping just their third game in their last 14 to the lickety-split Wings.

The result drops the Jets to 10-8-3 on the season, with the St. Louis Blues here Sunday afternoon in the finale of a three-game homestand.

HEART WILLING, LEGS WEREN’T
THE Jets took a 3-2 lead into the third period and had been 6-0-1 in those situations... until Thursday night. Justin Abdelkader and Tomas Tatar rallied the Wings with two goals in the third, taking advantage of a Jets squad that had lost its zip.

"To be honest with ya, I think it was 15 games in 28 days and twice off the east coast," said Jets coach Paul Maurice. "The bench didn’t get quiet out of anything but they were breathing pretty good. We just didn’t have the fight on some pucks, hit a post and they came down and made good.

"We had some strange things happen to us on the ice that ended up in the back of our net, plays that you haven’t seen... you get those aberration plays every once in a while. We normally don’t feed pucks up the middle or fall down or lose a guy back door. We’ve been good on those things. It’s not systemic of what we’ve seen of our team. I just didn’t think that we had a lot of push back in that third.

"We weren’t sitting back, I just didn’t think we had enough gas to go forward."

TWO GOALS, TWO GAFFES AND A HON CANDIDATE
AFTER a scoreless first, the Jets and Wings served up an erratic but entertaining middle frame. The Jets would break out to a two-zip lead as Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry both broke 14-game goalless streaks, but then two defensive lapses -- the first by Toby Enstrom, the second by Mark Stuart -- directly led to superb goals by Tatar and Johan Franzen as Detroit pulled even again in the span of 3:20.

The fifth goal of the wild period featured Mathieu Perreault circling the Wings net, backing out in front before beating Mrazek for his second goal in as many games.

All of which was moot with the tank empty and the Jets operating on fumes in the final period.

"We’ve been good all year with the lead, but couldn’t get it done tonight,” said Perreault. "It's unfortunate, but we've got to move on. They put a good push on, but I think its on us. We didn’t execute as well as we've been doing. They came hard at us, kind of took us by surprise a little bit and got the win.

"It's hard to put the finger on one thing. A couple bounces here and there, a couple plays we weren't strong enough and it ended up being in the back of our net.”

“A couple bounces here and there,” added Dustin Byfuglien, "and that's the game of hockey."

TWO SCARY NUMBERS

1. The Jets were 0-for-3 on the power play, extending their ineptitude with the man advantage even further. Winnipeg is now 0-for-its-last-six-games on the PP, whiffing on their last 21 chances.

2. Detroit dominated the faceoff circle, winning 61 per cent (39 of 64) of the draws.

"They were able to large stretches of the game and I think that comes down to faceoffs,” said Adam Lowry, who lost all four of his draws. “Any time a team wins that many draws they're going to have the puck and they're going to make some plays.”

SOME REST FOR THE WICKED
THE Jets will not be on the ice Friday and that's perfectly cool with Maurice, who leaned heavily on the fatigue factor after the game.

"The first two periods were some pretty fine hockey," he said. "We spend a lot of energy doing what we do in the first two periods of that game. It takes a lot. There's a lot of finished checks, there's a lot of back pressures. There's a cost to playing as hard as we do and that's why we try to keep our team off the ice and not practising a whole lot.

"I was more fearful you were going to see that version in the last game just because the back-to-back in Nashville and Minnesota cost a lot. We got through five periods surviving it and didn't get through the sixth.”

Frolik is Mr. Shutdown
Jets winger morphed game to heed coach's suggestion

By: Ed Tait

No doubt Michael Frolik has heard a lot of compliments over a career that has covered 451 games with three different NHL teams.

But it could be said none of them carried more weight than a recent bouquet tossed his way, courtesy Mark Scheifele earlier this week. Said Scheifele, who had been reunited on a line with the veteran Czech and rookie Adam Lowry:

"He's unbelievable," said Scheifele. "I feel like everyone is fighting to play with him. He makes all the best plays, he rarely makes a mistake, he's great offensively and great defensively.

"He just does everything right and that's everything you want in a linemate."

It doesn't take long for any of Frolik's teammates to willingly gush about the man. They speak of his work ethic, his consistency, his attention to detail in both ends of the ice and the example he sets every day at the rink.

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-- Mark Scheifele on linemate Michael Frolik

Funny thing about all this praise for his two-way game... back in the day, back when Frolik was a young prospect from Kladno in the Czech Republic, somebody nicknamed him 'Baby Jagr.' It's a flattering nickname, no doubt, but maybe more than a tad unfair because there is only one No. 68, a player who won't have to wait long to be enshrined in The Hockey Hall of Fame.

Frolik, as gifted as his offensive skill set is, has never scored more than 21 goals in his NHL career -- and he reached that mark in his first two years as a pro after being drafted 10th overall by the Florida Panthers in 2006.

He has 80 goals in his stops in Florida, Chicago and now in Winnipeg, but has essentially recreated himself as one of the league's more dependable two-way players, a guy that seems to bring out the best in any of his linemates.

In fact, he's more of a Frank J. Selke-type than a guy who will challenge for the scoring title.

"He's just such an honest, quick player," said Jets coach Paul Maurice after Thursday's game-day skate. "He makes really good defensive reads, so you're not spending a lot of time chasing it in your own end.

"It's his consistency shift to shift. He doesn't take nights off and he doesn't take shifts off. And there's a personality part of that. He's got a smile on his face most days. He enjoys playing the game and there's not a lot of negative tension on the bench with him. If they have a shift that doesn't go their way, he's the 'let's-go-get-em-on-the-next-shift' kind of player. That brings out the best in his linemates."

The transformation of Frolik's game essentially began four years ago after the Panthers traded him to the Blackhawks along with Alexander Salak for Hugh Jessiman, Jack Skille and David Pacan (oops).

Seeing all the talent ahead of him on the depth chart and heeding the advice of coach Joel Quenneville, Frolik made himself into a defence-first forward.

"It was from Q (Quenneville)," said Frolik, when asked who first broached the idea of him changing his game. "When I got there there was so much offence I was on the third-fourth line and the message from him during the lockout year was 'You're going to be playing the PK and you're going to be that shut-down guy.'

"(Marcus) Kruger and I worked together on the PK and we had a good run there. That's something I'll never forget... we went something like 25 games in the playoffs without giving up a goal."

"You just listen to the coach and what he says. Obviously, you want to play offence. But I'm not a guy who thinks too much about that. I just take the role and do my job."

Frolik doesn't offer any magic formula for his compatibility with linemates other than good communication. He also preaches playing the 'right way' -- making sure he's responsible in his own end and being judicious in taking offensive chances.

"When I was younger it was just offence, offence," said Frolik. "But when you get here you need to play a two-way game. I still hope I'm an offensive guy. It's fun when you score goals and can help the team. But if you play good defence I think you can make your career last a little bit longer. I kind of found that way in Chicago when I played that role because we had so much offence there. I still want to play offence. It's what I like and what I used to do.

"Hopefully it's going to come back a little bit, too."
Postma fits role to the letter
By: Gary Lawless

Ugly wasn’t enough Postma fits role to the letter Frolik is Mr. Shutdown Frolik is Mr. Shutdown Ugly wasn’t enough Lowry shakes early nerves, making great strides in first 20 games
It was just another strong game in a string of many for the 25-year-old who has finally found regular work in the NHL after being a player the organization felt was always wanting in key areas and never quite ready for prime time work.

A swift skater with a thunder clap of a shot, Postma has picked up points at every level prior to the NHL and in spot duty over the last few years he’s always managed to show a flash here and there.

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Ugly wasn't enough
Jets stuck to their game plan, but came up a goal short against Wings

By: Ed Tait

Who has been the Jets best defenceman so far this season?
Toby EnstromJacob TroubaMark StuartZach BogosianView Results

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The Wings, playing without Pavel Datsyuk and with Petr Mrazek making his first of the season start in goal as Mike Babcock opted to give Jamie Howard a break, improved to 10-4-5.

HEART WILLING, LEGS WEREN’T

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"We weren’t sitting back, I just didn’t think we had enough gas to go forward."

TWO GOALS, TWO GAFFES AND A HON CANDIDATE

After a scoreless first the Jets and Wings served up an erratic, but entertaining middle frame. The Jets would break out to a two-goal lead as Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry both broke 14-game goal-less streaks, but then two defensive lapses — the first by Toby Enstrom, the second by Mark Stuart — directly led to superb goals by Tomas Tatar and Johan Franzen as Detroit pulled even again in the span of 3:20.

The fifth goal of the wild period featured Mathieu Perreault circling the Wings net, backing out in front before beating Mrazek for his second goal in as many games.

All of which was moot with the tank empty and the Jets operating on fumes in the final period.

"We’ve been good all year with the lead, but couldn’t get it done tonight,” said Perreault. "It’s unfortunate, but we’ve got to move on. They put a good push on, but I think its on us. We didn’t execute as well as we’ve been doing. They came hard at us, kind of took us by surprise a little bit and got the win.

"It’s hard to put the finger on one thing. A couple bounces here and there, a couple plays we weren’t strong enough and it ended up being in the back of our net."

"A couple bounces here and there,” added Dustin Byfuglien, "and that’s the game of hockey."

TWO SCARY NUMBERS

1. The Jets were 0-for-3 on the power-play, extending their ineptitude with the man advantage even further. Winnipeg is now 0-for-its-last-six-games on the PP, whiffing on their last 21 chances.

2. Detroit dominated the face-off circle, winning 61 per cent (39 of 64) of the draws.

"They were able to large stretches of the game and I think that comes down to face-offs,” said Adam Lowry, who lost all four of his draws. "Any time a team wins that many draws they’re going to have the puck and they’re going to make some plays."

SOME REST FOR THE WICKED

The Jets will not be on the ice Friday and that’s perfectly cool with Maurice, who leaned heavily on the fatigue factor after the game.

"The first two periods were some pretty fine hockey,” he said. "We spend a lot of energy doing what we do in the first two periods of that game. It takes a lot. There’s a lot of finished checks, there’s a lot of back pressures. There’s a cost to playing as hard as we do and that’s why we try to keep our team off the ice and not practising a whole lot.

"I was more fearful you were going to see that version in the last game just because the back-to-back in Nashville and Minnesota cost a lot. We got through five periods surviving it and didn’t get through the sixth."

Lowry shakes early nerves, making great strides in first 20 games

By: Ed Tait
Posted: 11/20/2014 6:52 AM | Comments: 0

He grew up in a hockey household, his dad having carved out a respectable NHL career that saw him play in 1,084 games with five different teams.

And so it's not that Adam Lowry expected all this -- to be playing in the bigs at age 21 and after just one full season of grooming in the AHL -- but he did have a complete understanding of what it would take to get here.

Maybe that explains why Lowry sounds like a 10-year NHL vet when the cameras and microphones are in his face. Maybe it's why there have been so few dips in his performance through his first 20 games as an NHL player.

But there's also this sense from Winnipeg Jets coaches and teammates who have watched him play: This guy could play a long time in the NHL.

"It's been a good experience so far," said Lowry on Wednesday when asked for a take on his first 20 NHL games. "Getting to play to your first NHL game is something you look forward to and remember for a long time. Scoring your first NHL goal... that was a pretty special moment as well.

"There's been a lot of firsts -- getting to go on my first road trip, getting to play at Madison Square Garden, playing at the Madhouse on Madison in Chicago... getting to experience all those things has definitely been a cool experience.

"The Madhouse in Chicago was something special. You hear about the anthem and everything and how loud it is. But until you get there and actually experience it, it's hard to describe. Same thing for Madison Square Garden. It was pretty cool in the pre-game skate just to look around and know the history in that building.

"One of my favourite players growing up was Patrick Marleau," added Lowry. "So, getting to play San Jose and going on the penalty kill against Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau... that was pretty cool. San Jose was also my favourite team growing up. Playing against those guys was something. It was like, 'Well, this is really happening.'"

There's a quiet confidence to Lowry off the ice that mirrors more and more what everyone is seeing when he's at work. There are a lot of layers to his game that don't necessarily show up on the black and white of the scoresheet, such as his hockey sense, his attention to detail in the defensive zone and basics like finishing checks.

And that's only going to grow now that he's got a month and a half under his belt.

"You always go in having confidence in your own game, but it's a matter of time, a matter of playing against guys in the NHL to know if you're fully ready yet," Lowry said. "The first few games I think I was nervous and it showed in my play. Over the last 15 or so games I feel like I continue to get better every night. A lot of that has to do with confidence now and knowing that I can play at this level. Now I have to work on continuing to make better reads and make better plays with my linemates.

"I don't want to look too far ahead. I just want to continue to improve, play solid defensively and starting to generate more chances. The last five or 10 games I've felt more comfortable with the puck and I'm trying to make some plays. As the season wears on that's going to continue to improve.

"I want to continue to be hard on players whenever I'm out there against the other team's top players. That's something that's going to be important for me moving forward. I understand there are things I need to work on and improve.

"But I also know it's been a lot of hard work and a lot of sacrifice to get here. To finally be able to say that you reached your goal and are living your dream to play in the NHL... not a lot of people can say they get to do what they wanted to do as a child. I'm grateful for this."

ABOUT THE RED WINGS

The Wings arrived in Winnipeg late Wednesday afternoon following a 5-0 shutout of the Columbus Blue Jackets in Ohio on Tuesday. The win improved Detroit to 9-4-5 and has them fourth in the Atlantic Division behind Montreal, Tampa Bay and Boston.

The Wings have been all over the map over the last little while, beating Chicago 4-1 last Friday, falling to Montreal by the same score on Sunday before Tuesday’s blanking of the Blue Jackets.

Jimmy Howard picked up the shutout, the 19th of his career, and it came in his 300th NHL game, all with the Red Wings. He is now 160-89-41.

Pavel Datsyuk (groin) did not dress for the win over Columbus and his spot in the lineup was taken by Daniel Cleary.

Darren Helm, the pride of St. Andrews, scored Tuesday night to give him two goals and five assists in 17 games this season. He told the Detroit News his skating is where he’d like it right now.

"I don't have that jump, a step or half-step too slow, whatever it is," Helm said. "I haven't quite found my game that I want to be playing right now. I have a lot of room to improve and each game I'm trying to work harder and get to that spot."

WINNIPEG JETS

31 Ondrej Pavelec
34 Michael Hutchinson
2 Adam Pardy
4 Paul Postma
5 Mark Stuart
8 Jacob Trouba
9 Evander Kane
14 Anthony Peluso
15 Matt Halischuk
16 Andrew Ladd
17 Adam Lowry
18 Bryan Little
19 Jim Slater
21 T.J. Galiardi
22 Chris Thorburn
24 Grant Clitsome
26 Blake Wheeler
33 Dustin Byfuglien
39 Toby Enstrom
44 Zach Bogosian
55 Mark Scheifele
67 Michael Frolik
85 Mathieu Perreault

DETROIT RED WINGS

34 Petr Mrazek
35 Jimmy Howard
50 Jonas Gustavsson
2 Brendan Smith
4 Jakub Kindl
8 Justin Abdelkader
13 Pavel Datsyuk
14 Gustav Nyquist
15 Riley Sheahan
17 Daniel Cleary
18 Joakim Andersson
20 Drew Miller
21 Tomas Tatar
23 Brian Lashoff
26 Tomas Jurco
27 Kyle Quincey
40 Henrik Zetterberg
41 Luke Glendening
43 Darren Helm
49 Andrej Nestrasil
52 Jonathan Ericsson
55 Niklas Kronwall
65 Danny DeKeyser
90 Stephen Weiss
93 Johan Franzen
-- Tait

And there atop the list -- as it was Wednesday morning -- was Hutchinson.

First in average at 1.38. First in save percentage at .948.

"I didn't realize it until a couple of my friends screen shot it for me and sent it to me," said Hutchinson with his trademark grin Wednesday. "Obviously I haven't played as many games as most of the guys on that list, but just to have your name on that list -- even if it's for a short period of time -- is something really cool. It'll be something I look back on down the road."

One thing you learn quickly in any chat with Hutchinson is there might not be a boastful bone in his body. And most of that humility comes from where he's been and the road he's travelled to get here.

Consider this: It was a year ago this week the 24-year-old Barrie, Ont., product was backstopping the Ontario Reign of the ECHL to a 3-1 win over the San Francisco Bulls in front of 2,237 at the Cow Palace. Five days later, he was kicking out 20 shots in a 2-1 win over the Bakersfield Condors in front of 6,816 on home ice.

It was all part of a campaign that saw him play in 76 games in three leagues: 28 in the ECHL, 45 in the AHL with the St. John's IceCaps -- including a run to the Calder Cup final -- and three more with the Jets at the end of the regular season.

This from a guy who had been cast adrift by the Boston Bruins after being drafted in the third round in 2008 and hooked up with the Jets through his agent, Mike Liut, who had nothing but praise for Jets assistant GM Craig Heisinger dating back to his days with the Manitoba Moose.

Another of Liut's clients? Cory Schneider, the man at the other end of the rink as Hutchinson led to the Jets to a 3-1 victory over the New Jersey Devils Tuesday night.

So from Ontario to St. John's to Winnipeg and all points in between, from bus rides and commercial flights all the way to the bright lights of the NHL... you can see why Hutchinson is loving every minute of this.

"It's absolutely crazy," he said. "It's a relatively short period of time and when I look back and think about where I was a year ago... it really puts things in perspective. It makes me thankful for the opportunity and the fact I was able to play well and play well up here to help the team win.

"I also know that it's a competitive business. You know there's someone coming for your job. I was in that position for the last couple of years where I was trying to make it to this level. Just being able to make it this far, I know how hard I had to work to get here. And I know I have to work that much harder to stay here."

He vows to take nothing for granted, even if his name is listed -- perhaps only temporarily, maybe longer -- among the NHL leaders such as Jonathan Quick, Pekka Rinne, Craig Anderson and Corey Crawford.

And here's the proof: Asked if he still has moments when he wakes up and can't believe he is here in the NHL now, Hutchinson's face lights up like a kid racing down the stairs on Christmas morning.

"That's pretty much every day for me," he said. "I have to pinch myself and think that I'm playing in the NHL and playing against the best players in the world. It's absolutely a dream come true."

"Every day I wake up and I'm thankful and I'm happy to come to the rink. I look forward to coming to the rink every single day. And then there are moments like being in Chicago a couple of weeks ago -- or playing any single game -- and it's really icing on the cake."
Jets have major sore point
Despite hot streak, Winnipeg power play still a work in progress

By: Ed Tait

Life is good in Jetsville these days. There are smiles everywhere and back slaps aplenty.

Little wonder: An 8-2-3 run since an early season stumble -- coupled with the buy-in to the defensive blueprint used by coach Paul Maurice & Co. -- has the Jets heading into work daily with a little more hop in their collective step.

But when the subject of the team's anemic power-play is broached, heads get shaken in disgust or -- as was the case following Tuesday's win over the New Jersey Devils -- Maurice is making gallows-humour cracks about the unit's ineptitude.

(No truth to the rumour the Jets will petition the league's board of governors for a new rule that would give a team the right to decline a power play).

"The interesting part about it is it's never as bad as it seems and it's never as good as it feels sometimes," said Maurice after his team held an off-ice workout and optional skate at the MTS Iceplex on Wednesday.

"We're fourth in the league for shots on goal on our power play... so it's a little bit like our five-on-five offence: The puck is getting to the net. What we need to work on and develop is how we're getting those pucks to the net and where we're positioned off the shots.

"Our last two games our power play hasn't looked good."

Yes, in the Jets' 3-1 win over New Jersey the power-play was 0-for-5 and in Sunday's 4-3 OT loss to Minnesota it was a woeful 0-for-8, including 90 seconds with a two-man advantage. But the woes date back further than that. Winnipeg has now gone five games without a power-play goal, a stretch of 18 chances.

After Tuesday's win over the Devils, Maurice talked about changing the mindset on the power play. A day later, he expanded on that theory.

"Confidence is everything, right? In all walks of life. And it's not an overly confident group right now. You can't have your power play taking away from your five-on-five game and two of the best chances we gave up last night were right after a power play because there's that frustration building.

"What has to change is how we're delivering the puck to the net. We're getting it to the net. So, there's the standard coach's line of 'We've got to shoot the puck more.' Our shot attempts were over 200 on our power plays, but just slightly over 50 per cent are actually getting to the net. We're missing the net and we're getting an awful lot blocked. How we're getting the pucks (to the net) has got to change a little bit. But all that... we're talking about a half foot in just about everything you do out there.

"It's the quickness that comes, part of it from confidence, part of it is an intensity level. And then a big part of it is the timing and the structure of it. We've really fallen off in the last two games with the structure of it... a shot gets to the net and somebody is two feet off the post instead of being right in front.

"That's what we'll work on."

Old, bad habits return as Winnipeg Jets blow leads, fall to Red Wings 2

BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN

Paul Maurice isn’t the kind of guy to lean on excuses as a crutch. When given a chance to describe what happened to his Winnipeg Jets during a rare third-period collapse, Maurice didn’t hold back.

They’re going to make a push down a goal,” Maurice said after a long pause. “To be honest with you, I think it was 15 games in 28 days, twice off the east coast. The bench didn’t get quiet out of anything but they were breathing pretty heavy. We just didn’t have the fight on some pucks. (Andrew Ladd) hit a post and they came down and made good.”

The Jets had been pretty strong in third periods this season, posting a 6-0-1 record when holding the lead after 40 minutes of play going into the contest, the lone blemish coming when they gave up a late goal to Michael Ryder before the New Jersey Devils rallied for a 2-1 shootout win on Oct. 30.

But this was different.

On Thursday, the Jets built a 2-0 cushion on goals from Dustin Byfuglien and Adam Lowry but allowed the Red Wings to claw their way back into the game.

First, it was an uncharacteristic turnover from defenceman Toby Enstrom, whose blind pass into the slot landed on the tape of Tomas Tatar instead of a teammate and the Red Wings were on the board at 10:02.

Enstrom then took a tripping minor that ultimately allowed the Red Wings power play to even the score.

On the play itself, just as Johan Franzen was picking up speed, Mark Stuart lost his balance and fell to the ice, allowing the Red Wings’ winger to cruise in all alone and bank his shot off the iron and in at 12:52.

Just when thought the Jets might be losing their composure, they found a way to restore order when Mathieu Perreault scored on a turnaround wrister at 16:12.

The Red Wings weren’t done there.

Justin Abdelkader battled to get to the front of the net, providing a screen on a shot from Brian Lashoff, then redirected the puck before Ondrej Pavelec knocked it over the goal-line with seven minutes to play.

Abdelkader then provided a slick pass to Tomas Tatar for the goal that provided the dagger to the Jets, who fell to 10-8-3 on the season and will close out a three-game homestand on Sunday afternoon against the St. Louis Blues.

“We had some strange things happen to us that ended up in the back of our net, plays that you haven’t seen,” said Maurice. “You get those aberration plays every once in a while. We don't feed pucks up the middle or fall down or miss a guy backdoor. We've been good on those things. It's not systemic from by we've seen of our team.

“I just didn't think that we had a lot of pushback in the third. We weren't sitting back, I just don't think they had enough gas to go forward. The first two periods were some pretty fine hockey, we had a lot of great things happen, (had) good jump there. We spend a lot of energy doing what we do. There's a lot of hard checks, a lot of hard back pressures. There's a cost to playing as hard as we do.”

The Red Wings were playing without star centre Pavel Datsyuk and started Petr Mrazek in goal for the first time in the NHL this season, but this group was relentless and was eventually rewarded for their up-tempo possession game that was aided by winning 61 per cent of the draws on Thursday.

“You're going to have your games when you have a few mistakes and they end up in the back of your net,” said Byfuglien, who snapped a 14-game goal-less drought after a nifty, no-look between-the-legs feed from Evander Kane at 2:15 of the first period. “Ever since I’ve been playing against
Babcock: Teams find success when they learn to 'bring it' every single day

BY KEN WIEBE, WINNIPEG SUN
FIRST POSTED: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 07:58 PM CST | UPDATE: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2014 08:02 PM CST

Mike Babcock knows a thing or two about creating an identity for a hockey club.

Whether it’s been in his role as the longtime bench boss of the Detroit Red Wings or the Canadian men’s Olympic team during the past two gold-medal triumphs, Babcock has helped set the foundation for success.

So after Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice reiterated on Thursday that his team was still in the early stages of developing an identity, it was only natural to check in with Babcock to see if he had any idea how long this process could take to complete?

“You know what, that’s a good question. Some years are quicker than others,” said Babcock, whose Red Wings took on the Jets at MTS Centre on Thursday night. “It took us until the second half (last season), we had some young kids playing in our lineup. What you’re doing is you’re looking for a blueprint every year for your players to play with. So you’ve got to figure that out and it changes year-to-year.

“From there, it’s got to be a buy-in from them and then you’ve got to learn to do it each and every night. With young teams, you get satisfied in a hurry. You win a game and you think the next day of practice should be off. Well, that’s not how you play. We play every day and you bring it every day. If you do that, in the end you become a good team. The league is hard. You want your ups to be longer than your downs. That’s just it.”

Jets captain Andrew Ladd says embracing the defensive structure his team is trying to play is an important part of laying that foundation.

“At the end of the day, the best teams in the league that I’ve played on are great defensively. That’s the starting point that we need to nail down,” said Ladd, a two-time Stanley Cup winner. “I think we’ve done a good job of cementing what we need to do from our end out and that’s got to continue to be our backbone.

“Regardless of whether we are scoring goals or have the offence clicking every night, we know that the defence is there and that’s something we can fall back on and win a game 1-0.”

Winnipeg Sun LOADED 11.21.2014
It figures to be another tight checking, low-scoring game when the Winnipeg Jets host the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday at MTS Centre.

The Jets (10-7-3) are fourth in the NHL in goals against average (2.05), while the Red Wings (9-4-5) are seventh (2.17) so taking care of the puck and limiting costly turnovers will be essential for both clubs.

"For me, Detroit over the years has been the best team on the puck, going back for the last 12 to 14 years in terms of their battle," said Jets head coach Paul Maurice, whose Carolina Hurricanes lost 4-1 to the Red Wings in the 2002 Stanley Cup final. "I'm going back 12 years and I don't know if they threw a hit in that series, but you couldn't get the puck off him and if you had it, they were coming for you.

"It's a tight gap game and they've got quickness on their transition and quickness with their skill level up front. It's going to be a hard game, it may not be mean."

Although the Jets remain near the bottom of the NHL in goals for, they've scored six times during their past four periods and change (including Sunday's third-period rally and overtime loss to the Minnesota Wild and the victory over the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday), so the offensive confidence should be on the rise after seeing some results from their newly-formed lines.

Red Wings head coach Mike Babcock was impressed by what he saw on the Jets pre-scout.

"I really like their back end, their goaltender has played well this year, they have good skill level up front and really come at you with speed," said Babcock. "It should be fun. I like playing in here. If you're not ready at the start, you're usually in trouble. We're going to try to start on time, try to execute and play our game."

Ondrej Pavelec is back in goal for the Jets, while the Red Wings counter with backup Petr Mrazek, who hasn't played an NHL game this season.

The Red Wings will be without centre Pavel Datsyuk, who went out onto the ice after the morning skate was wrapping up but will miss a second consecutive game with a groin injury.

Red Wings captain Henrik Zetterberg leads his team in scoring with four goals and 17 points in 18 games this season.

Earlier on Thursday, the Red Wings found out they lost centre Andrej Nestrasil on waivers to the Carolina Hurricanes.

Here's how I expect both teams to start on Thursday:

**JETS**
Andrew Ladd-Bryan Little-Blake Wheeler
Evander Kane-Mathieu Perreault-Dustin Byfuglien
Adam Lowry-Adam Lowry-Michael Frolik
Chris Thorburn-Jim Slater-Matt Halischuk
Toby Enstrom-Zach Bogosian
Mark Stuart-Jacob Trouba
Adam Pardy-Paul Postma
Ondrej Pavelec (Michael Hutchinson)

**RED WINGS**
Johan Franzen-Henrik Zetterberg-Gustav Nyquist
Tomas Tatar-Riley Sheahan-Justin Abdelkader
Tomas Jurco-Darren Helm-Daniel Cleary
Horvat is not trending toward a full season in the NHL. He has two games remaining to change that.

CONTRACT BE DARNED: Benning told The Vancouver Sun during the Canucks' California trip two weeks ago that he is unconcerned about Horvat playing more than nine NHL games and burning a year off the prospect's contract. Nor is the team worried about keeping Horvat under 40 games on the active roster, which counts as a season toward free agency and could make him an unrestricted free agent at age 26 instead of 27.

The issue for the Canucks is simple: if Horvat is good enough to play regularly, he will. Their worry is that if he goes beyond nine games but isn't ready to be an everyday NHL player, the Canucks lose the option of Horvat playing big minutes in junior this season. At 19, he is ineligible to play indefinitely for the Canucks' AHL farm team in Utica, N.Y.

As Desjardins said Tuesday: “Once those nine games are up, we have no choice. You have to be sure at that point. I just want to make sure we’re not forcing him to do something that’s not best for him or the team.”

LOOKY LUCA: After missing four games with an ankle injury, Luca Sbisa returned to the Canucks lineup in time to face his former team. Initially, he might have wished he hadn’t, as he was minus-two in the first period when the Ducks bolted to a 2-0 lead.

Part of the Ryan Kesler trade in June, Sbisa was asked whether Kesler or Corey Perry would be the bigger pain to play against. “That’s a tough one,” Sbisa said.

“Probably, I would say Perry. I’ve played a few times against Kesler and he definitely hasn’t been pleasant to play against. But I’ve seen Perry on the ice about a thousand times. He’s a pest in practice.”

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Edmonton Oilers send Will Acton to Vancouver Canucks for Kellan Lain

BY THE CANADIAN PRESS NOVEMBER 20, 2014

EDMONTON — The Edmonton Oilers have acquired centre Kellan Lain from the Vancouver Canucks in exchange for centre Will Acton.

Lain, 25, has appeared in 10 games for the American Hockey League’s Utica Comets this season, registering one assist and 20 penalty minutes.

In 86 career AHL games, the six-foot-six, 210-pound centre has accumulated 20 points (seven goals, 13 assists) and 155 penalty minutes.

The native of Oakville, Ont., played in nine games with the Canucks last season, posting one goal and 21 penalty minutes.

Acton, a 6-1, 199-pound native of Edina, Min., played in three games with the Oilers this season, registering five penalty minutes. He had a goal and an assist in six games with the AHL’s Oklahoma City Barons.

Acton had three goals and two assists in 30 games with the Oilers last season. He added 12 goals and 11 assists in 47 games with the Barons.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.21.2014
Game Day: Canucks, Ducks set to face-off with loaded lineups

BY IAIN MACINTYRE, VANCOUVER SUN COLUMNIST NOVEMBER 20, 2014

VANCOUVER — One more time with even more feeling. And full lineups.

The Vancouver Canucks and Anaheim Ducks, two teams at the top of the National Hockey League’s Western Conference, play tonight for the second time in two weeks (7 p.m., Sportsnet Vancouver, Team 1040). But unlike the Canucks’ 2-1 shootout win in Anaheim on Nov. 9, the lineups are stronger tonight at Rogers Arena.

All-world sniper Corey Perry and top-four defencemen Francois Beauchemin and Cam Fowler will play for the Ducks after recovering from injury or illness. The Canucks’ lineup will include rugged wingers Derek Dorsett and Zack Kassian as well as former Ducks defenceman Luca Sbisa, who missed the game in Southern California due to injuries.

Oh, and there’s one more paramount difference: Former Canuck star Ryan Kesler will be playing in Vancouver for the first time since he forced a trade to the Ducks last June.

"I think experience, playing in big games, gold-medal games, Stanley Cup Final Game 7s, I think those prepare you for big games and big moments in games," Kesler said.

So, this is a big game for him?

"Yeah, it's a big game."

For the teams, too.

The Canucks did just enough to beat the Edmonton Oilers 5-4 Wednesday in Alberta, but have allowed 18 goals in their last five games. The Ducks, one point up on the Canucks and two other teams in the conference, haven’t won a game in regulation time since Nov. 2 and are 1-1-5 since then.

"Obviously, they're a good team and we're a good team," Kassian said after this morning’s optional skate. "It's always a high-paced game with a lot of tempo. And especially with Kes coming back, there will be a lot of excitement in the building.

"They're always fun games to play in. It's going to be fun for our line, too. They have some big D-men over there, so it's going to be exciting to see where we (Kassian, Shawn Matthias and Brad Richardson) fit and if we can keep our cycle game going and get to the net. Every game there's something to prove."

Anaheim coach Bruce Boudreau said Kesler's return to Vancouver adds excitement for his team, too.

"Everybody seems to want to play for their teammates," Boudreau said. "We know he's been here 10 years. He was a major component of getting to the Stanley Cup Final and winning the Presidents' Trophies — all of those things. We're motivated as a team."

The goaltending duel of Canuck backup Eddie Lack and Duck starter Frederik Andersen is a rematch from two weeks ago, when Lack made 28 saves for his only victory of the season. This is just his fifth start.

"Every game is important for me right now," Lack said. "First of all, I'd like to get up to .500 in the win-loss column, so every game is important."

He doesn't think beating the Ducks previously makes it any easier for him tonight, especially since Perry, who has 11 goals in 15 games, didn't play against the Canucks in Anaheim.

"They were missing a lot of guys last time," Lack said. "Especially with Kes coming back here, too, it's going to be a different game tonight."
Canucks fall to Ducks, 4-3 in SO

BY BRAD ZIEMER, VANCOUVER SUN
NOVEMBER 20, 2014 10:29 PM

VANCOUVER - It started badly and didn't end well.

In between, the Vancouver Canucks were pretty darn good.

That kind of sums up the night for the Canucks, who fell 4-3 in a shootout Thursday to Ryan Kesler and the Anaheim Ducks at Rogers Arena.

The Ducks scored on their first shot, 37 seconds into the game, and then a minute later Vancouver lost defenceman Dan Hamhuis to what appeared to be a significant right leg or groin injury.

The Canucks fell behind 2-0 before the first period was over, but showed some character in mounting a comeback that fell just short and at least earned them a point.

"After they scored their second, I think we took over the game," said Vancouver captain Henrik Sedin.

The Canucks are 13-6-1 through 20 games and performances like Thursday's, especially coming in the second game of a back to back against a more rested and healthy Ducks team, should convince even the most die-hard skeptics that this team's fast start is no mirage.

The Canucks may be for real.

"I think overall the whole season we have showed that we never give up," said winger Radim Vrbata, who scored his ninth of the season. "There were some games that didn't go our way. But we have stayed in a lot of games and found a way to get points. Tonight was a perfect example of that.

"Our start wasn't the greatest, we were down 2-0 very quickly and had a pretty good second period. It's too bad we couldn't score that fourth one and have a little cushion."

The Canucks actually had a 3-2 lead heading into the third period and had been perfect -- 7-0-0 -- when leading after two periods this season.

But Matt Beleskey tied the game at 11:32 of the third and the Ducks won it on shootout goals by Corey Perry and Jakob Silfverberg.

At least Kesler missed his shootout attempt.

Kesler, of course, was playing his first game in Vancouver since forcing a trade this summer.

The Canucks took the high road and played a brief -- if you blinked you missed it -- tribute to Kesler on the scoreboard just before the opening faceoff. That was followed by a close-up on Kesler on the bench, which has greeted by lots of boos from the Vancouver fans.

It was that way most of the night. Kesler heard it from the crowd every time he touched the puck. One of the biggest cheers of the night came when Kesler shot wide on his shootout attempt.

"I'm glad it's over now," Kesler said after the game. "I can get back to the sunshine."

Kesler seemed taken aback by all the boos.

"Obviously, when you play somewhere for 10 years you expect something different, but I am happy for the support I have gotten in this city over the years. I am really thankful for that."

It was rookie Bo Horvat, who wasn't supposed to be playing, who got the Vancouver comeback started. Horvat was a late addition to the lineup when Alex Burrows couldn't play because of an upper-body injury suffered in Wednesday night's 5-4 win in Edmonton.

Horvat's first NHL goal was a beauty. It came off the rush as he one-timed a pass from linemate Derek Dorsett past Anaheim goalie Frederick Andersen at 3:08 of the second period to cut the Ducks lead to 2-1.

"That is one that I'll definitely never forget," Horvat said. "Zack (Kassian) and Dorsett made a heck of a play to get it to me there. All I had to do was put it in. It definitely felt nice to put the puck in the back of the net."

Vancouver took the lead midway through the second when Jannik Hansen and Vrbata scored 30 seconds apart.

The Canucks feel good about themselves as they hit the season's quarter-pole.

"There has been some low points -- Dallas and at home here against Arizona -- but for the most part we have been battling and I think we have been playing well," Henrik said.

Andrew Cogliano scored on the opening shift when he pounced on a loose puck at the side of the net and flipped it past Vancouver goalie Eddie Lack.

Ducks captain Ryan Getzlaf scored a nice goal at 13:10 of the first to put the Ducks up 2-0. Getzlaf got behind Vancouver defenceman Luca Sbisa, took a pass from Patrick Maroon and roofed a backhand past Lack.

ICE CHIPS: The Canucks swapped minor-leaguers with the Edmonton Oilers on Thursday, trading winger Kellan Lain for centre Will Acton. The 27-year-old Acton has three goals and five points in 33 NHL games.

Thursday night's game was the third sellout of the season at Rogers Arena.

-Iain MacIntyre
Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.21.2014
The Canucks get a point. They also get their first moral win of the season.

What else do you call it when their first line dominates; their second line dominates; their fourth line dominates; and they do it without Burrows and do it without Hamhuis.

In Desjardins speak, the Canucks played real good against a real good team. They also shut down Old 17. Given the way the crowd reacted to their former star, that has to be a decent consolation prize despite the loss.

Maybe things would have been different if Sbisa and Weber didn’t get rolled on that first shift.

The Canucks were down 2-0 13 minutes into the first, and their goalie didn’t have a chance on either. “It felt like there wasn’t too much I could do on that first goal,” Lack said. “I was trying to cover my percentage and it popped out. I never saw it until it was in the back of the net.”

“Honestly, it felt like it happened a lot last year. I feel like I’m getting used to it.”

You probably don’t want your goalie getting used to giving up an early goal he has no chance on.

BEST ALARM BELLS

Willie Desjardins didn’t seem to think Higgins would miss any time, but the Canucks forward was noticeably limping after the game.

The Lord was concerned enough to follow him into the medical room.

Also, Luca Sbisa had both ankles wrapped in ice.

He said one is still bothersome.

“I hope it’s just a bruise.”

BEST GUESS

Hamhuis has a knee injury.

BIGGEST SURPRISE

I didn’t expect Kesler to get booed. Not like that. Despite all the BS that was his last season, he poured his guts onto the ice for most of his 10 years.

It was more than just the Nashville series. It was three years where he was one of the best three second line centres in the NHL. He never dogged it. and sometimes it was to his detriment.

Sure, he pouted at times and could have used his wingers more. But he left Vancouver as one of the greatest players the Canucks have ever had.

In fact, The Province’s top 101 of all time had him at No. 10. He gave the city enough thrills to get some back in his first game here.

Personally, I didn’t mind the short video tribute. Gushing over ex-players should be reserved for when they’re retired. Old 17 will be in the ring of honour here one day. That will provide more than enough time to edit together a stirring video which properly reflects what he has meant to this team.

For now, he’s just a divisional rival.

In fact, the Canucks probably would have been better without a video rather than tumbling through a few highlights on the big screen, and doing it so early many fans were still arriving.

Old 17 must of had some idea how it was going to go down. He passed on the opening faceoff. But it was pretty clear after the game, he didn’t expect it to be as rough as it was.

“When you play somewhere for 10 years, you expect something different,” Kesler said.

Did it bother you?

“They paid their tickets, they’re allowed to do what they want to do. Does it hurt? Obviously, when you play somewhere for 10 years and you give your heart and soul… it is what it is.”

BEST EFFORT TO MAKE HIM FEEL BETTER

Did you notice there were a few claps as well?

“Someone on the bench said ‘It’s 50/50 Kes!’”

Uh, no, no it wasn’t.

BEST KESLER DIG

“I’m glad it’s over. I want to get back, get back to the sunshine and enjoy.”

Get it. It rains in Vancouver. Lots.

BEST BREAK

Boudreau asked Old 17 if he wanted to take the opening faceoff. Old 17 said no.

Big break for the Ducks, turned out.

BEST NAME BAR

unnamed The Provies: The Not so New Adventures of Old 17

BEST "COULD USE A COOL NAME BAR"

Who am I kidding, nothing could save this jersey.

Instead of all Kesler tweets in Provies I’m sure atleast 1 hate tweet on Johnny Canuck "fashion" jersey @botchford pic.twitter.com/t0sf46BkXm

— Jovan (@JovanHeer) November 21, 2014

BEST ONE LINER

Kesler in the box

— Rob The Hockey Guy (@RobTheHockeyGuy) November 21, 2014

BEST TROLL

Remember Alex Rodriguez calling “Ha, I got it” as he rounded third to distract Blue Jays infielders? Remember it creating great controversy and A-Rod getting labelled, again, bush league?

Old 17 had a version of his own. When Horvat picked a puck off and was cutting toward the net. Old 17 began giving the rookie the beaver tail

BO:

I was wondering who was doing that. I heard it. Loud. I thought it was Dorse. I actually said ‘Dorse, sorry I didn’t pass it to you.

He said ’No, that wasn’t me.’

It is nice to know it was (Old 17)

BEST QUOTE

In the second period, I caught myself going to the other box. I don’t think you guys caught that one on camera. Hopefully not.

— Kesler

BEST SHIFT

Everyone will be talking about Horvat’s goal. And it was a nice finish off a sexy Dorsett backhand.

More meaningful, however, was the fact the Canucks trusted Horvat to matchup against Kesler. At worst, he came out even.

His best shift came on the PK, when he cleaned Kesler’s clock in the faceoff circle again, and then picked his pocket with a pretty sweet defensive play.

If Horvat is going to stay past nine games (and how are they going to send him down now?) he is going to need to be trusted killing penalties.

A few more shifts like this will help.
BEST HONEY BADGERING

Hansen wasn’t amused when his breakaway goal was brought up after the gameday skate.
A smiling JPat asked him about breaking the breakaway slump.

“What?” a curt Honey Badger responded with.
The breakaway goal, you made it look easy.

“Sometimes you get lucky,” was Hansen’s response peppered with sarcasm.

Then he made his case:

“I’m 20% (I think he meant on breakaways on the year).”

“If one of our goalies only stopped 80% of shootout attempts, they’d be in trouble.”

Not really. A great save percentage in the shootout is anything more than 70%.

At least he’s keeping track.

BEST CELEBRATION

A month ago, The Provies predicted Drancers favourite player this year would be Hansen. Dubbed him Drancer’s Meatloaf player, for whom he would do anything for love.

Drancer has given Hansen lots of love during the past two weeks. And he’s getting paid back in a way SPF7 never could.

In fact, he’s swimming in glory after two goals in two games for the yoddler.

Jannik “on pace for 20 goals” Hansen. pic.twitter.com/b3fkCHVFDv
— Thomas Drance (@ThomasDrance) November 21, 2014

BEST TWEET SAYS IT ALL
Best sign of the night #Canucks pic.twitter.com/xbH9TfaJv
— Michael Wilkinson (@DrMWilkinson) November 21, 2014

BEST EXPLANATION
“There are a couple of guys here who report things that shouldn’t be reported.”
— Ryan Kesler

Mystery descended upon the Lower when Kesler dropped this cryptic pleasantry. And now that he’s brought it up, it must be explained.

If you’ve been following the Kesler v Media timeline this season, it’s been, well, interesting.

He has gone from this in September:

“There are a couple of guys here who report things that shouldn’t be reported.”
— Ryan Kesler

To this two months later:

“Maybe not make up stories, but did stories that didn’t need to be written”

To where he stood Wednesday, whittling his media assault down to “a couple of guys.”

I’ve heard people confused as to what he’s referencing. I am not. I know exactly what he’s talking about. There are three times Kesler was irked about something reported off the ice. He believes The Provies are responsible for two of those times.

The Provies are not. I explained that to him. But a squirrel is going to squirrel.

Last winter was not a fun time for Kesler. His teammates voted to strip him of his letter, A. It is generally accepted as the point of no return when it comes to his Canucks career.

Sounded extensively more than usual, it was difficult to hide the displeasure. Even the team’s ugly Christmas sweater photo shoot was gruelling and painful for everyone instead of good times. The frustrated photographer laboured to pump a smile out of Kesler.

In the end, Lu got it done for a pic, which Strombone1 would later tweet out with the tag line, “Every kiss starts with k.”

1416527103201 collagemix The Provies: The Not so New Adventures of Old 17

The more you knew the background that day, the funnier Lu’s tweet was.

Nothing was easy with Kesler by then, which is why Daniel Sedin would, a year later, answer a question about the Kesler saga this way:

Jake and Pratt asked what Daniel thought of how the Kesler saga played out. He replied, “How much time do you have?”
— omarcanuck (@omarcanuck) November 13, 2014

It is in this backdrop terezowens.com had an item connecting Old 17 with the 50-year-old Pam Anderson. I deemed it a joke, and linked to it in The Provies with nothing else but “BEST LOL.”

Kesler would later accuse me of writing “the story, the column.”

I have continued to explain to him I did not write it. He has countered by explaining his family reads The Provies. He wanted me to take the link down. I explained that wouldn’t make the story go away. The Canucks got involved. The Province was contacted. The paper was asked to take down the link. It did not.

Eventually, the link was deleted as a favour to the team. It did not, however, make the story just disappear from the Internet.

TerezO was never contacted by the team or by Old 17.

I’ve told this story before. Old 17 did turn it on me and asked what my wife would say if it was me and Pammy in the story.

I told him she’d laugh. Then, probably accuse Kesler of writing it.

That’s when he said it was the second time I had written about his off ice antics. I again said I didn’t write the piece. I explained I had seen and heard plenty of off ice shenanigans over the years and had never written about any of it.

So what was he talking about?

“It was our night in Nashville.”

Ahh, yes. The “when a group of Flyer fans run into the Canucks night.” It was a fans take about the night they met some Canucks. It’s fairly tame.

Kesler is said to have been singing Real Men of Genius, before he smashed a bottle.

This is what I wrote about that night, in its entirety.

Screen Shot 2014-11-20 at 11.23.57 AM

In reality, the media has heard dozens and dozens of interesting Kesler stories in Vancouver during the past decade. Stories told by limo drivers, Earls servers, bell hops and fans.

Media has seen and heard plenty too, which brings us to the third off ice story which I mentioned earlier. Of all of those times, the media didn’t mention a thing, except for one night in Sochi.

Bruce Arthur: Kesler was in a bar telling people he wanted out of Vancouver, he was naming teams he wanted to go to
— Taj (@taj1944) February 28, 2014

The irony of Kesler’s media comments here shouldn’t be lost on anyone.

Not one of his off-ice stories has ever been reported in Vancouver by the Vancouver media. If I were advising him, this issue he’s focused on would be the last thing I’d open up in Vancouver.

Despite the loss, Canucks restore hope among the faithful

BY ED WILLES, THE PROVINCE NOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:25 PM

There was a moment in the second period when Thursday night’s game, mercifully, stopped being about Ryan Kesler’s return to Vancouver and started being about something else.

OK, the script writers didn’t get the ending right, but given everything the faithful endured last season, including being rejected by Kesler, this one felt like something was being restored. It remains to be seen if the Canucks can sustain their current pace but, right now, they sit in second place in the Western Conference and that should be celebrated along with Thursday’s performance.

On Kesler appreciation night, the Canucks surrendered a goal 37 seconds in, lost defenceman Dan Hamhuis to injury, then fell behind 2-0 before they awakened the ghosts of 2011 with three highlight goals in the middle frame. OK, if it ends there, it’s the perfect night. Or if Daniel Sedin converts his brother’s pass in overtime it’s the perfect night. As it was, the Ducks record a 4-3 shootout win, but let’s take the long view on this one.

Last season, the Canucks were 2-9-3 against the three California teams. This season, they’re 2-1-1. Thursday night, they also got just about everything right except the opening scene and the dramatic conclusion.

In the memorable second, Bo Horvat scored his first NHL goal before Jannik Hansen and Radim Vrbata scored 30 seconds apart and The Rog was transformed. Defensively, the Canucks didn’t give up a thing and in the third, they surrendered just four shots on Eddie Lack. Problem was Matt Beleskey scored on one of them, which explains the shootout.

Kesler, you ask? Well, he wasn’t invisible, but he was minus-1 and pointless on the night. Horvat, for his part, opened his goal-scoring account, played just under 10 minutes and won 64 per cent of his faceoffs. He was also named first star in a hometown decision, but the larger point was, by the end of the night, the crowd could barely muster the interest to boo Kesler.

This game, instead, was about their team and what could be this season. That story is still playing out. You just hope they nail down the ending better than they did against the Ducks.

Here are five things we're pondering heading into the return of Ryan Kesler to Rogers Arena

1. The rink should be charged with emotion, as the Canuck faithful get their first up close and personal look at Kesler in Anaheim colours. How Vancouver handles that should go a long way towards deciding the outcome.

“We can’t let it impact us,” said coach Willie Desjardins. “We just have to do our thing. He’s a good player. He was a big part of this organization. But we can’t worry about him, just like when we were in Anaheim. We have to worry about us and how we play.”

Vancouver winger Jannik Hansen was among those who said he hoped Kesler received a positive response from the crowd.

“He had a lot of success here. It’s going be nice to see him get back and hopefully get a little credit for what he’s meant to this team,” said Hansen.

2. Kesler, who did a session with the Vancouver media on Wednesday, was back taking questions from the press after the Anaheim morning skate.

“I had a good day yesterday, saw some people I hadn’t seen in awhile, caught up with friends,” Kesler said. “Today is business. I’m trying to focus on getting two points out of here.”

Kesler admitted that playing against Vancouver for the first time on Nov. 9 in Anaheim “was a different situation for me,” but says that it’s even “bigger coming into this building.”

3. Vancouver, coming off that 5-4 win in Edmonton on Wednesday night, didn’t take a full morning skate, with just a few players hitting the ice.

Desjardins did say that Linden Vey (healthy scratch) and Luca Sbisa (lower body), who didn’t play against the Oilers, would suit up against Anaheim. Bo Horvat and Ryan Stanton were the two last Canucks on the ice, so expect Vey to take Horvat’s place centring the fourth line and Sbisa to be inserted on defence.

Sbisa, who was part of the Kesler trade, missed the 2-1 shoot-out win in Anaheim with his injury, so this will be his first crack at his former club.

“He’s healthy and it’s probably a good match for him,” Desjardins said of Sbisa, who had sat the past four games.

4. Eddie Lack is expected to start in goal. It’s his first appearance since his 29-save effort in Anaheim.

Kesler hit the post to finish the shoot-out in that game and seemed to have words back and forth with Lack after that.

“We hugged it out in the hallway,” Lack quipped. “I think we are all good.”

Lack is 1-4-1 all-time against Anaheim, with a 3.24 goals against and an .885 save percentage.

Frederik Andersen is expected to get the start for Anaheim. He’s 3-0-1 versus Vancouver in his career, with an 0.98 goals against and a .970 save percentage.

5. Desjardins downplayed the fact that the Ducks were resting in Vancouver on Wednesday, while the Canucks were playing in Edmonton. The Ducks haven’t played since Tuesday in Calgary.

“We’ve had a long layoff. Playing one game, we still have lots of energy,” said Desjardins, whose team hadn’t played since Friday against Arizona prior to the Edmonton match-up.

“There’s no excuse for us to not have a good game tonight.”
Jensen's two goals sparks Canucks farm team to another victory

BY MARK CASWELL JR., THE PROVINCE/ NOVEMBER 20, 2014

It was a busy night for Nicklas Jensen; the first star of the game scored two of the Comets three goals which brings his total to six on the season. Alex Friesen also had quite the return, tallying two assists after suffering from a shoulder injury since the first game of the season. Joacim Eriksson recorded his fifth win on the season and stopped 19 of 21 shots taken by the Bulldogs, which kept the Comets in first place with 26 points out of a possible 30.

Exactly half way through the opening period, Alexandre Grenier displayed some dirty dekes just before he scored his fifth goal of the year and the first of the game. After receiving a pass from Cal O’Reilly, Grenier carried the puck into the offensive zone for a 2-on-1 opportunity. A toe-drag and a move to the backhand allowed Grenier to sneak the rubber underneath Mike Condon’s pads to make it 1-0.

The Bulldogs found the equalizer just two minutes and 31 seconds later after a feed from Eric Tangradi led to a gigantic blue-line slapshot from Magnus Nygren. A deflection off of a player in front tipped it past Eriksson and evened the score to 1-1.

It took a little patience, but the Comets finally put themselves back on top at 13:57 into the middle stanza after a swing and a rip from Bobby Sanguinetti at the point. Following the shot on net, Friesen tried to jam it in but Jensen recovered the loose puck to the left of Condon and slipped it past the post for his first of the night to make it a 2-1 game.

Utica jumped up to a two-goal lead early in the third at 4:51 following a couple of tic-tac-toe passes between Alex Friesen and Ronalds Kenins that caught the Bulldog’s defense out of position. Condon found himself on the wrong side of the net when Jensen potted his second goal of the night to push the score to 3-1.

Hamilton ended up scoring the final goal of the night on a 5-on-3 power-play opportunity at 8:47 but it wasn’t enough to top league leading Comets who are now 12-0-0-0 when leading after two periods of play. Veteran Rene Bourque ripped off a shot point blank past Eriksson after receiving a pass from T.J. Hensick to make it a 3-2 decision. Sven Andrighetto received credit for the secondary assist.

The Comets will have one day of rest before they head into a potentially record breaking weekend. This Friday, they will head to Rochester for their second meeting of the season with the Americans at 7 p.m.

It’s time to call someone out. Oh yes, it’s time for a call-out.

Many of you have heard of sportsmanship. Most of you, I’d imagine. But the other night, I came across a guy who’d clearly never heard the word.

It was beer league. Division 37, or thereabouts. You know, the guys who never really played much hockey, still don’t play much hockey, just like to have fun with their buddies, occasionally do something that surprises themselves. In some cases, these Div 37 guys never skated as kids, are still just trying to stay on their feet half the time, and hope like hell they don’t get hurt or have a coronary.

Occasionally, a rock star — comparatively speaking — plays in Division 37, or thereabouts. Years ago, in a much higher division, we had a teammate who’d played some minor pro. But the only thing he ever did in Division 24C was pass the puck, skate at half-speed, try to help ankle-burners feel good about themselves. He certainly never, even once, chose to humiliate an opponent, and rarely crossed the red line.

Monday night, “Colton Schell” decided it was time to set some division records. I put his name in quotes, since Bumaby 8-Rinks is notorious for getting guys’ names wrong. “Colton Schell,” a mystery who was playing his first game for the Tacos in Division 37, wasted no time. Four minutes in, he had three assists, dipsy-doodling around the ice. By the end of the second period, he had three more points, including a pair of goals, as the Tacos led my Eagles 8-0.

And so, with time winding down, the Tacos leading 9-1. “Colton Schell” decided he hadn’t had enough. There was no running the clock out. No sportsmanship. No class. No gestures of goodwill. Instead, one final rush, a 3-on-1. Reminiscent of the tiki-taka the Spaniards used to be so good at. A couple of give-and-go’s, culminating with a hat trick for “Colton Schell” with seven seconds to go. Final score, 10-1. Three goals and four assists for “Colton Schell.” Well done, “Colton Schell.”

Here’s hoping “Colton Schell” is different from the Colton Schell who has his own entry in hockeydb.com, thanks to playing a few games in the BCHL. That Colton Schell is 22 years old; he couldn’t possibly be the “Colton Schell” who was playing against a bunch of guys in their mid-40’s. That Colton Schell, said a former coach as Schell committed, just 18 months ago, to play club hockey for Thompson Rivers University, was “a leader both on and off the ice.” That Colton Schell put up 224 regular-season points in four seasons in the Kootenay International Junior Hockey League. That Colton Schell, two years ago, was a favourite to win the KIJHL scoring title — the same level as the more well-known BCHL. This, I gather, is slightly higher than Division 37 at 8-Rinks.

Who’s winning the KI scoring title this year? Retweet for BrendanBurge, Favorite for Colten Schell #KI

— KIJHL Problems (@KIJHLProblems) November 14, 2012

Colton Schell can’t possibly be the same guy as “Colton Schell.” He’s a leader both on and off the ice. He wouldn’t choose to embarrass a bunch of old guys, would he? In Division 37?

Here’s the Morning Skate ...

Anaheim Ducks v Los Angeles Kings

The Home Team

We hear Ryan Kesler is in town (Rogers Arena, Sportsnet Vancouver, TSN 1040, 7 p.m.), and that he apparently has a bone to pick.

Kesler: “There are a couple of guys here who report things that shouldn’t be reported.”

— Clay Imoo (@CanuckClay) November 19, 2014

“Yes, Ryan? Follow-up question. What are the things that were reported that shouldn’t have been reported? Are they things that actually happened? Or not happened? Because, to be more specific, media shouldn’t report things that don’t actually happen. Is that what you meant?’

That wasn’t an actual follow-up question.

There’s lots of Kesler today, as the Canucks get a few hours’ rest after their messy but exciting 5-4 win over the Edmonton Oilers Wednesday night. Ben Kuzma chats with former teammates, and Kesler’s first NHL coach Marc Crawford, about the divisive RK17. Jim Jamieson shares five memorable Kesler moments and a complete timeline. And in Wednesday’s always-fantastic Provies, following the win over the Oilers, Jason Botchford tantalizingly informed readers that tonight’s Provies will be “The New Adventures of Old 17” Provies. Kes won’t read them, of course; the players never read what’s written about them.

Now, there are other things happening out there pertaining to your Canucks. Here’s an odd one. Have you stumbled across The Zack Kassian Showcase? It’s “a self-inspiration blog for the Canucks’ future hall-of-famer.” (Can’t we just honour him as the ‘Seventh Canuck’?) What do you mean, we’re not doing the Seventh Canuck any more?) And it’s most certainly inspiring. If it’s actually Zack Kassian, you have to love passages such as; “I will acknowledge the fact that my opponents do not expect me to score and succeed, but I will never give up. Weakness will not be in my heart. I will look to my comrades, to those who have brought me into this world and to those who have trained me and I will draw strength from them. WHO AM I? I am KASSIAN.” My lord.

Fishing the Pacific

So what’s what in the Pacific today? Well, there’s that minor first-place showdown between the Ducks and Canucks. The Calgary Flames, technically, could jump both with a home win over the Chicago Blackhawks. The Los Angeles Kings, just a couple of points back of Calgary and Vancouver, host the Carolina Panthers. The San Jose Sharks, two back of Los Angeles, host the Florida Panthers. The Arizona Coyotes are in Dallas. And last-place Edmonton has the night off. But it’s in Los Angeles where there’s some serious intrigue, considering team captain Dustin Brown has just three goals in 19 games and has spent time on the fourth line. But Ryan Dunn of the Battle of California blog ignores the whole Dustin Brown situation, instead choosing wisely to avoid talking about the visiting, dull-as-dishwater Hurricanes by instead telling readers about the recuring dream he has about Game of Thrones star Peter Dinklage.

Meanwhile, the Five for Fighting blog has decided to celebrate the Coyotes’ Martin Hanzal for his hat trick against the Canucks last Friday. And put your hands together for Owen Nolan, the former Shark who was inducted into the San Jose Sports Hall of Fame. Amazingly, despite spending a few weeks around training camp with the Canucks just three years ago, he is not one of the 101 Greatest Canucks.

Canadian Content

What are the sweetest NHL sweaters? According to Andrew Bensch of the Hockey Writers, just one of the top 10 belongs to a Canadian team. That would be the white Montreal Canadiens jersey. (“The famous C-H logo really pops on the white jersey. Personally, the logo seems to get a bit lost with the red background of their home red sweaters.”) I don’t know, I’m partial to the Canucks’ third jersey, the stick in rink. The Oilers’ jersey. The Leafs’. I’m going to disagree with Bensch’s selection of the Los Angeles Kings’ black jersey and, particularly, the San Jose Sharks’ white.

OH SHIT, IS NONIS ROCKING THE SOLIDARITY B? #LEAFS FANS, THERE MAY STILL BE HOPE! pic.twitter.com/9pNYBmX4LL

— Sandro Desaulniers (@DeltaCanuckian) November 19, 2014

So, these are apparently difficult days for the Toronto Maple Leafs. At least, it’s been a really difficult week; losing 2-1 to Pittsburgh last Friday, 6-2 to Buffalo last Saturday and 9-2 to Nashville on Tuesday. As Maple Leafs GM Dave Nonis reminded reporters, they weren’t so interested about coaches being fired when the Leafs had reeled off three straight wins just before these three straight losses. But ah, there’s the rub: Nonis, the former general manager of your Vancouver Canucks. James Minier of The Globe & Mail tells readers that Nonis is at least as responsible for the current mess as head coach Randy Carlyle. The zillion-dollar signing of forward David Clarkson “should have been a fireable offence on its own.”

Of course, it’s hard to be a Maple Leafs fan. Perhaps harder than being a Canucks fan, despite actually winning Stanley Cups back in the day. Like this beauty:
Why did you make me a Leafs fan? Text your parents and share with us! pic.twitter.com/VbUhc3yJhK
— BarDown (@BarDown) November 19, 2014

Are they really “the Coronation Street of terrible teams”? That’s what Steve Dangle shouts in his latest, strangely compelling video, shot while the Leafs were in the process of slightly losing to the Predators:

It should be noted that the Leafs host the Tampa Bay Lightning tonight. Tampa has the second-best record in the Eastern Conference. I’m sure the Leafs will pull out of their tailspin.

Michael Hutchinson

In the meantime, the early-season sadness out of Winnipeg has given way to joy, as the Jets sit third in the surprisingly weak Central Division and are 6-2-1-1 in their last 10. How have they done it, considering they’re scoring exactly two goals a game — better only than the Sabres? The Globe’s Roy MacGregor says it’s been the goaltending of Michael Hutchinson, and doesn’t appear to chalk up their success to much more than that. MacG does make one sloppy oversight. He points out that Canadian teams “have been the surprise of the NHL — Montreal leading the league, Calgary rising, others contending.” In reality, the Maple Leafs and Oilers haven’t been contending. It’s the Canucks who are sixth overall in the NHL.

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Let’s Go to the Video

We do lots of video these days here at Province Sports. Some of it is very good, really polished. Network quality, people! Some of it, not so much. Occasionally, you get guys shooting video themselves. And it doesn’t look so hot. Which makes one of the very first Province Sports videos that much more amazing. Our soccer writer, Marc Weber, was in Arizona for the Vancouver Whitecaps’ first-ever MLS training camp back in March, 2011. He was able to grab a few minutes with Whitecaps legend Carl Valentine, poolside. The topic of conversation? Valentine’s obscene, George Costanza-like wallet.

Nearly four years later, this collaboration between Weber and Valentine stands up as one of my favourite Province Sports videos ever. And now we know that if you stuff old hotel room keys and long-since-cancelled bank cards in your wallet, it will be gargantuan:

— Mashable (@mashable) November 20, 2014

In Other Sports

I grew up in cold. And snow. But Buffalo is ridiculous.
— Buffalo Bills (@buffalobills) November 19, 2014

They’ve currently got 500 workers, apparently working shifts around the clock, to rid Ralph Wilson Stadium of the seven zillion metric tons of white stuff that might impede Sunday’s game against the New York Jets. (Shouldn’t the Jets just forfeit? They are the Jets, after all.) Whatever they do, I think they should keep the snow in the stands intact and put the traditional toboggan-seating into effect Sunday afternoon.

Jason Collins

It’s also worth pointing out that unsigned NBA veteran Jason Collins announced his retirement. “His ordinariness, at least in the relative world of the NBA,” writes The Guardian’s Hunter Felt, “was a key part of the story.” And you have to like the headline on Collins’ first-person retirement speech in The Players’ Tribune: simply, “I’m Out.”

France Soccer Euro 2016 Mascot

And did you see that they unveiled the mascot for the 2016 Euro tournament in France? He’s a fine-looking, clean-cut fellow. And the Mirror rightfully asks: who does this young man remind you of? I voted for Jack Wilshere. Turns out the Arsenal midfielder is the leading vote-getter, significantly ahead of second-place Hugo Lloris, the Tottenham goalkeeper.

Let’s Go to the Video (Again)

If you’re BioSteel Sports Inc., the creator of the sports drink #DrinkthePink, you might not be overly thrilled that your client, possible future superstar Connor McDavid, is sitting out with a broken hand after a recent fight.

Here’s McDavid in a new #DrinkthePink commercial, shot at Toronto’s awesome, ancient St. Michael’s College rink, back when McDavid had two good hands:

Just Survive, Baby

Recently, Outside magazine decided to serve up a lovely little quiz to its readers. The subject: Could you “survive truly life-threatening scenarios?” I decided to give it a go.

Well, there were questions about sharks, and questions about being stranded on your sailboat without GPS, and questions about apparently vicious theses monkeys. Damn. I got 11 out of 16. They say I’m “zombie bait.”

Boral Promotes His Latest Film In Melbourne

When I Say South Korea, You Say Sheep Farm

As always, Torben Rolfsen, author of The Province’s Live@5 blog, finds the good stuff. He’s made me aware of this tweet, sent from the 2018 Winter Olympics organizing committee’s Twitter account. Says Rolfsen: “A touch of Boral here …

When is the last time you see something nature? If you don’t know, this photo of PyeongChang’s farm will give you one!
pic.twitter.com/xVpFDY32Oc

— PyeongChang 2018 (@2018PyeongChang) November 19, 2014

How good is that? And who knew PyeongChang had just one farm?

In all fairness, English isn’t their first language. And here’s another recent PyeongChang tweet that all Canadians should applaud:

If you dream and you allow yourself to dream, you can do anything—Claara Hughes, cyclist & speed skater. What’s your dream? pic.twitter.com/OMi9ycfLiC

— PyeongChang 2018 (@2018PyeongChang) November 18, 2014

Newest Innovations In Consumer Technology On Display At 2014 International CES

Again With the Video?

In Tuesday’s Morning Skate, Patrick Johnston shared one of his favourite TV themes: the Rockford Files. After all, his mother would gather the children in the living room for Rockford reruns — Patrick wasn’t even born when the James Garner series first aired. It would be mid-afternoon. Within minutes of the show starting, Mrs. Johnston would be fast asleep. Every single time.

I promised Patrick I’d share one of my favourite old-time TV openings. It’s still amazing, nearly 40 years (!) later. (And RIP Glen Larson, who helped create not only The Six Million Dollar Man, but a couple of my other all-time favourites: Magnum, P.I. and the insanely addictive Knight Rider.)

Paul Chapman grabs the Morning Skate controls on Friday. Enjoy.

One of the best points the Canucks have earned in a long while

BY TONY GALLAGHER, THE PROVINCENOVEMBER 20, 2014 11:25 PM

Anaheim Ducks’ Ryan Kesler takes part in the pre-game skate before an NHL hockey game against his former team, the Vancouver Canucks, in Vancouver B.C., on Thursday November 20, 2014. In a show of kindness, Kesler would later congratulate Bo Horvat on his first NHL goal when the two were facing off against each other.

Was it Kevin Bieksa’s glove hand right to the face of Corey Perry in the scrum at the end of the first period?

Was it the first goal scored by Bo Horvat and the corresponding response from the crowd when they put the kid up on the scoreboard?

Whatever it was that got the Vancouver Canucks going Thursday night at Rogers Arena what they did was remarkably impressive given the context in which they thrust themselves into their game with the Anaheim Ducks. And while they lost the lead in the third period and spent most of the overtime in their own end before losing in the shootout, this was still one of the best points this team has come away with in a good long while.

Consider it was the second game of a back-to-back and they were playing a Ducks team that hadn’t been playing particularly well, but had pretty much returned to health with the return of Cam Fowler, Francois Beauchemin and Perry. And the Canucks had seen their top defenceman Dan Hamhuis go down for what looks like quite a while in the first period when he appeared to turn awkwardly and hurt his right groin. And while we can’t be sure of the diagnosis, and the Canucks are never very helpful in that area, at the very least he couldn’t put any weight on the area as he was helped from the ice. He’ll be out for a while.

Down two goals and coming off a win the previous night, it would have been easy to mail it in and look forward to figuring out how they are going to cope with life with one of either Yannick Weber, Luca Sbisa or Ryan Stanton playing in their top four. And the baptism comes Sunday evening against the Chicago Blackhawks who always seem to perform so well in Vancouver.

But there was no postage available. This team decided they were going to compete and when they got a goal from the kid who wasn’t going to play until Alex Burrows couldn’t go after having had his bell rung in Edmonton, they put together a great second period, perhaps their best canto of the season, and they put the building into a frenzy in the process.

“No way we’re mailing anything, you know us better than that,” said an exhausted Kevin Bieksa who played over 28 minutes hard minutes. “Maybe it (the poke in Perry’s face) had something to do with it, we certainly had a good second period and had the best chance in overtime. But basically we’re 20 games in, we’ve had a good start, and there isn’t much more to it than that.”

“We kept working and didn’t give up and that’s the important thing,” said Radim Vrbata, whose goal put the Canucks ahead 3-2 after Horvat and Jannik Hansen, with his second goal in two games, had evened the game. “We’ve got good character on this team and that was a point we’re glad to have. We didn’t want to sit back in the third period the way we did, but that’s just the way it seemed to work out.”

What happens now on the back end is anyone’s guess.

“You push on and see what happens,” says Bieksa of the team playing with one of it’s top four out for what could be quite a while, to say nothing of the fact Chris Higgins was limping after the game and Chris Tanev was getting treatment for the shot he blocked at the end of overtime. “We need Luca (Sbisa) or Webs to step up and (Ryan) Stanton to come back with one of them playing in that role. We’ll see how it goes.”

Sbisa will be lucky to be stepping anywhere given his right ankle was heavily iced and he was looking a little forlorn afterwards.

“No, I’m not going for x-rays,” he said. “I just blocked a shot and it’s a little sore.”

“Every point is important and that’s a good team over there,” said coach Willie Desjardins, who chose Anaheim to shoot first in the shootout because he said he wanted to give his shooters a little more time to rest before they took their turn. It backfired as Perry was able to open the scoring, putting more pressure on the Vancouver shooters, but nobody is going to win every one goal game — something the Canucks had accomplished so far this season going into this one.

And for those who don’t care for Ryan Kesler, get a load of this one.

“He actually congratulated me on the goal while we were facing each other,” said Horvat, of when the two came together in the faceoff circle a couple of times in the second period. “That was kind of nice of him.”

Anaheim’s Emerson Etem got big boost in junior from Desjardins

BY STEVE EWEN, THE PROVINCE NOVEMBER 20, 2014

Emerson Etem says that Willie Desjardins’ reputation played a major role in a California kid chasing his hockey dream to the Prairies.

“I knew that he knew talent, from having guys like Tyler Ennis and Joffrey Lupul there,” Etem, the Anaheim Ducks right winger from Long Beach, Calif., said of Desjardins, the current Canucks coach who recruited him to the WHL’s Medicine Hat Tigers for the 2009-10 season.

“I looked at those guys that he had produced, and that he had won the WHL championship and went to the Memorial Cup a few years prior (2007),” said Etem. “I knew that he was a winner and the word going around was that he was an awesome, awesome hockey guy, and I think that’s what I needed in my life at that point.”

Etem, 22, is one of the rising stars with the Ducks, a 2010 first-round draft pick whose name was thrown about when talk of Ryan Kesler being traded to Anaheim first arose.

It feels like the 6-foot-1, 212-pound, left-handed-shooting speedster is now starting to take a step even further forward. In Anaheim’s 20 games this season prior to their visit to Rogers Arena Thursday, Etem averaged 11 minutes, 24 seconds of ice time. But in the four games leading into the tilt against the Canucks, he was up to 14:56 a night, and starting to see time with Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry on the Ducks’ first unit.

He had two goals and two assists through his first 20 games with Anaheim this season.

He did have caché before Desjardins got to him. His parents, Rick and Pat, were collegiate rowers, and Pat competed for the U.S. at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.

Etem grew up 20 minutes from the Ducks’ home rink, the Honda Center. You can find stories of a 14-year-old Etem riding public transit to get to workouts set up by Venice Beach fitness guru T.R. Goodwin, where Etem would often go through the paces alongside then-NHLers Rob Blake and Chris Chelios.

Etem starred at Shattuck-St. Mary’s, the boarding school in Faribault, Minn., that has also been home to Sidney Crosby and Jonathan Toews, among others. Etem had been one of the better players with the U.S. National Development team, based out of Ann Arbor, Mich., the season before he came to Medicine Hat, and could have easily stayed there.

Medicine Hat went after him hard. They had picked him in the sixth round of the 2007 bantam draft and it was a coup to get him.

And how did Desjardins handle him as coach? Etem says Desjardins put him to work.

“He didn’t hand anything to me,” Etem maintained. “I came there expecting a lot of ice time and to be put on the power play right away, and the penalty kill, too. I had to learn. I started out pretty much just 5-on-5. That was great. It made me work that much harder.

“We had a great year that year. I learned so much from him, both about the game and off-ice stuff. He made me a better person.”

As a 17-year-old that season, Etem led all league rookies in goals, putting up 37 in 72 games.

Desjardins left for a job with the Dallas Stars that next summer, and assistant Shaun Clouston replaced him at the helm in Medicine Hat. Etem bagged 45 goals in 65 games that season, playing on a line with current Canuck Linden Vey. Vey won the league scoring championship, with 116 points, including 46 goals.

In his final season in the WHL in 2011-12, Etem led the league with 61 goals, and his 107 points put him seventh in that category.

Canucks prospect Hunter Shinkaruk was his linemate for much of that campaign.

“I know he’s a passionate guy and he’s a little bit disappointed that he didn’t make the Canucks roster,” Etem said of Shinkaruk, a left-winger currently with the AHL’s Utica Comets. “He loves the game. He’s going to be quite a player.

“He has that Crosby-type shuffle step in his stride. Jeff Skinner has it. A lot of top guys are using it and it looks very effective. He’s very slippery in the corners. He’s just a great playmaker and scorer.”
It’s often hard to reconcile what you believed to be the truth for years from what you later find out is the real truth.

So is the story of Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson.

The hockey world was abuzz Thursday as the explosive story of the financial wreck that Johnson’s personal life has become was reported by veteran Columbus beat writer Aaron Portzline -- and later confirmed by ESPN.com.

Documents also obtained by ESPN.com and information provided by those who are familiar with the Johnson situation confirm Portzline’s meticulous outline of a young player whose own parents led him to financial ruin.

Johnson filed for bankruptcy, and documents allege that his mother Tina Johnson borrowed at least $15 million against her son’s future earnings and that Jack Johnson’s current worth is less than $50,000 with debt exceeding $10 million, according to the report.

The relationship between Jack Johnson and his parents has been severed, according to the Dispatch.

It is all true, one source familiar with the situation told ESPN.com.

Before he signed his current seven-year, $30.5 million deal, Jack Johnson parted ways with highly respected agent Pat Brisson and turned over power of attorney to his mother. In light of recent events, it would not be at all surprising to see Johnson return to Brisson as a client in the coming days.

Jack Johnson

Jack Johnson is playing in the fourth year of a seven-year contract worth $30.5 million, but his current worth is less than $50,000.

All of this is both shocking and more than a little sad, not just the financial mess but the personal toll this must have taken and will no doubt continue to take on Jack Johnson, his younger brother Ken and the rest of the family.

I first met Jack Johnson at his parents’ home near Ann Arbor, Michigan, a few months before he would be drafted by the Carolina Hurricanes with the third overall pick in the 2005 draft.

His parents, Jack Sr. and Tina, had moved to Michigan to be close to Johnson when he joined the U.S. National Team Development Program after attending hockey prep school Shattuck-St. Mary’s in Minnesota, where one of his close friends was Pittsburgh Penguins star Sidney Crosby.

Crosby is represented by Brisson.

Before that, the Johnsons quit their jobs and moved to Minnesota instead of having Jack live on campus at Shattuck.

The Johnsons appeared to be a tight-knit family, with Jack Johnson doting on younger brother Kenny. Even at that young age, it seemed obvious that Jack Johnson was aware of the sacrifices his parents had made to pave a smooth route to hockey success.

“I think about it all the time,” Johnson told ESPN.com in 2005. “If all this stuff works out, it’s all because my parents got up at 4 in the morning to take me to skate before school started. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for them. I owe so much to them I’ll never be able to make it up.”

Prophetic? More than a little.

A few years later, I talked with Tina Johnson at the Vancouver Olympics in advance of the gold-medal game between Canada and the United States, for whom Jack Johnson was playing.

*Amazing is just a word that falls off your lips pretty often around here,” she told ESPN.com at the time. “It’s just such a joyful experience to be here together and nerve-racking at the same time.”

Jack Johnson said at the time that he thought of his parents and his younger brother as he prepared for the first Olympic tournament game.

“They said there were a lot of emotions involved,” Jack Johnson said in the days leading up to the gold-medal game, ultimately won by Canada. “They thought about all the 5 a.m. mornings, going to the rink, and actually I did too getting dressed. You kind of run through that -- everything that you went through to get here all the way back to when you’re 5 years old to when you’re 23 sitting in the Olympics. You can’t help but think about things like that.

"To be able to share this with my family is real special. They're the reason I'm here, really. Without them, I wouldn't be here.”

Now, less than five years later, his relationship with his parents appears to be on the rocks as Jack Johnson tries to rebuild his financial future.

While Jack Johnson’s situation would seem to be a rare one, it is also a cautionary tale for all young athletes.

The National Hockey League Players’ Association includes two financial components to its annual rookie education program. Young players are addressed every year by financial experts who provide advice about diversifying their investments and ensuring that their investments aren’t handled by one single source.

There is also a part of the process that involves testimonials from players who share some of the mistakes or pitfalls they encountered in their lives.

The NHL also has a financial component to its annual security address to players, while the union’s financial educational component is reinforced during annual visits with individual teams.

Still, it’s obvious that people like Jack Johnson sometimes fall through the cracks, and the price they pay, on a number of levels, can be a steep one.

Talking with Jack Johnson last spring during the playoffs, he appeared to be in a good place with his career and was upbeat about his future, in spite of being left off the U.S. roster for the Sochi Olympics. He had embraced his trade from Los Angeles to Columbus as part of the Jeff Carter deal in 2012.

A fan favorite, Jack Johnson was enjoying his role in helping redefine a Blue Jackets team that had known nothing of playoff success as they pushed Pittsburgh -- and his pal Crosby -- to six games in a rollicking back-and-forth first-round series.

“I don’t think I’ve changed at all since I’ve been here,” Johnson said. “I’m just the same guy, I think, same guy that came out of college. I just ended up in a different city, just different place, different atmosphere. It’s worked out great for me. I couldn’t be happier here, and it’s been a great fit for me.”

If only his personal and financial life had found such a solid foundation.

ESPN LOADED: 11.21.2014
The Montreal Canadiens made another trade Thursday that mirrored one from earlier this month.

Rene Bourque
Rene Bourque will make $2.5 million this season, but carries a cap hit of $3.33 million.

In acquiring veteran blueliner Bryan Allen from the Anaheim Ducks in exchange for forward Rene Bourque, Habs general manager Marc Bergevin shed himself of a contract that had term past this season.

Allen is an unrestricted free agent after the season -- just like Sergei Gonchar, who was acquired earlier this month from the Dallas Stars in exchange for Travis Moen. Moen had another year left on his deal next season -- just like Bourque.

Between Bourque and Moen, the Habs have shed $5.18 million off their salary cap for next season. Pretty shrewd moves here by Bergevin. Not to mention that, if Gonchar and Allen have anything left in the tank, they also bring experience to a roster that's hoping for a deep playoff run.

Remember that teams around the league are nervous that the salary cap won't go up that much next year.

From Anaheim's perspective, the Ducks are a budget team, not a cap team. And it's important to note that Bourque's salary is actually $2.5 million this year and next even though his cap hit is $3.33 million. While Bourque has struggled a lot in Montreal, a change of scenery at $2.5 million is probably worth the risk for Anaheim.
The news out of downtown Thursday night was that the Los Angeles Kings won their game against the Carolina Hurricanes. This was not entirely shocking - the Hurricanes only have 15 points this season. But given the news that broke over in the South Bay earlier in the day, the hockey world was anxious to see how the Kings would play.

The answer is the same - the Kings have played the same since losing defenseman Slava Voynov to an indefinite suspension 14 games ago. And in the last 14 games, L.A. has gone 7-4-3 and even won a game using only five defensemen.

The team has maintained that Voynov's suspension has not been a distraction off the ice and on it, they've seen serviceable contributions from Brayden McNabb and Jamie McBain, the latter of which will likely sit when Alec Martinez returns.

Thursday night's showing against Carolina, McBain's former team, wasn't exactly a blowout, but it was enough to earn two points, tying Calgary for third place in the Pacific Division.

The defense corps earned strong reviews as the Hurricanes had a difficult time even touching the puck.

"We controlled the game in the offensive zone, so we did what we wanted," said coach Darryl Sutter. "We tried to get to the net, but (Cam) Ward's been hot. We knew we had to get some traffic and some screens. Our defense did a really good job putting pucks there. We had a lot of shots from up top, we were trying to beat the defensemen to the net out of the corners with the style of the game that they play."

The Kings' 10 wins and 21 points on home ice at the Staples Center is the most in the league and they haven't lost to Carolina at home since 2005. The score was close but it didn't feel like it as the Hurricanes got off only 27 shots and no more than 11 in any period.

"We had a hard time handling their size on the walls," said Carolina coach Bill Peters. "They wore us out in the d-zone, they were a heavy team in the offensive zone and we spent too much time in their tonight."

With the announcement that Voynov is going to be formally charged with felony corporal injury to a spouse stemming from his domestic abuse arrest last month, the NHL made it clear that the Kings will be without the services of the Russian d-man for quite a while.

The veteran defensemen are still playing heavy minutes and even McNabb has been playing around 20 the last few games. There are questions of whether or not they're being overplayed. Drew Doughty in particular, but when Martinez returns the workload will be alleviated.

For now, the Kings are doing just fine without Voynov.
NBCSports.com / NHL postpones Rangers-Sabres due to ‘weather-related difficulties’

Mike Halford Nov 20, 2014, 3:19 PM EST

From the league:

Due to the continuing weather-related difficulties in the Greater Buffalo area and out of respect for the fans of the Sabres, Friday’s game between the New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center, NHL Game No. 291, has been postponed.

A makeup date will be announced as soon as it can be confirmed.

It’s worth noting the league went ahead with Tuesday’s Sabres-Sharks game — played in front of a sparse crowd at First Niagara — despite the onset of heavy snowfall earlier in the day. There’s been five feet accumulated already in the Western New York area, and up to three more feet are expected by end of Thursday.

“Hockey seems like a very small thing when a city is going through what we’re going through right now,” Sabres coach Ted Nolan said today, per TSN.
After the Toronto Maple Leafs defeated the Tampa Bay Lightning did they snub the fans at the ACC by not thanking them at centre ice?

CHRIS JOHNSTON   NOVEMBER 21, 2014, 12:41 AM

TORONTO — In the place it mattered most — the scoreboard — a little order seemed to be restored around the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday night.

But even after putting an end to an ugly three-game losing streak there were still signs of possible discontent.

Most notably, the Maple Leafs decided to buck tradition by skipping the customary salute to fans following a 5-2 victory over the Tampa Bay Lightning. During the last couple seasons every win at Air Canada Centre has been celebrated in the same way: With players skating to centre ice and raising their sticks in the air.

At least every win until this one.

While one member of the team told me afterwards that the group was simply looking to change things up and didn’t intend to offend the paying customers, the gesture certainly left plenty of room for another interpretation.

It has been a trying season in Toronto, with fans often booing the team and throwing sweaters on the ice repeatedly during games. Already the Leafs have been beaten by three or more goals in their building on four occasions.

They couldn’t even escape the scrutiny during a tough loss last weekend in Buffalo, where a fan tossed a full can of beer onto their bench and saw it explode on a couple players.

When they arrived at the rink on Thursday, they were only two days removed from the low point of the year — a 9-2 loss to Nashville here that James van Riemsdyk claimed led to a lot of “over-analyzing” in the city.

Despite all of the swirling negativity, the Leafs bounced back with a much better effort against Tampa and rode a three-goal second period to victory. The team’s top line was particularly strong, with van Riemsdyk scoring twice and Phil Kessel looking extremely dangerous throughout.

“The other night it was nine goals and we were embarrassed by it and there was nothing we could do to take it back,” said coach Randy Carlyle. “But we sure didn’t want for something bad to happen to our hockey club tonight and I think (the players) were rewarded with their hard work.”

“It was an example of what kind of team we can be when we stay disciplined to our system and manage the puck,” added defenceman Cody Franson.

Basically it was the kind of victory that should provide some much-needed pressure relief, especially since the Leafs are right in the middle of the playoff race with a 10-8-2 record. That fact has been almost entirely lost in the public discourse during seven weeks of wild highs and lows.

Yet, even after Thursday’s win, it was hard to ignore what the post-game celebration — or non-celebration — seemed to suggest. There is still a lot of frustration lurking beneath the surface here.

Carlyle often refers to the endless analysis of the team as “white noise” and there’s no question that some players have difficulty tuning it out.

“(We have) the most passionate fans in the world here and a lot of coverage for our team, so you know there’s going to be a lot of people giving their two cents — deserved or not,” said van Riemsdyk. “We’ve just got to be ready to just not worry about that and worry about what we’re doing here.”

The players appeared to make a last-minute decision to skip the salute to fans after beating the Lightning. On the video, Kessel can be seen saying something to captain Dion Phaneuf while the team congregated around winning goalie Jonathan Bernier before then skating along the process to and guiding some of his teammates off the ice.
Websites

Sportsnet.ca / North Dakota hockey player 'lucky to be alive'

EVAN PEASLEE   NOVEMBER 20, 2014, 7:22 PM

A player for the University of North Dakota women’s hockey team may never play hockey again, but she’s lucky to be alive after being hit by a car on Monday.

Lisa Marvin, a 20-year-old forward with UND’s team, was filling up her truck on the side of the road after it ran out of gas when another vehicle ran into the back of her pickup and flung her into the air before she landed on the pavement.

According to Brad Elliott Schlossmann of the Grand Forks Herald the accident occurred around 1:20 pm on Monday.

Marvin’s arm was severely broken between her shoulder and elbow, and there was a sizeable hole where the bone went through her skin.

She’s “really, really, really lucky to be alive,” David Marvin, her father, told Schlossman.

Two men were charged in the incident. The driver of the vehicle that struck Martin was charged with aggravated reckless driving, while another driver was charged with racing.

The UND sophomore underwent about three hours of surgery on Monday evening to insert two separate plates in her arm to aid in bone regeneration. She’s also dealing with nerve damage in her arm and is unable to straighten it out or make a fist.

Marvin also requires reconstructive surgery on her knee at some point to repair the damage done by the accident.

“It’s going to take a lot of hard work on her part if life can be normal again,” her father said. “She’s going to have a ton of doctor appointments, check-ups and X-rays. It’s going to be a very, very long road of rehab in front of her. At the moment, she’s extremely uncomfortable, even with the (painkillers). Her best time is when her teammates come and visit her. That takes her mind off the pain.”

Although her young collegiate career is in question just 12 games into her sophomore season, her family and friends are happy that it wasn’t any worse.

“We’re blessed that she’s alive with what she went through. It’s a miracle that she didn’t get hurt worse,” her father said.

Marvin scored her first goal of the season last Friday against Bemidji State.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.21.2014
Syracuse Crunch goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy will sport a new mask for Saturday’s AHL Frozen Dome Classic.

Vasilevskiy had Sylvie Marsolais of Sylabrush Airbrush design a mask specifically for the game. It incorporates elements of the Crunch, Syracuse University, and his home country of Russia.

The goalie’s nickname, Vasy, is written on the chin of the mask, with the S replaced with the Syracuse logo.

Sylvie Marsolais on Twitter
Tendy Gear on Twitter

In eight starts this season, the 20-year-old netminder is 3-2-3 with a .888 save percentage and 3.07 goals-against average. He was drafted by the Tampa Bay Lightning in the first round (19th overall) of the 2012 NHL Draft.

The Crunch take on the Utica Comets Saturday at the Carrier Dome, which is the home of the Syracuse Orange NCAA basketball team.
The Montreal Canadiens acquired their second veteran defenseman in the past nine days, obtaining stay-at-home blueliner Bryan Allen, 34, from the Anaheim Ducks for forward Rene Bourque.

On Nov. 11, the Canadiens picked up Sergei Gonchar from the Dallas Stars for veteran forward Travis Moen.

Gonchar was brought in to help the team's power play, and Allen seems like an insurance policy. Right now, Montreal's defense has P.K. Subban and Andrei Markov averaging more than 24 minutes each, and Alexei Emelin and Tom Gilbert playing more than 20 minutes each. Gonchar has averaged 18 minutes in his four games.

Mike Weaver is playing a little more than 16 minutes a game, and Jared Tinordi is the younger defenseman trying to earn his place. He is averaging 12 minutes.

The Ducks, considered a prime contender in the Western Conference, are missing injured forward Dany Heatley. Bourque, 32, could help the team's secondary scoring.

Bourque doesn't have a goal this season but has cracked the 20-goal level three times. Last spring, he scored eight goals in 17 playoff games.