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718892 Anaheim Ducks

Ducks eager for season to take flight Wednesday

By ERIC STEPHENS / ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Published: Sept. 30, 2013 Updated: 10:07 p.m.

ANAHEIM –

Training camp wasn’t kind to the Ducks and the performance in their preseason finale didn’t leave any impression they’ve got all their gears in motion for the regular season.

Try telling that to them after a spirited workout Monday at Honda Center. The Ducks still have some things to work through, but they looked like a team that has long been eager to get the real games going.

“You could tell that the guys were looking forward to the season starting,” Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau said. “Because it was so much more upbeat than the last couple in training camp. I was pretty happy with it.”

The Ducks, who are coming off a surprising wire-to-wire run to the Pacific Division title, unveil their newest edition Wednesday in Denver against the Colorado Avalanche. This one isn’t too different from their last one.

There are a few changes, with the obvious being the traded Bobby Ryan no longer in their dressing room. Promising winger Jacob Silfverberg comes from Ottawa in return and should make his Ducks debut after recovering from a lower-body injury.

Hard-hitting Mark Fistric gives them some needed depth on a question-filled defense corps that is without veteran Sheldon Souray, who is gone until midseason because of a torn wrist ligament suffered while doing offseason workouts.

There is Hampus Lindholm, the 19-year-old defenseman and 2012 first-round pick who might be playing his first NHL game against the Avalanche.

“I’m just trying to be as confident as I can with the puck,” Lindholm said. “I know that’s my game.”

And newly acquired center Mathieu Perreault joins them Tuesday. But there are still many of the same pieces and the names are familiar: Selanne, Perry, Fowler, Hiller, Beauchemin, Fasth, Koivu, etc.

A banner reflecting the Ducks’ second division title sits alongside those from 2003 and 2007 that carry more meaning. The Ducks had notable achievements last season but still feel the sting of their early playoff exit.

“We better have some frustration from last year,” Ducks captain Ryan Getzlaf said. “Part of building a winning organization is every year transfers into the next. When you lose in a Game 7 situation, it’s got to weight on you going into the start of the year.”

Ah, Game 7. The Ducks never did apply the knockout blow to Detroit despite three series leads, allowing the Red Wings to go the distance, and then capture the decisive game on the road.
"I haven’t got over it,” said Getzlaf, perhaps hoping others pick up on his message.

But Boudreau wanted to move beyond that low moment.

"Geez, that was a few months ago," he said. "We want to do better. But I don’t think we’re going to sit there every night and rehash what happened.”

Heading into the new season, the Ducks have had trouble keeping players on the ice as injuries have taken a toll. Boudreau has lamented his inability to put together the lines he imagined at the start of camp.

Left wing Emerson Etem and defenseman Luca Sbisa still are sidelined after suffering lower-body injuries during earlier exhibition games and both figure to at least miss the opener. But Silfverberg could be back in the lineup.

Silfverberg was very encouraged, using the word “definitely” with regard to playing Wednesday after a practice session and skates on his own Saturday and Sunday.

"I feel good,” said Silverberg, who had 10 goals and nine assists as a rookie with the Senators. “It’s just a matter of getting the conditioning up there. … I’m getting a couple of good practices now. I’m ready.”

Injuries have allowed a few bubble players to stick — at least for the moment. The Ducks got their roster down to the 23-player maximum, and Lindholm, Peter Holland, Devante Smith-Pelly and Pat Maroon survived.

One forward will need to be moved out when Silfverberg is activated from injured reserve. Smith-Pelly acknowledged the feeling of “waiting on pins and needles” but thought he made his argument for a roster spot.

"I did exactly what was asked of me,” he said. “That’s all I can do really. Make it hard on the coaches and management.”

The Ducks assigned wingers John Kurtz and Brad Staubitz, center Rickard Rakell and defenseman Nolan Yonkman to the Norfolk Admirals of the AHL, and sent goalie Igor Bobkov to their new ECHL team, the Utah Grizzlies.

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718693 Boston Bruins

Bruins’ front office takes charge

By Kevin Paul Dupont

October 01, 2013

The Bruins return to work Thursday night, the start of their 2013-14 NHL season, with a roster that again places them among the preseason favorites to win the Stanley Cup. It has become the routine, the expected, the moribund franchise of just a few years ago resurrected and reshaped as a perennial championship-contending heavyweight.

The trick to it all?

"It takes time and trust and success — and failure — to be able to come up with the right formula," Peter Chiarelli said recently, prior to embarking on his eighth season as the club’s general manager. “I am not saying we have the right formula. But we have a good formula.”

Specifically, it’s a successful concoction mainly of Chiarelli, team president Cam Neely, and coach Claude Julien, a somewhat ecletic bunch brought together in a span of less than 18 months following club owner Jeremy Jacobs’ decision in 2006 to broom out his old management guard. First came Chiarelli in the spring of that year, followed one season later by Julien, and then Neely’s return, initially as vice president and face of the franchise in September 2007.

In simple terms, the trio works this way:

■ Neely is head of concept and vision, charged with identifying, restoring, and helping to maintain the franchise’s image, culture, and ethos on both the playing and business sides of the operation.

■ Chiarelli is the chief hockey integrator, managing both up and down the organization, empowered, he says, with autonomy to make all player moves he and his group deem necessary — including the blockbuster transactions that dealt high-profiled young stars Phil Kessel and Tyler Seguin in a span of less than 48 months.

■ Julien’s role is application, the shaping, employment, and maximizing of the player products delivered to his doorstep by Chiarelli and assistant GMs Jim Benning and Don Sweeney, the pair of ex-NHL defensemen who serve as Chiarelli’s trusted player-personnel lieutenants.

That’s how it all looks on a corporate flow chart, with defined hierarchical standing and job duties. But much like the game of hockey is played, there are vagaries and nuances, with roles at times overlapping, shifting, changing on the fly. It is a management team that has grown “organically,” said Chiarelli, a word he used repeatedly in a near-hour-long interview that focused on the club’s front-office operation and its standing now among the best in the NHL.

There have routinely been differences of opinion throughout the organization, noted Chiarelli, but nothing yet that has impeded a steadily-improved trajectory leading to two visits to the Stanley Cup Final the last three seasons, including a title run in 2011 that delivered the franchise’s first Cup in 39 years.

“I wouldn’t say we’ve [ever] been diametrically opposed, but we disagree on things, and we work through them,” said Chiarelli, speaking directly to his working relationship with Neely. “He as president represents ownership, so there are certain parameters [mainly financial] that he has to uphold … which I uphold, too. But he realizes you have to let people do their jobs. I also have disagreements with my scouts, with my coaches. And Cam has disagreements with me, with other employees, and we work through them. That’s why I say organically it has grown and we are getting better at it.”

Those disagreements have been few and relatively easy to settle, added Neely, in large part because it became clear to him from the outset that he and Chiarelli view players and the game through a very similar lens.

“TIn all honesty, early on, I got a sense that we both liked the same type of player,” said Neely, the Hall-of-Fame right winger whose game was built on power and emotion. “So it didn’t take much time to figure that out. He may like a little different bend of the player than I do, but we both ultimately like the same.”

Julien, on his third stand behind an NHL bench, following abrupt dismissals in Montreal and New Jersey, has never enjoyed such success or stability. He is entering his seventh season as the Bruins bench boss, and but for a half-hour in the spring of 2006, he possibly would be entering his eighth season here.

In one of his few missteps since taking over, Chiarelli in his first weeks on the job signed Dave Lewis to a five-year contract as coach, only to ditch Lewis after one non-playoff (35-41-6) season. However, shortly before signing up Lewis in June ’06, the newly-hired Chiarelli placed a call to Julien, a longtime acquaintance from Ottawa, hoping Julien would have an interest in being Boston’s coach.

"It was a half-hour earlier, and I am not exaggerating, that I signed to take the job in New Jersey," recalled Julien. "Probably nobody knows about that, but it’s true. I was [home] in Ottawa at the time. I’d just signed the contract, sent it to Lou [Lamoriello, New Jersey GM] by fax, got in my car and went to a store. A half an hour later, I’m in my car in a parking lot, the phone rings, and it’s Pete, wanting to talk to me about the job here.”

Too late. Julien was committed to the Devils, though his tenure there was briefer than Lewis’s in Boston. Lamoriello dismissed him with three games to play in the regular season. Lewis, whom Chiarelli initially said would return for the 2007-08 season, was fired in mid-June, roughly a week before Julien was brought in as his replacement.

"Let’s put it this way, when I got fired by New Jersey, Peter called me right away and wanted to know if I was still interested in coming,” said Julien, asked if he believes he would have been Chiarelli’s No. 1 choice here in 2006. “So this is how I ended up here.”

What became abundantly clear in lengthy interviews with Julien and Neely is that Chiarelli, the former Harvard hockey captain and later assistant GM in Ottawa, works through decisions deliberately and methodically. Big moves, such as those that sent Kessel and Seguin packing, are neither impulsive nor unilateral.

Typically, said Chiarelli, though refusing to speak directly to either the Kessel or Seguin deals, what he defines as big “organizational trades” are vetted...
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Seguin, fast and skilled, was dealt for a variety of reasons, best depicted perhaps as lack of maturity, both in his game and his off-ice behavior. Chiarelli said again he would have preferred to retain Horton, had an offer on the table to keep him here, but "personal reasons" tied the sturdy winger to seek employment in slower-paced Columbus. Ference landed a $13 million deal in Edmonton, days after the Bruins decided his price would not fit their pay structure or needs — not with a rich pipeline of young, talented, and less expensive defensemen at the ready.

"We just couldn’t keep him with the money that he would get," said Chiarelli, "and that he deserves."

Julien’s ability to work with whatever players are sent his way, said Chiarelli, is in large part why he recently labeled the veteran coach his most significant hire in Boston. Julien and his staff are "malleable," said Chiarelli, able to groom all players, for the most part, to deliver in a defensive-oriented system that is the shared vision of both coach and GM.

"One thing I am not is hard-headed," said Julien. "As I often say to Peter, my role as coach is always the same, to get the most out of players I have in my possession. If I do that, and it’s not good enough, then it’s up to Peter to make those changes. If I don’t do my job, and don’t get the most out of a player, it’s hard for him to know if that player should go or stay. That’s how you have to work together on that kind of stuff."

Julien worked hard with Kessel, was encouraged how he delivered in his third season here (36-24—60), says he would have eagerly worked more with him, only to see Kessel force his trade to Toronto. For the most part, Julien feels the same way about Seguin, who was flipped to Dallas, the team that drafted him 11th overall, to Calgary in December of 1995, setting the stage for a long and deep relationship between city and player.

"Tyler was not a bad kid when it came to coaching," noted Julien. "He would come in and listen. Now, whether he would do it or not . . . that’s something else. He was very coachable. When I say that, he didn’t ignore that stuff. Some games he would do what you asked, some games less . . . or it might last a couple of games." In December 2011, Seguin’s second season, Julien tried to get his attention, capture his focus as a professional, by scratching him a game in Winnipeg after the star missed a morning meeting at the hotel.

"I don’t babysit, I coach," said Julien, his frustration with Seguin still clear when recalling that incident. "If I was coaching junior, it would be a different thing. Kids 20 and under, you are doing some babysitting, but not at this level here."

Neely’s main input on the player side is the least hands-on of the group, from owner and president down to the coaching staff, are included in the assessment process.

"You make a major organizational decision like that, you have to talk to your owner and talk with your president, and let them know what you are doing and why you are doing it," said Chiarelli. "So that’s a decision, while I have the autonomy to recommend and make that decision, it would be negligent of me and anyone else sitting in my chair not to apprise and get counsel from everyone, whether it’s a board, a board and owner, a president.

"I am always thinking of ways to improve the team — whether there are signings or trades — those are always going through my mind. I put them to paper, or I put them to our group when I think it may be something we should consider at some point down the line. Time period? That could be six months. Now, I am not going to get too much in depth on the Tyler thing. We’ve talked about it enough. But generally speaking, I would say six months. It’s me first saying, ‘Hey, guys, we have to think about this, keep it in your heads — here are the ways, the routes it could go, but I want it in your heads, and I want to talk about it.’"

For a club that fell only two wins short of winning another Cup in June, the Boston roster has changed dramatically, in part because of the decision to sever ties with Seguin, the No. 2 overall pick in the 2010 draft. Nathan Horton, the club’s top-line right winger, bolted to Columbus as a free agent. Veteran defensemen Andrew Ference signed a four-year free agent deal in Edmonton, making him a third significant piece culled from the club’s core.

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A name for himself

They thought they were getting a player who would be a solid professional. They learned quickly it would be much more. Iginla signed his first pro contract just hours before his first game, Game 3 of the first round of the 1996 playoffs, having been called at 1 a.m. that morning on an emergency basis.

Iginla had an assist in that game, a goal in the next, harbinger of the 1,095 points he would score with the team.

But it wasn’t just that. He was an Edmonton kid, embraced by a city three hours due south. He was loved. Yes, loved. He brought them oh-so-close to a title, and endured even more down years than anyone in Calgary would like to remember. He was the face of a team, a franchise, a city, a province, even a country, after his Olympic glories brought gold to Canada.

“His mother, raising Iginla by herself, had gone into the red to provide hockey safe haven, for just one more signature. And one more after that. That number rose to a million dollars when combined with matching gifts from charities that provide underprivileged children the opportunity to play sports.

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“Teammate Martin Gelinas noted the moment Iginla finally seemed to fully inhabit the role. Iginla stood up in the dressing room when the Flames were on the brink of losing to Vancouver in Game 7 of their first-round series in 2004, a series they weren’t supposed to win. He spoke. The feeling in the room shifted. They won. And kept winning, all the way to the Stanley Cup Final, a heartbreaking seven-game loss to Tampa Bay.

“When he took that team on his shoulders and made it happen, the city embraced him even more,” Gelinas said. “This is where he went from a really good player to a great player, where the city said, ‘This is our captain. This is our guy.’”

Iginla wasn’t a natural leader. He got better, though. He became what they needed.

But the Flames would never reach those heights again.

“I don’t think I was under an extreme amount of pressure,” Iginla said. “I think if you look at any of the Canadian cities, that’s part of it. When you’re winning, it’s great. If you’re not, it’s not as good, as far as pressure.”

He felt the pressure most in the last few years, as time and opportunity were waning down. There was uncertainty. There was, as he put it, “fear of the unknown.” Calgary wasn’t going to get better, not without a complete overhaul, and it was looking more and more like a divorce was inevitable.

And then it arrived. He never got to say goodbye.

Chasing the Cup

Iginla’s time in Calgary started with that question mark. It ended, too, with a question mark.

The day after he was traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins, the Calgary Herald asked: “Will hockey ever be the same?”

The Flames will go on, albeit in a diminished, rebuilding form. It will be different, though. Because for all those years, even those down years, there was a reason to come to the Saddledome. There was a player who could be counted on for at least 30 goals, sometimes as many as 50 (Iginla did it twice).

That is over.

Iginla took his turn in Pittsburgh, a disappointment for all involved. It was disappointing for the Flames, who had a deal struck — then mixed — with the Bruins to ship him to Boston. It was disappointing for the Penguins, who didn’t win the Stanley Cup despite being a favorite, especially after acquiring the then-35-year-old Iginla in March last season. Ultimately, though, it was most disappointing for Iginla.

He chose the Penguins, waiving his no-trade contract and spurning the Bruins, because he believed Pittsburgh had the best chance to win the title that had eluded him. He wasn’t thinking long term, not about family and schools, not about anything but the Cup. It didn’t happen. The Penguins were swept by the Bruins in the Eastern Conference finals.

“That wasn’t easy,” Iginla said. “That wasn’t easy to take at the time.”

He took more time off than usual before he got back on skates after his season ended, a full month. It wasn’t until July when he got back on the ice.

“I was a little burned out,” he said. “It was just — it was a bigger adjustment than I thought. Moving and playing.

“By the end of it, I just felt a little burned out. Not that I ever doubt the enjoyment of the game — I love it — I just felt physically I just needed to rest and mentally and just not think about hockey for a little break.”

By that time, he had signed with the Bruins, in one of the more surprising twists of the offseason. First, he rejected them to join the Penguins. Now he wanted in?

“Might as well ask,” Iginla said of his mind-set at the time. “I don’t know if they really still want me and I can understand if they’re very offended or take it very personal. I can understand that. But I figured I might as well ask.

“The biggest thing as a free agent, I want to be on a team that has an opportunity to win. At this stage it’s not about just lifestyle or nice weather or anything like that. It’s about being on a team that has a chance to win and in Boston you get a little bit of all that.”

He knew Bruins general manager Peter Chiarelli might think he was crazy. Chiarelli didn’t, and inked Iginla to a deal that could be worth $6 million, with incentives. Milan Lucic’s reaction, typical among Iginla’s future teammates?

“First, I laughed,” he said.
Iginla can understand the reaction. But he wanted Boston. Boston wanted him. And he was heading to a new home.

Shirt off his back

It took less than 48 hours for the Flames pro shop to sell out of Iginla’s Calgary jerseys, knocked down to half price from their original $225. Few pieces of merchandise remained in late August on a quiet day at the still-rebuilding Saddledome, which was severely flooded in the summer.

“Everybody wanted a piece of him before he left,” said a man working the counter at FanAttic.

Tucked into the sale rack, there are still some reminders of Iginla’s tenure in Calgary — 19 T-shirts marked down to $12.50, a couple of long-sleeved shirts to $20. A few novelties are left, tiny sticks with his No. 12, and some souvenirs pucks.

Fans still showed up to the Saddledome in Iginla attire. Except some of that Iginla attire bore the logo of his new team, the Penguins. Maybe some fans will don a No. 12 spoked-B at the arena this fall.

Soon, though, there will be nothing left. The Flames named a new captain on Sept. 20, Mark Giordano, a player dwarfed in every way by the legacy of the man who wore the “C” for the decade before Giordano. Iginla sold his Calgary dream home less than a month after he was traded.

He was never able to bring them what they wanted, to return the Cup to Calgary. So, like Ray Bourque before him in Boston, knowing it would never happen in the city where it should have, the Flames shipped him away. Iginla will have to win one elsewhere. Perhaps that will come in Boston, in his second season away from Calgary, as it did with Bourque for the Colorado Avalanche.

“I remember saying when I was younger if I had a choice I’d rather win it near the end of my career than at the beginning and never win again,” Iginla said. “I maybe shouldn’t have said that. I should have said I’d rather win at the beginning and the end and the middle.

“That’s what I should have said. That’s what I was really hoping for.”

He laughs now, ruefully. He has come from a post-practice workout with Zdeno Chara, another 36-year-old trying to hold back the hands of time. Iginla has left a place that was his home for nearly half of his life, coming to a new team and a new country, searching for what he couldn’t find with the Flames.

On his last day in Calgary, Iginla couldn’t play, couldn’t risk being injured, so he didn’t get to skate with the Flames a final time. It was just over. Conroy remembers him saying, “It’s disappointing. I just wanted to do it for the city. They’ve been so great to me. I wanted to be able to give them back a Stanley Cup, and I wasn’t able to do it.”

He always wanted to win it in Calgary, to justify that love affair. He couldn’t. Now he moves on, and tries to win one for himself.

Boston Globe LOADED: 10:01.2013
718695 Boston Bruins

Bruins primed to go for cup again

By Amalie Benjamin
| Globe Staff
| October 01, 2013

They spent weeks thinking about those 76 seconds.

The Bruins were headed for Chicago, for Game 7, for a chance to win their second Stanley Cup in three years — and then, well, they weren’t. It all fell apart in the span of 17 seconds and two goals by the Blackhawks, ruining what had been a brilliant story line for the Bruins.

So, yes, they spent weeks thinking about those 76 seconds in Game 6 of the Final, as the clock ticked down from the tying goal to the winning goal to the end of their season.

Then they shook it off, as their team got shaken up, with general manager Peter Chiarelli remaking key parts of a team that could have stood pat for the 2013-14 season. But the Bruins decided not to, shipping out Tyler Seguin and Rich Peverley, deciding to let Andrew Ference and Jaromir Jagr go, bringing on Jarome Iginla and Loui Eriksson.

It was the opposite approach to what Chiarelli did after the team won the Cup in 2010-11, keeping the personnel and the chemistry intact. But this time, Chiarelli and the Bruins might have made the team better.

“It’s important, every once in a while, to get some fresh faces in and continue to create that excitement of being competitive and wanting to win every year,” coach Claude Julien said early in training camp. “Things can get stale after a while. That’s a known fact.

“I think what we’ve done is kept our core together — we’ve got some great leaders, a great core group of guys — and we’ve added some quality people in there, too.”

And the goal for the season is the same as it was, the same as it always is: to get back to the Final. To take the Cup this time.

“When you win the Cup, you’ve got to turn the page and say, ‘We’ve got to do it all over again,’” Julien said. “That doesn’t change when you lose in the finals. I think we have to turn the page and create ourselves another opportunity here.”

When Chiarelli’s contract was extended before training camp began, the GM noted that neither he nor the organization was satisfied, and that his goal was to keep the team at that level year after year after year. So he felt he had to make changes.

“We want to compete for the Stanley Cup every year,” Chiarelli said then. “It’s my mandate, my charge to do that. So we have to be proactive in this cap world, we have to be aggressive.”

That’s all the more true as the centerpiece of the Bruins ages. With Zdeno Chara 36 this year, the brain trust recognized that the team didn’t have years to wait for Seguin to develop. The time to win was now.

So Chiarelli refashioned parts of the team — some by his choice, some (Nathan Horton’s departure) not by his choice. He spent his summer locking up the long-term pieces that he needed — goalie Tuukka Rask and center Patrice Bergeron — and figuring out how to bring in the rest.

He looks, so far, to have been successful.

The top line, with Iginla now on the right wing in place of Horton, appeared to make a seamless transition in the preseason. The second line, with Eriksson now on right wing in place of Seguin, took slightly longer, but seems to be picking up steam with Bergeron on the mend from his postseason injuries.

Both lines look as though they can generate the offense needed to support the always-exceptional defense played by Julien’s squad.

Added to that is a revamped power play that could finally be the answer to the Bruins’ years-long struggle with the man advantage. The team finished 26th in the NHL on the power play last season, but could see an uptick in production this year with Chara being used down low, plus the addition of Iginla and his 165 career power-play goals.

But there are, of course, question marks. How much does Iginla have left at 36? Will the revamped third line — with Carl Soderberg and Reilly Smith joining Chris Kelly — look like the productive group of 2010-11 or the mess it was most of last season?

How will Chiarelli’s attempt at a youth movement go?

One of the GM’s key tasks this season was to get new, young blood. That will come both in the form of the defense — Torey Krug, Dougie Hamilton, and Matt Bartkowski — and in the form of third-line winger Smith, who came over from Dallas in the Seguin deal. And as the season goes along, possibly others will be added to that list.

“We’re going to see an influx of young players this year,” Chiarelli said. “They’re going to get a chance — not just the ones we have seen last year, but the other guys are going to get a chance.

“We’re going to have to make room and find players, because to make the commitments that we did to our core, although the cap is going to go up, you have to have flexibility. you have to have the other players coming.”

For now, though, it’s not about the cap. It’s about the players Chiarelli put together to compete this season, a group that looks primed to make the
 Bruins — potentially — even better than they were last year, at least in the regular season.

Last season’s group was able to turn it on when it mattered. It remains to be seen whether the Bruins can get back to the Final for what would be the third time in four years.

But right now, in the heady days before the season’s first game Thursday, it looks sure as if these Bruins have a chance.

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718696   Boston Bruins

Dougie digging in

Tuesday, October 1, 2013

By: Matt Kalman

It was one of two penalties Dougie Hamilton was whistled for in a forgettable first period during a preseason game in Winnipeg last Thursday, but it was also a telling moment.

The defenseman was called for an infraction after an opposing player he was battling hit the deck. For the 20-year-old, that negative play had the faintest silver lining.

“Maybe with that one penalty, maybe I wouldn’t have knocked that guy down last year,” Hamilton said jokingly after the Bruins practiced Sunday at the Garden.

Entering his second NHL season, Hamilton is still just a few months removed from being a teenager. He’s still growing and maturing, and there’s a limit to how much stronger he can become year to year. Nonetheless, fresh off skating in 42 games and posting 5-11-16 totals as a rookie, he went off this summer to improve his strength, skating and his ever-important defensive-zone play.

“I think it’s pretty much been stressed by everyone that I need to improve my defensive game,” said Hamilton, who noted that he’s watched tons of video with the coaches during camp. “I think if I’m playing against top-two lines, then I really need to focus on that. . . . You have to be a lot more aware, I guess, and I guess more careful.”

Hamilton was a fixture in the Bruins’ first 39 games last season, as he played top-four minutes (often alongside Dennis Seidenberg) and logged time on the power play. By the end of the season, though, Hamilton had already gotten a dose of how difficult it would be to keep his job as compared to winning it. Fatigue and some subpar play led to coach Claude Julien showing him that he can be really helpful for this team.”

“Really, no. I think I try not to pay attention to anything outside of all this stuff,” Hamilton said. “I think just for me it was just about trying to do my best and playing and improving. I think it’s tough when people kind of don’t believe in you in a way. That’s what’s going to happen all year and throughout my career, with media and stuff like that. So just try and stay away from that stuff and just play your best and earn your spot.”

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718697   Buffalo Sabres

Girgensons joins Sabres’ youth group

By John Vogl | News Sports Reporter | @BuffNewsVogl | Google+

on October 1, 2013 - 12:01 AM

There’s just something different about Zemgus Girgensons, something in his attitude and outlook that foretells of future promise. He proved it again Monday.

Though Girgensons hadn’t officially been told he was on Buffalo Sabres’ roster, the signs were there. He practiced as a regular on a forward line. He was a key penalty killer during drills. Coaches typically don’t put spare pieces in such vital roles two days before the season opener.

Most 19-year-olds would be ecstatic, happy to have made it to the NHL in just their second professional season.

“For any young guy in this locker room, I don’t think there’s such a thing as ‘made it’ so far,” Girgensons said in First Niagara Center. “I think for the young guys, you have to make it every day. You have to make every day count. You’ve got to prove yourself every day to stay up here because any young guy can be sent down at any time.”

Girgensons’ play has matched the intensity of his words, a big reason he has, in fact, made the Sabres’ season-opening roster.

NHL teams needed to reach the 23-player maximum Monday evening, and the Sabres’ roster trimming lacked drama. Forward Marcus Foligno is still out with a sore shoulder, so he joined defenseman Nikita Zadorov (finger) and forwards John Scott and Johan Larsson as the extras Monday.

With the team in place, the next move is determining which 20 players will dress in Detroit on Wednesday night. The only real questions are up front. Buffalo has 14 forwards, so two will be healthy scratches against the Red Wings.

“Really, no. I think I try not to pay attention to anything outside of all this stuff,” Hamilton said. “I think just for me it was just about trying to do my best and playing and improving. I think it’s tough when people kind of don’t believe in you in a way. That’s what’s going to happen all year and throughout my career, with media and stuff like that. So just try and stay away from that stuff and just play your best and earn your spot.”

Enforcer John Scott and rookie center Johan Larsson served as the extras Monday, making it appear as if they’re the odd men out to start. After practice, though, Rolston lauded Larsson’s effort and preseason production.

“You could argue he might have been the best of all those guys in terms of competitive nature in camp,” he said. “We were impressed with the way he played, the details he has, the competitive nature.”

The Sabres’ four centers Monday were Cody Hodgson, Tyler Ennis, Mikhail Grigorenko and Cody McCormick. Larsson’s main competition is Grigorenko, the 19-year-old who wants to make an impact during his second season after an unpleasant rookie campaign.

“I got some confidence from last year, so I think this year is going to be a lot better,” Grigorenko said. “I just want to prove to the coaches that they need me and do what I can do best, which is create offense, work hard and just show him that I can be really helpful for this team.”

Rolston gave Grigorenko plenty of opportunities in the preseason to prove his worth. The center was the only player to dress in all seven exhibitions. He finished with two goals and tied for the team lead with four points.
“It’s going to be a process, but I’ve seen off-ice maturity,” Rolston said. “I’ve seen some on-ice maturity. His compete’s getting better. It’s not where we want it to be, but it’s getting better.”

The Sabres’ third line featured right wing Brian Flynn skating with Girgensons and Grigorenko, Buffalo’s two first-round picks in the 2012 draft. The duo hasn’t “made it” in Girgensons’ view, but it’s still impressive that the two prospects have reached the big leagues so quickly. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, selected eighth overall this year, also made the cut.

“For all of our young guys, it’s just now the ability to do it every night and every day in practice,” Rolston said before elaborating on Girgensons. “He’s physically a man in terms of his development, just strength over the puck. He’s a focused player, and I know that he’s going to bring the energy every night. That’s what we’re looking for.”

The Sabres’ roster features four rookies (Mark Pysyk, Ristolainen, Girgensons and Larsson) and two skaters who’ve played fewer than 30 games (Grigorenko and Flynn). Buffalo is expected to be the NHL’s youngest team when the final totals are announced.

“We’ve got some good young players,” Rolston said. “Now it’s for us finding the mix that’s going to help us move into the future but also be able to have results, too. There’s a balance there.”

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.01.2013

718698 Buffal o Sabres

Sabres notebook: McBain takes first step in comeback

By John Vogl | News Sports Reporter | @BuffNewsVogl | Google+
on September 30, 2013 - 11:38 PM

Jamie McBain is making the most of his fresh start in Buffalo.

The defenseman, acquired via trade after a rough season in Carolina, has taken the first step toward a comeback year. He made the Sabres’ season-opening roster Monday, one of seven blue-liners kept by Buffalo.

It wasn’t easy. The 25-year-old needed to set himself apart from the defensive logjam that included veteran Alexander Sulzer and prospects such as Chad Ruhwedel and Brayden McNabb.

“There were a lot of guys here and obviously a lot of guys you’re competing with, a lot younger, but it’s always a good feeling to be in the spot you want to be right now,” McBain said in First Niagara Center. McBain practiced as the extra defenseman Monday and likely will be a be right now,” McBain said in First Niagara Center.

“A lot of times it takes that change of scenery in order to find yourself again and find your game again,” McBain said. “You get to prove yourself all over again, and that’s a good thing. Coming in with a fresh start has been a lot of fun.”

McBain played three full seasons in Carolina, which selected him in the second round of the 2006 NHL draft. The first two years went fine: he totaled 15 goals and 57 points in 152 games. He stumbled to one goal and eight points in 40 games last year.

Carolina General Manager Jim Rutherford said McBain arrived out of shape. The 6-foot-2, 200-pounder feels better this preseason, when he had two goals and three points in three games.

“Last year was a fluke,” McBain said. “My first two years were pretty solid years for myself. I wanted to continue to improve, and last year was a down year for myself, a frustrating year for myself, one that I’m definitely going to rebound from. Regardless of when that time comes, I’m going to be ready when my name’s called.”

... Sulzer, who was waived Sunday, went unclaimed and was optioned to Rochester.

“You can’t say enough about his professionalism, what he brings every day, both off the ice and on the ice,” Sabres coach Ron Rolston said. “It’s just a numbers situation there for us that we had to be at seven on the back end.”

The Sabres’ three defense pairs Monday were Christian Ehrhoff and Mark Pysyk, Henrik Tallinder and Tyler Myers, and Mike Weber with Rasmus Ristolainen.

“We’ve got a lot of diversity,” McBain said, “a lot of guys that are defensive defencemen, a lot of offensive-minded guys, and I think we jell together. I think everyone’s going to be able to play with each other.”

... Rolston is expected to name a captain today.

“We have a lot of guys that could be in that situation for us,” the coach said.

The NHL and its players’ association have agreed to implement hybrid icing after a preseason trial run. If a linesman determines a defending player would win a race for an iced puck, he’ll blow the whistle when the player reaches the end-zone faceoff dot.

“The players participated in a survey, and a majority of teams supported this rule change in an effort to make the game safer,” said Mathieu Schneider, special assistant for the NHLPA. “We are hopeful that the implementation of the hybrid icing rule, which is a middle ground between the old rule and no-touch icing, will help minimize the incidence of player injuries on icing plays.”

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.01.2013

718699 Buffalo Sabres

Poll: Who should be the Sabres’ captain?

September 30, 2013 - 4:00 PM

By John Vogl

Just two days away from the start of the NHL season, the Sabres don’t have a captain. Coach Ron Rolston is expected to name one Tuesday.

“We have a lot of guys that could be in that situation for us,” Rolston said today. “We’re looking for guys who are respected in the room, set examples in the room, especially with a younger team; guys who can hold those young guys in terms of their attention and help those young guys, can help them develop but also make those guys accountable.

“For us, it’s all about making sure they’re setting the standard for those younger players and the team, for that matter. That’s what we’ll be looking for.”

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.01.2013

718700 Buffalo Sabres

Slow healing by Foligno means Sabres’ roster is set; Sulzer clears waivers

September 30, 2013 - 12:32 PM

By John Vogl

Marcus Foligno is still hurt. Johan Larsson, Brian Flynn and Zemgus Girgensons have made the Sabres because of that.

Buffalo coach Ron Rolston held out hope last week that Foligno’s injured shoulder would heal in time for the season opener. However, the big winger was unable to practice again today, and Rolston said Foligno won’t be ready for Wednesday’s game in Detroit.

That leaves the Sabres with 23 healthy players -- the exact number for the NHL’s roster limit, which must be reached by 5 this afternoon. Since the Sabres are already there, Rolston said they don’t have to and won’t make
another move. He said everyone who was at practice today will be back in First Niagara Center on Tuesday.

Flynn, Girgensons and Larsson were the most likely candidates to head to Rochester at the roster deadline because they don't require waivers to be sent to the minors. But with injuries up front to Foligno, Corey Tropp (jaw) and Joel Armia (hand), all three will stick around. Rookie Nikita Zadorov (finger) will join the hurt trio on injured reserve, then return to his junior team when healthy.

The Sabres will enter the season with 14 forwards, seven defensemen and two goaltenders. The logjam at forward leaves uncertainty as to who will be the 20 players to dress against the Red Wings.

The Sabres did limited line work today, but the first four units were as follows:

Thomas Vanek-Cody Hodgson-Drew Stafford
Steve Ott-Tyler Ennis-Ville Leino
Zemgus Girgensons-Mikhail Grigorenko-Brian Flynn
Kevin Porter-Cody McCormick-Patrick Kaleta.

Larsson and John Scott served as the extras.

The top three defense pairs featured Christian Ehrhoff and Mark Pysyk, Henrik Tallinder and Tyler Myers, and Mike Weber and Rasmus Ristolainen, with Jamie McBain rotating in as the extra.

Defenceman Alexander Sulzer, who was waived Sunday, was not claimed by another team and is expected to report to the Amerks.

The Sabres have yet to select a captain. To hear Rolston talk about what type of player he wants to wear the "C," click the audio file below.

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.01.2013
718701  Calgary Flames

Feaster feels pressure has become too great, too quick for Baertschi

Feaster, in hindsight, says that he would've gone with 17 skaters instead, from the Portland Winterhawks in March 2012.

By Scot t Cruickshank, Calgary HeraldSeptember 30, 2013 11:01 PM

An hour after Brian Burke paddled Sven Baertschi, Jay Feaster made a startling admission.

The Calgary Flames general manager acknowledged that, if he could do it over again, he would not have recalled, on an emergency basis, Baertschi from the Portland Winterhawks in March 2012.

Feaster, in hindsight, says that he would've gone with 17 skaters instead, that he would rather not have had the kid score three times in five games.

"Sven's performance at that time? It just created such sky-high expectations," Feaster said Monday. "(In a do-over) I wouldn't have brought him in because then we don't create the same kind of expectations — internally, externally, and even for himself. I think that experience . . . you start to believe, 'I come in with a cape on, with an 'S' on my chest instead of a flaming 'C.' We still love him, but there's a lot of work to be done, for him and us.

"I thought at the end of (last) season, when he was very focused — Bob (Hartley) had created a very tight working plan for him as far as his day-to-day preparation — and he recorded points in seven straight games. In fact, he was the only rookie . . . to record points in seven straight games.

"We still feel he's a top-end prospect."

But this year — at rookie camp, at main camp — the young left-winger had struggled mightily. Perhaps only Michael Cammalleri's injury spared him another trip to Abbotsford.

Burke, president of hockey operations, had not pulled punches earlier when asked about the Flames' first-round pick from 2011.

"All I've seen so far are flashes of brilliance . . . (which) are fine if you're working in a university, but they're not much good to people in an NHL building," he said. "There are three zones on the ice surface in this league. I don't see that he's learned to compete in two of them. He's got to learn there's a clock in this league and there's so many minutes in a game and you have to compete through all of them. I see this as a guy right now who's focusing on one area — and, even then, sporadically.

"So I don't know what we have. I'm not ready to quit on the young kid. I'm not ready to throw him under the bus and rip him, but I think you can tell from my comments that I see big holes and a lack of commitment that's not going to get him anywhere in my books."

Okey dokey.

Burke did point out that Baertschi is green — he turns 21 on Saturday — and far from a writeoff.

Feaster agreed.

"Sven is still very much a work in progress," Feaster said. "There are times when you watch Sven and say, 'Boy, that's so exciting,' and you smile with anticipation about what could be. And then there are other times — and I think Brian's right — when you look in the other two zones and you say, 'Oh boy, we need to work on that.' He's still trying to figure out how to be a good pro, how to prepare every day.

"I met with Sven over the weekend and I told him, 'We're going to help you. You need to trust us. You need to do the things the coaches are asking you to do. But we're going to get through this together.'"

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718702  Calgary Flames

Johnson: Brian Burke offers his usual blunt, entertaining assessments on eve of NHL season

By GEORGE JOHNSON, Calgary HeraldSeptember 30, 2013 11:00 PM

Poor Jay Feaster. Toughest job in hockey. No, not being anchor guy on the rope trying to pull a moribund franchise out of the muck. Not that. Hardy.

You trying coming on an hour and 15 minutes after Brian Burke.

Imagine following the Beatles on Sullivan. Or Sinatra at the Sands.

Burke has always favoured hockey gloves, not kid gloves. And in his first public access since after the day he was hired as the Calgary Flames' VP of Hockey Operations back on Sept. 5th, put in charge of the salvage crew down at the Scotiabank Saddledome, he didn't disappoint. The man, as we're all aware, has never been a Tiny Tim/tiptoe-through-the-tulips kinda guy.

"First off," he began, top shirt-button characteristically open and tie oh-so-slightly askew, "I'm not sure so many people have been assembled to hear so little content that I'm going to give you.


And, characteristically, ingots of honesty. Blunt, withering honesty.

Starting with the Swiss Mr., Sven Baertschi.

"That I don't know. That I don't know," replied Burke, unblinking, when asked what kind of potential he saw in the 20-year-old darling.

"I'm not sure.

"I will tell you I watched him his draft year because we had a player there (in Portland), Brad Ross that I had drafted in Toronto. (Baertschi) is a gifted kid who left home at an early age to make point, to get to a better hockey level. All I've seen are flashes of brilliance.

"And flashes of brilliance are fine if you're working at a university, but they're not much good to people in an NHL building. He's got to learn there's three zones on the ice surface in this league. I don't see that he's learned to play or compete in two of them. He's gotta learn there's a clock in this league, so many minutes in the game, and you've got to compete through all of them. And I see this is a guy focusing on one area, then only sporadically.
"So I don’t know what we have.

"I'm not ready to quit on a young kid, not ready to throw him under bus here today. I'm not going to rip him. I think you can tell from my comments that I see big holes and a lack of commitment that's not going to get him anywhere in my books.

"But I've seen kids at that age, with those holes, turn into players."

There was a welcome absence of hyperbole, of inflated value, to this rare bit of Burke. For instance, he equated Joe Colborne, his Sunday acquisition, to David Steckel (!), a defensive specialist. Not to Joe Thornton, the easy comparable that people around here — including Joe Colborne — want to hear. No overt tire-pumping allowed.

"A new and improved" David Steckel, the man said. Just the facts, m'am.

The Flames, he also admitted, are still too wee, particularly in the beefy Pacific Division. How true. Claimed he couldn't make informed comments on a lot of players because he hasn't seen enough of them. Admitted to not being the most patient person on planet earth but that in this scenario, like it or not, that is what's being paid to be.

Above all, on Monday Brian Burke used his pulpit to preach an unshakable truth in his personal doctrine: All mollycoddling in this organization, any and all sense of entitlement, is at an end.

Sven Baertschi, for one, is hereby on alert.

"This," he said, softening momentarily, "is the hardest-working group at camp Sven Baertschi, for one, is hereby on alert.

truth in his personal doctrine: All mollycoddling in this organization, any and not, that is what's being paid to be.

Seeking $8 million. Burke said Monday. "Look at my record on it — it's pretty clear. Bobby Ryan, Nazem Kadri. I think this kid is going to make it a real difficult decision for Jay as far as whether he goes back or not."

Burke has been MIA around the team in spots lately due to prior commitments back east (and will head over to the Middle East to visit with Canadian soldiers in 10 days or so). He's bought a house here and takes possession in roughly two weeks. Even bought a pickup truck ("You can identify it, it's the only one in Calgary that doesn't have any stone chips in the windshield").

He says he feels grateful to be here, but won't soft-sell the task set before him, Feaster, assistant GM John Weisbord, assistant to the GM Craig Conroy and head coach Bob Hartley.

"As Jay has said, repeatedly: We were a cap team with star players that did not have success. We are in a different mode going forward. We are below the cap. I think Jay's done an able job of clearing it. We have $13 million, roughly, in cap room — I guess. Joe (Colborne) would eat up some of that, so $12 million. We are poised to add to this group if we see the value in doing it. We have been given authorization by ownership to spend to the cap. So that's not an issue.

"The issue is value. We have not seen an addition that makes sense from a value perspective. Not from a budget perspective, a cost perspective. Just a value perspective. Nor are we going to add just to add. We think we owe our season ticket-holders and our sponsors that. Not to waste money."

They're barely into the process, Burke's only been on the job a month, and already folks hereabouts are wondering how long it might take to get this run-against boat off the rocks and out into the open sea again.

"People," sighed the boss, "always ask for a time frame. They ask: How do you measure success? It's a fair question. I'm not jumping on the question or ducking the question. I think the problem is I can't stand when I see guys do this in other sports or in our sport, where a guy stands up and says "This process is going to take five years." Because basically then I'm asking you guys to give me five years. I've never understood that. And I'd never bite on it if I were a reporter. 'What kind of BS is that? Five years?' We have cap space, we have contract room, we have the ability for Jay to improve the team. And Jay, to his credit, has created that.

"Ask me today how long it'll take, what is success, I don't know because I don't know what we'll be able to do.

"I think the fans can live with this if they see a plan in place and they see that is absolutely, rigidly adhered to. Not someone saying 'Well, here we'll do this one day.' We'll stick with the kids."

For the first month of his reign, Brian Burke has been a man of his word. Incommunicado. Retreated into the shadows. His presence, rarely seen, still managing to pervade the entire enterprise.

On Monday, he emerged briefly from the self-imposed exile and, bless him, left his audience thirsting for more.

"If you're a colourful guy," he sighed, "people say 'Oh, there's Brian Burke again, jumping in front of a camera.' I've never called anyone in this room for an interview.

"Part of it is because I try to say things in a colourful way and make your job easier. So you get a GM and a guy'll say 'How did your team play?' And the GM'll say 'I don't think we were very good tonight.'

"Whereas I'll say 'Tonight we couldn't knock a sick goat off a stump.'

'Which one do you think is gettin' on the air?'

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718703 Calgary Flames

Flames notes: Monahan draws praise from the boss; plan for Colborne laid out

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald

September 30, 2013

Brian Burke likes — really likes — Sean Monahan.

But the Calgary Flames president of hockey operations takes no credit for adding the teenager to the organization. Monahan, drafted sixth overall at the National Hockey League draft, was general manager Jay Feaster's selection.

So far, though, Burke is impressed by what he's seen — to the point that he'll bend personal policy and permit the kid, if he deserves it, to stick in the NHL.

"I've been a guy who's always sent guys back to junior after their draft year," Burke said Monday. "Look at my record on it — it's pretty clear. Bobby Ryan, Nazem Kadri. I think this kid is going to make it a real difficult decision for Jay as far as whether he goes back or not."

The Flames' current 23-man roster includes the teenager, who can appear in up to nine NHL games and remain eligible to return to the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League.

"The reason I always sent players back is because my coach would never guarantee he'd give them enough minutes of situational ice time for them to get better," said Burke. "Morgan Rielly last year . . . he goes back to (Moose Jaw of the Western Hockey League) and plays 28, 30, 31 minutes some nights, first-(team) power play, P.K. He's getting an incubator to learn in all different manpower situations, on every inch of the ice surface, that he's not going to get if he stays with the Toronto Maple Leafs and plays seven or eight minutes.

"The challenge to Bob (Hartley) is going to be, 'If you guarantee Jay that the kid is going to play so many minutes, he can stay.' If not, going back to the CHL . . . it has almost never hurt a player. They say players are bored when they go back, players get bad habits when they go back. Sometimes they do, but that's our player-development guy's job — that Ronnie Sutter's job — to make sure that doesn't happen."

Burke sees value in both scenarios — Monahan staying here as a teen or Monahan dominating the OHL.

"I think they are two good outcomes," said Burke. "I think Sean's going to dictate which one, with his play early . . . whether he can justify the minutes of situational ice time that we would need to keep him here."

PLAN FOR COLBORNE

Joe Colborne, according to Burke, is not "a black and blue" player.

But he is six foot five and 23 years old. His former general manager explained exactly where Colborne sits in his career.

"So far, Joe Colborne, with several years of pro hockey under his belt, has not been able to crack the lineup as a top-six forward," said Burke. "It's our plan, given his size and skating ability and hockey IQ, that he could turn into a pretty special bottom-six forward . . . especially with Bob Hartley teaching him."

No one has to guess at the blue print for the Colborne, who'll wear No. 8 for the locals.
First-round pick Sean Monahan earns right to start season with Flames (with video)

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald
September 30, 2013

From the moment he was drafted, Sean Monahan planned to make the Calgary Flames.

So far, so good, for the young man.

Monahan — who turns 19 on Oct. 12 — is part of the team’s 23-man roster heading into its season-opening bid Thursday in Washington.

“Sean has earned the right to be with us,” general manager Jay Feaster said Monday afternoon at the Scotiabank Saddledome. “We will continue to monitor Sean’s progress on a daily basis. We’ll see how he stacks up, how he accumulates points. Then we’ll make a decision that we believe to be in the best interests of both Sean Monahan’s continued development and also in the best interests of the Calgary Flames organization.”

The Flames have nine games — nine games, that is, in which he appears — before they make up their minds. If he’s found wanting, back to the Ontario Hockey League before,” Feaster said of Ramo, who went 11-21-10 with the Tampa Bay Lightning. “I really do believe (the difference between he and Berra) is razor-thin. We talked to (goalie coach) Clint Malarchuk . . . and he’s very, very bullish on Reto. But right now . . . Karri gets to carry that ball.”

And since the squad didn’t want to lose backup Joey MacDonald on waivers, Berra had to scram.

“We believe he has outstanding talent,” said Feaster. “We’re convinced that he’ll be a No. 1 goaltender in the National Hockey League in short order.”

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The debate round these parts the last handful of autumns has revolved around whether the Calgary Flames were capable of making the playoffs.

No longer.

After losing the team’s iconic captain, franchise goalie and best defenceman — without replacing any of them — it would be short-sighted at best to continue post-season pipedreams in Calgary.

Throw in a re-alignment that has the Flames in a torturous division, and it’s laughable at best to suggest their season will extend past mid-April.

The question to be asked now is whether the Flames will be the worst team in the NHL this year.

The answer is yes.

But that’s not necessarily a bad thing — unless, of course, you are Bob Hartley or Jay Feaster.

Fact is, the growing pains involved with undergoing a rebuild as massive and overdue as the one facing the Flames are going to be more excruciating than locals can fathom.

It’s not to say things won’t get interesting down at the Dome over the next few years.

However, instead of agonizing over every loss, fans will be able to embrace failure while searching for silver linings in the form of signs prospects are doing the previously unthinkable here: Develop.

It may be hard to believe given the Flames’ drafting the last two decades, but players will emerge as legitimate NHLers over the next few years (as
opposed to blossoming after they’ve left town a la Dwayne Roloson, Martin St. Louis, Brandon Prust et al.)

Finishing last this year will most certainly help ensure the coffers are stocked with the sort of high-end talent the club seemed to land in the ’80s.

For the first time in team lore, the Flames will undoubtedly draft in the top five next summer, which should further advance their cause as the team eventually becomes competitive again in three to five years.

The talk of trying to land OHL phenom Connor McDavid first overall two drafts from now has already started.

It’s not considered probable just because the Edmonton Oilers recently tanked three years in a row, but because the cupboards are still stunningly bare here in Calgary.

This turnaround will take time.

None of this is meant to be too harsh on the club, as rebuilding is the right way to go and Feaster deserves full credit for abstaining from the free-agent market with Band-Aids aimed at helping the team’s immediate future.

This team will be full of kids this year, next year and for the foreseeable future.

That’s a good thing — a wonderful infusion for a team of veterans who tried in vain to make the playoffs here the last four years.

The team’s most accomplished player, veteran Michael Cammalleri, will spend the first half of the season auditioning for playoff teams that will bid for his services as the trade deadline approaches with an eye on landing the Flames yet another prospect, draft pick or two.

Massive question marks hang over the Flames at every position heading into camp, including between the pipes where Miikka Kiprusoff masked so many of the team’s deficiencies for a decade.

The best asset this team has now is coach Hartley, whose focus is on accountability, work ethic and discipline — traits his players will need to possess if they are to have any chance, night in and night out, against teams with far more skill.

Over time, new young leaders will emerge, giving Flames faithful hope and plenty to cheer about.

But the losses will mount.

Only the Nashville Predators will challenge Calgary for the basement.

There have been suggestions the lowly Florida Panthers will be the team to give Calgary the biggest run for last place this season.

Those people forget the Panthers have been stockpiling young studs for years, recently signed all-world goalie Tim Thomas and have reigning Calder Trophy winner Jonathan Huberdeau to build the team around.

The Flames should be so lucky one day.

One day far, far away.

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718706 Calgary Flames

Calgary Flames hockey ops boss Brian Burke likes what he sees from Monahan, but has harsh words for Baertschi

By RANDY SPORTAK ,Calgary Sun
First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 10:43 PM MDT | Updated: Monday, September 30, 2013 11:34 PM MDT

Brian Burke has now become a true Calgarian.

The Calgary Flames president of hockey operations has purchased both a home and a vehicle that fits into the city.

“A pickup truck,” Burke said Monday, his first meeting with the media since joining the organization Sept. 5. “You can identify it — it’s the only one in Calgary that does not have any stone chips in the windshield.”

To which it was pointed out, not yet.

“Yeah, yet.”

The way things go when somebody makes a claim like that, odds are Burke’s pristine windscreen has a nick now. Or two.

But Burke is still in love with the Stampede City and, to his word, has been in the background, leaving the day-to-day aspects of the management group and dealing with the media to GM Jay Feaster.

“I feel like I’m involved without pushing the buttons,” Burke said.

Rest assured, he has his fingers on the buttons as the team readies for Thursdays season-opener against the Washington Capitals.

Burke let it be known he hasn’t seen enough from club’s prized prospect, Sven Baertschi. “There’s three zones on the ice ... and I don’t see that he’s learned to play and compete in two of them,” was one gem of a comment.

Likewise, he’s impressed with the performance to date of 2013 first-round draft choice Sean Monahan.

He also cautioned any fans who believe newcomer Joe Colborne is a top-six forward.

Burke, who knows Colborne from their days together in Toronto, said the local product may develop into a scorer, but he wants him to be an excellent defensive forward.

“I think that’s the plan, that Joe’s going to undergo a religious conversion, if you will, and turn what is a struggling career into one that can be a dozen years in this league,” Burke said.

And between personal appearances scheduled before he was hired by the Flames — among them a trip this month to the Middle East to visit troops — he’s been assessing the hockey department from top to bottom.

“We always have a test on my teams, that if I fired everybody, how many people would get hired the next day by another organization,” he said. “That’s a test of whether you have good people or not, so we’re going through that type of self-evaluation right now.”

As much as the Flames are in need of a successful long-term plan, they still are eyeing to make the 2013-14 campaign a success.

The Flames, with oodles of salary-cap room, have the go-ahead from ownership to spend to the limit, but Burke said they’re not planning to add other team’s cast-offs to do it, reiterating the plan for patience in the next while.

“It’s not fun, but that’s what we’re paid to do, as long as you believe the blueprint is going to work and the plan is a sound one,” he said. “You guys know me, patience isn’t really in the first or second part of my vocabulary, but that’s what we get paid to do.

“It’s a lot like farming — sometimes you’ve got to plant the field and then just got to sit and wait. You can weed if you want and you can do some other things, but basically you’ve got to wait and see what that crop is.”

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718707 Calgary Flames

Wide-open race for NHL Calder trophy

By RANDY SPORTAK ,Calgary Sun
First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 10:48 PM MDT | Updated: Monday, September 30, 2013 11:05 PM MDT

If you thought the truncated 2013 NHL season had a plethora of Calder Memorial Trophy candidates, check out what’s awaiting this campaign.

Whittling it down to a list of 10 candidates was actually a challenging task.

Jonathan Huberdeau, of the Florida Panthers, was awarded the rookie-of-the-year honours after last season, and it shouldn’t have come as a surprise. Huberdeau was the No. 3 pick in the 2011 draft and after a season and a half in the junior ranks, jumped into the NHL and collected 14 goals and 31 points in 48 games.
Time will tell whether this year’s winner is a player from the impressive ’13 draft class, a highly touted product of a previous draft who has finally made the jump or a player seemingly out of nowhere.

Here’s our best guess of 10 players to choose from.

**LW Sven Baertschi, Calgary Flames**

Newcomer Sean Monahan, the No. 6 pick in this year’s draft, was impressive during the pre-season and will start the season in Calgary, while Baertschi was not very noticeable. However, Baertschi, who ended last season with a seven-game point-scoring streak, may have more offensive upside now and going forward.

He has a goal-scorer’s touch and under-rated passing skills, and if he can get out of the funk that had him on the bubble to make the roster, he could be a driving force.

**C Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche**

First-overall draft picks don’t often win the Calder, but MacKinnon is not one of those top picks who will be alone on an island alongside less-talented teammates.

He’s joining a Colorado Avalanche team loaded with skilled forwards in the likes of Matt Duchene, Gabriel Landeskog, Ryan O’Reilly, PA Parenteau, Paul Stastny and Alex Tanguay.

The only possible drawback for MacKinnon is he may struggle to get top-six ice time with that group.

**C/LW Boone Jenner, Columbus Blue Jackets**

The ’11 second-round pick has been skating on a line with Brandon Dubinsky and Marian Gaborik, which could bode well for Jenner, who collected 45 goals and 82 points in 56 games last season with the OHL Oshawa Generals.

Jenner’s size — 6-foot-2, 208-lb. — and aggressive nature can make him an impact player.

The Blue Jackets have another Calder Trophy candidate in defenceman Ryan Murray.

**RW Valeri Nichushkin, Dallas Stars**

The fact Nichushkin fell to No. 10 in the ’13 NHL Draft was not an indication on his talent. It was due to the fact he’s Russian, which brought about questions as to whether he’d play in the NHL right away or even at all.

The 6-foot-4 winger is joining a Stars team with more forward talent than perceived at first glance. Who knows? Maybe he’ll click with Tyler Seguin or the ageless Ray Whitney or Jamie Benn?

**D Dan DeKeyser, Detroit Red Wings**

Yes, a defenceman can be the rookie of the year, but it could be tough with the kind of offensive numbers we can expect to see from youngsters.

DeKeyser went to Detroit as a free agent from the college ranks and jumped right into the mix. He may not have the offensive punch you’ll see from the Boston Bruins’ Torey Krug and Ryan Murray in Columbus, but may be the most all-around player of the freshman blueliners.

**C Aleksander Barkov, Florida Panthers**

Back-to-back winners from Florida? Why not? The Panthers aren’t likely a playoff team, so they’ll continue to try adding young talent and concern themselves with offensive production.

Barkov, the No. 2 pick in this year’s draft who was nearly a point-per-game player in Finland’s top loop last season, is a big piece for a team that also has the likes of Kris Versteeg, Tomas Kopecky and Tomas Fleischmann.

**C Filip Forsberg, Nashville Predators**

Drafted by the Washington Capitals 11th overall in ’12 and then traded to the Predators last season for Martin Erat, Forsberg joins a Predators team that’s clamouring for offensive standouts.

Forsberg’s game is well rounded enough to be an everyday player for a Nashville squad that wants to return to its roots by being a strong defensive club first. He jumped into the NHL late last season and skated in five games.

The Preds have another hot-shot rookie-of-the-year candidate in defenceman Seth Jones.

**C/RW Ryan Strome, New York Islanders**

Could he end up on a wing with John Tavares? The Islanders are an up-and-coming team, but could use another threat, and Strome is a good candidate. The No. 5 pick in ’11 collected 268 points in 164 OHL games during his final three OHL seasons.

The Islanders are looking to build on that playoff berth last season, and improving their talent will be a factor. Strome can play a big part.

**RW Tomas Hertl, San Jose Sharks**

The arrival of San Jose’s ’12 first-round choice was a big reason the Sharks, in the summer, traded away TJ Galiardi, who skated on a line with Joe Thornton and Brent Burns.

Hertl spent the last two seasons in Czech Republic’s top league and is coming off an 18-goal, 30-point season.

If the Sharks are willing to put Hertl into the deep end right away, it could be instant big offence.

**C Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets**

The Jets have been working on Scheifele’s defensive game, and he’ll have to earn the trust of head coach Claude Noel before he’ll be put in a scoring role, but eventually they’ll look to the ’11 seventh-overall pick for the offensive flair he possesses.

He also spent some time in the pre-season on a line with Devin Setoguchi and Evander Kane, which could mean big things for the 20-year-old who had a couple of short auditions early in each of the last couple of seasons.

**Calgary Flames:**


C Mark Scheifele, Winnipeg Jets

Scheifele was the Jets’ top pick in last year’s NHL Draft and is expected to be a franchise cornerstone for years to come.

He’s a complete player who can contribute immediately and is an excellent addition to the Jets’ lineup.

**C Nathan MacKinnon, Colorado Avalanche**

MacKinnon was the top pick in the 2013 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Avalanche.

He’s a dynamic player with excellent skills and has the potential to be one of the league’s top stars.

**RW Valeri Nichushkin, Dallas Stars**

Nichushkin was the 10th overall pick in the 2013 NHL Draft and is expected to contribute immediately for the Stars.

He’s a physically dominant player with excellent scoring ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.

**C/LW Boone Jenner, Columbus Blue Jackets**

Jenner was the 12th overall pick in the 2013 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Blue Jackets.

He’s a hard nosed player with good size and has the potential to be a top-six winger.

**RW Valeri Nichushkin, Dallas Stars**

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Forsberg was the 11th overall pick in the 2012 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Predators.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.

**C Joshua McFadden, Minnesota Wild**

McFadden was the 16th overall pick in the 2013 NHL Draft and is expected to make a solid contribution for the Wild.

He’s a hard nosed player with good size and has the potential to be a top-six winger.

**C Jordan Eberle, Edmonton Oilers**

Eberle was the 27th overall pick in the 2008 NHL Draft and has become a key player for the Oilers.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.

**C Filip Forsberg, Nashville Predators**

Forsberg was the 11th overall pick in the 2012 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Predators.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.

**C Matthew Tkachuk, Calgary Flames**

Tkachuk was the 2nd overall pick in the 2016 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Flames.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and has the potential to be a top-six winger.

**C Filip Forsberg, Nashville Predators**

Forsberg was the 11th overall pick in the 2012 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Predators.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.

**C Filip Forsberg, Nashville Predators**

Forsberg was the 11th overall pick in the 2012 NHL Draft and is expected to make an immediate impact for the Predators.

He’s a skilled player with excellent offensive ability and is expected to be a top-six winger.
Way back in '80 -- the first season the Flames were in the Stampede City -- LaVallee was drafted in the second round, 32nd overall, from the Brantford Alexanders of the Ontario Hockey Association.

A 19-year-old forward coming off a 65-goal, 135-point season in 65 games, LaVallee was drafted in the second round, 32nd overall, from the Brantford Monahan, who the Flames drafted at No. 6 in this year's affair, has a very good chance to spend the season in Calgary, appearing capable of handling the physical rigors (being 6-foot-2, 200-lb.) and possessing hockey sense, but it goes beyond those elements.

Monahan, who the Flames drafted at No. 6 in this year's affair, has a very good chance to spend the season in Calgary, appearing capable of handling the physical rigors (being 6-foot-2, 200-lb.) and possessing hockey sense, but it goes beyond those elements.

Flames president of hockey operations Brian Burke is a firm believer junior-aged youngsters belong with their peers, but admitted Monahan is testing his theory.

"I think this kid's going to make a really difficult decision for Jay, as far as whether he goes back," Burke said of GM Jay Feaster.

"It's almost never hurt a player to go back. They say players are bored when they go back, players get bad habits when they go back and sometimes they do, but that's our player development guy's job. That's Ronnie Sutter's job to make sure that doesn't happen.

"I think there are two good outcomes and I think Sean's going to dictate which one with his play."

"He has to show he can be a regular," added head coach Bob Hartley. "We will not keep Sean Monahan here being our 22nd or 23rd guy. There's no way we will sit a kid. If he can play a role and get decent minutes " and we feel physically he can take it, if he's strong enough, can play the game the right way, those are things will dictate if he can stay or not.

"If you ask me, is he fully ready for the NHL? I think it's very promising, but I can't give you a clear answer today."

That means play in the top nine and not be a fourth-liner or sitting in the press box watching games more often than not.

The good news is the team can get a good read on its prized prospect because the schedule sets up perfectly.

If a junior-aged player skates in nine or fewer NHL games, he can be sent back and the first year of his contract doesn't kick in.

Calgary's slate is almost perfect for seeing whether the big centre can cut it, with a pair of road games against the Washington Capitals and Columbus Blue Jackets before a three-game homestand against the Vancouver Canucks, Montreal Canadiens and New Jersey Devils.

That would allow Monahan to ramp up his game before facing some truly elite centres on a road swing that features clashes with the Anaheim Ducks, San Jose Sharks and Los Angeles Kings.

Want to get a read on Monahan? See how he fares against the likes of Ryan Getzlaf, Joe Thornton and Anze Kopitar.

"No friendly places," Hartley said, knowing those games could test whether Monahan will sink or swim in real NHL action. "If you swim, you're good. Those are tough places to play with big-sized centremen. If you can compete with them, you certainly can play with the best."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718709 Calgary Flames

Calgary Flames hand keys to Karri Ramo for season-opener

By WES GILBERTSON , Calgary Sun
First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 10:25 PM MDT | Updated: Monday, September 30, 2013 11:03 PM MDT

Kari Ramo will be between the pipes for the Calgary Flames in Washington.

It's a good start.

The 27-year-old puck-stopper isn't satisfied with just winning the No. 1 job out of training camp, though. He wants Thursday's clash with the Alex Ovechkin and the Capitals (5 p.m., TSN, Sportsnet Fan 960) to be the start of something special.

"I'm pretty sure (the Flames) are looking for something like that, too," Ramo said.

"I don't think they're looking for a goalie just for the one game. They're looking for a goalie for a longer time, to be the solution, what they need now.

"I don't think it's going to be perfect for anybody," he added. "There's no goalies who doesn't allow goals in this league, but I think they're going to see the big picture. It's just one game in Washington. After that, there are 81 more.

"A lot of things will happen and you have to be on top of your game for the whole year. That's what they're looking for."

For the ninth consecutive campaign, the Flames are employing a Finn as their main masked man. Except this time, it's not Miikka Kiprusoff.

Ramo, who spent the past four winters with Avangard Omsk of the KHL, appeared in 48 games for the Tampa Bay Lightning from 2006-09, posting an 11-21-10 record with a 3.35 goals-against average and .895 save percentage.

That's not the most impressive stat-line, but it's worth noting it's almost identical to Kiprusoff's career save percentage (.897) before he was traded to Calgary.

In fact, Ramo's tour in Tampa Bay was one of the deciding factors in his training camp battle with Swiss League import Reto Berra, who was assigned Monday to the American Hockey League's Abbotsford Heat.

"Based on the pre-season and based on where we see things today and who we believe gives us the best opportunity to win a hockey game on Thursday, right now, Kari gets to carry that ball," said Flames GM Jay Feaster.

"Right now, it's the fact that Kari has that NHL experience and we feel he's slightly ahead and we're going to give him the chance to run with it."

What's impressive about Ramo, a two-time KHL all-star, is that he's not awe-struck — or star-struck — by this second chance to stop pucks in the NHL.

Just one day after Kiprusoff made his retirement official, the 6-foot netminder made it clear that "for me to come back, I needed to be part of the plan, not just be a fill-in."

"I really wanted to come to a situation where I was wanted," he reiterated a few days later.

"That they really believe in me, that I can be a good goalie in this league — that's the only situation I really wanted."

That doesn't mean he wouldn't like to see Russia one more time.

Ramo was one of eight goalies on Finland's initial list of candidates for the 2014 Sochi Olympics, although he's a longshot behind established NHL starters such as Niklas Backstrom (Minnesota Wild).
Baertschi is the final name on the list, but the 20-year-old left-winger is also the only member of the Calgary Flames to even earn a mention.

"You know the situation in Finland. You know how good a few goalies have been the past few years in the NHL. I think I have a lot to show to beat them. My goal is totally on the Flames, totally on playing for this club. It's not about showing for Finland, but I guess they go hand-in-hand.

"It's going to look good in their newspapers, too, if I play well for the Flames. I play good here, and maybe I get a chance there."

"I want to be. I want to establish myself here and I want to make sure that I'm not ready to throw him under the bus here today and rip him, but I think you can tell from my comments that I see big holes and I see a lack of commitment that's not going to get him anywhere in my books.

"But I've seen kids that age with those holes that turn into players."

Baertschi, who turns 21 this weekend, might have been ranked among ESPN's top-100 forwards from around the league, but the truth is the Flames debated whether he would even be among their top 14 at Monday's roster deadline.

The 5-foot-11, 190-lb., winger finished last season on a seven-game point spree -- he collected nine of his 10 total points in a two-week span in April -- but was firmly on the bubble after what would be best described as a so-so performance at training camp and zero goals in four pre-season outings.

In fact, a hand injury to fellow left-winger Michael Cammalleri might be the only thing that spared Baertschi from a demotion to the American Hockey League's Abbotsford Heat.

"We need the kind of skill that Sven brings," said Flames GM Jay Feaster.

"So he's here for now and we're going to continue to work with him."

For now.

That's hardly a ringing endorsement.

Then again, maybe it's best the expectations for Baertschi aren't so lofty. He was instantly anointed the future of the Flames during a five-game emergency recall from the Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks in March 2012, scoring three times for an injury-nilled squad and selling a schwack of No. 47 jerseys.

After an appetizer like that, it's no wonder Baertschi was mentioned as a Calder Trophy candidate last winter.

The projections turned out to be pie-in-the-sky.

The sneak preview, Feaster suggested during Monday's media availability, did the kid more harm than good.

"If I had a do-over, if I had a mulligan, the one mulligan that I would take -- and I would take it without hesitation -- and the do-over I would do is I would play with fewer than 18 skaters on the roster as opposed to have brought Sven in when he was in Portland and still a junior player for those five games," Feaster said. "Sven's performance at that time, I think it just created such sky-high expectations. And that's both externally and internally.

"Sven is still very much a work in progress. There are times when you watch Sven and you say, 'Boy, that's so exciting' and you smile with anticipation about what could be. And then, there are other times -- and I think Brian is right -- when you look in the other two zones and you say, 'Oh boy, we need to work on that. That's something we have to correct.'"

"We still think he's a top-end prospect," Feaster added. "But, again, if I could do one thing over, I wouldn't have brought him in because then I don't think we create the same kind of expectations -- internally, externally and even for himself. I think that experience back when he was in junior, when you come in and you do as well as he did, I think you start to believe that 'I come in with a cape on and there's a 'S' on my chest instead of Flaming C.'"

"We still love him, but there's a lot of work to be done, for him and us."

Although ESPN's ranking of the NHL's top-100 forwards includes several unproven youngsters, none has logged fewer big-league outings than Baertschi. Nobody has fewer goals in The Show, either.

Baertschi might have only scored three times in 20 games with the Flames last winter, but he insisted during training camp his first professional campaign wasn't a complete loss.

"Me, I get always measured in goals and assists and all that stuff, and the rest isn't important," Baertschi said. "That my defensive game improved? Nobody knew about that. Nobody cares about that, you know?"

"But it did, and that was important for me. Because I went to school with Troy (Ward) in Abbotsford and then Bob (Hartley) here, the standards were from the coach's side that if you can't produce, you've gotta help us defensively or else you're useless. That's what I was trying to do.

"I'm a better hockey player now because my defensive game has improved."

On Monday, Burke made it clear that his defensive game needs to improve even more.

A lot more.

Baertschi oozes offensive talent, but it's clear the Flames' first-round selection from the 2011 NHL Draft is still finding his way in his own zone.

One of the top 100 forwards in the NHL?

Not yet.

"I want to be. I want to establish myself here and I want to make sure that I'm a big help for the team," Baertschi said. "If other people think that it's possible that I can be a top-100 forward, I'm glad. That's something I'm happy about but I look at it the same way -- I don't want to be just a top-100 forward.

"I want to move forward, I want to get better and better. I want to move as much up as possible, but I also need patience."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718711 Calgary Flames

Pundits picking Calgary Flames to fail... they beg to differ
For too long, "rebuild" was a four-letter word around the Saddledome.

Now, you’ll hear it spoken as often as an f-bomb.

In some cases, it’s been piling on, likely the price to pay for blatant past sins. Under-achieving team. Management was adding veteran players to an already aged and enjoyable as being forced by your better half to watch an America’s Next Top Model marathon.

The Flames have become one of the NHL’s targets for pundits to mock at every turn.

In some cases the catcalls have been deserved, especially when management was adding veteran players to an already aged and under-achieving team.

In some cases, it’s been piling on, likely the price to pay for blatant past sins.

And now, the general belief is the 2013-14 Flames are destined to finish at the bottom of the reconfigured, tough-as-nails Pacific Division, probably the same for the Western Conference and quite likely the whole NHL.

It’s easy to see why, with enough holes in the roster to drive a convoy of Mack trucks — and a chartreuse micro-bus — through to the other side.

Going into Thursday’s season-opener against Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals, the crop of Flames centres is about quantity and not top-end quality.

The defence corps is nowhere physical enough to strike fear in opponents. The scoring depth is nonexistent (Want proof? Michael Cammalleri is the team’s lone skater to have posted a 30-goal season, done twice). The goaltending is unproven.

And on, and on, and on.

Granted, the Flames were left on the outside of the NHL’s playoff dance each of the last four seasons and failed to win a single playoff series after the glorious ’04 run to the Stanley Cup Final with face-of-the-franchise Jarome Iginla and all-world goalie Miikka Kiprusoff, so it’s not like disappointment will be new to the local heroes.

Still, anybody pitting the Flames to finish at the bottom of the league and be in the running to select either Sam Reinhart or Aaron Ekblad with the first overall selection in the 2014 draft is hardly going out on a limb.

Those predictions must be either demoralizing or motivating. After all, wouldn’t it be nice to throw them back at the naysayers by proving them wrong?

"Not to prove them wrong, to prove us right. That’s our goal," head coach Bob Hartley countered. "That’s where I’m trying to motivate those guys. Don’t go on the outside looking for motivation, whether it’s positive or negative. Get it right from the inside, right from us. Prove ourselves right. Prove Brian Burke, prove Jay Feaster, prove the ownership right. Prove our fans right. Those guys are behind us 100%. This community is behind us.

"Let’s prove those guys right."

Therefore, the Flames are insistent they’re going into the season running for a playoff spot.

Far-fetched? Maybe, but it’s better than expecting to be bottom-feeders. That said, Hartley knows his squad must first turn around a battleship that’s veered way too far off course.

"If we show improvement, if we raise our young kids the right way with great leadership coming from me, my partners, the players, we’re going to be good," Hartley said. "We’re going to be good. I have no doubt in my mind. Are we the perfect team right now? No, but, at the same time, 20 guys together can achieve a lot.”

That attitude is the rallying cry in the room.

"We know what type of team we have to be," captain Mark Giordano said. "We have to be one of those teams that’s hard to play against, one of those painful teams that are relentless. We’re not going to win games that are run-and-gun, open-style. We have to be really good defensively and really aggressive.

"Wins are tough in this league. Teams are so evenly matched. It’s who executes better most times. We feel we have a good group, a deep group, with guys that are all willing to buy in, and that’s the most important things in our minds.

"So, we have to go out and execute. We know what it’s going to take and at the end of the day, wherever you’re picked to finish doesn’t matter. You have to believe, first and foremost, and have to execute on the ice.”

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Rookie Sean Monahan makes the cut as Flames announce roster

By WES GILBERTSON , RANDY SPORTAK ,Calgary Sun

First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 01:11 PM MDT | Updated: Monday, September 30, 2013 05:32 PM MDT

The Calgary Flames will take 2013 first-round draft choice Sean Monahan to Washington for Thursday’s season-opener against the Capitals.

The Flames finalized their roster Monday, with Monahan, 18, making the grade.

Monahan must either play with the Flames or return to the junior ranks, something the Flames can decide before he plays 10 regular season games.

President of hockey operations Brian Burke - whose history is to return junior players after their draft - said he’s impressed with Monahan so far to the point that decision is up in the air.

"I think this kid’s going to make a really difficult decision for (GM Jay Feaster), as far as whether he goes back," Burke said.

“Sean has earned the right to be here and start with us,” Feaster said.

Forwards Roman Horak and Blair Jones, defenceman Patrick Sieloff and goalie Reto Berra were assigned to the AHL’s Abbotsford Heat prior to Monday’s roster deadline.

Conversely, Michael Cammalleri has been placed retroactively on the injured list due to the hand injury which kept him out of camp. Cammalleri, who is to see a specialist, could return to the lineup at any time.

Defenceman Chris Breen, who had off-season shoulder surgery, is a non-roster injured player and when he’s cleared must be put on waivers to send to the minors or remain with the Flames.

Here is the Flames’ roster to start the season:

FORWARDS
Sven Baertschi
Lance Bouma
Michael Cammalleri
Joe Colborne
TJ Galiardi
Curtis Glencross
Jiri Hudler
Tim Jackman
David Jones
Brian McGrattan
Sean Monahan
RALEIGH — Carolina Hurricanes, like many NHL teams, turned in their season-opening roster Monday to the league.

But that could be a formality. The Canes don't open the season until Friday, when they host the Detroit Red Wings at PNC Arena, and things could change by then.

"What the roster is today may not be what it for opening night," general manager Jim Rutherford said Monday.

One player who won't be in the lineup is defenseman Tim Gleason. Canes coach Kirk Muller said Monday that Gleason has been sidelined with a concussion suffered in a preseason game last week in Montreal.

The Canes on Monday assigned defenseman Ryan Murphy and forward Chris Terry to the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL. Terry was placed on waivers Sunday but cleared waivers Monday at noon.

But Murphy could be back with the Canes by Friday. It's all a part of the machinations of dealing with the league's new collective bargaining agreement and its salary-cap limitations, and also apparently ties in with Joni Pitkanen's season-ending heel injury.

Pitkanen could be placed on long term injured reserve on Tuesday. That will provide some financial relief and other wiggle room.

"It's complex," Rutherford said.

It's possible, Rutherford said, that the Hurricanes could offer a contract to veteran forward Radek Dvorak, who came to training camp on a professional tryout. Rutherford said there is interest, that the two sides are talking and a decision could be reached Tuesday.

"My feedback is I thought he performed very well," Muller said of Dvorak, 36. "It's a matter of (management) sorting everything out to see if there's a fit and a match and we can make it work."

Injuries remain a concern. In the preseason game Sept. 21 in Montreal, Gleason played the first period — engaging the Canadiens' Jarred Tinordi in a fight — but did not return after the opening period.

"We'll go through the protocol and when the time is right we'll get him back in action," Muller said.

Forward Jeff Skinner, who missed the final two preseason games with a lower-body injury, returned to practice Monday. Rutherford said the Canes need to get them in some practices prior to that.

"There's still a chance you could see them in action opening night but we need to get them in some practices prior to that," Muller said.

Forward Tuomo Ruutu continues to recover from a lower-body injury. Muller said Monday that Ruutu will return.

The Canes players are eager to drop the puck and play. Enough preseason work; it's time for the real season.

"Now it's about putting it together and performing," Canes captain Eric Staal said.

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718715 Carolina Hurricanes

Gleason out with concussion

Submitted by chipalexander on 09/30/2013 - 13:59

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Tim Gleason has been sidelined with a concussion, coach Kirk Muller said Monday.

Gleason was injured in the Canes' preseason game in Montreal last week, Muller said. He played the first period of the game, but did not return after the first.

Gleason will be sidelined indefinitely, Muller said.
Toews a Chicago great at ripe old age of 25

Leader of two Cup runs, captain is an uncommon winner Blackhawks, city are lucky to have

Steve Rosenbloom
9:09 PM CDT, September 30, 2013

If you value championships and a player's contributions to them, then you could make a case that Jonathan Toews is the most accomplished Chicago player by age 25 in decades and maybe ever.

Even more accomplished than Michael Jordan.

Again, I'm talking age and valuing a player's role in championships above everything else.

Jordan didn't win his first title until he was 27 when he was in his seventh season. Toews will help raise his second banner in six seasons in the United Center when the team he captains opens the season Tuesday night.

I'm not trying to start a Toews-Jordan argument here. Jordan won his first MVP when he was 24 and his second when he was 27. Toews doesn't have a Hart Trophy on his growing mantle yet. Jordan won seven straight scoring titles through 1992-93, and if you count full seasons, he won 10 in a row.

Toews is looking for his first Art Ross Trophy.

So, if it ever becomes a reasonable argument, it won't be for a while. Instead, I'm just trying to offer some perspective on one of the best players-leaders-stars this city has seen in a long time.

In six NHL seasons, Toews has become captain of the Hawks, led the team to two Stanley Cups, earned one Conn Smythe Trophy as playoff MVP, captured one Selke Trophy as the league's top defensive forward, won an Olympic gold medal playing for Canada amid the asphyxiating pressure of doing it in Canada, and was named Most Outstanding Forward of those Games.

Toews centers the Hawks' top line. He usually starts the power play and has been on the first penalty-killing unit. He plays in all critical situations. He can skate, pass and score, and he remains one of the NHL's top faceoff men. The faceoff is the first battle, and Toews wins it more than almost everybody.

Toews is all about winning.

There are countless examples of Toews' greatness under pressure, and two jump to mind immediately, both from Game 6 of the Cup clincher in Boston.

As the Bruins seemed to be pummeling the Hawks into a Game 7, Toews grabbed a puck while short-handed and moved down the wing before beating Tuukka Rask to tie the score at 1. A captain doing what captains do when someone absolutely has to do something.

Later, of course, Toews was central in creating one of those two famous goals you might've heard about. Just before David Krejci cleared the puck along the left boards with the Bruins up 2-1 in the final 90 seconds, Toews deftly lifted his stick as the Hawks pulled goalie Corey Crawford for an extra skater.

The puck chipped back to Patrick Kane, who, before getting cross-checked, pushed the puck up to Duncan Keith at the hash marks. Keith saucer ed a pass to Toews, who had peeled toward the net. Gathering the puck, Toews calmly flicked a perfect pass to the far post, where Bryan Bickell banged in the tying marker with 76 seconds remaining in regulation.

Seventeen seconds later, Dave Bolland happened. Fifty-nine seconds after that, Toews' team had won its second Cup in four seasons.

Toews is smooth and strong, elegance and force, in open ice and high-traffic areas. He's not flashy the way Kane so often is, but Toews certainly has pulled off some gasp-induced moves.

Toews' game and leadership are mindful of a couple other 19s: Steve Yzerman and Joe Sakic. They took the captain's responsibility young and grew into Hall of Fame leaders and winners. Toews is headed there, as coach Joel Quenneville noted recently.

Of the 10 players that hockey-reference.com lists as most similar to Toews for his career, eight are in the Hall of Fame. One of the two who hasn't been inducted is Rick Martin, a phenomenally talented winger who gained fame on the Sabres' "French Connection" line. The other is that kid from Buffalo named Kane.

Good company, eh?

Hockey players reach the pros younger than players in other team sports, coming out of junior at 17 or 18, so, they have a better chance to accomplish a lot by the time they're 25.

Mario Lemieux won his first Cup at that age, but he required seven seasons. Wayne Gretzky played one season in the defunct World Hockey Association and won his first Cup in his sixth pro season, his fifth in the NHL.

Again, I'm not trying to argue Toews-Lemieux-Gretzky anymore than I'm arguing Toews-Jordan, although the comparisons might be more interesting than you would've imagined. I just wanted to offer an appreciation of excellence, and I'll leave it at this: The Hawks are lucky to have him and we're lucky to watch him.

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718718 Chicago Blackhawks

Another banner night 'pretty cool' for Hawks

Players appreciate 'special' moment, but focus is on season opener

By Chris Kuc, Tribune reporter
7:51 PM CDT, September 30, 2013

All eyes will be on the Blackhawks' 2013 Stanley Cup championship banner when it is slowly raised to the United Center rafters — including those of the players who gave their blood and sweat to earn it.
"That's your place in history," captain Jonathan Toews said. "You look up not only at the Blackhawks banners but the Chicago Bulls banners, and you always dreamed you'd get a chance to raise one up there. And now we have two.

"It's pretty cool to look up there and feel like you're already part of that history of all the great names, the numbers that are retired and the division and conference championships, Stanley Cups — and we're already adding to it."

The banner will be raised before the season opener Tuesday night against the Capitals, the second time in four years the Hawks have added to the collection.

"It puts another stamp on what we've done here," winger Patrick Kane said. "When you see that (2010) banner up there when they flash the lights on (it) for the national anthem, it always gives you a warm feeling in your heart. (When) you'll see 2013 next to it, it's even more special. It's something no one can ever take away from you."

With one up and another soon to follow, do the Hawks ever start to ponder whether they can add another and another and another …?

"Absolutely," Toews said. "That's our goal every year. That's a pretty amazing thing that we don't count ourselves out ever.

"We know it's a long road to get there and that there will be some challenges to have a successful regular season like we had last year ... but when playoff time comes, I don't think we're a team anybody should bet against. We have that belief ... that we can do something special and make something out of every opportunity."

Added defenseman Duncan Keith: "We don't play the game to not win. ... We know what we have in the room and the potential, and it's just a matter of trying to reach it."

Before the Hawks can focus on the grand scheme, they will try not to be distracted by the pomp and circumstance surrounding the banner raising that will delay the start of the game about 20 minutes and will feature interactive fan involvement.

When the Hawks raised the banner in 2010, they followed the ceremony with a 3-2 loss to the Red Wings. Last season, the Hawks were in Los Angeles to watch the Kings raise their 2012 banner in a lengthy ceremony, then proceeded to spoil the party with a 5-2 victory.

"The ceremony will come first and we'll enjoy that, but everyone is focused on how we're going to play," Kane said. "We played in LA and had our warm-ups and then had about an hour before we played the game, and we came out pretty strong. We scored three goals in the first period, so maybe we can take something from that."

Said Keith of the ceremony: "For players, those things are nice to be a part of and you certainly want to be part of a championship team, but at the same time we're preparing for our game that night. That's where our focus is. It's going to be cool to see the banner go up and it will be exciting for fans and everybody, but as players we have a job to do."

Chicago Tribune 
LOADED: 10.01.2013
718719 Chicago Blackhawks

Nordstrom, Kostka claim Hawks' final two roster spots

Young forward will replace Frolik on penalty kill; versatility gives veteran defenseman the nod

By Chris Kuc, Tribune reporter
7:22 PM CDT, September 30, 2013

When the dust settled on the battle for the Blackhawks' final roster spots, Joakim Nordstrom and Michael Kostka were still standing.

Along with Jimmy Hayes and Ben Smith, Nordstrom, 21, beat out Brandon Pirri and Jeremy Morin for a spot at forward and skated on the fourth line with Brandon Bollig and center Marcus Kruger during practice Monday.

"This is where it all begins," said Nordstrom, a third-round draft pick (90th overall) in 2010. "Hard work brought me here, (and) hard work is going to make me stay."

Nordstrom will be tasked with filling the spot on the penalty kill vacated by Michael Frolik's trade to the Jets.

"Nordstrom had an excellent camp in that role," coach Joel Quenneville said. "He's going to get a chance to start there, and we'll see how it evolves."

Kostka, 27, signed a free-agent contract during the summer after playing with the Maple Leafs last season and got the nod over Ryan Stanton for the eighth defensemen spot. Stanton was placed on waivers and claimed by the Canucks.

"I wasn't guaranteed anything coming into it," Kostka said. "I knew I was going to have to put my best foot forward."

Kostka said he talked with other teams before signing with the Hawks at the urging of his Hinsdale-based agent, Justin Duberman.

"We were making the decision solely based on what the opportunity was," Kostka said. "(Duberman) was kind of pushing for here a little more than maybe some other teams going off the feeling he had initially. I was just thinking, 'There's no way. It just doesn't seem to add up.'

"I had a good conversation with the management. They really did give me a good feel and I felt they were pretty candid with me, which I appreciated because it's always tough to try to weave through what people are telling you and what they actually mean. I'm thankful to them for holding up their end that if I were to come in and put my best foot forward, there was potentially an opportunity."

Quenneville said Kostka's ability to play at both ends gave him an edge.

"He gives us some nice offense from the back end," Quenneville said. "He's versatile, he can defend well, he's got some quickness (and) he's very handy with the puck. Last year, for the majority of the season he was playing against other teams' top lines, and he handled it very well."

Full strength: Every Hawk was on the ice for the last practice before the season opener. Marian Hossa, Michal Handzus and Corey Crawford are scheduled to be in the lineup Tuesday night against the Capitals.

Hossa and Handzus did not appear in any exhibition games because of injuries, while Crawford missed the final tune-up game with stiffness.

"I'm ready to go," said Hossa, who aggravated a back injury in the first week of training camp. "I (didn't) play preseason games, but obviously I wasn't ready for them. It was a better idea to rest up and get well. I've had three or four good practices and I feel comfortable."

Handzus has been skating and practicing since the first day of camp but was held out of exhibitions while recovering from wrist and leg injuries suffered last season.

"I'm ready," he said. "(There are) going to be no limitations. I'm good."

Round trip: Quenneville said those who were vying for roster spots until the end are still in the picture.

"We expect all these guys to be playing here at some point, and that depth is going to be important," he said. "Not just the guys who are here but in Rockford and organizationally as well."

Heading west: Losing Stanton to the Canucks was a disappointment, Quenneville said.

"We liked the depth he gave us," Quenneville said. "It's good for him to get the chance. He's going to play at this level right off the bat (with the Canucks). We wish him well."

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718720 Chicago Blackhawks

Blackshees healthy for season opener

By Chris Kuc
Tribune reporter
1:46 PM CDT, September 30, 2013
In the final practice before the open of the 2013-14 NHL season, every member of the Chicago Blackhawks was on the ice.

Veterans Michal Handzus, Ryan Stanton for the eighth defenseman spot. Stanton was placed on waivers and was claimed by the Vancouver Canucks on Monday.

Handzus has been skating and practicing since the first day of camp but was held out of exhibitions while recovering from wrist and leg injuries suffered last season.

The center echoed Hossa's declaration by saying, "I'm ready. (There's) going to be no limitations. I'm good."

Also practicing were roster survivors Joakim Nordstrom and Michael Kostka, who came into camp with no guarantees and will leave it with spots among the forwards and defensemen, respectively.

"I played consistent throughout all the (exhibition) games, said Nordstrom, a third-round pick (90th overall) in the 2010 draft. "I played good defensively and good smart, hockey making sure I got the pucks in the zone and out of the zone."

Nordstrom beat out Brandon Pirri and Jeremy Morin for a roster spot and skated on the fourth line with fellow winger Brandon Bollig and center Marcus Kruger during Monday's practice at Johnny's IceHouse West.

"I knew that there was an opportunity I could make the team," Nordstrom said. "I knew what I had to do. I just had to stick to my plan and I think I did pretty well. This is where it all begins. Hard work brought me here but hard work is going to make me stay."

"I knew what I had to do. I just had to stick to my plan and I think I did pretty well. This is where it all begins. Hard work brought me here but hard work is going to make me stay."

Said coach Joel Quenneville of Nordstrom, who will be tasked with filling the hole on the penalty kill vacated by Michael Frolik's trade to the Winnipeg Jets: "He's a young kid and hopefully he's going to get a chance to start there and well see how it evolves. He's a young kid and hopefully he's going to get a chance to start there and well see how it evolves. He's a young kid and hopefully he's going to get a chance to start there and well see how it evolves.

"I'm sure he's going to learn and get better as we go along."

"I was looking for a player who could come in and have an excellent camp in that role and that hole we were looking to fill in Frolik's absence. He's going to get a chance to start there and see how it evolves. He's a young kid and hopefully he's going to get a chance to start there and see how it evolves."

"I knew what I had to do. I just had to stick to my plan and I think I did pretty well. This is where it all begins. Hard work brought me here but hard work is going to make me stay."

Kostka, who signed a free-agent contract with the Hawks during the summer after playing with the Toronto Maple Leafs last season, got the nod over Ryan Stanton for the eighth defense spot. Stanton was placed on waivers and was claimed by the Vancouver Canucks on Monday.

"I wasn't guaranteed anything coming into it," Kostka, 27, said. "I knew I was going to have to put my best foot forward and I feel like I did."

Kostka said he had discussions with other teams before signing with the Hawks at the urging of his Hinsdale-based agent, Justin Duberman.

"We were making the decision solely based on what the opportunity was," Kostka said. "(Duberman) was kind of pushing for here a little more than maybe some other teams going off the feeling he had initially. I was just thinking, 'there's no way. It just doesn't seem to add up.'"

"I had a good conversation with the management," Kostka added. "They really did give me a good feel and I felt they were pretty candid with me, which I appreciated because it's always tough to try to weave through what people are telling you and what they actually mean. I'm thankful to them for holding up their end that if I were to come in and put my best foot forward there was potentially an opportunity."

Added Quenneville on Kostka: "He's one of those defensemen that's useful as far as both sides of the puck. He gives us some nice offense from the back end. He's versatile, he can defend well, he's got some quickness (and) he's very handy with the puck. Last year (with the Leafs), for the majority of the season he was playing against other teams' top lines and he handled it very well."

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718721 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL Award Predictions: It's smart to choose Crosby to win Hart

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter September 30, 2013 8:39PM

1. Hart Trophy (MVP) — Sidney Crosby, Penguins

If last season showed anything, it's that Jonathan Toews might never win a Hart Trophy. He was the best player on a historically great team and is the total package — offense, defense, special teams, intangibles — yet he finished fourth behind Alex Ovechkin, Crosby and John Tavares. As good as he is, Toews might never produce the kind of video-game stats to sway voters. And this season will be no different. Crosby showed last season that he's still a singular offensive talent when he's healthy. If he plays anything close to a full season, he'll run away with the Hart.

2. Norris Trophy (top defenseman) — Duncan Keith, Hawks

Keith was the best player on the ice during most of the Stanley Cup playoffs last season, dominating and dictating play like he did when he won the Norris in 2010. If he plays like that all season — and coach Joel Quenneville thinks he has come into camp with a clear purpose — he'll be right in the mix again. His toughest competition will come from Ryan Suter, who, like Keith, is an indefatigable minutes-eater with a playmaking touch.

3. Vezina Trophy (top goalie) — Henrik Lundqvist, Rangers

It's a contract year for Lundqvist, who single-handedly has made the offensively inept Rangers a perennial chic pick to make a championship run. And that will make the best goalie in the world that much better. The usual suspects — Jonathan Quick and Pekka Rinne, for example — will be in the mix, too. Don't sleep on a resurgent Roberto Luongo, either. Corey Crawford has the ability to put up some eye-popping numbers, especially with the best defensive corps in the league in front of him. And his Olympic aspirations might motivate him even more in the first half.

Mark Lazerus
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718722 Chicago Blackhawks

NHL realignment and rules changes

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter September 30, 2013 8:39PM

1. Realignment

Hawks fans might not be happy to lose the Red Wings (and Blue Jackets) to the Eastern Conference and get the Jets in return, but it certainly made the path back to the Stanley Cup Final a little easier. Expect the Blues — maybe the second-best team in the conference — to re-emerge as the Hawks' biggest rival as the games against the Red Wings dwindle and the heat with the Canucks fades.

The biggest difference with realignment is the postseason setup: The top three teams from each division advance, plus two wild cards. The second- and third-place teams in each division will meet in the first round every season, with the other series based on most points vs. fewest points.

2. Goalie pads

In an effort to increase scoring and lessen goalie dominance, the NHL reduced the size of goalie pads this season. Corey Crawford lost about 2 inches off the top of his pads. Reactions have been mixed through the preseason, with some goalies saying the five-hole is more open and others saying there's little to no difference.

3. Shallow nets

The nets are 4 inches shallower and narrower, though the opening is still 6 feet by 4 feet. That creates a little more space in Wayne Gretzky's old office behind the goal. The idea is to allow for more playmaking and easier wrap-around attempts in another effort to goose goal-scoring.
4. Video review for high sticks (double minors or majors, stops embellishment)

Embellishment has become an issue in recent seasons, and the NHL now will use replay to make sure a player really was hit in the face with a high stick on all double-minor and major penalty calls.

5. Hybrid icing

The players voted Monday to implement hybrid icing, effective immediately. In an effort to increase player safety and avoid big collisions along the end boards, hybrid icing allows an official to blow a play dead when the defending player is leading or tied in the race for the puck once he hits the faceoff dots in his zone.

Mark Lazerus
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718723 Chicago Blackhawks

Lazerus’ Stanley Cup prediction: Blues over Red Wings

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter September 30, 2013 8:39PM
Updated: October 1, 2013 2:20AM

Mark LAZERUS’ PREDICTION

Stanley Cup Final: Blues over Red Wings.

By any objective measure, the Hawks are the clear favorites to win the Stanley Cup. They have a deep and talented offense, the best defense in the league, a Cup-winning goalie and strong veteran leadership. And they’re largely intact after their magical season in 2013.

But here’s the thing: Magic is hard to come by, and the Cup is even harder to come by. There’s a reason no team has repeated since 1998. It’s ridiculously difficult. Eventually, the short offseason, a second consecutive compressed regular season, the Olympics and another playoff run will take its toll on the Hawks. Or maybe there’s a key injury. Or maybe they just run into a hot goalie.

It’s the playoffs, where little goes according to plan. Are they the best team in hockey? Yes. But that usually doesn’t mean much in the NHL. This won’t be a popular pick with Hawks fans — the only thing that would make it worse is if the Vancouver Canucks were in there — but fear not. Picking the playoffs over a Cup won’t be all bad. There’s still loads of talent around, and as long as Zdeno Chara and Tuukka Rask are on the ice, the Bruins are going to be contending for another run at the Cup.

Contender: Minnesota Wild. It’s a top-heavy team in terms of offensive talent but if goalie Niklas Backstrom can stay healthy and Ryan Suter can in his zone.

Dark horse: St. Louis Blues. After adding Jay Bouwmeester and Jordan Leopold late last season, the Blues got stronger during the offseason by adding Derek Roy and Brenden Morrow. If goalies Brian Elliott and Jaroslav Halak can stay healthy and harmonious, the Blues are a legitimate threat to dethrone the Hawks in the West.

Dark horse: Pittsburgh Penguins. Even after losing Jarome Iginla and Matt Cooke, the talent level is ridiculously high. But goaltending is a massive question mark. Marc-Andre Fleury imploded in the playoffs last spring, and Tomas Vokoun is out indefinitely after havin g a procedure to dissolve a blood clot. The Penguins’ hopes rest on Fleury’s shaky shoulders.

Contender: New York Rangers. After years of playing under John Tortorella, coach Alain Vigneault’s up-tempo style will be a breath of fresh air. But the Rangers don’t necessarily have the talent up front to play it with great success. With Henrik Lundqvist in net, the Rangers are always just one hot streak away from a championship run.

Dark horse: Washington Capitals. After years of dominating the weak Southeast Division — five titles in the last six seasons — the Capitals will have to play with the big boys now. With the retooled Flyers and resurgent Islanders and Blue Jackets each looking to take the next step, even third place won’t be guaranteed. But as he showed late last season, a motivated Alex Ovechkin can will this team a long way.

Atlantic Division

Favorite: Boston Bruins. Gone are Tyler Seguin (Stars), Nathan Horton (Jackets) and Jaromir Jagr (Devils); in are Loui Eriksson and Jarome Iginla. But there’s still loads of talent around, and as long as Zdeno Chara and Tuukka Rask are on the ice, the Bruins are going to be contending for another run at the Cup.

Contender: Detroit Red Wings. The Red Wings are poised to make an instant impact in the East. Teams will have their hands full against a stacked lineup of Daniel Alfredsson, Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg. If the Red Wings eventually let youngsters such as Gustav Nyquist take the torch from players such as Todd Bertuzzi and Mikael Samuelsson...

Dark horse: Ottawa Senators. Alfredsson was the heart and soul of this franchise for years, but Bobby Ryan is a significant step up in terms of offense. With a healthy Erik Karlsson (a Norris winner), goalie Craig Anderson and coach Paul MacLean’s defensive-minded system in place, the Senators will be a tough matchup every night.

Central Division

Favorite: Blackhawks. The defending champions are the clear class of the division and the league. With nearly every key player back from a team that started 21-0-3 and finished as Stanley Cup champs last season, expectations never have been higher.

Contender: St. Louis Blues. After adding Jay Bouwmeester and Jordan Leopold late last season, the Blues got stronger during the offseason by adding Derek Roy and Brenden Morrow. If goalies Brian Elliott and Jaroslav Halak can stay healthy and harmonious, the Blues are a legitimate threat to dethrone the Hawks in the West.

Dark horse: Minnesota Wild. It’s a top-heavy team in terms of offensive talent, but if goalie Niklas Backstrom can stay healthy and Ryan Suter can log his usual 25 to 30 minutes a game, the Wild will be able to hang with most teams.

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718725 Chicago Blackhawks

Favored Blackhawks ready to begin another Stanley Cup run

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter September 30, 2013 8:32PM
Updated: October 1, 2013 2:20AM

Patrick Kane is 24 years old. Only 24.
Stop for a moment and consider that. A veteran entering his seventh season with his name hammered into the side of the Stanley Cup twice, he’s pretty much just a kid. Just getting started.

It was back in 2007 that Kane arrived in Chicago as a wide-eyed 18-year-old, much just a kid. Just getting started. with his name hammered into the side of the Stanley Cup twice, he's pretty

Stop for a moment and consider that. A veteran entering his seventh season with his name hammered into the side of the Stanley Cup twice, he’s pretty much just a kid. Just getting started.

It was back in 2007 that Kane arrived in Chicago as a wide-eyed 18-year-old, much just a kid. Just getting started. with his name hammered into the side of the Stanley Cup twice, he's pretty

It’s a little different now, the second time around. Now, the kids are having kids.

“It’s crazy how time flies,” Kane said. “From 2010 to 2013, three years makes a big difference. Guys getting married and having babies [from] guys being single and not having girlfriends. It’s pretty amazing what can change in that short amount of time.”

Indeed, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook became fathers this year. Bryan Bickell got married. Corey Crawford got engaged. And there are more Hawkings on the way.

“It’s kind of weird,” Keith said of hanging with Seabrook, his longtime buddy and defensive partner. “Conversations go from hockey to changing diapers. Everybody’s getting older now.”

But there’s the rub. The Hawks are getting older, but they are startlingly far from old. Kane is 24. Toews is 25. Niklas Hjalmarsson is 26. Seabrook is 28. Keith turned 30 during the summer. Patrick Sharp is a spry 31. They’re still young and hungry, but they’re experienced and accomplished. They have youthful vigor and veteran perspective. They’ve done so much together, but they have so much left to do.

In short, they’re prepared to handle the incredible — and perhaps unreasonable — amount of hype and expectations that are being heaped upon them.

There’s no harder trophy to win in sports than the Stanley Cup, yet the Hawks are being tapped by many to walz to their third title in five seasons, to become the first team to repeat since the 1997-98 Red Wings, to build a bona fide dynasty during the next several seasons the likes of which hasn’t been seen in the NHL since the 1980s.

The Hawks, who feel like they’ve seen it all, just shrug it off.

“I think we have guys in here that won’t be affected by all that,” Sharp said. “It’s not just winning it the first time and learning from the 2010-11 season. You’ve got a number of guys in here who have played in huge games, whether it was junior hockey, college hockey, the Olympics, international hockey and a couple of Stanley Cup finals. I like the makeup of our team. We’re a young team, but we’ve been through a lot already in our careers.”

They’ll need that veteran poise to handle a season full of big stages — the banner-raising opener Tuesday against the Capitals, a dozen national-TV games, a game against the Penguins on March 1 at Soldier Field and another potentially grueling slog through the playoffs — as well as the difficulty that comes with facing every team’s

“A” game and “A” goalie.

The Hawks got a taste of that when their record 24-game season-opening point streak was reaching into the high teens last season. This season, it’ll be like that every game. There will be no easy nights.

“Obviously, [after] winning a Stanley Cup, people want to prove themselves against you, so there’s always that element of getting teams’ best performances,” Toews said. “At the same time, we’ve got to have that mentality where we’re starting from the ground up, starting over. We want to be a team that’s really hungrier than anyone else and plays the role of the aggressor every single night.”

They also will need that youth to handle what might be an unprecedented grind of a season. They’re coming off a 79-day offseason (the shortest in modern history) that will be followed by a full 82-game season that’s nearly as compressed as the post-lockout schedule, thanks to a three-week interruption for the Olympics in Sochi, Russia — a tournament that will feature more than half the roster traveling to the other side of the world to play even more high-intensity games.

“I don’t know if it’ll really hit us until about Christmastime,” Seabrook said. “It might turn into a little bit of a grind, but every team’s going to go through that.

We had the luxury of playing [23] more playoff games, so I think we’re prepared for the long haul.”

Coach Joel Quenneville is older and wiser, too. He learned last season how to keep his team fresh through a compressed season, offering more days off and putting more responsibility on his fourth line to ease the burden on his top guys. And he learned from the disappointing 2010-11 title defense just how crucial a hot start is. The Hawks, after losing half their roster that offseason, were a mere 11-11-2 in late November and barely scratched their way into the playoffs as the eighth seed, losing to the Canucks in the first round.

Quenneville also knows he can lean on a core group that’s wise beyond its years, one that has managed not to let the two Cups, the four Sports Illustrated covers, the massive Grant Park celebration, the viral YouTube videos and the endless hype get to their heads.

“You look at their demeanor, their character, their approach — they’re always in the right place,” Quenneville said. “Very professional, putting things in perspective and welcoming the next challenge. . . . They’ve played in a lot of big games, and I don’t think it changes their approach one bit. I think they just welcome the next challenge.”

Whether that challenge is fatherhood, marriage or the playoffs, with just the right mix of energy and experience, swagger and savvy, these Hawks appear to be built for the long haul.

“It’s interesting the way things have changed over the years here,” Quenneville said. “We had a bunch of young guys, and they’re all buddies and they’re young and they’re having a good time. And now they’re young dads. It’s kind of been a fun couple of years here. I can only see it being more fun when the Blackhawks family’s getting bigger and bigger and bigger.”

Along with — assuming things go according to plans and expectations — the trophy case.

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5 keys to the Blackhawks’ season

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter September 30, 2013 8:39PM

Updated: October 1, 2013 2:22AM

Five keys to the season

1. Turn on the power

The last three teams to win the Stanley Cup did it with a lousy power play, but imagine how dominant the Hawks could be if they had a functional one. With so much top-shelf talent, it can be tough to dumb things down and not get too cute with the puck. But if the Hawks keep it simple — stand a guy on the doorstep and shoot the puck in his direction — they can fix the one thing that’s broken.

2. Man in the middle

Michal Handzus did a fine job as the Hawks’ second-line center during the playoffs, but it might be asking a lot to have him do it for a full 82-game season. The hole has been there for a few years now, and it’s time for someone — Brandon Pirri, perhaps? — to step up and prove he can be the answer. At least until tantalizing Teuvo Teravainen comes and takes it next fall, that is.

3. Grow a new Fro

Michael Frolik was about as valuable a three-goal scorer as you’re likely to find. He threw himself into his newfound penalty-killing role with abandon, and putting more responsibility on his fourth line to ease the minutes of Jonathan Toews and Marian Hossa. Unheralded Joakim Nordstrom will get the first try to become the new Fro.

4. QuennevilleCare
It’s up to coach Joel Quenneville to keep his team fresh and healthy. That will be no easy task, given a short offseason and a full 82-game slate that’s as compressed as the post-lockout schedule was because of the Olympics in February. That means carefully managing the ice time and games played of everyone, particularly veterans such as Hossa, Michal Rozsival and Handzus.

5. Big Bicks, big bucks
Bryan Bickell earned every bit of his four-year, $16 million contract with his playoff performance. Now it’s up to him to prove it wasn’t a fluke by doing it for a full season and to prove he can be a 30-goal power forward while clearing space for — and cleaning up after — Toews and Patrick Kane.

— Mark Lazerus
Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.01.2013

The 2013-14 Blackhawks roster

By Tim Sassone

Here’s a glance at the Blackhawks’ roster for the 2013-14 season, and a comment on each player.

2 — Duncan Keith, D
Cap hit: $5.5 million
After a dominating performance in the playoffs, Keith is hoping to pick up where he left off.

4 — Niklas Hjalmarsson, D
Cap hit: $3.5 million
The most underrated player on the Hawks’ blue line and a premier shot blocker.

6 — Mike Kostka, D
Cap hit: $625,000
Will fill a depth spot on the blue line and could be called upon at times for some power play action.

7 — Brent Seabrook, D
Cap hit: $5.8 million
Coaching staff would like Seabrook to use his big shot more on the power play.

8 — Nick Leddy, D
Cap hit: $2.7 million
Hawks want this 22-year-old defenseman to take his game to the next level.

10 — Patrick Sharp, LW
Cap hit: $5.9 million
Had a great camp and is definitely motivated to make the Canadian Olympic team.

16 — Marcus Kruger, C
Cap hit: $1.3 million
Only 23 years old, he’s a penalty killing whiz whose offense is starting to come.

17 — Sheldon Brookbank
Cap hit: $1.3 million
Depth defenseman who isn’t afraid to stick up for teammates and use his size (6-foot-1, 202 pounds).

19 — Jonathan Toews, C
Cap hit: $6.3 million
There are no weaknesses in his game, which makes him one of the premier leaders in hockey.

20 — Brandon Saad, LW
Cap hit: $894,000
He’s a versatile forward with good size and deceiving skill, with a lot of maturity at age 20.

22 — Jimmy Hayes, RW
Cap hit: $875,000
Has the size (6-6, 221) to be the next Bryan Bickell. Scored 4 points in 10 games last season.

26 — Michal Handzus, C
Cap hit: $1 million
The popular Handzus will start the season at No. 2 center. Had 11 points in 23 playoff games last spring.

27 — Johnny Oduya, D
Cap hit: $3.4 million
A perfect complement to partner Hjalmarsson, Oduya turns 32 on opening night.

28 — Ben Smith, RW
Cap hit: $563,000
Gritty winger played in only 1 regular-season game last year, but he has finally earned his shot.

29 — Bryan Bickell, LW
Cap hit: $4 million
Can he be the same dominating force he was as a power forward in the playoffs with 17 points?

32 — Michal Rozsival, D
Cap hit: $2.2 million
Veteran presence on the blue line who played big in the biggest Hawks games last season.

39 — Nikolai Khabibulin, G
Cap hit: $2 million
Can the Blackhawks get 25-30 solid games from the veteran? Stay tuned. Has 46 career shutouts.

42 — Joakim Nordstrom, RW
Cap hit: $766,667
Came out of nowhere to make the team, partly because of his chemistry with Kruger on penalty kill.

50 — Corey Crawford, G
Cap hit: $2.7 million
Finally got the recognition he deserves by winning the Stanley Cup. Was 19-5-5 last season.

52 — Brandon Bollig, LW
Cap hit: $575,000
Fighting is his forte but he also has decent skill. Led Hawks with 51 penalty minutes in 25 games last year.

65 — Andrew Shaw, C
Cap hit: $578,000
Gritty center is always in the middle of the action. Accounted for 9 points in the NHL playoffs.
10 key questions as the NHL makes its return

By Tim Sassone

Another NHL season is here, starting Tuesday night when the Blackhawks raise their second Stanley Cup banner in four years.

You've got questions? We've got answers.

Q. What were the biggest off-season story?

A. Realignment.

With Detroit and Columbus heading to the Eastern Conference and Winnipeg to the West, the NHL thinks things now make sense.

The Red Wings long lobbied for a move to the East to be within their own time zone. Their rivalry with the Hawks might take a hit, but just think if these two Original 6 teams meet in the Stanley Cup Final.

There are 16 teams in the East now and 14 in the West, but that shouldn't make a huge difference in making the playoffs.

Q. Was Vancouver keeping Roberto Luongo and trading Cory Schneider to New Jersey a surprise?

A. Absolutely it was. Schneider was the top guy with the Canucks last year, but he was much easier to trade because of Luongo's huge contract, which runs until he is 42.

Now Luongo is on the spot to be the man again in Vancouver. Can he win a Stanley Cup? Probably not.

Q. Can new coach John Tortorella last in Vancouver?

A. Absolutely not. This lets more fan bases experience the greatness of the event.

By Tim Sassone

Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said Mike Kostka was a better fit on defense than Ryan Stanton because "offensively he really complements our style of play."

Kostka won the eighth job on defense over Stanton, who was waived and claimed by the Vancouver Canucks on Monday.

Blackhawks game day

Blackhawks vs. Washington Capitals at the United Center, 7 p.m.

TV: Comcast SportsNet

Radio: WGN-AM 720

The skinny: The Capitals can be dangerous offensively led by three-time MVP Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and Marcus Johansson. They were tied for fourth in the league last year in average goals scored per game at 3.04. Corey Crawford starts in goal for the Hawks.

Next: Tampa Bay Lightning at the United Center, 7 p.m. Saturday.

— Tim Sassone

"He's one of those defensemen who is useful as far as both sides of the puck," Quenneville said of Kostka. "He can give us some nice offense from the back end and is versatile and can defend well. He's very handy with the puck.

"Last year for the majority of the season (in Toronto), he was playing against the other team's top lines and handled it very well."

Kostka, who appeared in 35 games for the Maple Leafs, feels the free agent gamble to come to a championship team with what appeared to be a set defense paid off.

"Coming into it I was hoping to put my best foot forward, and I think I did," Kostka said. "Of all the places I didn't think this was going to be one of them, but I'm thrilled they gave me the opportunity.

"The one thing that really was attractive here is that it's a puck moving team. They've got awesome forwards, where it's basically just get them the puck and get into the play. That's the style I like to play.

"In Toronto, it was more of a defensive-minded team so it's a breath of fresh air coming here. I feel like I jell a little more with the style of play than in a shutdown role."

Kostka joins a defense that allowed the fewest goals in the NHL last season and has everybody back from the top seven.
"We've got good defensemen back there," Duncan Keith said. "I think it's the backbone of our team and the key to our whole team and success."

Long shot makes it:
Swede Joakim Nordstrom also made the team as the fourth-line right wing and will kill penalties with Marcus Kruger in Michael Frolik's old role.

"I think I played consistent in all the games and played good defensively and played good, smart hockey." Nordstrom said. "I don't think I was a long shot, but I knew there was an opportunity that I could make the team and I knew what I had to do."

Joel Quenneville said Nordstrom was noticeable from the first day at Notre Dame.

"Nordstrom came in and had an excellent camp in that role we were trying to fill with Frolik," said Quenneville. "At the start of camp I don't know if he was on the radar at that time, but watching his speed and quickness from the first day on the ice there at Notre Dame you noticed him.

"You notice his instincts and he can play all three forward positions, which is important for us. You don't want to get targeted as a defensive player, but hopefully he can start at that and progress and add offense to his game. Certainly he's going to get a chance to kill penalties for us, and hopefully he evolves the way Kruger did."

All systems go:
Joel Quenneville said everyone is healthy for Tuesday's opener and that includes Marian Hossa, Corey Crawford, Michal Handzus and Michal Rozsival.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 10.01.2013
718730 Chicago Blackhawks

Breaking down the NHL contenders, pretenders

By Tim Sassone

Here's a look at our NHL power rankings by division to open the season, and our predictions for the Stanley Cup playoffs:

Western Conference
Central Division
1. Blackhawks
Key additions: G Nikolai Khabibulin, RW Joakim Nordstrom, D Mike Kostka.
The skinny: The Hawks will not only win the division but repeat as Stanley Cup champions. The only concern is the power play.
2. St. Louis Blues
Key additions: LW Brenden Morrow, C Derek Roy, LW Magnus Paajarvi, RW Maxim Lapierre,
The skinny: The Hockey News picked the Blues to win it all and all the pieces are in place for a Cup run.
3. Minnesota Wild
Key additions: LW Matt Cooke, D Keith Ballard, RW Nino Niederreiter.
The skinny: The Wild made the playoffs last year, then suffered goalie injuries in the first round against the Hawks. There's pressure in Minnesota to win now.
4. Nashville Predators
Key additions: RW Viktor Stalberg, C Matt Cullen, LW Eric Nystrom, D Seth Jones.
The skinny: The Predators signed Stalberg to beef up one of the league worst offenses, but he will miss 3-4 weeks with a shoulder injury.
5. Dallas Stars
Key additions: C Tyler Seguin, C Rich Peverley, C Shawn Horcoff, D Sergei Gonchar.
The skinny: The Stars made big changes during the off-season, turning over their top three centers, but it still won't get them into the playoffs.

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The skinny: The Stars made big changes during the off-season, turning over their top three centers, but it still won't get them into the playoffs.

6. Winnipeg Jets
Key additions: LW Devin Setoguchi, LW Michael Frolik.
The skinny: The Jets don't have enough to get to the playoffs, but they do have a nice 1-2 punch at left wing in Evander Kane and Andrew Ladd.

7. Colorado Avalanche
Key additions: LW Alex Tanguay, C Nathan MacKinnon.
The skinny: New coach Patrick Roy won't be miracle worker in his return to the NHL.

Pacific Division
1. Los Angeles Kings
Key additions: LW Matt Frattin, LW Daniel Carcillo, G Ben Scrivens.
The skinny: The Kings believe they have what it takes to compete again for the Cup, and they do.
2. Vancouver Canucks
Key additions: C Brad Richardson.
The skinny: How the players react to temperamental new coach John Tortorella might define the Canucks' season. That and the return of Roberto Luongo to No. 1 goalie status.
3. San Jose Sharks
Key additions: LW Tyler Kennedy.
The skinny: The Sharks might be the most disappointing team in the league with so much talent and so little to show for it.

4. Anaheim Ducks
Key additions: LW Jakob Silverberg, LW Dustin Penner.
The skinny: Trading Bobby Ryan to Ottawa is going to come back to bite the Ducks and GM Bob Murray.
5. Phoenix Coyotes
Key additions: C Mike Ribeiro, G Thomas Greiss.
The skinny: The Coyotes finally have stability in ownership and one of the game's top goalies in Mike Smith, but there's little reason for optimism in the desert.

6. Edmonton Oilers
Key additions: LW David Perron, C Boyd Gordon, G Jason LaBarbera, D Andrew Ference.
The skinny: It's put up or shut up time for the Oilers. This young group is out of excuses.
7. Calgary Flames
Key additions: RW David Jones, LW T.J. Gallardi, D Kris Russell, G Karri Ramo,
The skinny: The rebuild in Calgary is going to be long and painful despite the presence of Brian Burke as the new director of hockey operations.

Eastern Conference

By Tim Sassone

Here's a look at our NHL power rankings by division to open the season, and our predictions for the Stanley Cup playoffs:

Metropolitan Division
1. Pittsburgh Penguins
Key additions: D Rob Scuderi.
The skinny: Despite their dismal showing in the Eastern Conference finals against Boston, the Penguins are convinced they have what it takes to win it all.
2. Washington Capitals
Key additions: None.
The skinny: Can the Capitals hold up in a more competitive division? They can if goalie Braden Holtby and Alex Ovechkin perform.
3. Philadelphia Flyers
Key additions: C Vincent Lecavalier, G Ray Emery, D Mark Streit.
The skinny: The Flyers went all in by signing Lecavalier, Streit and Emery, and now they must produce.

4. New York Rangers
Key additions: LW Benoit Pouliot.
The skinny: The Rangers have a new voice behind the bench in Alain Vigneault, which could make all the difference in the world for this team.

5. Carolina Hurricanes
Key additions: D Andrej Sekera, G Anton Khudobin.
The skinny: The Hurricanes were on their way to the playoffs last season when goalie Cam Ward got hurt. Their season depends on Ward again.

6. New York Islanders
Key additions: LW Pierre-Marc Bouchard, LW Cal Clutterbuck.
The skinny: The Isles could make a return to the playoffs if John Tavares achieves and goalie Evgeni Nabokov is solid again.

7. Columbus Blue Jackets
Key additions: RW Nathan Horton, RW Jack Skille.
The skinny: The Blue Jackets will be wishing they were back in the Central Division before this season is over. Can goalie Sergei Bobrovsky stay hot?

8. New Jersey Devils
Key additions: RW Michael Ryder, RW Jaromir Jagr, LW Ryane Clowe, G Cory Schneider.
The skinny: The Devils will be wishing they were back in the Central Division before this season is over. Can goalie Evgeni Nabokov stay hot?

Atlantic Division
1. Boston Bruins
Key additions: RW Loui Eriksson, RW Jarome Iginla, RW Reilly Smith, G Chad Johnson.
The skinny: The Bruins will make another run at the Cup behind a strong core led by Patrice Bergeron, Zdeno Chara, David Krejci and Tuukka Rask.

2. Detroit Red Wings
Key additions: RW Daniel Alfredsson, C Stephen Weiss.
The skinny: The Red Wings have two top lines but depth will be an issue as well as a thin defense. Jimmy Howard remains the most underrated goalie in the NHL.

3. Ottawa Senators
Key additions: LW Bobby Ryan, RW Clarke MacArthur.
The skinny: The Senators will get along just fine without Daniel Alfredsson thanks to the addition of Bobby Ryan. Goalie Craig Anderson was a stud last year.

4. Montreal Canadiens
Key additions: RW Danny Briere, RW George Parros.
The skinny: The Canadiens remain on the small size, especially up front, where size matters. A young and mobile defense helps.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs
Key additions: C Dave Bolland, RW David Clarkson, G Jonathan Bernier.
The skinny: Clarkson left the bench to fight in the preseason, which earned him a 10-game suspension. That's a big loss to overcome.

6. Tampa Bay Lightning
Key additions: C Valtteri Filppula.
The skinny: The Lightning are loaded up front with Steven Stamkos and Martin St. Louis, but there are big questions on defense and in goal.

7. Buffalo Sabres
Key additions: D Jamie McBain, D Henrik Tallinder.
The skinny: All you need to do is look at the Sabres down the middle (Cody Hodgson, Tyler Ennis and Mikhail Grigorenko) to see it's going to be a long season.

8. Florida Panthers
Key additions: G Tim Thomas, C Brad Boyes, D Tom Gilbert, C Aleksander Barkov, RW Bobby Butler.
The skinny: The Panthers were going young until they went out and signed veteran free agent goalie Tim Thomas. So which way are they headed?

First round
Blackhawks over Nashville
St. Louis over Minnesota
Los Angeles over Anaheim
Vancouver over San Jose
Pittsburgh over Rangers
Philadelphia over Washington
Boston over Montreal
Detroit over Ottawa
Second round
Blackhawks over St. Louis
Los Angeles over Vancouver
Pittsburgh over Philadelphia
Detroit over Boston
Western Conference finals
Blackhawks over Los Angeles
Eastern Conference finals
Pittsburgh over Detroit
Stanley Cup Final
Blackhawks over Pittsburgh
— Tim Sassone

718731 Chicago Blackhawks
Toews & Kane: Hawks' core wants more

By Tim Sassone

Together they have led the Blackhawks to two Stanley Cups in the last four years.

Jonathan Toews won the Conn Smythe Trophy in 2010 as playoff MVP. Patrick Kane won the Conn Smythe last June.

Toews has a gold medal from Team Canada in 2010 at Vancouver and was the Calder Trophy winner as rookie of the year in 2008.

They will be Hawks forever, if you believe what chairman Rocky Wirtz and general manager Stan Bowman say.

So what do Toews and Kane do for an encore? For them, it's all about winning.

"I've always said you are presented with certain opportunities and you've got to make the most of them," Toews said. "We don't care about the little things,
It's difficult to imagine Toews playing better than last season when he scored 28 goals and had 48 points in 47 games and finished fourth in the voting for the Hart Trophy as the league's MVP.

But nobody pushes himself harder than the Hawks' captain, who contends there are always ways to get better.

"A lot of people ask what's next?" Toews said. "As a player you always want to get better, and personally on a selfish level you always want to better the way you contribute to your team. There are little things that you know you can do better and that you can improve and help your team. Every year I want to produce more and more."

It's always on to the next challenge for the 25-year-old Toews.

"It's forget what we did yesterday and it's on to the next thing," Toews said. "Whether your past game was a good or bad one, you've got to move on and try and prove something every single day. If you're just getting a little something out of every single day, at least it adds up to something special in the end."

"We're not going to get ahead of ourselves. People want to talk about repeating this year, but that's a long way away."

For Kane, he has been able to elevate his game every year since he was a rookie. He led the Hawks with 55 points in 47 games last season.

"We're working on trying to get better every day and just enjoy playing hockey and have fun with it," Kane said. "We've got a great team here, we had a great team last year. You always want to get better as a player and improve your stats to help the team."

Kane can think of a few ways he can be better.

"Just your overall game, from scoring to stick handling to playing defense to making good plays and not turning it over," he said.

Kane won't turn 25 until November while Toews already is 25. They are in the middle of their athletic prime despite starting their seventh season with the Hawks.

"They really understand what it's all about," Bowman said. "We are very fortunate to have two players like that. I think most franchises would die to just have one, and we've got two of them."

Hawks coach Joel Quenneville knows how fortunate he is to have players such as Toews and Kane.

"They're both young guys and I would say they're still getting better," Quenneville said. "Both guys are looking to be the best they can be on a daily basis. They both like winning, so it's a situation where I don't think they're content with where they are in their development."

"There is still room for growth. I've watched Kaner skate out here in practice and he looks quicker and stronger, I think Johnny is at that same place. I don't want to say there's a certain age where you stop getting better, but I think these guys still have a ways to go where they're still going to be improving."

If anyone can keep getting better and better, it's Toews.

"I like to consider myself able to compete with the best players and push myself to get to that next level," he said. "At the same time with a team's success, individual success always seems to follow."

"I didn't score a lot of points compared to the top players in the league and somehow I made it into the Hart Trophy talk. That says something right there. I'm surrounded by a great team, and that definitely helps a lot."

Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said Mike Kostka was a better fit on defense than Ryan Stanton because "offensively he really compliments our style of play."

Kostka won the eighth job on defense over Stanton, who was waived and claimed by the Vancouver Canucks on Monday.

"He's one of those defensemen who is useful as far as both sides of the puck," Quenneville said of Kostka. "He can give us some nice offense from the back end and is versatile and can defend well. He's very handy with the puck."

"Last year for the majority of the season (in Toronto), he was playing against the other team's top lines and handled it very well."

Kostka, who appeared in 35 games for the Maple Leafs, feels the gamble that came with coming to a championship team with what appeared to be a set defense as a free agent paid off.

"Coming into it I was hoping to put my best foot forward and I think I did," Kostka said. "Of all the places I didn't think this was going to be one of them, but I'm thrilled they gave me the opportunity."

"The one thing that really was attractive here is that it's a puck moving team. They've got awesome forwards where it's basically just get them the puck and get into the play. That's the style I like to play."

"In Toronto, it was more of a defensive-minded team so it's a breath of fresh air coming here. I feel like I jell a little more with the style of play than in a shutdown role."

Swede Joakim Nordstrom also made the team as the fourth line right wing and will kill penalties with Marcus Kruger in Michael Frolik's old role.

"I think I played consistent in all the games and played good defensively and played good, smart hockey," Nordstrom said. "I don't think I was a long shot, but I knew there was an opportunity that I could make the team and I knew what I had to do."

The league and players association announced today that hybrid icing will be implemented for the 2013-14 season, which begins tomorrow. Players participated in a survey regarding hybrid icing following the preseason games, and Mathieu Schneider, NHLPA special assistant to the executive director, said a majority were in favor of it "in an effort to make the game safer."

"We are hopeful that the implementation of the hybrid icing rule, which has a middle ground between the old rule and no-touch icing, will help minimize the incidence of player injuries on icing plays," Schneider said in a statement.

Here is now the icing rule (Rule 81.1) now reads:

For the purpose of this rule, the center red line will divide the ice into halves. Should any player of a team, equal or superior in numerical strength (power-play) to the opposing team, shoot, bat or deflect the puck from his own half of the ice beyond the goal line of the opposing team, play shall be stopped. For the purpose of deflected pucks, this only applies when the puck was originally propelled down the ice by the offending team.

For the purpose of this rule, the point of last contact with the puck by the team in possession shall be used to determine whether icing has occurred or not. As such, the team in possession must "gain the line" in order for the icing to be nullified. "Gaining the line" shall mean that the puck, while on the player's stick (not the player's skate) must make contact with the center red line in order to notify a potential icing.
Bickell is anticipating good things with Kane and Toews.

"It worked last year. Hopefully we can carry it on," he said. "Our last exhibition game we were together for the first time and we had a lot of opportunities and good puck control. We didn’t want to do the simple plays. We wanted to do the tap-ins. But come tomorrow and the regular season, we’ll bear down and hopefully stick together."

Bickell’s time has arrived. His opportunity is here. He’ll be hard pressed to earn better linemates than the ones with which he’ll start this season. The stellar postseason and offseason euphoria are in the past now. It’s time for Bickell to add to what he’s already done.

"Bicks is a guy with a big shot and a big presence in front of the net. He mixes well with Toews and Kane, having that sort of toughness and a guy who runs and opens space for those two," Corey Crawford said. "He’s only going to get better."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.01.2013
718735 Chicago Blackhawks

Hawks notes: Kostka, Nordstrom make the cut

September 30, 2013, 2:00 pm
Tracey Myers

Forward Joakim Nordstrom and defenseman Mike Kostka could exhale a little on Monday.

The two, who were hoping to be part of the Chicago Blackhawks’ opening-night roster, were sitting in their respective stalls on Monday afternoon, assured of just that. While it’s unknown if Kostka is in, Nordstrom will start on the fourth line when the Blackhawks open against the Washington Capitals tomorrow night.

As far as the starters with recent injuries, Corey Crawford, Marian Hossa and Michal Handzus are all expected to play tomorrow night.

Nordstrom has been playing with fellow Swede Marcus Kruger, and he’s going to be getting some penalty killing work as the Blackhawks look to find Michael Frolik’s replacement there. Nordstrom said he’s ready for the challenge.

“I tried to watch as often as I could; of course I noticed how he was playing on the ice,” Nordstrom said of Frolik. “I knew the role Marcus has had. He’s helped me a lot and explained how I could play to make it easier for me.”

Kruger said they’ll see how the PK works out, but that Nordstrom is already a heady player.

“To be young and coming over here and to play that good, give him a few games and he’ll be a really good player for us,” he said. “We’ll play (some PK) here in the beginning. He’s a smart player. He can play it all and maybe we can find some chemistry there. It’s going to be exciting for him.”

Kostka, meanwhile, got that eighth and final defenseman spot. Now he’ll see when he gets in for the Blackhawks, who Kostka said are a “breath of fresh air” with their playing style.

“This is a puck-moving team awesome forwards: just get them the puck and get into the play. And that’s the style I like to play,” said Kostka, who spent last season with the Toronto Maple Leafs. “It’s a bit of an adjustment from how things were in Toronto, which is a more defensive-minded team. I gel a little more with this style of play than with the shutdown role I had in Toronto.”

Stanton claimed

Defenceman Ryan Stanton, who was placed on waivers on Sunday, was picked up by the Vancouver Canucks on Monday morning. Stanton had vied for a spot on the Blackhawks’ roster during training camp. But be it him not being what the Blackhawks were looking for or Kostka playing better, Stanton will get a fresh start with the Canucks.

“We were concerned he could get picked up,” coach Joel Quenneville said of Stanton. “We liked the depth he gave us; it was a chance for him (during camp). But good for him that he’s going to play right off the bat. You wish him well.”
Stanton had three goals and 22 assists in 73 games with the Rockford IceHogs last season.

He said it

"The ring is over the top. Very nice job." Coach Joel Quenneville, on the championship rings the Blackhawks received in a private ceremony on Sunday night.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.01.2013

Sunday night.

The NHLPA approved hybrid icing today, something that was long overdue in my opinion.

I'll give you the letter of the law definition of what it means, then explain what it means in a one-sentence of common-man English:

Rule 81.1 – Icing: For the purpose of this rule, the center red line will divide the ice into halves. Should any player of a team, equal or superior in numerical strength (power-play) to the opposing team, shoot, bat or deflect the puck from his own half of the ice beyond the goal line of the opposing team, play shall be stopped. For the purpose of deflected pucks, this only applies when the puck was originally propelled down the ice by the offending team.

For the purpose of this rule, the point of last contact with the puck by the team in possession shall be used to determine whether icing has occurred or not. As such, the team in possession must "gain the line" in order for the icing to be nullified. "Gaining the line" shall mean that the puck, while on the player's stick (not the player’s skate) must make contact with the center red line in order to nullify a potential icing.

For the purpose of interpretation of the rule, there are two judgments required for "icing the puck". The Linesman must first determine that the puck will cross the goal line. Once the Linesman determines that the puck will cross the goal line, icing is completed upon the determination as to which player (attacking or defending) would first touch the puck. This decision by the Linesman will be made the instant the first player reaches the end zone face-off dots with the player’s skate being the determining factor. Should the puck be shot down the ice in such a manner that it travels around the boards and/or back towards the end zone face-off dots, the same procedure shall be in effect in that the Linesman shall determine within a similar distance as to who will have touched the puck first."

For clarification, the determining factor is which player would first touch the puck, not which player would first reach the end zone face-off dots.

If the race for the puck is too close to determine by the time the first Player reaches the end zone face-off dots, icing shall be called.

The puck striking or deflecting off an official does not automatically nullify a potential icing.

What it means: Actually, it’s pretty clear what it means from all those words, but to sum up anyway: if the puck is going to be a clear icing, the linesman can just blow the whistle now well before it actually crosses the goal line – assuming he feels the defensive player is well ahead of the offensive player. No more having to actually wait for it to cross the goal line, then the offensive forechecker getting some cheap shot in after the whistle.

If the players are “tied” going to the end line on a potential icing? Then the whistle blows too, and the defensive player wins, with (hopefully) both players letting up before they actually make contact with each other.

The overall bottom line: the linesmen will have to use more judgment than they have in the past, watching the puck itself more, instead of just who touches it first.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.01.2013

Why the Avs aren’t making any trades right now

By Adrian Dater

The Denver Post

Over the weekend, there was chatter about the Avs maybe being in the market for a defenseman, maybe with a team like Philadelphia, which is cap-strapped and desperate to move one of their expensive D-men thanks to Paul Holmgren’s continued bumbling management of the salary cap.

John Mitchell was mentioned as a possible target for Philly, who could use a versatile and cap-friendly forward. The Avs this year will probably always be interested in at least hearing what another team has to offer in the way of D-men. So, while I am confident those teams at least talked about a possible deal, nothing came of it and on Sunday coach/executive VP of hockey ops Patrick Roy spilled out why there won’t be any trades – at least for a little while.

The Avs have plenty of cap room – about $10.6 million. They could easily take on a $3-4 million player, even two. But Roy said it’s better to see what this team can do first before looking elsewhere.

"We’re happy with our roster. We’re happy with the signing of (depth D-men) Nate Guenin and (Nick) Holden," Roy said. "Holden has been very impressive. Same thing for Guenin. They’re going to start the year with us. When (Ryan) Wilson comes back, we’ll make a decision. But as of right now, we don’t have to make a decision. They’re steady, they’re consistent in their game and been great guys to add to our roster.

"Right now, the problem in the NHL is there are a lot of teams that are close to the cap. They’re trying to unload the player that basically no one wants. That’s no help for us. We need to go for the players that we think will play a role. And quite frankly, I like my four lines, with (Marc-Andre) Cliche as the fifth guy. I’m very comfortable. I don’t mind our D. We’re not going to replace our D with D that we don’t think are going to make our team better. We’ve been working with them for the last two weeks. Let’s keep working with this group, let’s see where we’re going to go. I feel like I owe it to this group to start the year and then we’ll see about any moves.”

Ryan Wilson did skate on Sunday, on his own with a knee brace. Roy said the Avs are targeting the fifth game of the season, Oct. 12 in Washington, for his return.

The Avs are off today, playing in a team charity golf tournament. Back to practice Tuesday.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.01.2013

Strong start on minds of Blue Jackets

By Shawn Mitchell

The Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:07 AM

It would be far easier for coach Todd Richards to talk about the past had the Blue Jackets made the playoffs last season rather than failing a point short.

But the Jackets, who tied the Minnesota Wild for eighth place in the Western Conference, were playoff also-rans for the 11th time in 12 seasons. They finished on a 19-5-5 run, by far the best two months in franchise history, but it ultimately didn’t mean much.

"I’m trying not to reference last season too much, and that’s by design," Richards said. "We weren’t good enough. No matter how you look at it, all the good things we did, we weren’t good enough. We got better as a team as the season went on and became a good team, but it wasn’t good enough."
The Edmonton Oilers selected Andrew Ference on Sunday and Buffalo are expected to do so this week. The Blue Jackets have been without a permanent captain since Rick Nash was traded to the New York Rangers on July 23, 2012. They are one of three teams that have not named a captain for this season, although Tampa Bay was scheduled to return in the afternoon and MacKenzie could be cleared for contact as soon as today, Richards said.

“Gabby’s that guy who can score from anywhere on the ice. But mostly we’re going to need him to work hard, everybody forechecking and the energy just coming in waves,” Richards said. “Versatility.”

Blue Jackets notebook: Richards sees no rush to select a team captain

By Shawn Mitchell

The Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:06 AM

Blue Jackets coach Todd Richards channeled his inner Jim Carrey yesterday when asked if there was a chance he would name a captain this week.


Christmas was the name of Carrey’s character in Dumb and Dumber, who incredulously and excitedly said, “so you’re telling me there’s a chance” when Mary Swanson (Lauren Holly) told him what sort of shot he had, romantically speaking, with her — “one out of a million.”

“There is (a chance), but it would be a real, real, real low percentage,” Richards said. “I’m comfortable (without a captain). It’s still early. I know other teams are naming them. But I don’t think one has to be named (based on) a timeline or anything like that. I think it’s based on when the time is right and if you’ve got the right player and he’s ready at that time.”

The Blue Jackets have been without a permanent captain since Rick Nash was traded to the New York Rangers on July 23, 2012. They are one of three teams that have not named a captain for this season, although Tampa Bay and Buffalo are expected to do so this week.

The Blue Jackets offense: Hard work cornerstone of young team

By Aaron Portzline

The Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:05 AM

Only one NHL team opted not to re-sign its leading scorer from last season. That team — yes, it’s the Blue Jackets — finished 25th in the league in scoring, at only 2.40 per game.

On the surface, letting 38-year-old Vinny Prospal ride off into the sunset might seem a bizarre move, not unlike former general manager Doug MacLean’s decision to let Ray Whitney walk via free agency after leading the Jackets in scoring during the 2002-03 season.

But the Blue Jackets see it as part of the evolution of the franchise.

“You have to make tough decisions in this job,” general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said. “It’s a tough decision. But we have players here who need opportunities, players who deserve bigger roles and are ready for the challenge.”

The Blue Jackets will rely heavily on right wing Marian Gaborik, hoping he can pump in 30 or 35 goals and use his speed to stretch defenses and open up ice for his linemates.

But other than Gaborik, the Blue Jackets have no elite forwards for whom opposing clubs create defensive schemes or assign top-notch checkers.

“Our strength is we work our (butts) off,” center Brandon Dubinsky said. “When we’re playing well, we’ve got four lines rolling, everybody skating hard, everybody forechecking and the energy just coming in waves.”

“Gabby’s that guy who can score from anywhere on the ice. But mostly we’re a group that cycles pucks down low, makes the other team pay a price and follows the puck to the net.”

Asked early in training camp what he likes best about his forwards, Blue Jackets coach Todd Richards exhaled, looked slightly toward the ceiling and paused.

Then came his answer: “Versatility.”
The Blue Jackets have six centers on the roster, and all have played either left or right wing at some point during their careers. Almost all of the non-centers can play either wing. A handful of players can dress at any forward position without issue.

The Blue Jackets expect veterans R.J. Umberger and Brandon Dubinsky to have bounce-back seasons offensively. If they can approach 20 goals — the norm just two seasons ago — the Jackets will be delighted.

Further, there are a handful of players for whom 20-goal seasons would not be a surprise — third-year pro Ryan Johansen, Artem Anisimov, Nick Foligno, Cam Atkinson and Mark Letestu. Nathan Horton, the Blue Jackets’ free-agent signing, should be a forceful addition when he has recovered from off-season shoulder surgery in December or January.

Rookie Boone Jenner made a major impact during training camp, even earning a spot on the No. 1 line with Dubinsky at center and Gaborik at right wing.

“We need some guys to step up offensively,” Richards said, “and they know that.

“We didn’t score enough goals last season. We were a hard team to play against, and a hard team to score against, but we have to put more pucks in the net.”

The lack of skill is often brutally apparent on the power play, which was 28th in the NHL last season (14.2 percent) and 4 of 34 (11.8 percent) during eight exhibition games.

Blue Jackets defense: Cupboard well-stocked with powerful players

By Shawn Mitchell
The Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:05 AM

The Blue Jackets will return five of their top six defensemen from last season.

For once, that’s a good thing — especially considering that the sixth, rookie Ryan Murray, is a former No. 2 overall draft pick who, by all appearances, is ready for the NHL.

Murray, 20, will join a group that tied for ninth best in goals against (2.40 per game).

Yes, the defense was playing in front of Vezina-winning goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, but it was only the third time in 12 seasons that the Blue Jackets, traditionally defensively challenged, ranked in the top third in scoring defense.

“I think the plan is to pick up where we left,” said Jack Johnson, who ranked fifth in the NHL in average ice time (25:58) and is slated to skate in the top pair with defensive dean Fedor Tyutin, in his sixth season with the team.

“The fact that it’s pretty much the same ‘D’ corps should make things pretty smooth,” Johnson said. “We pretty much know what to expect out of each other. When you have success like we had at the end of the year last year, to have as little change as possible is a good thing.”

The “little change” is Murray, who might have made the team last year had the lockout not postponed the season. He returned to junior hockey and suffered a season-ending shoulder injury in November but has played with the maturity of a veteran during the exhibition season.

Murray likely will start the season paired with James Wisniewski, who is no longer considered a repeat offender (for suspensions) by the NHL and is expected to play with more bite than he has since signing a six-year, $33 million contract in 2011.

The defense does not lack size or grit. Dalton Prout, 6 feet 3 and 222 pounds, was outstanding as a rookie in 28 games after a March 1 promotion from minor-league Springfield. He’ll likely skate next to Nikita Nikitin (6-4, 223), who has emerged as a solid top-four defender since being acquired from St. Louis in November 2011.

Tyutin (22 points in 48 games), Johnson (19 in 44) and Wisniewski (14 in 30) should shoulder most of the offensive load once more.

They will need to do so without the aid of Adrian Aucoin, 40, who played 36 games and embraced his role as teacher and mentor last season. He was not re-signed.

“We don’t have that seasoned vet like that anymore,” coach Todd Richards said. “We’re still young. We got a lot out of last season, but we can add more to our game.”

The Jackets boast depth as well.

Tim Erixon, David Savard, Cody Goloubef and free-agent signing Ilari Melart were in a tight competition throughout training camp, and rookie Will Weber remained with the team through the end of camp.

“The depth on defense was one of our strengths last year and I think it is going to be a big strength again,” general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said. “I think we’re going to have very good defensemen fall into the seventh, eighth and ninth slots on our depth chart.

“That’s a great thing for an organization. You can never have too many defensemen.”

Blue Jackets goaltenders: Bobrovsky is likely to get lion’s share of playing time

By Aaron Portzline
The Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:04 AM

Sergei Bobrovsky has always seen himself as a world-class goaltender. It just took the hockey world a little while to come around.

Bobrovsky, 25, carried a heavy load in the final two months of last season, playing in all but one of the games during the Blue Jackets’ 19-5-5 run to close out 2013.

But last year was nothing compared with what Bobrovsky is likely to face this season.

No one in the Blue Jackets’ franchise will even estimate how many games Bobrovsky might play this season.

70 games? 74? 80?

But backup Curtis McElhinney, an eight-year pro, might see more ice if he lived in the Horn of Africa.

“You always have that template in your mind,” said Blue Jackets goaltending coach Ian Clark, who has a heavy hand in helping coach Todd Richards pick a starter.

Bobrovsky’s big load this season will not be limited to the NHL.

While several players will head to the Caribbean or another beachy spot for part of the three-week Olympic break in February, Bobrovsky will head to the Games in Sochi, Russia. He’s expected to be the host country’s No. 1 guy, too.

“My job isn’t the Olympics,” Richards said. “My job is to coach this team and win as many games as possible.

“We’ll keep an eye on Bob’s play and the schedule. We’ll watch him closely. We’ll have lots of discussions (as a staff), and I’ll have lots of conversations with Bob, too, just to try to stay on top of it.”

In 2002-03, Marc Denis played in 77 games and swallowed 4,511 minutes, then an NHL record. Listening to Richards and Clark, it seems unlikely that Bobrovsky will tread in that realm.

But given the light schedule in the first two weeks of the season, McElhinney’s first start has not been scheduled.
We’re going to need McElhinney,” Richards said. “Those games are going to be really critical. We just don’t know right now when that’s going to be.”

Bobrovsky is regarded as a physical specimen. After games and even lengthy practices, he’s been known to seek an exercise bike in the dressing room for yet more work.

“I try to keep fresh, to keep sharp, to always be ready,” Bobrovsky said. “This is why I work so hard in the summer, so I can play as much as the coaches want me to play.

“But, like most goalies, I always want to play. Even when the coach wants (me to rest), I want to keep playing.”

McElhinney is accustomed to playing a supporting role. He has backed up Mikka Kiprusoff in Calgary, Jonas Hiller and Jean-Sebastien Giguere in Anaheim, and Mike Smith in Phoenix, among others. He has played in 69 NHL games and 205 American Hockey League games since graduating from Colorado College in 2005.

“I knew the situation when I signed,” McElhinney said. “My job is to be ready to play and to support Sergei — hopefully push him a little a bit, too. That’s what the best tandems do for each other.”

Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:03 AM

Michael Arace commentary: Promise? Hope? Jackets have been here before

By Michael Arace

These are heady times for Columbus hockey fans. A new Blue Jackets season is about to get underway and, as Doug MacLean used to say, we think they’re going to take a step.

Therein lies the rub.

It looks so promising. Can it be trusted? There is an overriding sense of promise. It has felt this way before and, so often, disaster has followed. It has fed a brand of paranoia. Playoffs? You kidding me? Playoffs?

The Jackets have made just one playoff appearance, in 2009, and they were swept. Twelve seasons, one round, zero victories — statistically, this franchise defies convention. They are Browns on Ice.

Can they be trusted now?

We can still conjure Game 4 with vividness, even four-plus years later. Nationwide Arena was rocking as few arenas ever rock. It was like a USA-Mexico game, but with a roof. There were nearly 19,000 people jammed into the building and many stood for the duration of the third period.

The Jackets let the Detroit Red Wings off the ropes that night, yes, but they fed a fever. They looked promising. Ken Hitchcock was behind the bench, and the whole roster was returning in 2009-10. Surely, the franchise had reached a turning point.

The Jackets finished in 14th place in the Western Conference the next season. It was a massive disappointment, but was it a shock? Their average conference finish is 13th. Their fans are conditioned for it.

Those fans want to believe it will be different this year. Such is human nature, especially on days like today, when the puck drops on a new season — especially after what happened last season.

The Jackets made a charge that bordered on heroic. In March and April, they won more games, and piled up more points, than any team other than the Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals. Their goaltender, Sergei Bobrovsky, won the Vezina Trophy. Goodness, they had the best goaltender in the league. We kept waiting for him to blow out his groin.

The Jackets went 24-17-7 over a strike-shortened, 48-game season and missed the playoffs on a tiebreaker. They closed with a 19-5-5 mark over the last 29 games. It makes one wonder what they are now, with one of the youngest teams in the league and virtually everyone returning.

Are the Jackets a 94-point team, which is what last season’s record translates to over 82 games? That would put them right on the playoff bubble. Are they a 119-point team, which is what their last 29 games translate to over a full season? That would put them in the running for the Presidents’ Trophy. Are they something in-between — which would make them a sure playoff team, probably with home ice in the first round?

Their fans would take any of the above, in a heartbeat. To paraphrase Moonlight Graham, the promise is so thick, they have to brush it away from their faces.

Bobrovsky is back with a new contract and a mission to start for the Russian Olympic team. The defense in front of him is one of the strengths of the team. The offense is deep down the middle. Out on the wing, Marian Gaborik might score 45 goals in a contract year. Shoot, Cam Atkinson is looking like he might get 30.

Coach Todd Richards, under a revamped hockey operations department, has developed a team identity based on an uncompromising work ethic. Imagine that: an identity. When did their fans know, in their gut, what they were going to get?

They do now. Anticipation is further fed by realignment. The Jackets are moving to the East, where everything will be easier for them, from pre-game preparation to post-game recovery.

“How are the Jackets going to be?”

That question has for months been bandied about Columbus. Paranoid fans are almost too afraid to answer. Understandably, it is difficult for them to trust anything, even their own eyes. They need help.

OK, boys, what have you got?

Columbus Dispatch Tuesday October 1, 2013 6:03 AM

Heika: Bad blood boils with several of Dallas Stars' new Central Division rivals

MIKE HEIKA

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FRISCO — Truth be told the NHL’s new alignment doesn’t really mean much to Stars players.

A good deal of the roster was with different teams last season, so they don’t really understand the difference between the Pacific and Central divisions. But they know it’s important to the fans, and they know it could play a role in Dallas’ ability to make the playoffs.

“This is something I know the fans have wanted for a while, and it should be better for us,” veteran defenseman Stephane Robidas said. “We won’t have to change time zones so much, and we’ll start some good rivalries.”

Actually, they’ll resume some good rivalries. The Stars have a history with several of their new Central Division bunkmates, including some of the most memorable games in team history. Chicago, St. Louis, Minnesota, Nashville and Winnipeg fans all have reasons to dislike the Stars, and Dallas fans will be more than happy to reciprocate.

“I’m looking forward to it,” defenseman Trevor Daley said. “All I’ve ever known is the California teams and all of the battles we had there. But you look at the new teams, and we really do have some great rivalries. Chicago is a great team, I know we have a good rivalry with St. Louis and Minnesota. My
first few years in the league, we played Colorado in the playoffs. There’s some history there.”

Dallas has played Colorado four times in the playoffs since 1999, including two memorable seven-games series in the Western Conference finals. Expect new Avalanche coach Patrick Roy to be serenaded at American Airlines Center with chants of “Eddie’s Better!” to remind him of the strong performances of former Stars goalie Ed Belfour in those playoff series.

Most old Stars fans will hearken back to Dec. 31, 1993 for one of their favorite performances of former Stars goalie Ed Belfour in those playoff series.

Airlines Center with chants of “Eddie’s Better!” to remind him of the strong performances of former Stars goalie Ed Belfour in those playoff series.

Also over the 200-game mark in career meetings is St. Louis. The Stars are 100-116-47 all-time against the Blues, dating to the Minnesota North Stars days. The most goals scored in one game in franchise history is 18 — when Minnesota took a 10-8 win against St. Louis in 1984.

Even Winnipeg can get in on the old history. While the new Jets have the record book of the Atlanta Thrashers, the Stars were frequent visitors to Manitoba back in the day. In fact, Dallas and Winnipeg shared the Central Division from 1993-1996 before those Jets moved to Phoenix. Still a proud day in franchise history was a 15-2 win over Winnipeg back in 1981 — the largest margin of victory in one game for the North Stars/Stars.

More recent battles have pitted Nashville fans against Dallas fans, including Mike Modano and Robidas getting in a tussle with Jordin Tootoo. Those memories get Robidas booed for every game in Nashville.

But maybe the most heartfelt hate comes from Minnesota fans. After all, the North Stars left in 1993 to come to Dallas, and the Twin Cities have neither forgotten nor forgiven. After six years without NHL hockey, the Wild filled the void in 2000, and the two teams have not liked each other since.

Dallas has a 30-14-3 all-time record against the Wild, but that will certainly be challenged in the coming years.

“It’s not going to take much to get those games going,” said defenseman Alex Goligoski, a native of Grand Rapids, Minn. “I definitely think we should have a rivalry with the Wild for a lot of reasons. It will be fun to play those games.”

Dallas has a 30-14-3 all-time record against the Wild, but that will certainly be challenged in the coming years.

“Good enough.” Lites said. “I don’t want to tell you it was Edmonton, but it was good. As Jim Nill put it, ‘Good enough.’”

FRISCO, Texas - Dallas Stars General Manager Jim Nill announced today the club’s opening night roster for the 2013-14 season. The Stars roster is comprised of 22 players, including 13 forwards, seven defensemen and two goaltenders. Dallas’ full opening night roster is below:

FORWARDS
14 Jamie Benn "C"
12 Alex Chiasson
72 Erik Cole
20 Cody Eakin
38 Vernon Fiddler
16 Ryan Garbutt
10 Shawn Horcoff
28 Lane MacDermid

18 Chris Mueller
43 Valeri Nichushkin
21 Antoine Roussel
91 Tyler Seguin
13 Ray Whitney "A"

DEFENSEMEN
24 Jordie Benn
23 Kevin Connauton
6 Trevor Daley
4 Brenden Dillon
33 Alex Goligoski
55 Sergei Gonchar
3 Stephane Robidas "A"

GOALTENDERS
30 Dan Ellis
32 Kari Lehtonen

In addition, Stars forwards Scott Glennie and Rich Peverley, and defensemen Aaron Rome have been placed on injured non-roster.

The Dallas Stars open the 2013-14 regular season on Thursday, Oct. 3 as the club hosts the Florida Panthers at the American Airlines Center at 7:30 pm CT.

Dallas Stars’ Fort Worth training camp deemed a success

By Travis L. Brown
Special to the Star-Telegram

This off-season for the Dallas Stars was one of experimentation.

The organization decided to try out a new general manager, a new coach and a new brand, complete with updated logo and jerseys.

It also tried to broaden its range by sending training camp to the Fort Worth Convention Center and the Omni Hotel Fort Worth.

So far, the results of the Fort Worth experiment have come back all positive, Stars president and CEO Jim Lites said.

“Our experience was excellent,” Lites said. “I’m not surprised. It was every bit as good as we hoped when we did it.”

The NHL season begins Tuesday. The Stars open at home against Florida on Thursday at American Airlines Center in Dallas.

The organization held a three-day camp Sept. 12-14 in Fort Worth, practicing Thursday and Friday mornings followed by a “Green and White” scrimmage Saturday morning.

Fans had the opportunity to mix and mingle with players, front office staff and game-day promotions people while getting a first look at the new and improved team.

The only concern Lites and Stars general manager Jim Nill had with the choice in venue was the potential condition of the facilities and ice for the players to get a quality practice. Lites said it worked.

“I was pleasantly surprised that the ice was as good as it was in the convention center,” Lites said. “I don’t want to tell you it was Edmonton, but it was good. As Jim Nill put it, ‘Good enough.’”
While in town, the organization was able to host several season-ticket functions, which welcomed members of the front office with open arms, Lites said.

For the team, it allowed players to get away from their families and daily obligations and work on building team chemistry with future teammates as well as members of the Stars’ developmental affiliates.

“It’s not like they’re getting together in some ski lodge,” Lites said. “They are in an urban area where there is a lot to see and experience.”

Efficiency was the name of the game, which allowed the team to get in the work it needed without losing days from plane flights.

Lites said he hopes the team will return to Fort Worth for training camp, potentially even next year, should it receive the same opportunities presented by the City of Fort Worth and the Omni Hotel. Another potential option could be Cedar Park, home of the Stars’ AHL affiliate, the Texas Stars.

But this season, Fort Worth is where hockey really began.

“Everyone from Mayor Betsy Price to the city manager to the people that run the convention center — everyone who made a promise to us that we’d love going to Fort Worth — more than fulfilled the opportunities,” Lites said.

Detroit Red Wings' Tomas Tatar appears to be odd-man out, but he's 'waiting for next challenge'

October 1, 2013   |   By Helene St. James
Detroit Free Press Sports Writer

Tomas Tatar has a spot on the Red Wings’ roster, that much is certain. Now comes time to make a case for minutes.

Tatar practiced as an odd-man out Monday at Joe Louis Arena, two days before the Wings open the 2013-14 season.

“I respect I’m the youngest guy here, so I’ve got to wait for my chance,” Tatar said. “I just have to do everything to get into lineup. But I’m happy I made it here. Now I’m waiting for next challenge.”

The opening day roster was 13 forwards, one of whom was Tatar, as expected. The top-six spots are taken by Henrik Zetterberg, Pavel Datsyuk, Justin Abdelkader, Johan Franzen, Stephen Weiss and Daniel Alfredsson.

The third line, based on the last exhibition game and Monday’s practice, shapes up as Joakim Andersson centering Daniel Cleary and Todd Bertuzzi.

Cory Emmerton cleared waivers but avoided being sent to the minors Monday because the Wings need a center. The three wingers left are Tatar, Drew Miller and Mikael Samuelsson. Things can change quickly, but coach Mike Babcock pretty much revealed his hand while talking about Tatar.

“I like him,” Babcock said. “I think he’s a good player. He’s a very usable player. He has a knack for the net. But early going in the season, tie goes to the veteran, not the kid. That’s just life.”

Tatar, 22, is on the same path taken by most other young players in the NHL.

“Especially on the Red Wings,” Tatar said, “there’s so many good players, so many old players with experience. Now it’s just time for me to respect that and wait for my chance.

“I just have to work hard because I know the chance is coming. And when it is open, grab it and hold it.”

Tatar questioned whether he’d fit with the Wings after Cleary was brought in on the opening day of training camp, which, Tatar said Monday made him, “a little shaky. I’m happy I made it here.”

The Wings never had plans not to have Tatar be on the roster, which general manager Ken Holland said even before the exhibition season. The club likes Tatar — he was AHL playoff MVP after 21 points in 24 games en route to a Calder Cup in last spring — and see him as faster, tougher version of Jiri Hudler, who worked his way up from bottom six to top six within a few seasons.

Detroit Red Wings balance budget: Gustav Nyquist sent down, Darren Helm and Patrick Eaves put on LTIR

1:14 AM, October 1, 2013   |   By Helene St. James
Detroit Free Press Sports Writer

Front office personnel spent a busy Monday balancing the Red Wings budget, taking advantage of a couple of injured players to create maximum salary cap space.

By the 5 p.m. deadline, the Wings had pulled off the following moves: Gustav Nyquist was sent to Grand Rapids. Darren Helm and Patrick Eaves were placed on Long Term Injured Reserve, sidelining them a minimum of 10 games or 24 days, creating roster space and salary cap space.

Jonas Gustavsson and Jordin Tootoo were put on short-term injured reserve, but they can come off Wednesday morning thanks to the magic of backdating.

Cory Emmerton was tabbed for the minors after clearing waivers, but got a reprieve once Eaves went off the roster.

Defenseman Xavier Ouellet was called up because the Wings didn’t want to let an active roster spot go to waste. The Wings have seven healthy regulars on defense, so Ouellet isn’t going to see any playing time, if he even sticks around for long.

“By submitting a roster that included Emmerton and Ouellet, we maximized our cap space and our 23-man roster,” general manager Ken Holland said.

Nyquist was the only forward who could be sent to the minors without being exposed on waivers. It’s not an ideal situation, given his NHL-level skill, but it also isn’t permanent.

“We like Gus, and he’ll be with the team sooner or later,” Holland said. “Unfortunately we’ve got some difficult cap issues and we’re going to start out the way we’re going to start out, and we’ll sort it out as we go.”

Nyquist didn’t like the news, coach Mike Babcock admitted, but it’s a good opportunity for growth.

“Adversity is not about the decision made, it’s about how you handle it,” Babcock said. “You choose your attitude. Justin Abdelkader had the same thing happen to him. Jonathan Ericsson had the same thing happen to him.

“It’s not the first time that’s happened here. I’m sure he’s very, very disappointed, but I know him good and he’ll go down and be a real good pro and he’ll be prepared when he gets the opportunity.”

Helm’s $2.125 million salary and Eaves’ $1.2 million salary trimmed enough to get the Wings just below the $64.3 million ceiling for 2013-14. It’s complicated, but in essence, the salaries of LTIR players do count against the cap, only without penalty. A team is better off being close to the cap, if there are players on LTIR to start the season, because that allows the club to continue to operate with as high a budget as possible.

Eaves is dealing with a sprained knee. He hasn’t even started practicing yet, so being out at least three weeks is a reasonable time line. Helm has battted a sore back dating to last season and a pulled groin dating to just before training camp began this season. There’s no timeline for his return, and Helm sounded like he thought it was the right move to go on LTIR.

“This gives me an opportunity to take my mind off being ready now,” he said. “It seemed like it was getting close to some pressure being put on me to get kind of going and this takes that pressure of.”

Helm has played one game the past 18 months. "Throughout this whole process, it's been small steps," he said. "I feel like it has gotten better the last week or so. Hopefully, in a couple of weeks, I'll be 100% ready to go.”
The roster, then, shapes up as follows:

**Forwards**

Johan Franzen - Stephen Weiss - Daniel Alfredsson

Henrik Zetterberg - Pavel Datsyuk - Justin Abdelkader

**Defensemen**

Drew Miller - Cory Emmerton - Mikael Samuelsson

Tomas Tatar

**Goaltenders**

Jared Coreau

Injured reserve

Jordin Tootoo

Jonas Gustavsson

Darren Helm (long term)

Patrick Eaves (long term)

**Jets**

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718749 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings primed for what the East has to dish out

Ted Kulfan

October 1, 2013 at 1:00 am

Detroit — It would be hard to find any Red Wings player, coach or even someone from the front office who doesn’t like realignment.

Same goes for Red Wings fans, and maybe even all the other teams in the Eastern Conference, which Detroit now calls home.

“Everyone’s excited about it,” said Red Wings forward Justin Abdelkader, who is excited to reestablish Original Six rivalries with the Maple Leafs, Canadiens and Bruins. “It’ll be different, something new.”

The NHL realigned after the Atlanta franchise moved to Winnipeg, and thus, its exit from Southeast Division.

Detroit and Columbus, two organizations stuck in the Western Conference, wanted to move East.

And they did, setting up a new four-division setup, with the Red Wings in the eight-team Atlantic Division and Blue Jackets in the eight-team Metropolitan Division. The West consists of the Central and Pacific divisions.

“For our fans, they get to watch the games in our time zone,” Red Wings general manager Ken Holland said. “For our players, it’s less wear and tear with the travel. You see every team in your building at least once.”

Said Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard: “That’ll be the best thing, just getting to sleep in my own bed most of the time.”

Different style

One thing that’ll be interesting is how the Red Wings’ puck possession, skilled style works in the East.

Generally speaking, the East has been viewed as the more physical conference. Toronto, Buffalo, Ottawa, Tampa Bay and Boston were among the top 10 in total fights last season.

The Red Wings, however, don’t believe they need to adapt to what could be a brave, new, physical world.

“I know what we’re going to do and that’s play like we’ve always played,” Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. “That seems to have done pretty well for us.”

That’s an emphasis on skill and speed rather than fists flying.

“We really believe in toughness,” Babcock said. “We believe that toughness is toughness on the puck. You have to have the puck. I like 12 forwards that can all skate and handle the puck and I like six defensemen that can all skate and handle the puck.”

If needed, the Red Wings do have players who can handle the physical play.

Jordin Tootoo, Todd Bertuzzi, Justin Abdelkader and Jonathan Ericsson have shown the ability to protect themselves, or teammates, if needed.

But along with physicality, there are teams in the East that can play whatever style is needed.

Boston and Pittsburgh are generally regarded as the two best teams in the East, with stars such as Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin (Pittsburgh) and Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara (Boston) highlighting the rosters.

Alex Ovechkin (Washington), Steven Stamkos and Martin St. Louis (Tampa Bay), John Tavares (N.Y. Islanders), Rick Nash and Henrik Lundqvist (N.Y. Rangers) and Martin Brodeur (New Jersey) are just a sampling of the premier players in the conference.

“The stuff on video, that’s all fun,” Babcock said of scouting teams in the East. “The reality is when you’re playing them head to head. That’s when you learn about them.”

Scheduling

Along with realignment — the East has two eight-team divisions, the West has two seven-team divisions — scheduling and the playoff format changed as well.

The Red Wings play 30 games within the Atlantic and 24 against the teams in the Metropolitan. They’ll also play 28 games — one home and away — against every team in the West.

“There are some good rivalries we’ve established against teams in the West,” Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall said.

As for the playoffs ...

There still will be 16 teams, eight in each conference, but there’s a wild-card element included.

The top three teams in each division qualify automatically. From there, the remaining two spots in each conference will be filled by the next two highest-placed finishers based on regular-season points and regardless of division.

So it’s possible for one division to send five teams to the postseason.

The new alignment and playoff format will exist for a minimum of three seasons, through the 2015-16 season, at which point the league and Players Association will reassess.

Goodbye, West

The things the Red Wings will miss most about the West?

Sunshine, most of all.

“I’m going to miss a lot of those cities,” Abdelkader said. “There are some great cities. The California trips. Going out to western Canada, those are usually good trips. Going to miss Phoenix.”

But, Abdelkader was quick to point out how great it’ll be to be closer to home.
“The travel is going to be huge,” Abdelkader said.
Especially if the Red Wings reach the playoffs.

“That’s where you really feel it,” Red Wings forward Henrik Zetterberg said.
“Every few days traveling West, it can be a grind.”

New-look NHL
The league went from three division in each conference to two. The makeup:

**Eastern Conference**
- Atlantic Metropolitan
  - Boston Carolina
  - Buffalo Columbus
  - Detroit New Jersey
  - Florida N.Y. Islanders
  - Montreal N.Y. Rangers
  - Ottawa Philadelphia
- Tampa Bay Pittsburgh
- Toronto Washington

**Western Conference**
- Central Pacific
  - Chicago Anaheim
  - Colorado Calgary
  - Dallas Edmonton
  - Minnesota Los Angeles
  - Nashville Phoenix
  - St. Louis San Jose
  - Winnipeg Vancouver

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718750 Detroit Red Wings

NHL preview: Ted Kulfan’s Eastern Conference scouting reports
Ted Kulfan
October 1, 2013 at 1:00 am

Scouting reports on Eastern Conference teams, in predicted order of finish,
by Ted Kulfan of The Detroit News.

**METROPOLITAN DIVISION**

**Pittsburgh Penguins**
Coach: Dan Bylsma, 6th season with Penguins.
2012-13 record: 36-12-0, 72 points (1st in Atlantic Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, Chris Kunitz, 22; A, Sidney Crosby, 41; W, Marc-Andre Fleury, 23.
Key losses: RW Jarome Iginla, LW Matt Cooke, LW Brenden Morrow, RW Tyler Kennedy.
Key additions: D Rob Scuderi.
Pressure is on: C Evgeni Malkin -- There was actually some speculation the Penguins would entertain trading him, before they re-signed him to a long extension. Look for Malkin to return to MVP form.
Rising star: RW Beau Bennett -- Former first-round pick could get larger role this season.

The Skinny: An offensive power outage against Boston cost the Penguins last season. It’s difficult seeing that happening two consecutive seasons.

**New York Rangers**
Coach: Alain Vigneault, 1st season with Rangers.
2012-13 record: 26-18-4, 56 points (2nd in Atlantic Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, Rick Nash, 21; A, Derek Stepan, 26; W, Henrik Lundqvist, 24.
Key losses: LW Ryane Clowe, D Matt Gilroy.
Key additions: LW Benoit Pouliot, C Dominic Moore.
Pressure is on: C Brad Richards -- The big-ticket free agent was demoted to the fourth line and was a healthy scratch in the playoffs.
Rising star: LW Chris Kreider -- The former college star has played well in the playoffs and looks like he’ll be a 20-goal scorer.
The Skinny: Vigneault will be a breath of fresh air after John Tortorella, but it’s difficult to see the Rangers rapidly improving offensively.

**Philadelphia Flyers**
Coach: Peter Laviolette, 5th season with Flyers.
2012-13 record: 23-22-3, 49 points (4th in Atlantic Division).
Key losses: G Ilya Bryzgalov, C Danny Briere, LW Ruslan Fedotenko.
Key additions: C Vincent Lecavalier, D Mark Streit, G Ray Emery.
Pressure is on: Emery -- One of these seasons the Flyers will finally find a No. 1 goalie. Emery gets the chance after a great season in Chicago.
Rising star: Voracek -- A disappointment early in his career, Voracek is finally fulfilling his potential.
The Skinny: If Lecavalier and Emery produce like they’re capable, this could be a dangerous team.

**New York Islanders**
Coach: Jack Capuano, 4th season with Islanders.
2012-13 record: 24-17-7, 55 points (3rd in Atlantic Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, John Tavares, 28; A, Matt Moulson, 29; W, Evgeni Nabokov, 23.
Key losses: D Mark Streit, LW Nino Niederreiter, G Rick DiPietro.
Key additions: RW Cal Clutterbuck.
Pressure is on: RW Kyle Okposo -- Many of the Islanders’ recent draft picks have been hits, but the organization is still waiting for Okposo to provide needed secondary scoring.
Rising star: D Travis Harmonic -- Not well known beyond the Eastern Conference, this steady two-way defenseman was signed to a seven-year contract extension in the summer.
The Skinny: Making the playoffs last season was just a start. This young group is going to keep getting better.

**Washington Capitals**
Coach: Adam Oates, 2nd season with Capitals.
2012-13 record: 27-18-3 (57 points, 1st in Southeast Division)
2012-13 leaders: G, Alex Ovechkin, 32; A, Nicklas Backstrom, 40; W, Braden Holtby, 23.
Key losses: C Mike Ribeiro, C Matt Hendricks, D Jeff Schultz.
Key additions: C Mikhail Grabovski.
Pressure is on: GM George McPhee -- The Capitals didn’t make any major decisions and lost a key offensive performer in Ribeiro. This team lacks depth up front and on defense.
Rising star: Holtby -- Goaltending isn't an issue anymore after the way Holtby played last season.

The Skinny: The Capitals were a first-place team in the old Southeast Division but could be middle of the pack in this group.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Coach: Todd Richards, 3rd season with Blue Jackets.

2012-13 record: 24-17-7, 55 points (4th in Central Division).


Key losses: None.

Key additions: RW Nathan Horton.

Pressure is on: LW Jeff Skinner -- The former Rookie of the Year has been slowed by concussions. Will he ever regain his form?

Rising star: C Artem Anisimov -- Acquired in the trade for Rick Nash, Anisimov could begin to thrive away from the New York spotlight.

The Skinny: The Blue Jackets almost made an improbable, unexpected run into the playoffs last spring. The road to the postseason will be more difficult in this rugged division.

Carolina Hurricanes

Coach: Kirk Muller, 3rd season with Hurricanes.

2012-13 record: 19-25-4, (42 points, 3rd in Southeast Division).


Key losses: D Justin Faulk, another underrated Hurricane.

Key additions: D Andrej Sekera, D Mike Komisarek.

Pressure is on: LW Jeff Skinner -- The former Rookie of the Year has been slowed by concussions. Will he ever regain his form?

Rising star: C Artem Anisimov -- Acquired in the trade for Rick Nash, Anisimov could begin to thrive away from the New York spotlight.

The Skinny: The Blue Jackets almost made an improbable, unexpected run into the playoffs last spring. The road to the postseason will be more difficult in this rugged division.

New Jersey Devils

Coach: Peter DeBoer, 3rd season with Devils.

2012-13 record: 19-19-10, 48 points (5th in Atlantic Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, David Clarkson, 15; A, Patrik Elias, 22; W, Martin Brodeur, 13.

Key losses: LW Ilya Kovalchuk, RW David Clarkson, D Henrik Tallinder.

Key additions: LW Ryane Clowe, RW Michael Ryder, RW Jaromir Jagr, RW Damien Brunner, G Cory Schneider.

Pressure is on: LW Jeff Skinner -- The former Rookie of the Year has been slowed by concussions. Will he ever regain his form?

Rising star: D Ryan Murphy -- Many scouts think Murphy can be just as good as D Justin Faulk, another underrated Hurricane.

The Skinny: When Ward got hurt last season, the Hurricanes' season went downward. This team still lacks secondary scoring and depth on defense.

Ottawa Senators

Coach: Paul MacLean, 3rd season with Senators.

2012-13 record: 25-17-6, 56 points (4th in Northeast Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Kyle Turris, 12; A, Sergei Gonchar, 24; W, Craig Anderson, 12.

Key losses: RW Daniel Alfredsson, D Sergei Gonchar.

Key additions: LW Bobby Ryan, RW Clarke MacArthur, D Joe Corvo.

Pressure is on: C Jason Spezza -- With Alfredsson gone, Spezza is the new captain and needs to pick up some of the offense that left with Alfredsson's departure.

Rising star: D Jared Cowen -- D Erik Karlsson rightfully gains much of the acclaim but Cowen plays a lot of tough minutes.

The Skinny: If Ryan can match what Alfredsson produced last season, the Senators have the depth to keep taking steps upward in the standings.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Coach: Randy Carlyle, 3rd season with Maple Leafs.

2012-13 record: 26-17-5, 57 points (3rd in Northeast Division).


Key losses: RW Michael Ryder, D Tomas Kaberle.

Key additions: RW Daniel Alfredsson, C Stephen Weiss.

Pressure is on: G Carey Price -- Simply put, last season, Price wasn't as good as he's been. If he regains his form, the Senators will be a dangerous playoff contender.

Rising star: RW Brendan Gallagher -- The heart-and-soul Gallagher and skilled C Alex Galchenyuk are impressive building blocks for the Canadiens.

The Skinny: People tend to forget, but Montreal actually beat out Boston for the division title last season. Whether the Canadiens continue to improve and remain competitive in this tougher division will be interesting to watch.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

Boston Bruins

Coach: Claude Julien, 7th season with Bruins.

2012-13 record: 28-14-6, 62 points (2nd in Northeast Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Brad Marchand, 18; A, David Krejci, 23; W, Tuukka Rask, 19.


Key additions: RW Loui Eriksson, RW Jarome Iginila.

Pressure is on: LW Milan Lucic -- The rugged winger had a fine postseason with seven goals -- as many as he scored during a disappointing regular season.

Rising star: D Torey Krug -- The Livonia native and former Michigan State star was a playoff hero last spring for the Bruins.

The Skinny: Give GM Peter Chiarelli credit for shrewd trades and re-signing some key players. The Bruins are going to be contenders for the near future.
2012-13 leaders: G, Phil Kessel, 20; A, Phil Kessel, 32; W, James Reimer, 19.

Key losses: C Mikhail Grabovski, LW Clarke MacArthur, D Mike Komisarek.

Key additions: RW David Clarkson, C David Bolland, G Jonathan Bernier.

Pressure is on: Clarkson -- A Toronto native signs a big free-agent contract with the Maple Leafs. No pressure there, huh?

Rising star: Bernier -- Always considered a star-in-waiting with Los Angeles, but Jonathan Quick was in the way. Bernier gets his chance in the pressure cooker of Toronto.

The Skinny: The Maple Leafs are getting deeper and the talent level is increasing. If Bernier or Reimer solidifies the goaltending, this could be an intriguing team.

Buffalo Sabres

Coach: Ron Rolston, 1st season with Sabres.

2012-13 record: 21-21-6, 48 points (5th in Northeast Division).


Key losses: C Jochen Hecht, D Andrej Sekera.

Key additions: D Henrik Tallinder.

Pressure is on: G Ryan Miller and LW Thomas Vanek -- Both are in the final years of their contracts so trade rumors will begin circulating the minute the regular season begins.

Rising star: G Jonas Enroth -- Fortunately for the Sabres, they appear to have an able replacement in Enroth, who played well in spot starts.

The Skinny: What looked like a promising team a couple years ago has evolved into a team in need of a rebuild.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Coach: Jon Cooper, 1st season with Lightning.

2012-13 record: 18-26-4, 40 points (4th in Southeast Division)

2012-13 leaders: G, Steven Stamkos, 29; A, Martin St. Louis, 43; W, Ben Bishop, 11.

Key losses: C Vincent Lecavalier.

Key additions: C Valtteri Filppula.

Pressure is on: Filppula -- Lecavalier was a Tampa Bay hockey icon, so there is pressure on Filppula to at least match what Lecavalier was doing on the ice.

Rising star: LW Jonathan Drouin -- The first-round pick will be given every chance to succeed, playing with Stamkos and St. Louis.

The Skinny: GM Steve Yzerman has some talented, young players in the organization, but this team is another year or two from contending.

St. Louis Blues

Coach: Mike Yeo, 3rd season with Wild.

2012-13 record: 29-17-2, 60 points (2nd in Central Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Chris Stewart, 18; A, David Backes, 22; W, Brian Elliott, 14.

Key losses: LW Magnus Paajarvi, C Derek Roy, C Max Lapierre, LW Brendan Morrow.

Key additions: LW Magnus Paajarvi, C Derek Roy, C Max Lapierre, LW Brendan Morrow.

Pressure is on: Elliott/G Jaroslav Halak -- The Blues' goaltending tandem was outstanding two seasons ago, and not so much last season. This position is the biggest question mark on the roster.

Rising star: D Alex Pietrangelo -- One day, maybe this season, Pietrangelo will be a star. Failing that, he should be a top-3 defender.

The skinny: Many analysts think the Blues are at the point that they can contend for the Stanely Cup. That's not outrageous thinking.

Chicago Blackhawks

Coach: Joel Quenneville, 6th season with Blackhawks.

2012-13 record: 36-7-5 (77 points, 1st in Central Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane 23; A, Patrick Kane, 32; W, Corey Crawford, 19.

Key losses: C David Bolland, G Ray Emery, RW Viktor Stalberg, RW Michael Frolik.

Key additions: G Nikolai Khabibulin.

Pressure is on: LW Bryan Bickell -- Earned a nice four-year contract worth $16 million but some scouts feel he's nothing more than a third- or fourth-line player.

Rising star: LW Brandon Saad -- A Calder Trophy finalist, Saad gets almost forgotten in this embarrassment of riches roster.

The skinny: When the playoffs arrive next spring, the Blackhawks will have a lot of hockey since January 2013. But the organization's depth is incredible, and they may just overwhelm teams all over again.

Detroit Red Wings

NHL preview: Ted Kulfan's Western Conference scouting reports

Ted Kulfan

Scouting reports on Western Conference teams, in predicted order of finish, by Ted Kulfan of The Detroit News.

CENTRAL DIVISION

Chicago Blackhawks

Coach: Joel Quenneville, 6th season with Blackhawks.

2012-13 record: 36-7-5 (77 points, 1st in Central Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane 23; A, Patrick Kane, 32; W, Corey Crawford, 19.

Key losses: C David Bolland, G Ray Emery, RW Viktor Stalberg, RW Michael Frolik.

Key additions: G Nikolai Khabibulin.

Pressure is on: LW Bryan Bickell -- Earned a nice four-year contract worth $16 million but some scouts feel he's nothing more than a third- or fourth-line player.

Rising star: LW Brandon Saad -- A Calder Trophy finalist, Saad gets almost forgotten in this embarrassment of riches roster.

The skinny: When the playoffs arrive next spring, the Blackhawks will have a lot of hockey since January 2013. But the organization's depth is incredible, and they may just overwhelm teams all over again.

St. Louis Blues

Coach: Ken Hitchcock, 3rd season with Blues.

2012-13 record: 29-17-2, 60 points (2nd in Central Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Chris Stewart, 18; A, David Backes, 22; W, Brian Elliott, 14.

Key losses: LW David Perron, LW Andy McDonald, D Kris Russell.

Key additions: LW Magnus Paajarvi, C Derek Roy, C Max Lapierre, LW Brendan Morrow.

Pressure is on: Elliott/G Jaroslav Halak -- The Blues' goaltending tandem was outstanding two seasons ago, and not so much last season. This position is the biggest question mark on the roster.

Rising star: D Alex Pietrangelo -- One day, maybe this season, Pietrangelo will win the Norris Trophy.

The skinny: Many analysts think the Blues are at the point that they can contend for the Stanley Cup. That's not outrageous thinking.

Minnesota Wild

Coach: Mike Yeo, 3rd season with Wild.


Key losses: C Matt Cullen, RW Devin Setoguchi, RW Cal Clutterbuck.

Key additions: LW Matt Cooke, RW Nino Niederreiter, D Keith Ballard.

Pressure is on: Yeo -- The coach is in the last year of his contract and reaching the second round of the playoffs is the minimum expectation.

Rising star: D Jonas Brodin -- Some analysts actually compare him favorably to Anton Forsberg. Not fair, but Brodin is real good.

The skinny: Parise and Suter didn't disappoint in their Wild debuts but they're going to need some of these much-hyped youngsters to begin helping out.
Dallas Stars
Coach: Lindy Ruff, 1st season with Stars.
2012-13 record: 22-22-4, 48 points (5th in Pacific Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, Jamie Benn, Loui Eriksson, 12; A, Alex Goligoski 24; W, Karl Lehtonen, 15.

Pressure is on: RW Jaromir Jagr -- At age 41, can Jagr score 19 goals like he did in Philadelphia last season? The Stars really need his offense.

Key losses: RW Antti Miettinen, D Derek Meech.
Key additions: RW Viktor Stalberg, C Matt Cullen, LW Eric Nystrom, D Sergei Gonchar.

Pressure is on: G Jonas Hiller, Viktor Fasth, 15.

Rising star: D Slava Voynov -- Took a major step last season with 25 points and will be counted on this season to eat some of Scuderi's minutes.

Pressure is on: G Jonathan Quick -- If Quick get hurts, or his play dips, there is not much behind him in the organization. It would be a disaster.

Rising star: D Slava Voinov -- Took a major step last season with 25 points and will be counted on this season to eat some of Scuderi's minutes.

The skinny: The Avalanche aren't what they used to be. Not even close. And Sakic / Roy will find out managing is a lot more difficult than playing.

PACIFIC DIVISION

Los Angeles Kings
Coach: Darryl Sutter, 3rd season with Kings.
2012-13 record: 27-16-5, 59 points (2nd in Pacific Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, Jeff Carter, 26; A, Anze Kopitar, 32; W, Jonathan Quick, 18.

Key losses: D Rob Scuderi, LW Dustin Penner, G Jonathan Bernier.
Key additions: LW Matt Frattin, LW Daniel Carcillo, G Ben Scrivens.

Pressure is on: G Jonathan Quick -- If Quick get hurts, or his play dips, there is not much behind him in the organization. It would be a disaster.

Rising star: D Slava Voinov -- Took a major step last season with 25 points and will be counted on this season to eat some of Scuderi's minutes.

The skinny: These are the Kings, so they'll win a lot of 1-0 and 2-1 games, then do the same in the playoffs. It's a big, tough-minded team that will be difficult to beat.

San Jose Sharks
Coach: Todd McLellan, 6th season with Sharks.
2012-13 record: 25-16-7, 57 points (3rd in Pacific Division).
2012-13 leaders: G, Logan Couture, 21; A, Joe Thornton 33; W, Antti Niemi, 24.

Rising star: Hertl -- The way Hertl looked in the exhibition season, he might make the Stars successful in short order.

The skinny: The Predators have beefed up their roster but it's doubtful they'll sneak into the playoffs.

Anaheim Ducks
Coach: Bruce Boudreau, 3rd season with Ducks.
2012-13 record: 30-12-6, 66 points (1st in Pacific Division).

Key losses: LW Bobby Ryan.
Key additions: LW Jakob Silfverberg, LW Dustin Penner.

Pressure is on: Boudreau -- In six seasons as an NHL coach, Boudreau has made the playoffs five times but never gotten past the second round.

Rising star: Silfverberg -- The Senators had to include Silfverberg in a trade to get back Ryan. Most scouts feels Silfverberg will be a consistent 20-goal scorer.

The skinny: By trading Ryan, the Ducks actually became a deeper and more balanced team. Nobody will want to face the Ducks in the playoffs -- even with Boudreau as coach.

Vancouver Canucks
Coach: John Tortorella, 1st season with Canucks.
2012-13 leaders: G, Alex Burrows, 13; A, Henrik Sedin, 34; W, Cory Schneider, 17.
Key losses: G Cory Schneider, C Derek Roy, D Keith Ballard.

Key additions: C Brad Richardson.

Pressure is on: G Roberto Luongo -- Amazingly, after expecting to be traded, Luongo retakes the No. 1 position in net -- and with little depth behind him. No pressure in this hockey-mad market, right?

Rising star: C Bo Horvat -- June's first-round draft pick will be a cornerstone piece for many years, but he's not quite ready yet.

The skinny: Tortorella will shake things up and that's probably a good thing. But the window of opportunity may have closed on this roster.

Edmonton Oilers
Coach: Dallas Eakins, 1st season with Oilers.

2012-13 record: 19-22-7, 45 points (3rd in Northwest Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Nail Yakupov, 17; A, Taylor Hall, 34; W, Devan Dubnyk 14.

Key losses: C Shawn Horcoff, C Eric Belanger, G Nikolai Khabibulin.

Key additions: LW David Perron, D Andrew Ference, G Jason LaBarbera.

Pressure is on: G Devan Dubnyk -- If Dubnyk stops pucks, Edmonton could be dangerous.

Rising star: RW Nail Yakupov -- Just one of many high-end, first-round picks that dot this roster. Yakupov's 17 goals as a rookie were impressive considering the offensive talent on this roster.

The skinny: They will not win the Stanley Cup, but this team is maturing and should reach the playoffs.

Phoenix Coyotes
Coach: Dave Tippett, 5th season with Coyotes.


2012-13 leaders: G, Shane Doan, Antoine Vermette, 13; A, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, 21; W, Mike Smith, 15.

Key losses: G Jason LaBarbera, C Boyd Gordon.

Key additions: C Mike Ribeiro.

Pressure is on: Ribeiro -- The Coyotes shelled out $22 million over four years so Ribeiro can ignite a stagnant offense. But there are a bunch of inconsistent wingers around this playmaking center.

Rising star: Ekman-Larsson -- He goes unnoticed playing in the desert, but someday Ekman-Larsson will get the attention he deserves as a premier two-way defenseman.

The skinny: Stable ownership means the Coyotes are staying in town, which helps mentally. But they've been better on paper the last two or three seasons.

Calgary Flames
Coach: Bob Hartley, 2nd season with Flames.

2012-13 record: 19-25-4, 42 points (4th in Northwest Division).

2012-13 leaders: G, Curtis Glencross, 15; A, Lee Stempniak, 23; W, Miikka Kiprusoff, Joey MacDonald, 8.

Key losses: Kiprusoff (retired), LW Alex Tanguay, D Cory Sarich.

Key additions: LW T.J. Galiardi, RW David Jones, D Kris Russell, G Karri Ramo. Pressure is on: RW Jiri Hudler -- The former Red Wing had 10 goals and 17 assists after signing a big free-agent contract. Calgary will expect much more.

Rising star: D T.J. Brodie -- Underrated offensive defenseman who will log big minutes on a rebuilding unit.

The skinny: Life after Jarome Iginla will be a long, losing process until some young talent arrives.

From The Detroit News:
http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20131001/SPORTS0103/310010008#ixzz2gSV1XWdW

Detroit News LOADED: 10.01.2013

718752 Detroit Red Wings

Ted Kulfan's NHL playoff predictions

Ted Kulfan
October 1, 2013 at 1:00 am

Ted Kulfan of The Detroit News predicts which teams will earn playoff spots. He also sees a Pittsburgh vs. St. Louis Stanley Cup Finals series.

EAST PLAYOFF TEAMS

Metropolitan Division
Pittsburgh
New York Rangers
Philadelphia

Atlantic Division
Boston
Ottawa
Detroit
Montreal (wild card)
Toronto (wild card)

WEST PLAYOFF TEAMS

Central Division
Chicago
St. Louis
Minnesota
Dallas (wild card)

Pacific Division
Los Angeles
San Jose
Anaheim
Vancouver (wild card)

CONFERENCE FINALS

Pittsburgh over Boston
St. Louis over Los Angeles

STANLEY CUP FINALS

Pittsburgh over St. Louis

From The Detroit News:
http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20131001/SPORTS0103/310010010#ixzz2gSV7V0Ee

Detroit News LOADED: 10.01.2013

718753 Detroit Red Wings

Wings ship Gustav Nyquist to Grand Rapids, bring back Cory Emmerton

Ted Kulfan
September 30, 2013 at 1:00 am

Jimmy Howard, Justin Abdelkader and Jonathan Ericsson went through it.
Now, Gustav Nyquist is experiencing it.

Nyquist’s bid to make a loaded Red Wings roster ended Monday when he was sent to Grand Rapids in the team’s move to reach the roster and salary cap limits.

“Adversity’s not about the decision made, it’s about how you handle it and choosing your attitude right,” Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. “Justin Abdelkader had the same thing happen to him. Big E (Ericsson), the same thing. It’s not the first time that’s happened here.”

“I’m sure he’s very disappointed. But I know him good, and he’ll go down and be a real good pro and be prepared when he gets the opportunity.”

Nyquist had three goals and three assists in 22 games with the Red Wings last season. During the playoffs, he had two goals and three assists in 14 games.

Also headed to Grand Rapids was goaltender Petr Mrazek.

Forward Cory Emmerton, however, passed through waivers, was going to be sent to Grand Rapids, then wound up back with the Red Wings.

Among the other moves:

■ Forwards Darren Helm (back) and Patrick Eaves (ankle, knee) were placed on long-term injured reserve (minimum of 10 games and 24 days).
■ Goaltender Jonas Gustavsson (groin) and forward Jordin Tootoo (bruised shoulder) were placed on the short-term injured list (seven days).
■ Defenseman Xavier Ouellet and goaltender Jared Coreau are on the roster, but likely will be sent to Grand Rapids in a day or two.

Name game

The progress of Joakim Andersson along with the depth in the organization and the re-signing of Daniel Cleary contributed to Emmerton being sent down.

“Cory’s come a long way,” Babcock said. “But really what got a little bit in his way was Andy (Andersson). That’s just the way it is. We felt Dan Cleary was a guy we needed on our team. We’re in a cap situation that isn’t friendly until you get things worked out.”

Roster

Forward: Justin Abdelkader, Daniel Alfredsson, Joakim Andersson, Todd Bertuzzi, Daniel Cleary, Pavel Datsyuk, Cory Emmerton, Johan Franzen, Drew Miller, Mikael Samuelsson, Tomas Tatar, Stephen Weiss, Henrik Zetterberg.
■ Defensemen: Danny DeKeyser, Jonathan Ericsson, Jakub Kindl, Niklas Kronwall, Brian Lashoff, Xavier Ouellet, Kyle Quincey, Brendan Smith.
■ Goaltenders: Jared Coreau, Jimmy Howard.
■ Injured reserve: Patrick Eaves, Jonas Gustavsson, Darren Helm, Jordin Tootoo.
■ Sabres at Red Wings.
■ Faceoff: 8 p.m. Wednesday, Joe Louis Arena, Detroit.
■ TV/radio: NBCSN/97.1.
■ Records: Season opener.

From The Detroit News:

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

DETROIT -- Cory Emmerton isn’t headed to Grand Rapids just yet.

By placing forward Patrick Eaves (sprained MCL, ankle) on long-term injured reserve Monday, the Detroit Red Wings were able to keep Emmerton on their roster, after he had cleared waivers earlier in the day.

Emmerton likely will be centering the fourth line when the Red Wings open the regular season Wednesday against the Buffalo Sabres at Joe Louis Arena (8 p.m., Fox Sports Detroit).

“Had a conversation with Patrick Eaves and he felt he wouldn’t be ready to go in the next 2-3 weeks, he needs the necessary 10 games and 24 days on long term IR to get ready,” general manager Ken Holland said. “We were able to maximize our 23-man roster and cap space.”

The Red Wings also recalled young defenseman Xavier Ouellet from the Griffins. He will start the season on the NHL roster, but isn’t expected to play, since Holland said the team’s other seven defensemen are healthy and available for Wednesday.

In order to get cap relief from long-term IR, a team must spend to the cap and meet the 23-man roster limit. That is why the Red Wings submitted a season-opening roster that has Jared Coreau as their backup goaltender instead of Petr Mrazek. Coreau has a bigger cap hit. They might flip-flop positions later this week.

Holland said right wing Jordin Tootoo (bruised shoulder), who was placed on short-term IR, could be ready for Friday’s game at Carolina. Ouellet could be sent back to Grand Rapids when that happens.

Here is the 23-man roster the Red Wings submitted to the NHL on Monday (it can change after 24 hours):

■ Goaltenders (2): Jared Coreau, Jimmy Howard.
■ Long-term injured reserve (minimum 10 games and 24 days): Patrick Eaves, Darren Helm.
■ Short-term injured reserve (minimum seven days, retroactive to injury): Jonas Gustavsson, Jordin Tootoo.

From Michigan Live:

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on September 30, 2013 at 4:27 PM, updated September 30, 2013 at 4:35 PM

DETROIT – Detroit Red Wings center Darren Helm actually was a little relieved to be placed on long-term injured reserve Monday.

Now he knows he doesn’t have to push him to return sooner than he is ready. He will be out a minimum of 10 games and 24 days, during which time he hopes he ailing back will heal.

“I don’t know when I’m going to be ready,” Helm said. “This gives me the opportunity to not relax but keep my mind off being ready now. It was kind of getting close to some pressure put on me, this takes some pressure off and get better at a little slower pace, might be better for my body.”

Helm has played only four periods of hockey in the past 18 months, due to back pain and before that, a lacerated forearm. He remains optimistic that he will heal soon.

“I’ll be playing this year,” Helm said. “I’m confident in that.”

Helm suffered a pulled groin just before training camp but has been skating with the club the past few practices. He hasn’t been cleared for contact.
“I need to string together a few of those (hard practices) before I feel like I’m ready to play,” Helm said. “This (LTIR) will give me some time to get a little bit of a training camp, get in some skates, do some stuff after.”

He feels he’s improved since he returned to the ice.

“Every day I keep doing a little more,” Helm said. “Hopefully in a couple of weeks I’ll be 100 percent and ready to go.”

As for his weight training, he said, “I’m doing pretty much everything that everyone else is doing, maybe a little lighter weight. That’s another thing I need to build up before I get playing. I don’t think a week or two will give me that opportunity to be at that level. Long-term will give me a chance to take some pressure off myself and go at my own pace and be ready.”

The team wasn’t counting on having him at the start of the season.

“He’s not available, so we just continue like we did last year,” coach Mike Babcock said.

Tootoo practices, is close to returning; Gustavsson takes the ice

General manager Ken Holland said right wing Jordin Tootoo will start the season on short-term injured reserve but is close to returning. It’s retroactive to Sept. 19, so he can come off IR at any time.

“I’m feeling better. The shoulder is coming along,” Tootoo said. “You don’t want it to keep lingering on for the style I play. It’s better to be 100 percent rather than go in and aggravate it again.

“Today’s practice was pretty intense for me. Added a little physicality in there for me and it felt good.”

Backup goalie Jonas Gustavsson took the ice after practice, the first time he’s faced shots since hurting his groin on Sept. 21.

“Today’s practice was pretty intense for me. Added a little physicality in there for me and it felt good.”

He will be placed on IR and has no time frame for his return.

“Groins are a special thing for goalies because you really have to be 100 percent,” Gustavsson said. “You can’t really go out there if you feel a little sore. You won’t be able to play as good as you want and you might make it worse. That’s why we’re taking it slowly, not trying to force anything.”

Gustav Nyquist latest young Red Wing to be caught in cap crunch as team sets season-opening roster

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on September 30, 2013 at 4:30 PM, updated September 30, 2013 at 4:36 PM

DETROIT – If the Detroit Red Wings kept their best 14 forwards on their season-opening roster, Gustav Nyquist would be part of that group.

But their inability to make a trade, their reluctance to part with some veterans and salary-cap complications all worked against Nyquist, who was assigned to the Grand Rapids Griffins on Monday.

Nyquist earned a roster spot based on his skills, his performance last season and his play during training camp and the exhibition season. But the 24-year-old had the misfortune of being the only forward who is exempt from waivers. So sending him down enabled the Red Wings to get cap-compliant and meet the 23-man roster limit.

The move buys them some time while their roster issues are settled. Once Nyquist plays in two more NHL games, he loses his waiver-exempt status.

“We like him,” general manager Ken Holland said. “He’s a guy we want on the team sooner than later, but unfortunately, we’ve got some difficult cap issues and we’ll start out the way we start out and sort out as we go.”

Other young players have been in the same predicament over the years.

“Obviously, adversity’s not about the decision made, it’s about how you handle it,” coach Mike Babcock said. “Choose your attitude right. Justin Abdelkader had the same thing happen to him, Big E (Jonathan Ericsson) had the same thing happen to him. It’s not the first time that’s happened here.

“I’m sure he’s very, very disappointed. But I know him good, he’ll go down and be a real good pro and he’ll be prepared when he gets the opportunity.”

The Red Wings were able to get under the $64.9 million salary cap and trim their roster by assigning center Cory Emmerton to Grand Rapids, after he cleared waivers Monday, and placing center Darren Helm (back) on long-term injured reserve. Helm, who has been skating with the team but hasn’t been cleared for contact, must sit out a minimum of 10 games and 24 days.

The Red Wings also sent backup goaltender Petr Mrazek to the Griffins, opting to keep Jared Coreau on their roster for now. But Holland indicated that has more to do with some complicated cap issue. He said Mrazek and Coreau might trade places before Wednesday’s season opener against Buffalo at Joe Louis Arena. Not that it matters much, since Jimmy Howard obviously is starting.

Coreau said he believes he is being sent down before the opener.

Holland said goalie Jonas Gustavsson (groin) and right wings Patrick Eaves (sprained MCL, ankle) and Jordin Tootoo (bruised shoulder) also will be placed on short-term injured reserve. Eaves, who hasn’t skated since he was hurt on Sept. 19, and Gustavsson, who was back on the ice for the first time since Sept. 21, albeit after practice, don’t appear ready to return soon.

Holland said Tootoo is close to returning.

By clearing waivers, Emmerton will provide depth in Grand Rapids.

“Cory’s come a long way,” Babcock said. “But really, (Joakim Andersson) got a little bit in his way. That’s just the way it is. We felt Dan Cleary was a guy we needed on our team. We’re in a cap situation that isn’t friendly until you get things worked out.”

Babcock said he could plug Drew Miller into the fourth-line center slot in a pinch but that he hasn’t spent “one second” thinking about that, since he is waiting for “the smoke to clear.”

Emmerton, Luke Glendening or Riley Sheahan might be recalled prior to the opener.

Here is the Red Wings’ roster as of now:

Forwards: Justin Abdelkader, Daniel Alfredsson, Joakim Andersson, Todd Bertuzzi, Daniel Cleary, Pavel Datsyuk, Johan Franzen, Drew Miller, Mikael Samuelsson, Tomas Tatar, Stephen Weiss, Henrik Zetterberg.

Defensemen: Danny DeKeyser, Jonathan Ericsson, Jakub Kindl, Niklas Kronwall, Brian Lashoff, Kyle Quincey, Brendan Smith.

Goaltenders: Jared Coreau, Jimmy Howard.

Injured reserve: Patrick Eaves, Jonas Gustavsson, Darren Helm, Jordin Tootoo.

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718757 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings center Cory Emmerton clears waivers, assigned to Grand Rapids Griffins

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

on September 30, 2013 at 12:10 PM, updated September 30, 2013 at 1:40 PM

DETROIT – Detroit Red Wings center Cory Emmerton cleared waivers today and was assigned to the Grand Rapids Griffins.

The Red Wings needed to trim their roster to 23 players and get salary-cap compliant today.

They have assigned forward Gustav Nyquist to Grand Rapids.

They will place center Darren Helm (back) on long-term injured reserve. Right wing Patrick Eaves and goaltender Jonas Gustavsson also will be placed on IR, either long-term or short-term.

Emmerton filled the Red Wings’ fourth-line center spot the past two seasons, but he would not have had a place in the lineup once Helm returned because
He's played in an NHL All-Star Game, was on the All-Rookie first team, is a Vezina Trophy, an award given to the NHL's top goalie.

Emmerton had five goals, eight points and a minus-1 rating in 48 games last season and appeared in all by one playoff game (one goal, one assist, minus-1). He has appeared in 121 games over parts of three seasons, with 12 goals, 19 points and a plus-1 rating.

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718759 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings assign forward Gustav Nyquist, goaltender Petr Mrazek to Grand Rapids Griffins

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com
on September 30, 2013 at 11:37 AM, updated September 30, 2013 at 2:58 PM

DETROIT -- The Detroit Red Wings have assigned forward Gustav Nyquist and goaltender Petr Mrazek to the Grand Rapids Griffins, general manager Ken Holland said Monday.

Nyquist's demotion has nothing to do with his performance, it's all about getting cap compliant. He is one of only two Red Wings (defenseman Danny DeKeyser the other) who is exempt from waivers.

Even after putting center Darren Helm on long-term injured reserve and waiving center Cory Emmerton, the Red Wings needed to clear some cap space.

Nyquist clears $950,000 off the cap. His stint in Grand Rapids could be short, however.

Once Nyquist plays in two more NHL games he will lose his waiver-exempt status.

Nyquist, 24, had three goals and three assists in 22 games with the Red Wings last season. He stepped up his performance in the playoffs, picking up two goals and three assists in 14 games, forming an effective third line with Joakim Andersson and Damien Brunner.

Mrazek was sent down to play for the Griffins until the Red Wings need him to start a game, which could be this weekend, since they have back-to-back games in Carolina Friday and Boston on Saturday.

In the meantime, they have kept Jared Coreau as Jimmy Howard's backup.

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718759 Detroit Red Wings

Winning Stanley Cup drives Detroit Red Wings' Jimmy Howard to be one of NHL's best goalies

By Brendan Savage | bsavage@mlive.com
on September 30, 2013 at 6:30 AM, updated September 30, 2013 at 6:35 AM

DETROIT -- Jimmy Howard's accomplishments speak for themselves.

He's played in an NHL All-Star Game, was on the All-Rookie first team, is a top candidate to represent the United States in the 2014 Olympics, and in four seasons as the Red Wings No. 1 goaltender has won a pair of Game 7s in the playoffs.

One of the few individual achievements missing from Howard's resume is a Vezina Trophy, an award given to the NHL's top goalie.

Those types of things, however, aren't what drive Howard day in and day out while he might be battling a sore back, tender groin or is just trying to deal with the rigors of a long season.

He is one of the best goalies in the league now. We know he will give us a chance to go all the way and win the Cup again -- Henrik Zetterberg

Howard wants to win the Stanley Cup.

"If there's one thing I've always been told by my parents," said Howard, a 29-year-old native of Syracuse, N.Y., "it's that you don't rest on your laurels. It doesn't matter what you did in the past, you got to continue to go out there and prove yourself, work hard and play hard.

"I don't expect much to change here other than go out and get better."

So Howard, who has been a workhorse since replacing Chris Osgood as Detroit's No. 1 netminder in 2009-10, spends every day trying to help the Red Wings win their fifth Stanley Cup since 1997.

Twice in four seasons he's ranked among the top 10 NHL goalies in both games and minutes played. He's also been eighth or better in wins four straight seasons and has been among the top 10 in save percentage three times.

"I enjoy being out there and I enjoy competing," said Howard, who was fifth last season in both minutes (2,446) and games (42). "I get really bored just sitting there. I'm the type of guy that wants to be out there and play every single night. I definitely don't mind the workload one bit."

In the playoffs, Howard has taken the Red Wings to the conference semifinals three times, winning Game 7 as a rookie against Phoenix in 2010 and again last year against Anaheim.

Last season, he had the Red Wings on the verge of upsetting regular-season champion Chicago as Detroit built a 3-1 series lead before losing Game 7 in overtime to the eventual Stanley Cup champion in the Western Conference semifinals.

"He is one of the best goalies in the league now," said Red Wings captain Henrik Zetterberg. "He proved that last year. For a goalie it takes time to establish yourself in this league. Howie has really gone the proper way.

"He was the backup to Ozzie for a few years and kind of learned to see what he did, how he prepared and how he challenged himself in practices and games. Howie's doing the same thing. Every year he's taken a step. Now he is one of the elite goalies.

"We know he will give us a chance to go all the way and win the Cup again."

General manager Ken Holland agrees.

Holland put the Red Wings' future in Howard's hands last spring, when he gave Howard a six-year contract extension worth $31.8 million. That more than doubled Howard's annual salary while making him the 10th-highest-paid goalie at $5.5 million.

Holland almost sounded like he got a bargain when he signed Howard in April.

"If you look at the contract that we signed, we're going to wake up in a year and maybe there's eight or 10 goalies that are going to make more than Jimmy Howard," Holland said. "It's an important day to me because we got somebody locked up that's really important, at a number that he feels good about, that we feel good about, that we can work with."

Last season, Howard was among the top 10 NHL goalies in virtually every key category as the Red Wing overcame a rash of injuries to make the playoffs on the final day of the campaign and extend their postseason streak to 22 seasons.

He tied for seventh in wins with a 23-13-7 record, tied for first in shutouts (5), was eighth in goals-against average (2.13) and tied for ninth in save percentage (.923).

"He played real good for us last year," said veteran forward Daniel Cleary. "He's a tough goalie. Howie is a competitive guy, very competitive in the net, in practice. Definitely a guy we trust a lot and he's certainly won a lot of games for us.

"He's got your back. He's just a guy we count on. We know he'll be there night in and night out."

Howard's competitive nature and drive to succeed is a big part of what makes him so good, according to second-year defenseman Brendan Smith.
Jimmy Howard talks about possibility of playing for United States in 2014 Olympics Veteran goaltender is one of 11 Detroit Red Wings who could be headed to Sochi, Russia in February for Winter Games

"He competes every night, every day in practice," Smith said. "That's what makes a good professional player. You see everybody on every team in every room, they all have a lot of skill but what drives and makes you better is how competitive you are and how much you're willing to practice and get better.

"Jimmy's got that. I think that helps us. It's good for myself, coming in as a younger guy and learning from Howie and a bunch of the older 'D' men. For him being through all those things and being through the adversity of playing a lot of games, it's good to have him back there because he knows what to expect."

Howard will have an additional goal in mind early this season as he tries to play well enough to make the U.S. team that will play in the Winter Olympic Games in February in Sochi, Russia.

While that's important, it's not Howard's primary goal.

"Right now it's about taking care of business for this team," Howard said. "If you go out there and give your team a chance to win every single night, you just got to make it hard on their advisory group to not want to leave you off the roster."

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718760 Detroit Red Wings

RED WINGS NOTEBOOK: Team makes roster moves

By Chuck Pleiness, The Macomb Daily
Posted: 09/30/13, 7:55 PM EDT | Updated: 5 hrs ago

DETROIT – Gustav Nyquist had a feeling this day would come and it finally did.

The Wings assigned Nyquist to Grand Rapids to begin the season in order to meet roster limits and free up cap space.

"We like him, he’s a guy we want on the team sooner than later, but unfortunately, we’ve got some difficult cap issues and we’ll start out the way we start out and sort out as we go," Wings general manager Ken Holland said.

Nyquist signed a two-year deal with an annual cap hit of $950,000 this past offseason to stay with the club.

"Justin Abdelkader had the same thing happen to him, (Jonathan Ericsson) had the same thing happen to him, it’s not the first time that’s happened here," Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "I’m sure he’s very, very disappointed. But I know him good, he’ll go down and be a real good pro and he’ll be prepared when he gets the opportunity."

The Wings also placed Darren Helm (back) and Patrick Eaves (sprained MCL and ankle) on long-term injured reserve, while Jonas Gustavsson (groin) and Jordin Tootoo (shoulder) both went on short-term IR.

Cory Emmerton thought he was heading to Grand Rapids after clearing waivers Monday, but he remains on the roster because Eaves went on long-term IR.

The Wings also needed to add defenseman Xavier Ouellet and goalie Jared Coreau to the 23-man roster in order to reach the cap limit.

In order for teams to get cap relief from long-term IR, a team must use up all of its cap space and roster spots first.

"We’re ready to go," Holland said. "We have 23 able bodies as the coaches’ disposal. We’ll evaluate the roster as we go."

Once Tootoo returns, which could be as early as Friday, Ouellet could be heading back to the Griffins.

Submitted rosters to begin the season must be in place for only 24 hours before more shuffling can be done.

Emmerton was passed up on the center depth chart by Joakim Andersson and therefore made him a candidate to go to the minors if he cleared waivers.

"Cory’s come a long way, but really what got a little bit in his way is Andy got a little bit in his way," Babcock said. "That’s just the way it is. We felt Dan Cleary was a guy we needed on our team. We’re in a cap situation that isn’t friendly until you get things worked out."

Nyquist, who was the only forward that didn’t have to clear waivers to be assigned to the minors, is two NHL games played away from having his waiver-exempt status.

Defenseman Danny DeKeyser also could be sent down without having to go through waivers.

Despite not playing an entire season with the Griffins last year, Nyquist led them with 58 points in 60 games.

Tatar stuck watching

Tomas Tatar made the roster, but knows the question is when will he get in the lineup.

"I know the chance is coming, so just have to wait for a spot and when it’s open just grab it and hold it," Tatar said after practice Monday.

It appears Babcock will sit Tatar in the season opener, opting to go with a more veteran look as Andersson will center Todd Bertuzzi and Cleary.

"I’m out of the lineup right now, but I don’t know what will happen to the Wednesday, so just wait for a chance," Tatar said. "I’m the youngest guy in the locker room, so I wait and when chance comes I’m going to grab it and hold it."

Tatar, 22, was the American Hockey League MVP last season, scoring 16 goals to go with five assists in 24 games.

"I like him," Babcock said. "I think he’s a good player. He’s a very usable player, has a knack for the net. But early going in the season, tie goes to the veteran not to the kid. That’s just life. It’s amazing how that works. We’ll get it worked out."

Tatar spent four seasons with the Griffins. He had four goals and three assists with Detroit a year ago.

Helm vows to return

Helm, who’ll miss at least the first 10 games of the regular season due to going on long-term IR, practiced with the team Monday and centered a line with Drew Miller and Mikael Samuelsson.

"I’ll be playing this year, I’m confident in that," Helm said. "I need to string together a few of those before I feel like I’m ready to play."

Helm played one game last season and has yet to be cleared for contact due to his back.

"I don’t know when I’m going to be ready," Helm said. "This gives me the opportunity to keep my mind off being ready now. It was kind of getting close to some pressure put on me, this takes some pressure off and get better at a little slower pace, might be better for my body."

Helm hopes to travel with team and practice.

"Hopefully in a couple of weeks I’ll be 100 percent and ready to go," Helm said. "I’m doing pretty much everything that everyone else is doing, maybe a little lighter weight. That’s another thing I need to build up before I get playing. I don’t think a week or two will give me that opportunity to be at that level. Long-term will give me a chance to take some pressure off myself and go at my own pace and be ready."

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718761 Detroit Red Wings

Go west, young man! Nyquist heads to Grand Rapids

By Chuck Pleiness, The Macomb Daily
Posted: 09/30/13, 5:11 PM EDT | Updated: 10 hrs ago
DETROIT – Gustav Nyquist knew the day would come and it finally did.
The Red Wings assigned Nyquist to Grand Rapids to begin the season in order to meet roster limits and free up cap space.

“We like him, he’s a guy we want on the team sooner than later, but unfortunately, we’ve got some difficult cap issues and we’ll start out the way we start out and sort out as we go,” Wings general manager Ken Holland said.

Nyquist signed a two-year deal with an annual cap hit of $950,000 this past offseason to stay with the club.

“Obviously, adversity is not about the decision made, it’s about how you handle it,” Wings coach Mike Babcock said. “Choose your attitude right. Justin Abdelkader had the same thing happen to him, (Jonathan Ericsson) had the same thing happen to him. It’s not the first time that’s happened here. I’m sure he’s very, very disappointed. But I know him good, he’ll go down and be a real good pro and he’ll be prepared when he gets the opportunity.”

With the signing of Daniel Cleary to a one-year deal worth $1.75 million, it put the Wings at 26 players under contract for this season, three over the roster limit. And 17 of those are forwards, which they only expect to carry 14.

On Sunday, Darren Helm was placed on long-term injured reserve and Cory Emmerton was placed on waivers, leaving one spot left to be cleared.

Emmerton, who was passed up on the center depth chart by Joakim Andersson, cleared waivers and will also be assigned to the Griffins.

“Cory’s come a long way, but really what got a little bit in his way is Andy got a little bit in his way,” Babcock said. “That’s just the way it is. We felt Dan Cleary was a guy we needed on our team. We’re in a cap situation that isn’t friendly until you get things worked out.”

Holland said that Patrick Eaves (sprained MCL and ankle), Jordin Tootoo (shoulder) and Jonas Gustavsson (groin) will all begin the season on injured reserve.

“They all go on IR retroactive to when they’re hurt, so we could take them off Wednesday morning if we want,” Holland said.

Nyquist is the only forward that doesn’t have to clear waivers and be exposed for other teams to scoop up before being sent down to the minors.

He is however two NHL games played away from losing his waiver-exempt status.

Defenseman Danny DeKeyser also could be sent down without having to go through waivers, but that would leave Detroit with just six defencemen.

Despite not playing an entire season with the Griffins last year, Nyquist led them with 58 points in 60 games.

Nyquist, who had three goals and three assists in 22 regular season games a year ago, was part of a pretty formidable third line late in the season with Joakim Andersson and Damien Brunner. He had two goals and three assists in 14 postseason games.

Tomas Tatar made the roster, but now the question is when will he get in the lineup.

“I know the chance is coming, so just have to wait for a spot and when it’s open just grab it and hold it,” Tatar said after practice.

It appears Babcock will sit Tatar in the season opener, opting to go with a more veteran look as Andersson will center Todd Bertuzzi and Cleary.

“I’m out of the lineup right now, but I don’t know what will happen Wednesday, so I just wait for a chance,” Tatar said. “I’m the youngest guy in the locker room, so I wait and when chance comes I’m going to grab it and hold it.”

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“I like him,” Babcock said. “I think he’s a good player. He’s a very usable player, has a knack for the net. But early going in the season, tie goes to the veteran not to the kid. That’s just life. It’s amazing how that works. We’ll get it worked out.”

Tatar spent four seasons with the Griffins. He had four goals and three assists with Detroit a year ago.

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It’s one thing — and an astute move at that — for Eakins to move photos of the ’80s icons out of the team’s locker-room and onto the Rexall Place concourse, to redecorate the locker-room walls with Images of the players of today.

But when yesterday’s heroes often populate the halls, when two of them remain key club executives, you wonder how completely Eakins, or any head coach, can or will install a new mentality.

Messier, as Jim Matheson writes about elsewhere in this section, gave his seal of approval to the choice of veteran defenceman but first-year Oiler Andrew Ference as team captain.

On the ‘clean slate’ front, though, the 46-year-old Eakins already has won some players over, Ryan Smyth and Ales Hemsky at the head of that list.

The two veteran wingers, with left winger-turned centre Taylor Hall, arguably form the Oilers top line, making them Exhibits A and B that Eakins is true to his word about evaluating players on performance in the here and now, not on past performance or reputation.

Both Smyth and Hall had good camps and the coach rewarded them with plum assignments, at least to start things off.

"I think that was important for the guys," said Hemsky, who was removed from the trading block not long before training camp opened. "We have a different coach, a different mentality."

"It’s like a fresh start, I feel like that."

So, as he has said often during the training, does Smyth, which is saying something as he preps to start a full NHL season for the 18th time in his career.

"It’s pretty fun, said the 37-year-old Smyth, who skated with former Oilers’ tough guy Louie DeBrusk and speedy Todd Marchant at that first opening night, back in 1995.

Is an opening night still fun?

"Absolutely," Smyth said. "The adrenalin gets going and the excitement is there again.

"It brings you back to how you felt as a kid again. There are a lot of kids in this room, so hopefully I can be a part of it and jump in on it."

His coach certainly thinks so.

"I don’t know what’s gone on in the past — I did ask a few questions," Eakins said. "It’s back to that clean slate mentality.

"Play well and you play more, that’s the way it goes. So far in camp, he’s kept the pace. He’s been a good linemate for Taylor and Hemsky.

"Well, keep him there."

Eakins also lives by the “who’s going” dictum during games, so the trio will change, depending on how the players are performing that night.

"But (Smyth) has been good for me, so far. He’s done everything we’ve asked. And there’s a whole bunch of guys like that."

One player like that, and yet a little unlike the others is first-year player Anton Belov, and not because at six-foot-four, 212-pounds, the resident of Omsk, Russia is the club’s biggest defenceman.

Belov played for Avangard of Russia’s KHL for the last five seasons, taking a substantial pay cut to sign with the Oilers and test himself against the best in the NHL.

"I wait (for) this day a long time," said the soft-spoken Belov. "And (tonight) my dream comes a little bit closer, I can touch it.

"From the first day, everybody makes me feel welcome. This is a very comfortable atmosphere, I don’t need anything.

"I think I need to work hard everyday and show to the coach that he make a good choice."

Belov is paired with stay-at-home defenceman Nick Schultz for opening night, a shutdown unit, by all appearances. Meanwhile, offensive defenceman Justin Schultz will play with Ference, while Jeff Petry and Ladislav Smid, partners much of last season, are partners still.

Three of the six defencemen are new, and if they consistently fill up the coach’s clean slate with sound, efficient defensive-zone work, Eakins will be pleased, even with his high standards.

Even though there are eight new faces in the Oilers opening night lineup, the growth area for this team is going to be the incumbents dialing up their defensive responsibilities, buying into Eakins’ system, playing the proverbial ‘200-foot game,’ not merely relying on their elite-level skill to carry the day.

How they grade out at playing a complete game of hockey is something that will play out over the course of the season.

Tonight, as Smyth said, is about feeling like a kid again. It’s opening night.

Jim Matheson: Could this be Devan Dubnyk’s final shot at proving he’s a bonafide No. 1 for the Edmonton Oilers?

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton JournalSeptember 30, 2013

EDMONTON - Devan Dubnyk stands tall in the net but short in the love department around the National Hockey League, in which many aren’t yet sure if he’s a true No. 1 goalie.

While there are questions about Taylor Hall moving to centre, about whether Justin Schultz can carry the mail from the back-end like he did for much of his NHL rookie season, about where newcomer David Perron fits in new head coach Dallas Eakins’ top three forward lines, the Edmonton Oilers need goalie Devan Dubnyk to prove he’s the bonafide starter.

He’s got the stats to show he’s on the way (.920 save percentage last season, just a hair out of the NHL’s top 10 .923 mark), facing the fifth most shots in the league, but the Oilers tried to trade for Vancouver’s Cory Schneider at the NHL draft and were sniffing around LA’s Jonathan Bernier, which leads you to believe upper management isn’t completely sold on Dubnyk.

He’s nine years removed from being the Oilers’ first pick in the 2004 draft, and at 27, he’s at the age where goalies start to show whether or not they’re a 60-65 game starter.

Dubnyk is on the second year of a $3.5-million-per-season deal, after which he’s an unrestricted free agent in July.

The Oilers have no hotshot in the minors, no high-end junior-aged goalie they’ve drafted. This is Dubnyk’s time.

"Mentally, I feel confident I can do it (play night after night) and play well for these guys," he said Monday following practice at Rexall Place.

"I felt good in the pre-season, and I want to continue building."

He wants no part of proving to the world he can play.

"I don’t think that’s a very successful way to approach it, to think that far ahead, to think of that big a picture," he said.

Eakins says he “hates analyzing the goalies.”

"I just like goalies who stop the puck,” the first-year NHL bench boss said. "I think we have two more than capable guys (backup Jason LaBarbera) to handle the load. Dubnyk’s numbers in the past have been in the top part of the league and he’s had a good pre-season. Game on tomorrow (in the season-opener against the visiting Winnipeg Jets).

"It’s like the players. Play well, you play. If you’re struggling, you’ll have to give the net up to the other guy.”

Dubnyk knows he’s at the point where goalies step up or step back, although there’s the odd Tim Thomas who gets discovered in his 30s after wandering the goalie landscape for years. "You look at (Mikka) Kiprusoff, when he became a starter (Calgary) and (Henrik) Lundqvist (New York), when he came in," Dubnyk said.

Kipper? Good example. He was 26 when he got his best shot in Calgary. Lundqvist was 23 when he left Sweden.
Better example: Ryan Miller. He was 25 when he cracked the Buffalo Sabres roster after three years in the minors. Or Jimmy Howard, the Detroit Red Wings starter who toiled four years in the minors before getting the starting gig in Motown at 25.

"It takes reps to get there," Dubnyk said. "Some guys get an opportunity right away like Carey Price, who has run with it.

"I feel I've worked my way into the starting job here."

Nine years with one organization before becoming the go-to guy in net is a long journey, though

"Yeah, that doesn't happen that often, but I'm happy I've had a chance to grow up and get better with all the guys in here."

"I hope down the road, people will be saying it's been 15 or 16 years with the same organization."

Hard to believe it was 2004 when Dubnyk went 14th overall and the Oilers got flashy centre Rob Schremp with the 25th pick.

"I remember people were mad they took me first," said Dubnyk.

By Jim Matheson, Edmonton JournalSeptember 30, 2013

EDMONTON - You know what they say: you've gotta roll with the punches.

While one of the NHL’s best bodyguards, Steve MacIntyre, was limping around Rexall Place on Monday with a brace on his right knee after trying to hit Dallas Stars tough guy Luke Gazdic on Friday night, Gazdic was sporting an Edmonton Oilers jersey at his first practice with the team, a day after being picked up on waivers.

Funny how the wheel turns. You miss a check and the guy you missed is suddenly taking your cheque as the Oilers beat cop after being picked up on waivers.

Gazdic might have been willing to take MacIntyre on, but it never got there.

"Maybe I chirped at him a little bit. I wanted to do something to get noticed," said Gazdic, who scored a goal in the game.

"It was a complete whirlwind ... I went from having what I thought was my best game of the pre-season to being sent down the next morning, to being picked up by Edmonton. That's pretty ironic," Gazdic said.

The six-foot-three, 228-pound Gazdic likely won't play against the Winnipeg Jets Tuesday night, but you can bet he'll be in the Oilers lineup against the Minnesota Wild.

"I hope down the road, people will be saying it's been 15 or 16 years with the same organization."

Gazdic might have been willing to take MacIntyre on, but it never got there.

"Was I ready? Probably not," said Messier, who stopped by Rexall Place Monday morning with time to kill before a sports memorabilia event Thursday in Sylvan Lake. "I had some great leaders like Ron Chiasson, a real classy guy who treated everybody beautifully, Lee Fogolin and, of course, Wayne Gretzky took over (he was 22 but starting his fifth NHL season).

"When you sit beside guys day in and day out, that's how you learn, watching how they prepare, how they handle things. That's part of growing up in the professional environment. Unless there's a real need for it (captaincy early), I think the young guys should grow up and focus on their own games and be leaders in their own way on the team without the burden of carrying the captaincy."

Messier became captain when Gretzky was traded to the Los Angeles Kings in 1988. But he had some outstanding teachers.

He applauded Fogolin, who had the ‘C’ before No. 99.

"Everybody respected Fogey for his preparation, his commitment, his conditioning and approach to the game. His professionalism."

Messier has seen some very young captains thrive, though.

"It depends what you expect from a 21-year-old as a leader," he said. "We’ve seen situations where it’s been done like with (Jonathan) Toews (with the Chicago Blackhawks). But if you’re looking for a sophisticated guy who has a lot of water under the bridge and really understands the nuances of the game and the leadership aspect, I think that’s a lot to expect from a guy."

"For me, unless there’s a real void of leadership on the team, I’d prefer a player of that age (Hall or Eberle) have the time to find his way through the league and get a comfort level so when he’s ready to step into the captaincy, he’s more ready for the role."
“One thing I do know: that ship sailed a long time ago. I feel good, but that’s a long-gone thought for me. Am I NHL ready? Uh, no.”

On whether he wants to be a coach or a general manager down the road. He was in the running for the Rangers coaching job that went to Alain Vigneault, and many have said he could replace Rangers’ GM Glen Sather some day: “I don’t have any designs on coaching now. The Rangers asked if I’d like to coach, and after talking to my family, I said yes. I thought I could fill a void that the Rangers had, but they went in a different direction, and I completely understood and respected it.”

On his current pride and joy in New York, getting rinks built in the Bronx’s huge Kingsbridge Armory so kids and adults can play hockey. It’s close to getting started: “There are only seven rinks in the whole metropolitan area. I think the national average of ice rinks is one for every 100,000 in the United States. In New York, it’s one sheet of ice for every 1.2 million people.”

Getting started: “There are only seven rinks in the whole metropolitan area. I think the national average of ice rinks is one for every 100,000 in the United States. In New York, it’s one sheet of ice for every 1.2 million people.”

The Oilers will start the season with a 37-year-old, who looked like he was pretty much done last year, playing on the first line. They have another guy pretty much done last year, playing on the first line. They have another guy who knows there will be new challenges now that there are points on the line.

Edmonton Oilers centres focused on making most of opportunities

By Joanne Ireland, Edmonton Journal September 30, 2013

EDMONTON - When Boyd Gordon signed with the Edmonton Oilers, he did so expecting to start the season as the third-line centre.

But when the curtain lifts on the 2013-2014 campaign Tuesday at Rexall Place, in a game against the Winnipeg Jets, Gordon will be planted between Nail Yakupov and newcomer Jesse Joensuu as the Oilers attempt to forge ahead without centres Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Sam Gagner.

Gordon is the only centre in the Oilers’ opening day lineup who routinely took draws in the NHL last season.

Taylor Hall will make his debut between Ryan Smyth and Ales Hemsky. Mark Arcobello, who has played just one NHL game in his career, will centre Jordan Eberle and David Perron while Will Acton, who hadn’t even played an NHL pre-season game until this month, will start between Mike Brown and Ben Eager.

“It’s a good opportunity for me,” said Gordon, who had spent the previous two seasons with the Phoenix Coyotes.

“I’m playing with some good players, and when you get that chance, you want to make the most of it. I’d had a little bit of spot duty (in a more offensive role) in Phoenix, but it’s one of those things — with two of your better players out, everyone has to jump in and fill that void.”

Hall said he felt quite comfortable in his new role through the pre-season but knows there will be new challenges now that there are points on the line.

Nugent-Hopkins, who is almost six months out from off-season shoulder surgery, is practicing with the team but isn’t likely to return until mid-to late October at the earliest, the first of November at the latest. Gagner underwent surgery last week to have his broken jaw repaired and isn’t expected back for two months.

“Even though we’re missing two important guys, I like our group heading in,” said Hall. “If we can get a good start, it will put us in a good spot for the year, then once we get those guys back, who knows what we can do?”

“Overall, I was pretty happy with my pre-season. I felt good. I felt I had chances and over the course of 82 games, those chances are going to turn into goals. The biggest thing for me, is that now that we’re in the big leagues, I’m going to be playing against first lines down low in my end.

Head coach Dallas Eakins, who is going to start the season-opening proceedings by spreading the starts as thin as he can. This time I avoided the loading up two, said he’s convinced Gordon can contribute some points as well as wins in the faceoff circle.

In 2006-07, Gordon, then with the Washington Capitals, contributed seven goals and 29 assists in 71 games. His next best season came with the Coyotes in 2011-2012 (eight goals, 15 assists).

“I don’t want to get away from what I do, but I want to make plays, and if I’m getting the minutes, I want to put up some points,” Gordon said. “We’ll see how it goes.

“Obviously, Yak is very skilled and we want to get him the puck. We want him to shoot. Me and Jess are more north-south guys, puck retrievers, guys who get on the forecheck. Hopefully, those two things can complement each other.”

“For me coming into tomorrow, it’s comforting to play with a guy (like Gordon) who knows how to handle different situations in a hockey game,” said Joensuu. “He’s definitely leading our line and we’re trying to help him by doing as much as we can.”
I still think, and I know Devan feels the same way, that there's another level
The verdict is out on Devan. I've always believed that when you are
He had a .920 save percentage facing the fifth-highest number of shots in the
Dubnyk had a 2-1 record with .938 save percentage with a 1.73 goals against
He had a .920 save percentage facing the fifth-highest number of shots in the
Dubnyk, despite answering Canada’s call to play goal in world
It’s a big change,” he said of the attack-the-snake swarm concept, the
I’m not taking that 20-1 Bodog Stanley Cup bet. I don’t see a happy ending
Dubnyk was drafted by the Oilers a decade ago, in 2004, and said he made it
Dubnyk said he doesn’t care if it’s 6-5. His focus will be ‘Just Win, Baby’
Dubnyk says we need not worry about him, either.
But with so many unproven parts, are they good enough to satisfy that
And what of Taylor Hall? Does moving him to centre mean losing a big chunk
And, riddle me this, Edmonton: what can honestly be expected from a team
They're top two centres are injured. And they're using up roster spots for
Dubnyk's numbers in the past have been up in the top part of the league. I
I just like goalies who stop the puck.
I hate analyzing goalies, so I don't do it,” said Eakins.
"Dubnyk's numbers in the past have been up in the top part of the league. I
He had a .920 save percentage facing the fifth-highest number of shots in the
His win-loss record in the last three years is one helluva lot better than that of
Yet his general manager in a post-season session with season ticket holders
"The readiness for doing things differently is there, it's just a matter of putting
As of July 17, 2013
EDMONTON - If the Edmonton Oilers had a sense of humour — and given
"You can see the team buying in to how Dallas wants us to play.”
"And you know what, if we had won the last game, we would have been in the
tuned to tide a new goalie on. I think he's a good goalie and I think he could
Dubnyk’s numbers in the past have been up in the top part of the league. I
The answers are coming soon enough, some as early as Tuesday night,
“Win the games,” he said.
“I don't think that's the way to approach it.”
I'm not taking that 20-1 Bodog Stanley Cup bet. I don't see a happy ending
Dubnyk's numbers in the past have been up in the top part of the league. I
He had a .920 save percentage facing the fifth-highest number of shots in the
“I’ve waited a long time for this day,” he said. “This is a dream I’ve had my whole life. Now I can touch my dream a little bit. And every day I need to work hard and show the coach he made a good choice.”

Hall, too.

“It’s a little bit different and a lot harder, but I don’t really read too much into (pre-season points),” he said. “We had a lot of chances, I find myself getting the puck in different areas than I’m used to, but it’s still just a matter of getting those chances and making sure I’m not on for chances against.”

At least the new questions are more refreshing than the old ones, the ones about why this organization never makes the playoffs.

It’s time for those to stop. Once and for all.

“It really is,” said Hall. “You can’t really say it any other way. It’s time. I’m sick of losing. We want to be in the playoffs. It’s what we deserve.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 10:01.2013

718771 Edmonton Oilers

Tough guy Luke Gazdic turns pre-season tilt into audition for the Edmonton Oilers

By Derek Van Diest  Edmonton Sun
First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 04:47 PM MDT | Updated: Monday, September 30, 2013 05:21 PM MDT

EDMONTON - Luke Gazdic made quite the impression in his pre-season game against the Edmonton Oilers.

The Oilers claimed the six-foot-three, 240-pound winger off waivers, two days after going up against him and the Dallas Stars in Oklahoma City.

In an ironic twist, Gazdic will fill the void left by Steve MacIntyre, who injured his knee trying to make a hit on him Friday night.

MacIntyre will be out indefinitely, while Gazdic skated with the Oilers for the first time on Monday.

“He came over to try and make a hit, I’m not really sure what happened,” Gazdic said. “I was chirping with him a little bit in that game. I wanted to do something to get noticed and if that was trying to stir it up with one of the tougher guys in the league, that’s what you have to do.”

A Toronto product, Gazdic, 24, has yet to play in an NHL regular-season game. He may get into the lineup Tuesday when the Oilers open their 2013-2014 campaign at home against the Winnipeg Jets (7:30 p.m.) at Rexall Place. However, it’s more likely the Oilers will allow Gazdic to familiarize himself with the team first before inserting him into the lineup.

A sixth-round pick — 172nd overall — of the Stars in 2007, Gazdic felt he was having a strong camp with the Stars and was disappointed to be one of the team’s final cuts.

“I thought I played well,” he said. “I thought I came into camp in shape. I thought I was making plays, I got into a couple of exhibition games and I thought I did a lot of things well. I thought I had a chance to stick there. Things didn’t work out there, and I’m happy to be here.”

Gazdic scored a goal in the Stars’ 4-0 pre-season win over the Oilers. He spent last season with the Stars AHL affiliate in Austin, Texas, scoring four goals and adding seven assists in 59 games. The previous year, he scored 11 goals and added 12 assists in 76 games.

“I think I bring a lot more than just that goon mentality,” Gazdic said. “I think that job is done. I’ve learned that I have to be sound defensively, I have to be reliable making plays. It starts in the defensive zone and if I can chip in offensively once in a while, then that’s OK.

“But I know that, first and foremost, the physical side of my game is what got me this far and that’s my primary job on the ice.”

Gazdic played his junior hockey in the OHL with the Erie Otters, scoring 20 goals in his final year as a 19-year-old.

At the end of that year, he joined the Idaho Steelheads of the ECHL, playing for now Edmonton Oil Kings head coach Derek Laxdal.

“I turned pro with Laxdal when I was 19,” Gazdic said. “I played a couple of games there for him in the playoffs. He’s pretty stem, but he’s fair with his players. He was always good to me. Then I got sent down my first year from the American League to the ECHL and he was good to me then, too. He knows his stuff and he’s good with his players.”

Gazdic has spent the better part of the last four season in the AHL with the Texas Stars.

Needing size in the bottom half of their lineup, the Oilers felt Gazdic would be a good addition to the club, particularly when MacIntyre went down in his first pre-season game with the Oilers. MacIntyre had been claimed off waivers from the Pittsburgh Penguins a week ago.

“I don’t know a whole lot about (Gazdic), it’s more taking information from the scouts and Todd Nelson and his staff (in Oklahoma City),” said Oilers head coach Dallas Eakins. “But we’ll certainly give the guy a chance.”

On Monday, Gazdic was still trying to wrap his head around all that occurred in the past couple of days.

But he’s happy to be getting a second opportunity.

“It was a whirlwind,” he said. “I went from the lowest of the lows of being waived and sent to the minors for another year, and within 12 hours I’d been given the opportunity to play in the NHL again. It happened so fast. I got on the flight and got here as quickly as I could. I don’t think it’s even sunk in yet.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 10:01.2013

718772 Florida Panthers

Fresh start excites rising Panthers defensemen

BY GEORGE RICHARDS
Posted on Tue, Oct. 01, 2013

Dmitry Kulikov and Erik Gudbranson have a lot in common this year. Not only are they young defensemen for the Panthers, but they also find themselves on the ice together quite a bit as a regular pairing or on the power play.

And both players wouldn’t mind forgetting last season ever happened.

As the Panthers prepare for Thursday’s season opener in Dallas, a lot of their potential success seems to depend on how well Kulikov and Gudbranson play.

Last year both seemed to rush themselves into the lineup, just one of a few things that are different this season. Both players have been able to take part in the entire offseason conditioning program and full training camp because they were healthy.

“It’s been great. My shoulder is 100 percent. I’ve been able to give some hits and take some hits,” said Kulikov, who had offseason shoulder surgery.

“Everything seems to be working properly. There hasn’t been any discomfort.”

Kulikov had an OK season last year, one in which he jumped into the lineup after spending the lockout playing in Russia. Kulikov missed Florida’s brief training camp as he didn’t have a contract, and once that was settled, he didn’t play in the opener against Carolina after a long flight back from Russia.

This year, Kulikov has spent all but two weeks in South Florida as he rehabilitated his shoulder before joining his teammates for workouts.

“I have a big responsibility this season,” said Kulikov, who begins his fifth full NHL season and doesn’t turn 23 until Oct. 29.

“I spent the entire summer here, and I feel like I’m in the best shape I’ve been in. Having a normal season with normal preparation is something that’s in the back of my mind. Last season, we didn’t know if we would have a season. It was a mess. This season is definitely a different story.”

Gudbranson was back at practice Monday after leaving Saturday’s pre-season game from being boarded in a game against Tampa Bay.

Things never seemed to fall in place for Gudbranson last season as he had a rough sophomore slump after showing so much promise — especially during his showing in the playoffs against the Devils.
Defenseman Ryan Whitney officially signed a one-year deal worth $900,000 agreeing to terms with Ryan Whitney on a one-year contract Monday.

The Florida Panthers bolstered their defense ahead of the regular season, Gudbranson said. "Everyone else went through the lockout, so there’s no excuse. But it’s definitely nice to have the full camp, the full preparation for the season, get into the game physically. This has been a regular progress, and I’ve been excited about it."

Whitney signs

DefENSEMANRyan Whitney officially signed a one-year deal worth $900,000 with the Panthers on Monday and is expected to join the team Tuesday.

Panthers add depth at defense with Whitney signing

By Sports Network

The Florida Panthers bolstered their defense ahead of the regular season, agreeing to terms with Ryan Whitney on a one-year contract Monday.

Whitney was released from his tryout with the St. Louis Blues last week.

The 30-year-old Boston native has totaled 50 goals and 209 assists in 474 career games with Pittsburgh, Anaheim and Edmonton. He spent the past three-plus seasons with the Oilers and posted 13 points, including four goals, in 34 games during the shortened 2013 campaign.

Whitney was selected fifth overall by the Penguins in the 2002 NHL Entry Draft.

The Panthers open their season on Thursday in Dallas.

Injury updates

The Panthers will start with Bjugstad (concussion), goalie Scott Clemmensen (knee), forward Sean Bergenheim (groin), forward Steve Pinizzotto (hip) and defenseman Ed Jovanovski (hip) on injured reserve.

Bergenheim and Clemmensen are the closest to returning, as the veteran goalie joined his teammates for practice for the first time since undergoing knee surgery before training camp.

"My job doesn't change, go our there, do the best you can, make sure your game is in order,'' Clemmensen said of battling for a backup role with Jacob Markstrom behind Thomas. "There are certain decisions that will concern me, but they're not mine to make.''

Jovanovski doesn't have a timetable for his return.

Kings' Dustin Brown acknowledges 'rust' but says his knee is 'solid'

By Lance Pugmire

5:09 PM PDT, September 30, 2013

Kings captain Dustin Brown said Monday he was still working to "chip some of the rust off" after playing his first exhibition game Saturday and working hard through a morning practice.

"My conditioning, the physical part is OK," said Brown, who sustained an injured hamstring at the start of training camp. "It was the little puck plays, a couple plays where I mishandled it or didn’t make a touch pass I can make nine times out of 10. … I've missed training camp and it shows.

"That's why I wanted to play at least one game, and with three good days to push myself in practice, I'll have skated for seven, eight good days before the first game. My knee's solid, my hamstring feels fine."

Brown was slowed at the end of last season by a knee injury that now requires a brace — something the player who despises even tape on his body is working to find comfort with.

"We're working to get a brace that's more customized," Brown said. "I've got to get used to it. With an injury like this, I've got to protect myself."

Gudbranson injured his shoulder wakeboarding in Canada just before the lockout started and spent most of the lockout time rehabilitating. After a brief stint in the minors, Gudbranson joined the team in February and never got into rhythm.

This preseason, Gudbranson has been one of Florida’s better defensemen and scored three goals.

"Last season was tough," Gudbranson said. "Everyone else went through the lockout, so there’s no excuse. But it’s definitely nice to have the full camp, the full preparation for the season, get into the game physically. This has been a regular progress, and I’ve been excited about it."

Veteran acquisitions, all signed to one-year deals, boosted the average age to 26.4. They will allow highly touted prospects such as Vincent Trocheck, Alexander Petrovic, Nick Bjugstad and defenseman Colby Robak — who cleared waivers Monday — to gain experience in the AHL.

Ten of the 23 players weren't with the organization last year, including Joey Crabb, who also cleared waivers Monday, but will stick around as an extra forward. Only one true rookie, 18-year-old center Aleksander Barkov, will be making his NHL debut Thursday against the Stars.

"He's a young guy who needs more consistency to his game," Dineen said of the No. 2 pick of the draft. "There's no doubt he's talented. The pace and level of the game is something he's continuing to adjust to. He'll be fine."

Barch, who was reacquired from the Devils on Sunday to add his physical prowess, practiced with many of his former teammates from his last stint here in 2011-12.

"It'll be nice to come in here and keep an eye on those guys [like Barkov and Jonathan Huberdeau]," Barch said. "That's a job I enjoy and at the same time also contribute on the ice."

The Panthers finalize season-opening roster

Veteran defenseman Ryan Whitney and enforcer Krys Barch are latest newcomers to join the evolving roster

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel

5:01 p.m. EDT, September 30, 2013

CORAL SPRINGS —

When the latest veteran pickup, defenseman Ryan Whitney, arrived in South Florida on Monday to take his physical and sign his one-year contract, the Panthers opening-night 23-man roster for the 2013-14 season was completed.

"We're starting to see a look at the Panthers this year," coach Kevin Dineen said after practice at Saveology.com Iceplex. "I feel like we got good people and at the end of it our new ownership has certainly made a statement that they're willing to fill in some holes."

After a flurry of personnel moves over the past week as new owner Vincent Viola opened his wallet, the Panthers got appreciably older. Their supposed rebuilding phase has morphed into a retooling situation.

"Nobody wants to have a rebuilding season; everyone wants to win the Stanley Cup this year," said defenseman Erik Gudbranson, 21, who along with center Marcel Goc, practiced after sitting out the third period of Saturday’s preseason finale with upper-body issues.

In the span of four days, the Panthers signed or traded for goalie Tim Thomas, 39, forwards Brad Boyes, 31, and Krys Barch, 33, as well as a pair of 30-year-old defensemen in Whitney and Tom Gilbert, who played with each other in Edmonton for parts of three seasons.

"He's a great puck mover," Gilbert said of Whitney, who has 209 points in eight seasons. "He waits guys out and is able to move the puck out of the zone. He's always looking for plays offensively, looking for gaps, chances to join the rush."

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"That's why I wanted to play at least one game, and with three good days to push myself in practice, I'll have skated for seven, eight good days before the first game. My knee's solid, my hamstring feels fine."

Brown was slowed at the end of last season by a knee injury that now requires a brace — something the player who despises even tape on his body is working to find comfort with.

"We're working to get a brace that's more customized," Brown said. "I've got to get used to it. With an injury like this, I've got to protect myself."
Although Brown expects to play in the Kings' opener Thursday at Minnesota — perhaps on a third line with Jarret Stoll and Trevor Lewis — Kings Coach Darryl Sutter isn't making promises.

"If we played tomorrow, he'd be a very rusty player," Sutter said. "It's not who you are or what you did, it's where you are now. This is not Hollywood."

Kings set roster

The Kings got defenseman Jeff Schultz back after putting him on waivers a day earlier. He was then sent to minor league Manchester (N.H.) as the Kings set their regular-season roster at 23 players.

The Kings moved young right wing Tyler Toffoli, center Linden Vey and left wing Tanner Pearson to Manchester a day earlier. Sutter said each had pushed veterans to play better in camp and can expect to be back with the Kings this season.

"These kids are all awesome players," Sutter said. "Just 'cause the veteran players are playing ... those are the rules, the process. It wasn't like anyone here beat anyone out. They're all coming off good years in the American league and they have things they have to get more work in."

Sutter said Ben Scrivens beat out veteran Mathieu Garon for the backup goalie spot because he "got better as camp went on."

Welcome back

Kings defenseman Willie Mitchell, who endured two knee surgeries last season, expects to play in a regular-season game Thursday for the first time in 15 months. But he couldn't get to the finish line without some more discomfort from a puck that hit him in the ankle in the third period Saturday.

"There's a lot of things you miss about the game of hockey," Mitchell concluded, "but this isn't one of them."

Ducks set roster

Hampus Lindholm, the 19-year-old first-round pick of the Ducks in 2012, made the team's final roster as it prepares for Wednesday's regular-season opener at Colorado.

Lindholm impressed Ducks coaches with his skill and effort, and he scored three exhibition-season goals.

Right wing Devante Smith-Pelly and center Peter Holland also made the team, though forwards Emerson Etem and Jakob Silfverberg and defenseman Luca Sbisa are expected to return from injuries in October. Defenseman Sheldon Souray is expected out for the first two months.

The Ducks moved five players to the minor leagues, including right wing Brad Staubitz, who played 15 games with the team last season, and 6-foot-6 defenseman Nolan Yonkman, who came to the Ducks after seven games with Florida last season.

The team also put left wing and center Richard Rakell on the American Hockey League's Norfolk (Va.) roster, and put goalie Igor Bobkov at Utah.

LA Times: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718776 Los Angeles Kings

King, Clifford pleased with Breaking Bad finale (contains spoilers)

With the season about to begin, Jeff Schultz clearing waivers and Dwight King skating alongside Anze Kopitar and Justin Williams, it was natural that heavy attention at Toyota Sports Center this morning was placed on Sunday Night's Breaking Bad series finale.

Many Monday morning conversations through training camp included a quick stop at Kyle Clifford's stall to discuss the previous night's developments in a television series that used extreme acts of violence to illuminate the darkest sides of the human character while developing the slow evolution of a milquetoast high school chemistry teacher into a feared and powerful kingpin of organized crime.

Sunday's final episode — a well-tailored conclusion and a significant moment in television history — sat well with Clifford.

"I'm glad they closed it all up, and they didn't leave any hangers," the left wing said.

As it turns out — not that there's any surprise — there are several huge Breaking Bad fans within the team's locker room. One of them is Dwight King, who caught on late during the first season but beginning with the second season would plant himself in front of a television on Sunday nights as part of his weekly routine.

He, too, was pleased with the final outcome.

"Obviously Walt's character went through quite a development over the seasons, and it's kind of good that he takes onus of who he became. I appreciated that. It's funny to see that in the end, he actually got what his first goal was — to leave money for his family. It was a kind of a fitting ending," King said.

King referenced Walter White's final admission— one in which he took responsibility for his misdeeds not because of the need to augment his family's financial future, but because of the pleasure it gave him.

"I liked it. I was good at it. And I was really ... I was alive," White says as part of an epiphany in his final conversation with his wife, Skyler.

That White also was able to set plans in motion for his family to be compensated also sat well with Clifford.

"I think Walt kind of knew he screwed his life up. He set out what he had to do, and he got money to his family, so it was good. It was really good."

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718777 Los Angeles Kings

Hybrid icing approved by NHLPA

The NHLPA has approved hybrid icing after a trial run during the 2013 preseason. Though the rule appeared to lack consensus when player approval was gauged — and Darryl Sutter and Lou Lamoriello pulled no punches in sharing their disapproval — the Players Association voiced its support through a vote.

Here's NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly articulating the rule change on NHL Live:

And here's the official alteration to rule 81.1, Icing:

For the purpose of this rule, the center red line will divide the ice into halves. Should any player of a team, equal or superior in numerical strength (power-play) to the opposing team, shoot, bat or deflect the puck from his own half of the ice beyond the goal line of the opposing team, play shall be stopped. For the purpose of deflected pucks, this only applies when the puck was originally propelled down the ice by the offending team.

For the purpose of this rule, the point of last contact with the puck by the team in possession shall be used to determine whether icing has occurred or not. As such, the team in possession must “gain the line” in order for the icing to be nullified. “Gaining the line” shall mean that the puck, while on the player's stick (not the player's skate) must make contact with the center red line in order to nullify a potential icing.

For the purpose of interpretation of the rule, there are two judgments required for “icing the puck”. The Linesmen must first determine that the puck will cross the goal line. Once the Linesman determines that the puck will cross the goal line, icing is completed upon the determination as to which player (attacking or defending) who first touched the puck. This decision by the Linesman will be made the instant the first player reaches the end zone face-off dots with the player's skate being the determining factor. Should the puck be shot down the ice in such a manner that it travels around the boards and/or back towards the end zone face-off dots, the same procedure shall be in effect in that the Linesmen shall determine within a similar distance as to who will have touched the puck first.”

For clarification, the determining factor is which player would first touch the puck, not which player would first reach the end zone face-off dots.

If the race for the puck is too close to determine by the time the first Player reaches the end zone face-off dots, icing shall be called.

The puck striking or deflecting off an official does not automatically nullify a potential icing.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 10.01.2013

718778 Los Angeles Kings
A note on Suite Nights; deadline extended

Jon Rosen

The comments made on this blog as I attempted to promote a Suite Night were taken very seriously. Multiple sources were consulted from both inside and outside the Kings Digital Media team and Staples Center Ticketing to ultimately make a decision that stretched beyond the promotion of the upcoming event on October 19, and into the more abstract questions of whether Suite Nights were beneficial for this blog community and should continue.

The answer we came up with was a resounding “Yes.” I hope many of you who had previously expressed concerns about the means in which the October 19 Suite Night against Dallas will be handled will reconsider as we expect this to be a great and fun-filled evening.

Our findings after using multiple channels to determine the exact nature of Frank Robledo’s transactions in setting up Suite Nights came to the firm conclusion that he only served as a liaison and whose only benefit, from many hours of work, came in the form of free tickets for himself and his family. Frank’s relationship was very similar to what hundreds of fans do each year to coordinate group outings to games with friends and family. We call these individuals our “group leaders” and they play a significant role in the coordination of these events.

In addition, AEG, Staples Center, and those whose services are occasionally promoted on LA Kings Insider will never be used to compromise your personal information or put your money in unsavory hands.

That said, in an effort to avoid any further confusion, we have decided that following the event on October 19, all future Suite Nights will be handled internally by the Los Angeles Kings ticketing department.

I ask that each of you please understand that the sole purpose of these events is to bring the LA Kings Insider community together, in a large group, and share in the excitement and passion for the Los Angeles Kings and NHL hockey. You, as a consumer, have the right not to attend. If that choice is ultimately made because you feel your money had changed hands illegitimately, or that your financial and personal information had been compromised, you are misinformed. All ticket sales and all payments were run through AEG ticketing and Staples Center for all previous Insider events, including this one. In the future, they will all run directly through the Kings ticketing office.

I have heard how much fun Suite Nights have been, and I look forward to getting together with all of you on October 19. This will be a fantastic night.

Thank you for the ongoing conversation,

Jon Rosen

Note: The deadline to purchase tickets for the LA Kings Insider suite on October 19 has been extended to 5 p.m. on October 11.

To purchase please click on the link below and follow these steps:

1. Click this link
2. Click “Find Tickets”
3. Choose Special Offer Code – type kingsinsider (one word, all lowercase) – then click verify
4. Choose “Create an Account” – Add your email address and click “Sign Up Now”. You have to build an account as a first time purchaser before ordering tickets. If you already have an account from last year, use the same email and password. If you forgot your password, please reset it.

Note there will be a $1.25 processing fee per ticket purchased.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718779 Los Angeles Kings

Willie Mitchell “fine” after blocked shot

Willie Mitchell suffered a scare late in the third period of Saturday’s exhibition finale when he took a shot off his ankle and appeared to be in pain for the remainder of his shift before skating some of the pain away during a TV timeout. He finished the game.

At the time, I had a poor view of the incident. I was returning from a concourse restroom and was delayed near the press box by arena ushers in an area with an obscured view. I did not see the shot hit his ankle and instead thought I had seen a knee buckle — before returning to Twitter and the game’s live blog to offer my account.

Darryl Sutter did not offer a grave update of the injury after the game, saying that Mitchell “blocked a shot,” and continued to add that it was “no big deal. It was the only shot we blocked tonight. Defensemen are supposed to block shots.”

Mitchell walked from the team’s dressing room to the bench with a slight limp before taking the ice for practice this morning at the Toyota Sports Center. He was able to fully participate.

On how he felt following the team’s practice:

Fine. It was OK. It wasn’t as bad as it was at the time, and I didn’t get a lot a lot of swelling, so all good.

On whether he had any limitations at practice:

It hurts for a little bit, but then just like anyone else, you get used to it once you start skating on it and getting the blood moving. Nope, no limitations at all. It was all good.

On the blocked shot:

It’s just the ankle. All hockey players have taken ‘em there. I told the boys — I said, ‘Well, there’s a lot of things you miss about the game of hockey when you’re out 15 months, but getting one of those off the ankle, where you don’t have any padding, is not one of them, I’ll tell you that.’

On his excitement to start the season this week:

It’ll be good. Lots of work to do yet. We’ve got to work on a few things. A few teams get started before us, so I’m just looking forward to it and jumping right in. It’s a back-to-back, and a couple teams’ hope openers. They’re always fun. As we all know, we love our own home opener, so teams on the other side are geared up, and even being an opposing team, it’s fun to be a part of those, so we’re looking forward to it. It’s two great hockey markets, so it makes it a little bit more special, and like I said, just kind of continue building on what we’re doing here and getting ready for it.

On the impact of the preseason on his knee:

To be honest, I know everyone asks it, but I’m kind of tired of answering it. I guess it is a situation, but I’m just looking forward to business as usual right now for me. I’ve kind of passed all those hurdles. Played a back-to-back in Vegas, and everything was fine. Like I said, just continuing to work on my game, trying to continue to try and be a better teammate, and do the things I know I’m capable of and the things that are my strengths and continue working on those, and getting ready for [Thursday]. The preparation is going to start now for what we need to do [Thursday]. I’m just trying to get the mind in the right place and get ready to go.

On whether it was good to play in a back-to-back set before the season:

For myself, personally, yeah, it was excellent. I think I needed that challenge after everything I’ve kind of been through, and I think for the team as well. Darryl stressed that early on. I think we have – I think he said 14 back to backs – something crazy like that. So we’re going to have to be a good hockey team on those back-to-backs if we want to do what we want to do, which is win the division…so we get home ice for the second season. That’s all our focus, and it starts Wednesday.

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718780 Los Angeles Kings

September 30 practice quotes: Darryl Sutter

Posted by JonRosen on September 30, 2013
On getting down to 23 players in preparation of the season:

We don’t play ‘til Thursday, so the declaration of roster is not necessarily who’s out on the ice. I mean, we put a roster in, but we have injured guys too, so [if] we put guys on IR, then it opens some spots up again.

On whether there was an IR move today:

No. But we have guys – Dustin Brown has played one game, and whether he’s available on Thursday, we’ll see. So obviously that affects Jake Muzzin, who hasn’t played. So that obviously that impacts it.

On whether the players reassigned to Manchester did what he hoped they would:

Yep, absolutely. They’re all good young players. It wasn’t [just] the guys we sent yesterday. There’s six or seven of them that went, but as you go through camp and your games are spread out, you can only play 20 players, and there’s a point where you want your older guys playing more, quite honest, especially when you finish with back-to-backs. So that starts to eliminate the process or confirm the process as you go along. Those kids are all awesome players. Tanner Pearson, Linden Vey, Tyler Toffoli. It’s like telling veteran players her – just because they’re playing there, those are the rules. It wasn’t that long ago that those guys would still be here. It’s not like anybody here beat anybody out.

On the conversations with the young players that were reassigned:

I think those kids are all the very same. They’re all coming off a really good year in the American League, and they have things that they can work on. It’s not like they stood out or jumped out. They’re kids. That’s a fact. We’re a young team, but those guys are kids.

On Willie Mitchell’s status:

He passed his physical three weeks ago.

On how he plans on using Dustin Brown in his return from a hamstring injury:

We’ll see as the days go along. If we played tomorrow, he’d be a very rusty player. We’ll see as the next three days go along. It’s not about who you are or what you did, it’s about where you’re at now. [Reporter: He says he’s not dealing with any aches or pains. He’s just dealing with the natural hockey skills.] He pulled his hamstring the first day of training camp, so he’s not dealing with that now.

On what he’ll focus on over the next few days:

Our approach as a staff and as a group – trainers, players, coaches – was that our season started today, and yesterday was really when you go through the waiver process and the assignment process that is basically the beginning of the season. So your approach then is what you want to do for three days, and then you have to build your travel into it. What you want to accomplish in your three days is sort of a day-at-a-time. As long as the players know that the process you want to use in those three days, then tomorrow morning they set their dial again in terms of what we want to do. We’re glad that we had the…Sunday-to-Wednesday deal.

On whether players who were faced competition for their spots in the lineup did what they needed to do:

They have to understand their roles and accept their role. It’s very simple. That’s all it is, and that’s how it sorts out. You try and put guys into different situations in training camp and see how they respond. The thing about pre-seasons and training camps, is I’m playing against guys a lot of times that I don’t play against, meaning if I’m a premier player in training camp, basically you’re rolling four lines and using six D. Well the situations start to change as training camp goes along, and guys get exposed. So you talk about players like that – well, if you’re a fourth line player, and you’re playing against first line players and you can’t handle it, well it’s pretty clear for the coach where you’re going to play. Either you respond to it or you don’t. It’s what you talk about Dustin Brown. Well, Dustin Brown – he hasn’t played against first line guys since June of last year, so it’s pretty obvious where he’s going to be exposed on Thursday or Friday, because he hasn’t had the game situation for it.

On Jordan Nolan’s training camp, and his admission that he dropped weight:

He actually added some muscle. I think he was in the top four in terms of all the training. So now we see where he takes it.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 10.01.2013

Hybrid icing approved for the upcoming season

Blog Post by: Michael Russo

September 30, 2013 - 6:30 PM

The NHL has experimented all pre-season with hybrid icing after league GM’s recommended the rule change back in June. After a survey among NHL Players’ Association members (i.e. the players) this past weekend, hybrid icing has finally been approved in the NHL.

The NHL was the only league that had a full-on race for the puck. As Wild fans know, former Wild defenseman Kurtis Foster sustained a horrific injury in March 2008 in San Jose when he was hit from behind accidentally by now-Wild winger Torrey Mitchell as Foster went back to touch up an icing.

Foster broke his femur and it sent his career into flux. In a class move, former Wild GM Doug Risebrough re-signed Foster even though Risebrough knew Foster wouldn’t be close to ready by the next season. But it gave Foster motivation to rehab and he indeed worked his way back to play the final six games of the 2008-09 season.

Foster’s injury led to a slight rule change -- a two-minute minor if a player going back to beat out an icing hit his opponent with the sole purpose of not going after the puck.

But Foster, now playing in the KHL, had long campaigned for no-touch or hybrid icing. Particularly after Carolina’s Joni Pitkanen broke his ankle in several places last late season. If you remember, an angry Foster sent me a flurry of comments he asked me to tweet and write at the time.

Well, Pitkanen’s season is over for Carolina and his career is in jeopardy. I texted Foster a little bit ago, but it’s late out in wherever he is over the ocean.

When I hear back, I’ll add his thoughts.

Here is the press release:

NHL TO IMPLEMENT HYBRID ICING FOR 2013-14 SEASON

NEW YORK/TORONTO (September 30, 2013) -- The National Hockey League Players’ Association (NHCLA) and the National Hockey League (NHL) announced today that Hybrid Icing will be implemented for the commencement of the 2013-14 regular season. The Hybrid Icing rule had been tested during the 2013-14 pre-season.

“After testing hybrid icing during the pre-season games, the players participated in a survey and a majority of teams supported this rule change in an effort to make the game safer,” said Mathieu Schneider, NHCLA Special Assistant to the Executive Director. “We are hopeful that the implementation of the hybrid icing rule, which is a middle ground between the old rule and no-touch icing, will help minimize the incidence of Player injuries on icing plays.”

The Icing Rule now reads Rule 81.1 – Icing:

For the purpose of this rule, the center red line will divide the ice into halves. Should any player of a team, equal or superior in numerical strength (power-play) to the opposing team, shoot, bat or deflect the puck from his own half of the ice beyond the goal line of the opposing team, play shall be stopped. For the purpose of deflected pucks, this only applies when the puck was originally propelled down the ice by the offending team.

For the purpose of this rule, the point of last contact with the puck by the team in possession shall be used to determine whether icing has occurred or not. As such, the team in possession must “gain the line” in order for the icing to be nullified.

“Gaining the line” shall mean that the puck, while on the player’s stick (not the player’s skate) must make contact with the center red line in order to nullify a potential icing.

For the purpose of interpretation of the rule, there are two judgments required for “icing the puck”. The Linesman must first determine that the puck will cross the goal line. Once the Linesman determines that the puck will cross the goal line, icing is completed upon the determination as to which player (attacking or defending) would first touch the puck. This decision by the Linesman will be made the instant the first player reaches the end zone.
face-off dots with the player's skate being the determining factor. Should the puck be shot down the ice in such a manner that it travels around the boards and/or back towards the end zone face-off dots, the same procedure shall be in effect in that the Linesman shall determine within a similar distance as to who will have touched the puck first.

For clarification, the determining factor is which player would first touch the puck, not which player would first reach the end zone face-off dots.

If the race for the puck is too close to determine by the time the first Player reaches the end zone face-off dots, icing shall be called.

The puck striking or deflecting off an official does not automatically nullify a potential icing.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.01.2013
718782 Minnesota Wild

Russo's Western Conference predictions

By Michael Russo
September 30, 2013 - 9:37 PM

MICHAEL RUSSO’S WESTERN CONFERENCE PREDICTIONS

1. CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS
2013: 36-7-5, 1st in NHL (77 points)
• No Stanley Cup hangover for Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, the NHL’s deepest blue line and the league’s most disrespected stingy goalie, Corey Crawford.

2. LOS ANGELES KINGS
2013: 27-16-5, 5th in West (59 points)
• 2012 Cup champs still are stacked with experience up front … and Jonathan Quick in net. Enough said.

3. ST. LOUIS BLUES
2013: 29-17-2, 4th in West (60 points)
• Blues are the sum of their parts. No explosive point-getters, but tons of balance and size and a defensive structure.

4. SAN JOSE SHARKS
2013: 25-16-7, 6th in West (57 points)
• Made the playoffs in 14 of the past 15 years, and Logan Couture and Joe Pavelski are poised to lead a team that went 12-5-1 down the stretch and nearly upset the Kings.

5. ANAHEIM DUCKS
2013: 30-12-6, 2nd in West (66 points)
• Maybe the NHL’s most shocking team last season, the Ducks will be relying on young Jakob Silfverberg and Emerson Etem to aid top-liners Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf.

6. MINNESOTA WILD
2013: 26-19-3, 8th in West (55 points)
• Zach Parise and Mikko Koivu will get support. Look for a breakout season from Charlie Coyle and impacts from Jason Pominville and young Nino Niederreiter.

7. VANCOUVER CANUCKS
2013: 26-15-7, 3rd in West (59 points)
• Goalie controversy theoretically has disappeared with Roberto Luongo the last man standing, but it’ll be fun watching John Tortorella make the Sedin twins block shots.

8. DALLAS STARS
2013: 22-22-4, 11th in West (48 points)
• Tyler Seguin has a lot to prove after being banished from Boston under much scrutiny, and look for big, talented Alex Chiasson to be given an important role.

9. EDMONTON OILERS
2013: 19-22-7, 12th in West (45 points)
• Lots of potential offense with Jordan Eberle, Justin Schultz, Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and newbie David Perron, but this is a tiny team.

10. COLORADO AVALANCHE
2013: 16-25-7, 15th in West (39 points)
• Matt Duchene, Gabriel Landeskog, Ryan O’Reilly, No. 1 overall pick Nathan MacKinnon and the Avs’ other cast of forwards should pile up goals, but the blue line is lousy.

11. NASHVILLE PREDATORS
2013: 16-23-9, 14th in West (41 points)
• Can a healthy Pekka Rinne return to form behind a new cast including Matt Cullen, Viktor Stalberg, Matt Hendricks and future stud defenseman Seth Jones?

12. WINNIPEG JETS
2013: 24-21-3, 9th in East (51 points)
• The talent on the ice beyond just Evander Kane is starting to become clearer, but it could be a tough transition to the Western Conference.

13. PHOENIX COYOTES
2013: 21-18-9, 10th in West (51 points)
• The team finally is owned by a person — not, uh, a league — but even with Mike Ribeiro and a star-in-the-making blue-liner in Oliver Ekman-Larsson, it’s hard to see much to fear.

14. CALGARY FLAMES
2013: 19-25-4, 13th in West (42 points)
• Flames are in complete rebuilding mode, which isn’t a bad thing for what was a blah team that lacked prospects. They’re coming off a great draft, but that won’t help this season.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.01.2013
718783 Minnesota Wild

Russo's Eastern Conference predictions

By Michael Russo
September 30, 2013 - 9:35 PM

MICHAEL RUSSO’S EASTERN CONFERENCE PREDICTIONS

1. PITTSBURGH PENGUINS
2013: 36-12-0, 1st in East (72 points)
• Goalie Marc-Andre Fleury broke down yet again in the postseason, but this is the regular season and Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and James Neal will light it up.

2. BOSTON BRUINS
2013: 28-14-5, 4th in East (62 points)
• Tremendous on the back end, starting with goalie Tuukka Rask, and now the B’s add Loui Eriksson to a deep group of forwards.

3. DETROIT RED WINGS
2013: 24-16-8, 7th in West (56 points)
• Most felt the Red Wings would collapse last season without Nicklas Lidstrom. Didn’t happen, and now they move to East, where they should thrive.

4. OTTAWA SENATORS
2013: 25-17-6, 7th in East (56 points)
• Forward Jason Spezza and defenseman Erik Karlsson are healthy, and the addition of goal scorer Bobby Ryan should more than make up for the loss of Jonathan Bernier.

5. NEW YORK RANGERS
2013: 26-18-4, 6th in East (56 points)
• Ilya Bryzgalov and his idiosyncrasies were purged in the offseason, but the jury’s out as to whether Ray Emery and Steve Mason will solve Philly’s eternal goaltending issues.

7. NEW YORK ISLANDERS
2013: 24-17-7, 8th in East (55 points)
• The pending free agency and trade discussion of Thomas Vanek and Ryan Miller will be a distraction all season.

8. WASHINGTON CAPITALS
2013: 27-18-3, 3rd in East (57 points)
• There are 14 teams in the West, 16 in the East. Eight from each conference will make the postseason.

9. MONTREAL CANADIENS
2013: 29-14-5, 2nd in East (63 points)
• They better hope goalie Cam Ward is completely healthy after a knee injury, because defensively, this team has big issues.

10. PHILADELPHIA FLYERS
2013: 23-22-3, 10th in East (49 points)
• Most felt the Red Wings would collapse last season without Nicklas Lidstrom. Didn’t happen, and now they move to East, where they should thrive.

11. COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS
2013: 24-17-7, 9th in West (55 points)
• There are 14 teams in the West, 16 in the East. Eight from each conference will make the postseason.

12. TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING
2013: 18-26-4, 14th in East (40 points)
• They have dug goalie Tim Thomas out of his sabbatical and are skilled with Jonathan Huberdeau, Nick Bjugstad and Shawn Matthias, but they’re still too young.

13. FLORIDA PANTHERS
2013: 15-27-6, 15th in East (36 points)
• They’ve dug goalie Tim Thomas out of his sabbatical and are skilled with Jonathan Huberdeau, Nick Bjugstad and Shawn Matthias, but they’re still too young.

14. NEW JERSEY DEVILS
2013: 19-19-10, 11th in East (48 points)
• Ilya Kovalchuk up and retired, and this was a glacially slow team to begin with. This could be a tough go for the Devils.

15. CAROLINA HURRICANES
2013: 19-25-4, 13th in East (42 points)
• They have dug goalie Tim Thomas out of his sabbatical and are skilled with Jonathan Huberdeau, Nick Bjugstad and Shawn Matthias, but they’re still too young.

16. BUFFALO SABRES
2013: 21-21-6, 12th in East (48 points)
• There are 14 teams in the West, 16 in the East. Eight from each conference will make the postseason.
Wild notes: Koivu loosens up

Article by: Michael Russo
Star Tribune
September 30, 2013 - 10:18 PM

DULUTH – The Wild captain is relaxed, happy and smiling. It’s been that way throughout training camp, quite the contrast for the normally serious, steely-eyed Mikko Koivu.

“You almost think, ‘Should I be more tense?’” Koivu joked last week.

But Koivu, drafted sixth overall by the Wild 12 years ago and now the longest-tenured Wild player, looks around the locker room and is optimistic going into the season.

He’s on a line that could be dubbed “Tres Capitanes,” as former New Jersey Devils captain Zach Parise flanks Koivu’s left and former Buffalo Sabres captain Jason Pominville flanks his right. And Koivu sees a solid balance between youth and veterans.

“Culture wise, you see the guys, their work ethic on and off the ice, and how everybody takes care of themselves, that’s a big change for us,” Koivu said Sunday, an unconcealed denunciation of a few former teammates. “I feel we’re going in the right direction right now when you look at the young kids and veteran guys.”

It was a long summer for Koivu. It took awhile to get over the Wild’s first-round playoff loss to the Chicago Blackhawks, a series in which Koivu received much criticism for going without a point.

“You’re playing well during the year, and the downside at the end, of course it bothers you,” Koivu said. “If that’s the middle of the season, no one even remembers that. It happens at that point, you want to learn from that. Every day counts, and I learned that big-time last year.”

Koivu may be 30 now, he may be 40 points from passing Marian Gaborik for the franchise’s all-time leading scorer, but he’s still learning every day. He badly wants to lead the Wild to something special, and coach Mike Yeo believes the Parise-Koivu-Pominville line has that capability.

“Those are the guys, when the puck’s dropped and they go over the boards, all eyes go on them and that’s what you want,” Yeo said. “We have a great deal of leaders now. But when they step on the ice, they’re leading by example.

“We’re real fortunate to have that kind of character.”

Koivu and the rest of the line wasn’t happy with their game in Friday’s preseason finale in St. Louis. Koivu and Pominville were on the ice for all four Blues goals, Parise for three — not something you’d expect from three strong two-way forwards.

“We have the makings of being a good line, but it was a reminder that it starts defensively,” Pominville said. “We all work hard. The offense will come when we have the puck and take care of it.”

Koivu wasn’t with the Wild practicing or golfing in Duluth on Monday. He’ll join for Tuesday’s practice, spending an extra day at home with his fiancée, Helena, and newborn daughter, Sofie.

Hybrid icing approved

The NHL will implement hybrid icing after the players’ union gave the OK on Monday. Officials can call icing if a defender reaches the dot at the nearest faceoff circle before an attacker.

The rule is meant to prevent dangerous collisions behind the net on touch-up icing.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.01.2013
718786 Minnesota Wild

DULUTH – Blake Wheeler remembers Xcel Energy Center’s ice shaking under his skates, and this wasn’t for some playoff game.

It was Feb. 16, 2012 — the only time the Winnipeg Jets have visited the Wild’s home turf during the regular season since relocating from Atlanta.

“Our fans seemed to come in busloads,” said Wheeler, the former Breck School star and Gophers forward who now plays for Winnipeg. “We must have had 5,000, 10,000 fans it felt like in the crowd. It was so loud. It feels like this rivalry is budding, and with both teams in such close proximity, we’re going to see a lot of fans making that trek back and forth.”

Much to the delight of the Wild, which had to constantly cross time zones and borders its first 12 seasons in the Northwest Division, and the Jets, who were forced to compete in the Eastern Conference’s Southeast Division for two seasons, the NHL has realigned.

Of course, Wild fans might be subjected to more nonstop, raucous “Go Jets Go!” chants in their own barn because of it. Jets fans even came to the X in droves during last month’s exhibition game.

“Canadian fans are crazy and people can’t get tickets up in Winnipeg, so they’re going to drive down to Minny to watch games,” Jets defenseman Dustin Byfuglien said.

The Wild moves into the Central Division and faces Chicago, Colorado, Dallas, Nashville, St. Louis and Winnipeg four or five times a season.

At least through the 2015-16 season, the NHL has gone from six divisions to four, with 14 teams in the Western Conference and 16 in the Eastern Conference.

Five teams are most excited by the move — the Wild, Jets and Dallas Stars, who used to play in the Pacific Division with Phoenix and the three California
teams, and the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets, who move to the more geographically-logical Eastern Conference.

The Pacific Division now consists of Anaheim, Calgary, Edmonton, Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Jose and Vancouver. The Metropolitan (already dubbed Metro) Division houses Carolina, Columbus, New Jersey, the Islanders, the Rangers, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Washington, while the new Atlantic Division includes Boston, Buffalo, Detroit, Florida, Montreal, Ottawa, Tampa Bay and Toronto.

The top three teams in each division make the playoffs along with two “wild cards” per conference. The first two rounds of the playoffs will be played inside one’s division.

“I think it’ll take us awhile to figure it all out, but it brings the NHL back to where we used to be in the 1980s when those division rivalries created a lot of animosity between teams,” Wild General Manager Chuck Fletcher said. “How it impacts every team is different because the schedule is completely imbalanced as well as how you make the playoffs, but for us, it’s unbelievable because of the travel.”

Big draws

Wild fans should love it. First, every NHL team will come to St. Paul at least once. Second, there will be a lot fewer road games starting after 7:30 p.m. Central Time.

Fourteen of the Wild’s 41 road games this season start after 7:30 p.m. local time. To put that in perspective, 14 of the Wild’s 24 road games during last season’s condensed schedule due to the lockout began after 7:30 p.m.

From a player perspective, the wear and tear should be less. There’s less traveling west, less crossing Canadian customs into Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton, less arriving back in Minnesota from road trips at 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning.

The Wild plays 68 games in the Eastern or Central time zones this season and don’t play west of the Central time zone until Nov. 30 in Denver. In 2011-12, the Wild didn’t even play a road game in its own time zone until Dec. 13 at Winnipeg.

“Realignment was a no-brainer for us,” Wild owner Craig Leipold said. “It’s Dec. 13 at Winnipeg.

“Good day from beautiful Duluth and the terrific AMSOIL Arena, where there's quite a few banners hanging from the rafters -- Tommy Kurvers, some guy named Brett Hull, a national championship banner from 2011.

There's also a picture of this guy -- the great UMD goalie of all-time and longtime Wild goalie coach, Bob Mason.

Just an fyi: I will be hosting a live online chat on www.startribune.com/wild on Thursday at 2 p.m.

Today was Justin Fontaine Day at AMSOIL. The former Bulldogs national champ returned here as a bona fide NHLer and the local press was waiting with open arms.

Being a 25-year-old rookie and newbie inside the Wild dressing room, you can tell Fontaine is just a tad uncomfortable with all the attention he’s getting.

"It's always good coming back to your college town," Fontaine said sheepishly.

His teammates got a kick out of the building manager blaring the arena’s horn when Fontaine scored a shootout goal toward the end of practice. They threatened to fine him.

"That was a nice touch," coach Mike Yeo said of the loud noise that echoed through the college barn.

Fontaine will make his NHL debut on Thursday night against the Los Angeles Kings as a left winger on the fourth line with Zenon Konopka and Torrey Mitchell.

“Coming back would be nice, but the idea that you’re coming back and you just survived final cuts to stay with an NHL team, I think it’s got to be really exciting for him now,” Yeo said.

Fontaine had two solid years in Houston and worked hard off the ice to get his body in tip-top shape. Yeo was asked why it took so long for Fontaine to arrive after signing as a free agent in 2011.

"Part of it is paying your dues and developing in the minors," Yeo said. "This is the best league in the world. Obviously he had a great college career, but like most players, there are other things you have to learn to make that next step. You've got to give him a lot of credit because he's improved in all the areas he needed to improve on and he's now ready to make that step."

Yeo likes Fontaine’s versatility and noted that even though he was a top-line player in college, but there are only so many of those in the NHL. He said if a player wants to be really smart, he "would get good at all aspects of the game so they can fill in on any role."

Yeo likes that Fontaine can move up in the lineup if there’s an injury or an underperformer.

Captain Mikko Koivu remained in the Twin Cities with his fiancee and newborn daughter. He will join the Wild tonight in Duluth for practice Tuesday. Kyle Brodziak was lost for part of practice today because he fell to the ice and then conveniently took a puck to the forehead. He bled badly but was stitched up and back out on the ice in a jiffy.

The Wild's currently golfing after a light practice today. Yeo plans to get right back at it Tuesday with a hard practice to gear up for Thursday's opener against Los Angeles.

Last time we were in Duluth, Josh Harding hurt his ankle if I remember correctly at the team-building exercise the day before. Jim Mill, the Wild's assistant to the GM and now Iowa GM (was Houston), had to tend goal. Yeo noted the upgrade today in goal with Harding and Nik Backstrom on the ice but said, "mind you, it hurt the confidence of our shooters today" that Mill wasn't out there.

One other funny line. Zach Parise, with a gigantic smile, was asked his memories of Duluth: "I remember all they had to do was get one point off us for the [2004] MacNaughton Cup and we swept ’em. It was awesome."

GOOD DAY FROM BEAUTIFUL DULUTH AND THE TERRIFIC AMSOIL ARENA, WHERE THERE'S QUITE A FEW BANNERS HANGING FROM THE RAFTERS -- TOMMY KURVERS, SOME GUY NAMED BRETT HULL, A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP BANNER FROM 2011.

THERE'S ALSO A PICTURE OF THIS GUY -- THE GREAT UMD GOALIE OF ALL-TIME AND LONGTIME WILD GOALIE COACH, BOB MASON.

JUST AN FYI: I WILL BE HOSTING A LIVE ONLINE CHAT ON WWW.STARTRIBUNE.COM/WILD ON THURSDAY AT 2 P.M.

TODAY WAS JUSTIN FONTAINE DAY AT AMSOIL. THE FORMER BULDOGS NATIONAL CHAMP RETURNED HERE AS A bona fide NHLER AND THE LOCAL PRESS WAS WAITING WITH OPEN ARMS.

BEING A 25-YEAR-OLD ROOKIE AND NEWBIE INSIDE THE WILD DRESSING ROOM, YOU CAN TELL FONTAINE IS JUST A TAD UNCOMFORTABLE WITH ALL THE ATTENTION HE’S GETTING.

"IT'S ALWAYS GOOD COMING BACK TO YOUR COLLEGE TOWN," FONTAINE SAID SHEEPISHLY.

HIS TEAMSATES GOT A KICK OUT OF THE BUILDING MANAGER BLARING THE ARENA’S HORN WHEN FONTAINE SCORED A SHOOTOUT GOAL TOWARD THE END OF PRACTICE. THEY THREATENED TO FINE HIM.

"THAT WAS A NICE TOUCH," COACH MIKE YEO SAID OF THE LOUD NOISE THAT ECHOED THROUGH THE COLLEGE BARN.

FONTAINE WILL MAKE HIS NHL DEBUT ON THURSDAY NIGHT AGAINST THE LOS ANGELES KINGS AS A LEFT WINGER ON THE FOURTH LINE WITH ZENON KONOPOKA AND TORREY MITCHELL.

"COMING BACK WOULD BE NICE, BUT THE IDEA THAT YOU'RE COMING BACK AND YOU JUST SURVIVED FINAL CUTS TO STAY WITH AN NHL TEAM, I THINK IT'S GOT TO BE REALLY EXCITING FOR HIM NOW," YEO SAID.

FONTAINE HAD TWO SOLID YEARS IN HOUSTON AND WORKED HARD OFF THE ICE TO GET HIS BODY IN TIP-TOP SHAPE. YEO WAS ASKED WHY IT TOOK SO LONG FOR FONTAINE TO ARRIVE AFTER SIGNING AS A FREE AGENT IN 2011.

"PART OF IT IS PAYING YOUR DUES AND DEVELOPING IN THE MINORS," YEO SAID. "THIS IS THE BEST LEAGUE IN THE WORLD. OBVIOUSLY HE HAD A GREAT COLLEGE CAREER, BUT LIKE MOST PLAYERS, THERE ARE OTHER THINGS YOU HAVE TO LEARN TO MAKE THAT NEXT STEP. YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE HIM A LOT OF CREDIT BECAUSE HE'S IMPROVED IN ALL THE AREAS HE NEEDED TO IMPROVE ON AND HE'S NOW READY TO MAKE THAT STEP."

YEo LIKES FONTAINE’S VERSATILITY AND NOTED THAT EVEN THOUGH HE WAS A TOP-LINE PLAYER IN COLLEGE, BUT THERE ARE ONLY SO MANY OF THOSE IN THE NHL. HE SAID IF A PLAYER WANTS TO BE REALLY SMART, HE "WOULD GET GOOD AT ALL ASPECTS OF THE GAME SO THEY CAN FILL IN ON ANY ROLE."

YEo LIKES THAT FONTAINE CAN MOVE UP IN THE LINEUP IF THERE'S AN INJURY OR AN UNDERPERFORMER.

CAPTAIN MIKKO KOIVU REMAINED IN THE TWIN CITIES WITH HIS FIANCEE AND NEWBORN DAUGHTER. HE WILL JOIN THE WILD TONIGHT IN DULUTH FOR PRACTICE TUESDAY. KYLE BRODZIAK WAS LOST FOR PART OF PRACTICE TODAY BECAUSE HE FELL TO THE ICE AND THEN CONVENIENTLY TOOK A PUCK TO THE FOREHEAD. HE BLED BADLY BUT WAS STITCHED UP AND BACK OUT ON THE ICE IN A JIFFY.

THE WILD'S CURRENTLY GOLFING AFTER A LIGHT PRACTICE TODAY. YEO PLANS TO GET RIGHT BACK AT IT TUESDAY WITH A HARD PRACTICE TO GEAR UP FOR THURSDAY'S OPENER AGAINST LOS ANGELES.

LAST TIME WE WERE IN DULUTH, JOSH HARDING HURT HIS ANKLE IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY AT THE TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISE THE DAY BEFORE. JIM MILL, THE WILD'S ASSISTANT TO THE GM AND NOW IOWA GM (WAS HOUSTON), HAD TO TEND GOAL. YEO NOTED THE UPGRADE TODAY IN GOAL WITH HARDING AND NIK BACKSTROM ON THE ICE BUT SAID, "MIND YOU, IT HURT THE CONFIDENCE OF OUR SHOOTERS TODAY" THAT MILL WASN'T OUT THERE.

ONE OTHER FUNNY LINE. ZACH PARISE, WITH A GIANTIC SMILE, WAS ASKED HIS MEMORIES OF DULUTH: "I REMEMBER ALL THEY HAD TO DO WAS GET ONE POINT OFF US FOR THE [2004] MACNAUGHTON CUP AND WE SWEPT 'EM. IT WAS AWESOME."
After a whirlwind three months that's sent him to a new NHL organization via his first trade, the most intensive training camp of his career and a position battle for the past three weeks, he's learned to work around questions like this.

He showed plenty of that in Duluth, putting up 164 points in 159 games with the Bulldogs.

"If we lose a skill player, we know he can move up. We know he can create offensive pressure," Yeo said. "It's hard to say where it's going to go, how it's going to evolve, but a lot of it is up to him."
In the aftermath of what could have been a crippling player lockout, all is sunny and light in the new NHL.

Rules were changed for the 2013-14 season to enhance scoring and conferences were realigned so teams could play in more geographically sensible clusters. A half-dozen outdoor games were scheduled to jump-start revenues. And even the long-standing financial black holes – Phoenix, New Jersey and Florida – have been revitalized by new ownership groups.

Sports Illustrated issued a plea in its hockey preview – Free Sidney Crosby – presumably from the shackles of the defence-first systems that have bogged the game down. But seriously, when the action on the ice begins on three fronts Tuesday, what are the chances the 1980s will suddenly rise up again in the NHL?

"No chance," Phoenix Coyotes goaltender Mike Smith said with a small laugh. "No chance. You saw it last year, when goalie pads went from a 12-inch width to 11 inches, goal scoring actually went down. They are always looking for ways of getting goal-scoring up, but until they put in soccer nets, I don’t think they’re going to achieve that goal."

Smith plays for a team that might be the best example of what paying strict attention to defence can accomplish. In the last 82-game season (2011-12), the Coyotes made it to the Stanley Cup semi-finals on the strength of Smith’s goaltending and a smothering defensive system.

They were not alone in adopting that approach. Altogether, five NHL goalies – Cory Schneider, Henrik Lundqvist, Jonathan Quick and the St. Louis Blues duo of Brian Elliott and Jaroslav Halak – all boasted goals-against averages of less than 2.00 per game. Elliott, Schneider, Smith and Lundqvist had save percentages above .930 – historically low numbers.

By contrast, there were only two 50-goal scorers (Steven Stamkos, Evgeni Malkin) the last time the NHL played a full season and only one whose numbers would have prorated to 50 in last year’s shortened season (Alexander Ovechkin). Pure goal scorers are an endangered species, and Coyotes head coach Dave Tippett thinks he knows why.

"If you watch the game now compared to 20 years ago, you don’t see nearly as many mistakes happen," Tippett said. "I do believe coaching is very strong, but the other thing is players have a lot at stake financially now. … Players work hard not to make mistakes and if they do make a mistake, they work hard to get the mistake back.”

"The evolution of goaltending, and goaltending equipment, and far fewer mistakes in the game is the reason why scoring is down. We can tweak it however we want, but if you watch a game from 20 or 25 years ago, and see how many mistakes are made – the number of 2-on-1s, the lack of back-pressure, the lack of back-checking – it is a very different game than now."

Tippett was a defensive specialist as a player and is a defensive specialist as a coach and finds his job easier than ever, thanks to a dramatic rise in attention to defence can accomplish. In the last 82-game season (2011-12), the Coyotes made it to the Stanley Cup semi-finals on the strength of Smith’s goaltending and a smothering defensive system.

"I was blown away by the knowledge that these kids had just coming in," he said. "And that’s just growing up with good coaching. If you watch minor hockey now, they’re teaching structure, they’re teaching systems. When I first came into the league, I’ve gone through puberty – you know what I mean? Give me a break," 24-year-old defenceman P.K. Subban said, later adding: "As a team … we’re getting more comfortable with each other."

Continuity is the order of the day for this year’s Canadiens – with rare exceptions, head coach Michel Therrien has kept his lines and defensive pairings together throughout camp – and the idea is to profit from the extra experience and playoff heartbreak last spring.

Therrien said he expects to see clear progression, but "we have practically the same lineup as last year, with another season’s experience, so I’m looking toward this season with optimism.”

Whatever success the Habs enjoy this year will be a function of the ongoing hockey education and growing maturity of their young core – 26-year-old goalie Carey Price is the doyen of the group, which includes Subban, winger Max Pacioretty (24), centre Lars Eller (24) and second-year pros Alex Galchenyuk (19), Brendan Gallagher (21) and Jarred Tinordi (21).

The average age of the Habs squad was bumped upward by the addition of 35-year-old Daniel Brière and veteran role players George Parros and Douglas Murray – who will miss the next four to six weeks after suffering an undisclosed injury in practice last Sunday – but this is essentially the same team that finished a surprise second in the Eastern Conference in 2013.

There will be the predictable murmurs that a lockout-shortened season doesn’t offer the true measure of a team – in addition to the usual low-grade rumble about lack of size, defensive grit and the rest – and the first-round playoff exit against the bigger, brawnier Ottawa Senators was the real tell.

Habs banking on growth and continuity for successful season
Perhaps that’s true, and perhaps the cautiousness and humility with which the Habs are approaching the season suggests they tacitly agree with the learned prognosticators on television and in print who have them as a bubble team for the playoffs.

Or perhaps it means nothing of the sort.

“We’re not bothered by [predictions]. Everyone in this room knows what we’re capable of. Sometimes, when you start the season as the favourite, it can be tougher. I’m not worried at all about what anybody says,” said centre David Desharnais, who had an up-and-down 2013 season but enjoyed a strong training camp.

Whereas the main powerhouses of the Eastern Conference spent the off-season making major renovations (David Clarkson, Daniel Alfredsson, Loui Eriksson, etc.), the Habs liked what they saw of their team last season.

It’s also true the team’s glaring needs — an elite goal-scoring right winger and a stud, minute-munching, opponent-mashing defenceman — aren’t easily addressed.

But it isn’t a fluke the Habs were among the conference’s better regular-season teams. Possession stats don’t lie: Montreal was one of the league’s best five-on-five teams. If the penalty kill can reach the same exalted heights as the power play, the team should be in the thick of the playoff hunt.

The organization recognizes, however, there’s nothing much to be gained by talking about it.

“We’re confident,” Therrien said, “but you have to stay humble, that’s important.”

Or as Subban put it: “It’s easy to talk the talk … just go out and do the job.”

The job starts Tuesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, who won last year’s opener at the Air Canada Centre, took the season series and manhandled Montreal at home in a 6-0, fight-filled affair.

The addition of Parros suggests the Habs will be able to put up more of a fight. The former Anaheim Ducks tough guy is expected to match wits Tuesday against his former coach, Toronto’s Randy Carlyle, in his Bell Centre debut.

The two won a Stanley Cup together, and Parros understands Toronto’s bare-knuckled approach better than most.

“It’s not surprising, I’ve never had a problem with that sort of style,” he said. “Here he is, and here I am, and we’re going to go at it again.”

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718792 Montreal Canadiens

Bettman and Fehr back to business as usual a year after NHL lockout

STEPHEN WHYN
The Canadian Press
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Gary Bettman doesn’t want to focus on last season’s NHL lockout.

More than a year removed from the start of the work-strike, the commissioner isn’t looking back.

“We tend to be forward looking,” Bettman said in a phone interview. “In the course of operations of any sports league there are always going to be issues, and what you have to do is tackle the issues, make good, informed decisions, hopefully, and then look forward and move on.”

The man across the bargaining table from Bettman for more than four months is ready to move on, too. But NHLPA executive director Donald Fehr certainly hasn’t forgotten about what he and the players went through.

“I feel like I’m just as busy, although that can’t be true,” Fehr said. “But you just simply don’t have the uncertainty and the ongoing pressure. You’ve got a lot of problems to work through, you’ve got a lot of issues, you’ve got a lot of people to talk to, to go and see and all the rest of it, but when you are facing what was by this time last year the certainty of a very long lockout and an ugly situation, obviously it’s great not to have to live through that again.”

Fans who were prevented from seeing NHL hockey and players robbed of their earning potential until January undoubtedly agree with that sentiment. An 82-game regular season — not what Fehr called an “artificially short” 48-game jaunt — begins Tuesday.

Bettman said he doesn’t think many people are thinking about a year ago, but the differences are drastic. The league and the Players Association collaborated on rule changes last spring that are now in effect, and Fehr considers his interactions with NHL personnel “normal business-like.”

“Last year the presence of the lockout just overwhelmed everything,” Fehr said. “I don’t think people take things personally, not when you’re in a situation in which you’re bargaining. Sometimes you get mad, people are tired and on edge and wish it would end and all the rest of it, but it’s not personal. At least not with me.”

Bettman would prefer it not be personal. Booed by fans at the NHL draft in June and countless other times, he’s the figurehead for a multi-billion-dollar organization with 30 voices to listen to.

It’s 30 strong now after the sales of the Phoenix Coyotes, New Jersey Devils and Florida Panthers during what Bettman called a very busy summer.

“It goes back to making sure you have a system that enables clubs to be competitive and be able to afford to compete and have great competitive balance,” he said. “And I think the stability we have now with a long-term bargaining agreement has made owning a team more attractive.”

It’s Bettman’s belief that the NHL in general is in a better spot than it was going into the lockout. That’s why he brushed off the notion of being relieved the lockout is in the past.

“It’s not about relief. When you’re involved in a sports league you sometimes have to make difficult decisions,” he said. “Sometimes you have to endure short-term pain for long-term decisions that will be important for the growth and stability of the game and the business of the game. Frankly, I’m delighted that we can focus on long-term planning knowing that we have virtually a decade of labour peace.”

With at least six more seasons until either side can opt out of this CBA, Fehr can finally settle into a different aspect of his job. No longer is he a war-time leader.

“When you’re in a bargaining situation, everybody wants to know what’s going on and in a way it’s very focused,” Fehr said. “What we now have is a normal off-season or pre-season in which the questions tend to be individualized, but there’s a lot of them.”

Fehr is clear and direct in saying he’s the Major League Baseball Players Association’s “former director,” shrugging off questions of returning because of current MLBPA director Michael Weiner’s failing health.

Fehr is all-in on the NHLPA.

“I am obviously, having gone through this bargaining, much more comfortable than I was before,” he said. “I think I’ve got a pretty good feel for the people involved, I think I have a much better feel for the players. I think I understand the potential the sport has even better than I did before, I’m sure of that. And I really like it. I’m having a lot of fun, I’m getting a lot of satisfaction out of it.

“Players are absolutely fabulous and I think we’ve got a lot of opportunities before us. So, if together with the NHL we can figure out a way to take advantage of those, it’ll be good for everybody.”

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718793 Montreal Canadiens

NHL Face-Off gets season started with a party in Montreal

The Gazette September 30, 2013

MONTREAL — The Canadiens’ season opener against the Toronto Maple Leafs kicks off at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Bell Centre, but the fun starts outside several hours earlier in the Quartier des Spectacles.
The NHL is hosting a free street festival Tuesday at Place des Festivals from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. where people can also watch the RDS broadcast of the game on giant video boards.

The 2013 Molson Canadian NHL Face-Off will feature performances by Kings of Leon, the headline act, as well as Loco Lociass and The Beaches, a Toronto-based indie rock group. The event also includes family-friendly, free interactive games, prizes, street hockey clinics, and a chance for fans to compete for the hardest shot.

This is the third time the event has been held in Canada, with previous editions in Toronto and then Winnipeg.

“It has a little bit of everything for the fan base,” said Brian Jennings, the NHL’s chief marketing officer.

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718794 Montreal Canadiens

Can Price regain his form for Habs?

By Pat Hickey, THE GAZETTE September 30, 2013

MONTREAL — Can Carey Price regain the form he displayed in the 2010-11 season?

Is it possible that P.K. Subban can improve on his Norris Trophy-winning season?

Will Brendan Gallagher and Alex Galchenyuk avoid the sophomore jinx?

Which newcomers will have the greatest impact on the Canadiens’ season?

These are the questions facing the Canadiens as they prepare to open the regular season Tuesday when the Toronto Maple Leafs visit the Bell Centre (7 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio 690).

Training camp produced only two surprises in the roster that was finalized Monday. Defenceman Jarred Tinordi earned a spot in the top six, while Michael Bournival will open the season as a spare forward.

Here’s a breakdown of what to expect:

Goaltending: Price was among the NHL leaders in every major goaltending category in 2010-11, but his performance has slipped and he struggled down the stretch last season. The Canadiens have brought in goalie coach Stéphane Waite from the Chicago Blackhawks to work with Price and fans can expect to see the goaltender standing up more. Peter Budaj is a solid backup who posted an 8-1-1 record last season.

Defence: This could be a bright spot for the Canadiens and it gets better in the second half of the season when Alexei Emelin returns from knee surgery. There will be no pretense that Andrei Markov is the team’s best defenceman, but there are few teams that can boast a No. 2 as good as the heady Russian. Subban should silence his critics with his play last season and the 24-year-old says there’s room for improvement.

Tinordi provides a physical element that has been missing on the blue line. He’ll make mistakes — he was minus-5 in six preseason games — but has earned the right to make them at the National Hockey League level. The Canadiens will start the season with only six defencemen because Davis Drewiske and off-season acquisition Douglas Murray will start the season on the injured list. Drewiske is out with a shoulder injury, while the Canadiens announced Monday that Murray will miss 4-6 weeks with an upper-body injury.

Forwards: One criticism of the Canadiens is that they don’t have a legitimate No. 1 line. That might be true, but they have three balanced lines with proven NHL talent. The Canadiens scored 149 goals in the lockout-shortened 2013 season and only Pittsburgh and Chicago scored more.

That’s not to say there aren’t question marks.

Tomas Plekanec needs some stability on his line and that means Brian Gionta and Rene Bourque have to stay healthy. David Desharnais and Max Pacioretty have had chemistry since their American Hockey League days and newcomer Daniel Brière is working hard to fit in. The No. 3 line has Lars Eller between Alex Galchenyuk and Brendan Gallagher and they will get an expanded role. This could be a dominant line in a few years, but at some point Galchenyuk is going to get a chance to play centre.

The Canadiens have added some needed size in George Parros. He’ll start on a line with Travis Moen and Brandon Prust, who might be the team’s most versatile forward. Prust can play any forward position in any situation and he is, pound for pound, the best fighter in the NHL.

Special teams: The Canadiens had the fifth-best power play in the NHL last season and there’s no reason to believe they won’t be just as good. The Canadiens have two weapons at the point with Markov and Subban, and Brière provides them with a right-handed shot down low. The penalty-kill is a different matter. The Canadiens ranked 23rd last season and there’s plenty of room for improvement. Tinordi’s size will be a welcome addition to clear out traffic in front of the net. Coach Michel Therrien is fortunate that he can use Subban and Plekanec on the PK because both thrive on heavy workloads.

Coaching: The Canadiens’ second-place finish in the East last season hasn’t silenced the critics who believe Therrien’s only qualification for the head-coaching job is his ability to speak French. But Therrien brought stability to a chaotic situation and got the most out of his players last season. One testimony to his ability comes from Brière. After a couple of weeks in the Montreal camp, Brière said he understood why the Canadiens were tough to play against when he was in Philadelphia. He also said he enjoyed playing in Therrien’s system. The coach has been characterized as a stodgy defensive coach, but the team’s offensive output suggests otherwise.

The biggest change to Therrien’s staff has been the addition of goaltending coach Waite. He comes to the Canadiens after developing two Stanley Cup-winning goalies — Antti Niemi and Corey Crawford — in Chicago. He is charged with fixing the flaws in Price’s game and, going forward, he’ll be working with prospect Zach Fucale.

Summing up: The Canadiens are still a few years away from shedding their image as a small team, but with Eller, Galchenyuk and Bournival playing larger roles, and players like Michael McCarron, Sebastian Collberg and Tim Bozon in the pipeline, the team is heading in the right direction.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.01.2013

718795 Montreal Canadiens

Habs vs. Leafs should be on a Saturday night

By Dave Stubbs, THE GAZETTE September 30, 2013

MONTREAL — With respect to the storied, intense, often bloody rivalry between the Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs, there is something glaringly wrong about Tuesday’s Bell Centre season opener between the two clubs.

They’re playing on Tuesday.

A school night.

A work night.

It’s tiffic that this rivalry — once dynamite, then dormant — is making a spirited comeback.

But it should be in the NHL constitution that the Canadiens and Maple Leafs only face each other in Montreal on Saturdays, respecting the history of Hockey Night in Canada/La Soirée du hockey and addressing a more vital issue:

When Toronto fans come east by road or rail to cheer on their team, they should do so on Friday so they can boost this city’s economy by refreshing themselves into a stupor that night and still be in a state of shivery-legged disrepair come game time Saturday.

(It doesn’t matter so much in reverse. Most Canadiens fans at the Air Canada Centre are expat Montrealers who live in Toronto; Habs fans here don’t feel the need to pay obscene sums to ACC scalpers or to travel in order to party.)

Tuesday’s game will be the 15th time these two clubs have met to open an NHL season, dating back to 1921-22, with the Maple Leafs holding a 9-5 edge. Toronto defeated Montreal the first three times they met to begin a season, in consecutive years, outscoring their visitor 14-5.
It wasn’t until Nov. 29, 1924, the first-ever game in the beautiful new $1-million Montreal Forum, that the Habs would beat the Leafs to begin a season, the 7-1 shellacking the most lopsided score in their 14 openers.

The Canadiens were still legally tied to natural-ice Mount Royal Arena in 1924, the Forum constructed primarily for Montreal’s other team, a fledgling club that would be known as the Maroons.

But when ice was unavailable in their own barn — the word “barn” used advisedly — the Nov. 29 game was moved to the new artificial-ice arena.

The rivalry between the Canadiens and Maple Leafs — who grew out of the Toronto Arenas, then St. Pats — developed wonderfully through the decades, fuelled at first not by fan passion as much as snarkiness in the newspapers.

In their first-ever meeting, on Dec. 26, 1917 at Toronto’s Mutual rink, the only Canadian building east of Winnipeg to have artificial ice, the Arenas beat the defending Stanley Cup-champion Canadiens 7-5.

“Canadiens are the Flying Frenchmen no longer,” crowed the Toronto Mail and Empire the next morning. “A few years ago, very few teams in that third game of the season would have stopped Canadiens by superior speed and persistent backchecking. Things have changed, and with their speed gone, Canadiens are trying to win games by their grey matter.”

It was another era, to be sure. Imagine this posted in an NHL dressing room today, as Toronto boss Charles Querrie had done in his wartime 1917-18 quarters:

1. First and foremost, do not forget that I am running this club;
2. It does not require bravery to hit another man over the head with a stick. If you want to fight, go over to France.

The Arenas did neither, but they would defeat the Canadiens 10-7 in their two-game, total-goals semifinal playoff series.

That was the first of 15 times the two franchises have met in the post-season, the most recent being 35 years ago next spring. The Canadiens hold an 8-7 lead in that race, Toronto up 3-2 when the Stanley Cup was at stake in a final series.

Dopey NHL alignment and the teams skidding through respective slumps, some much longer than others, have kept them apart in the playoffs. Which is a shame, for there is nothing — truly, nothing — that would light up this country’s hockey population like a Canadiens-Maple Leafs playoff series.

It’s almost ridiculous to say, but Tuesday’s first game for both teams in an 82-game season might almost have a playoff feel, both tied atop the 30-team league.

During their seven-year, playoffs-are-a-rumour-to-us futility from 2006-12, the Maple Leafs were the butt of the NHL’s jokes, most painfully in Toronto. Where the 1940s Canadiens had their illustrious Punch Line, the Leafs for most of the past decade were a punch line.

And then came playoff fever in Toronto last season, the Leafs within 20 minutes of upsetting Boston in the Eastern quarters before imploding with a blown three-goal, third-period lead to lose and be eliminated in overtime.

They’ve moved on from that, as they should have.

David Clarkson signed on for $36.75 million over seven years, not that we’ll see him Tuesday; the Leafs marquee free-agent signing sits out his first in a 10-game suspension for jumping off a pre-season bench into a fight, the most expensive too-many-men penalty in the history of the world.

Toronto has retooled, a laughstock no longer.

“Are we there? No. Are we closer? I think we’re closer,” Maple Leafs GM Dave Nonis has said of the potential of his club, sounding an awful lot like his Canadiens counterpart, Marc Bergevin.

The Canadiens hold the NHL record of 17 consecutive openers without a defeat, going 13-0-4 from 1963-79.

They’re currently riding a streak of zero in a row, 2-1 losers in Game 1 vs. Toronto last season, so it’s a Habs win Tuesday night and just 17 more in a row until history is made in 2030.

One last statistic for opening night:

If they reach that milestone on Tuesday, this city will be ablaze with a firestorm about you-know-who. And the Canadiens might want to make sure they score at least six.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.01.2013

Predictions, anyone?

September 30th, 2013, in News

On the eve of a new National Hockey League season, predictions abound about how clubs will fare in the 2013-14 campaign.

The Canadiens face a few new rivals in the Atlantic Division thanks to the realignment that takes effect this season. The new eight-team grouping includes their usual division foes like the Boston Bruins and Toronto Maple Leafs, but also the Detroit Red Wings, Tampa Bay Lightning and Florida Panthers.

The Hockey News put the Habs in fourth place in the Atlantic Division in its preseason predictions, behind the first-place Bruins, followed by the Red Wings and Ottawa Senators. A fourth-place finish would mean the Habs would need to secure a wild card spot to make the playoffs.

USA Today hockey columnist Kevin Allen put the Habs in the No. 4 spot, behind the Bruins, Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs. But Allen also predicted the Senators at No. 5 "will be looking at the wild-card race all season" and project to be “third to fifth.”

A fifth-place finish for the Habs in the Atlantic Division was the consensus projection on TSN’s season preview show. Their consensus was that the Leafs, projected to finish in fourth place, would nab a wild card spot, with the Habs missing the playoffs.

The Gazette’s Pat Hickey predicted the Canadiens and Leafs will be in the hunt for the wild-card spots.

What are your predictions for the Canadiens’ this season? Are they a better team than they were last season? Have the off-season moves by Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin given them enough of an edge over some of their division rivals?

We’ll publish some of your responses in Thursday’s Hockey Inside/Out section in The Gazette.

The Canadiens got some bad news at practice Monday, announcing that defenceman Douglas Murray has an upper-body injury and will be out 4-6 weeks. Defenceman Davis Drewiske is expected to be sidelined another 2-3 weeks with a shoulder injury.

Meanwhile, defenceman Alexei Emelin — still recovering from major knee surgery — skated for about an hour before practice with Graham Rynbend, the team’s head athletic therapist, and looked good.

Coach Michel Therrien said the Canadiens would start the season with only six defencemen since they don’t have a heavy schedule to start things off.

After opening the season Tuesday night at the Bell Centre against the Toronto Maple Leafs (7 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio 690), the Canadiens play their next game Saturday at home against the Philadelphia Flyers before starting a four-game road trip next Wednesday night in Calgary.

Here’s how the lines and defence pairings looked at practice:

Pacioretty – Desharnais – Briere
Bourque – Plekanec – Gionta
Galchenyuk – Eller – Gallagher
Moen – Prust – Parros
Bournival – White
Markov – Diaz
Gorges – Subban
Bouillon – Tinordi
Nashville Predators’ Simon Moser works way into NHL job
Moser makes team after long shot bid

Sep. 30, 2013 11:19 PM  |  Written by Mike Organ

Simon Moser’s lifelong dream has been to play in the NHL, but it was the furthest thing from his mind at this point last year.

That changed after the 6-foot-1, 214-pounder’s rehabilitation went so well that he returned to the ice for Bern in the Swiss League A and then came to Nashville on a professional tryout agreement.

On Sunday, Moser signed a one-year contract with the Predators worth $550,000, his agent, Renaud Lavoie, said.

"I wasn’t even on the ice at this time last year, so I couldn’t imagine being here a year later,” Moser said. "I had a perfect rehab during the summer in Switzerland and got back into good condition by working out alone on the ice.

"It was painful at the beginning and a lot of hard work, but it’s paying off now.

The Predators assigned Moser to Milwaukee on Monday, so he won’t be a part of the 22-man roster when Nashville opens the season Thursday at St. Louis. He will be the first forward called up in the event of an injury, however.

In five seasons with Langnau of the Swiss Elite League, he had 56 goals, 54 assists and 179 penalty minutes in 232 games.

On June 7, he signed a two-year contract with Bern. If he is still with Milwaukee as of Dec. 15, Moser will have the option of going back to Bern and finishing the season in Switzerland instead of North America.

Moser made the transition from the European style of hockey to the NHL with ease, Predators coach Barry Trotz said.

"He can play in the small areas, and when most of the European players come over, they have trouble with the small-area game and keeping pucks alive," Trotz said. "In Europe it’s a little bit more about time and space, it’s a little bit more about making plays off the rush. You’ve got to make plays in the real tight areas in the NHL, and he’s able to keep pucks alive and do that.

"He’s got a very, very mature game, which fits the style of North America. That’s what sort of endeared me to Simon when I watched him over in Europe. He scored all of his goals around the net.”

Defenceman Francis Bouillon in 2009-10 was the last player the Predators signed as a result of a professional tryout agreement. Bouillon, however, was different from Moser in that he was an NHL veteran who was coming off an injury the season before with Montreal.

Moser did not realize how well his style of play would fit the NHL until he joined the Predators in the preseason. He scored a goal in a 2-1 win over the Lightning and another in a 6-4 loss to the Islanders.

"I had never played in North America, so I didn’t know what to expect,” he said. "Of course the smaller ice means you have less time to make decisions and to respond. But it can also make the game easier. Just by chipping it, working hard on the boards, winning the battles, and I think that’s my game.”

While his contract allows him to return to Switzerland in December and possibly play in the Winter Olympics, Moser said his focus at this point is on the Predators.

"What comes after that, I can’t really force it,” he said. "It will come how it comes.”

Patrik Elias put on IR but may still play in Thursday's opener

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on September 30, 2013 at 5:00 PM, updated September 30, 2013 at 6:39 PM

The Devils reduced their roster to 23 players today by placing Patrik Elias on injured reserve retroactive to last Wednesday and putting Mattias Tedenby on non-roster IR indefinitely.

Elias, eligible to come off IR Wednesday, can still play in the Devils’ opener Thursday night in Pittsburgh if he is deemed healthy enough. If so, the Devils would have to make another roster move.

"If he’s okay, we’ll just take Patrik off (IR) and then we’ll have to make a move,” general manager Lou Lamoriello explained. "Tedenby is on the non-roster because of the games he’s played. He’s not quite ready yet. He’s not 100 percent.”

Lamoriello said it appears Elias will be able to play in the opener, but this move was done as a precaution to get the team at the 23-man limit by 5 p.m. today and to buy some time. He said the move with Elias was actually filed last week and the Devils could have put other players on retroactive IR as well.

"But we didn’t,” the GM said.

Because Tedenby has only played 105 NHL games, he is eligible for non-roster IR.

The two moves mean defenceman Alex Urbom remains on the roster as the Devils once again will carry eight D.

The Devils’ 23-man roster:

No. Player Pos. Ht. Wt. Hometown
5. Adam Larsson D 6-3 205 Skelleftea, Swe.
6. Andy Greene D 5-11 190 Trenton, MI
7. Mark Fayne D 6-3 210 Nashua, NH
10. Peter Harrold D 5-11 180 Kirtland Hills, OH
11. Stephen Gionta C 5-7 185 Rochester, NY
12. Damien Brunner RW 5-10 185 Oberlunkhofen, Swi.
14. Adam Henrique C 6-0 195 Brantford, Ont.
16. Jacob Josefson C 6-1 195 Stockholm, Swe.
17. Michael Ryder RW 6-1 200 St. John’s, Nfld.
18. Steve Bernier RW 6-3-2 215 Quebec City, Que.
19. Travis Zajac C 6-3 205 Winnipeg, Man.
20. Ryan Carter LW 6-1 205 White Bear Lake, MN
24. Bryce Salvador (C) D 6-4 215 Brandon, Man.
26. Anton Volchenkov D 6-1 220 Moscow, Rus.
29. Ryane Clowe LW 6-3 225 St. John’s, Nfld.
30. Martin Brodeur G 6-2 220 Montreal, Que.
35. Cory Schneider G 6-2 200 Marblehead, MA
Hybrid icing will be used this season in the NHL after the Players’ Association approved it.

The league experimented with the rule in preseason games after the NHL board of governors approved it. The experiment apparently went well enough to convince the players to approve it.

Linesmen can whistle a play dead on a potential icing if a player from the defending team reaches the dot inside the faceoff circle in the far zone before a member of the clearing time reaches that dot.

Jagr was on the Devils’ power play today for the first time this preseason. He was up front on the first unit with Elias and Ryane Clowe. The point men were Marek Zidlicky and Travis Zajac.

The second unit had Andy Greene and Adam Larsson (or Peter Harrold) on the points with Adam Henrique, Brunner and Ryder up front.

“It was the first time. I guess nobody knows what the units are going to be. It was the first time for me after three or four months to be on the power play again,” Jagr said.

DeBoer said nothing is definite, but he likes Jagr in that spot.

“He definitely helps. You can see what he potentially can bring us in that area. I think we’re excited to get him in the fold and working with the units full time,” DeBoer said.

Assistant coach Dave Barr is running the power play.

“We actually have 12 or 13 guys dressed for power play units. That’s a good problem to have,” Elias said. “He’s just got to make sure he puts the right guys together so they make it work out there. It’s all a matter of putting the right units together and having the chemistry there.

“(Jagr) is good. He’s got a great shot. He’s got a quick release.”

Although Jagr and Elias never played on the same line with the Czech national team, they did see power play time together. Zidlicky was also on the Czech PP.

“I played with Marek a lot on the national team and on the same team in Czech during the lockout,” Jagr said. “During the lockout we always played together. Marek has such great vision. There are not many guys in the league with that kind of vision. I think he’s very underrated. I really appreciate guys like that who can fake the shot and pass it on the side. There aren’t many guys like that in the league.”

The Devils traded Krs Barch to Florida and sent Cam Janssen to Albany (AHL). Those were the club’s two fighters.

“I’m not worried about toughness. The people we have here play a hard game and play tough,” DeBoer said. “By that I don’t necessarily mean dropping the gloves. They’re not going to be intimidated by anybody.”

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The Devils season begins this Thursday in Pittsburgh, while the puck officially drops on the 2013-14 NHL regular season on Tuesday with a matchup between the Maple Leafs and Canadiens.

We’ve already looked at where one expert -- Sports Illustrated’s Brian Cazenave -- predicted the Devils would finish in the 2013-14 season. Here are where some other experts see New Jersey finishing:

The Hockey News

Prediction: 8th in the Metropolitan Division

"If defense and goaltending will keep the Devils in games from time to time this season, will the offense be able to pull out the win? So much (too much) star power has been lost in two off-seasons that hasn't been replaced by anything to inspire confidence."

Kevin Allen, USA Today

Prediction: 8th in the Metropolitan Division

"Will the Devils score enough? They ranked 28th in goals last season, and their scoring potential doesn't appear to have improved."
ESPN.com

Prediction: 8th in the Metropolitan Division (Scott Burnside and Pierre LeBrun); 7th in the Metropolitan Division (Barry Melrose and Craig Custance)

"Although it would be easy to point out the various holes throughout the Devils' lineup, leadership is not one of them. The team is led by a group of savvy veterans in Bryce Salvador, Andy Greene, [Patrik] Elias and [Martin] Brodeur." -- Katie Strang

Sean Gentile, Sporting News

Prediction: 5th in the Metropolitan Division

“They’ll struggle to hit playoff level again without Ilya Kovalchuk or David Clarkson, but they could quite easily make the postseason if Cory Schneider plays more than Brodeur. It's time.”

Scott Cullen, TSN

Ranking: 20

"For all the concern over losing LW Ilya Kovalchuk to the KHL, the Devils spent the summer improving their depth, adding RW Jaromir Jagr, LW Ryane Clowe, RW Michael Ryder and RW Damien Brunner, which ought to be enough to give the Devils a competent attack."

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.01.2013

718801 New Jersey Devils

Devils’ Martin Brodeur may not physically be ready to start season opener

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on September 30, 2013 at 2:17 PM, updated September 30, 2013 at 5:43 PM

Devils goalie Martin Brodeur was back on the ice today practicing with his teammates for the first time in five days.

After dealing with the death of his 82-year-old father, Denis, on Thursday and the emotions of spending the weekend with family in Montreal, he was back in his comfort zone behind the goalie mask in the crease.

“It’s hard. It’s a part of your life that changes tremendously,” Brodeur said. “Having a big family, I don’t know if it’s harder or easier. You see everybody being hurt by what happened. I guess it’s just part of life. It was the first time in my family it happened so close. Life goes on, I guess.

“I always found hockey for me to do whatever I wanted and not worry about outside things. I’m sure my dad wanted me to be back and start playing.”

It is not certain, however, that Brodeur will start the season opener Thursday night in Pittsburgh.

“I don’t know. Emotionally I think I’ll be alright,” he said. “You never know. It was a tough 3-4 days up in Canada. Hockey always helps you to forget things. Just do your thing. When that puck comes in a hundred miles an hour you better start thinking about the puck.

“Physically, we’ll see. This practice was kind of a little hard on me after not doing anything for four days. We’ll see for Thursday what the coach says.”

Brodeur last skated with teammates in the morning skate last Thursday. But he hustled to Montreal afterwards hoping to see his father one last time.

“I was close. Not on time exactly,” Brodeur said, “but I got to see him anyway.”

The goalie had spent time with his dad before training camp and prior to the team’s exhibition game in Montreal.

“I spent a lot of time (with him) the last two weeks. Just before camp I spent 2-3 days there. And before the Montreal Canadiens (exhibition) I flew in early the day before the game. I spent that Sunday and all of Monday before I went to the rink to play the preseason game,” Brodeur said. “I had a chance to spend some decent quality time while he was still able to communicate with us.”

The stress of the weekend was still evident, but Brodeur retained his sense of humor. He said he spent time with his mother and siblings looking at family photos.

“We do have a lot of pictures. I don’t know why,” he joked, alluding to his father’s profession as longtime official photographer for the Canadiens and Expos.

“My dad was a guy I modeled myself around, the way he conducted himself and how professional he was doing what he did for work. The fact he played hockey really helped me also in certain situations how to deal with things,” Brodeur said.

“Every time I did something I’m sure it was something he wished he could’ve done because he didn’t make it to the NHL. He went to the Olympics. So that’s why I made sure he was always there, regardless of the situation. He always came and supported me. It was fun to have him around.”

The last game Denis attended in person was the last game of the 2012 Stanley Cup Finals.

“The one against the Kings in the Finals was the last game he saw me live,” Brodeur said. “He didn’t miss many games after that. They were just on TV.”

He wasn’t well enough to see his grandson, Anthony, drafted by his son and the Devils on June 30 at Prudential Center.

“He felt almost good enough to come,” Brodeur revealed. “The day before he said, ‘Listen, I don’t want to jeopardize it. I feel barely okay. I don’t want to make the trip. I’ll be watching.’ It was nice for him to see his grandson got drafted. When Anthony came to camp, he knew it.”

Brodeur said he didn’t eulogize his father.

“I’m pretty strong but I wasn’t that strong for that,” Brodeur said. “One of my nephews did it and did a good job.”

In what could be his final NHL season, Brodeur will always keep his father on his mind.

“All the time. I always do,” he said. “It’ll be in a different way now.”

He wasn’t surprised by all the tributes to his dad.

“My dad was just a good guy. People respected him,” Brodeur said. “It was a different era of photography. He didn’t take a hundred pictures in two seconds and pick the nicest one. He really had to work at it. That’s why he was one of the best.”

And is the greatest goalie in NHL history a good photographer?

“No,” Brodeur said. “My iPhone is.”

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.01.2013

718802 New Jersey Devils

Martin Brodeur rejoins Devils after attending father’s funeral

By Rich Chere/The Star-Ledger

on September 30, 2013 at 9:37 AM, updated September 30, 2013 at 2:42 PM

Goalie Martin Brodeur, who attended the funeral of his father over the weekend, rejoined the Devils on the ice today for practice at AmeriHealth Pavilion.

Although he believes he’ll be ready emotionally to play in Thursday night’s opener in Pittsburgh, Brodeur said the weekend without practicing set him back physically.

“Emotionally I think I’ll be alright,” he said. “It was a tough three or four days I spent in Canada. Physically, we’ll see. Practice was a little hard on me. We’ll see for Thursday and what the coach says.”

Brodeur did not give the eulogy for his father. That was done by Brodeur’s nephew.

“I’m pretty strong, but I’m not that strong,” Brodeur said.

He joked that he spent the weekend in Montreal looking at a lot of family photos.
NEWARK – Martin Brodeur was back on the ice Monday morning, back where the Devils’ goaltender has always been able to block out what’s going on in his life outside hockey.

After four days in Montreal mourning the death of his father, Denis, who passed away Thursday at age 82, Brodeur knew returning to practice would be what his dad wanted.

“I always found hockey to be a place for me to do whatever I wanted and not have to worry about the outside things,” Brodeur said. “I’m sure my dad definitely wanted me to be back as soon as possible and start playing.”

Brodeur believes he’ll be fine “emotionally” to play in the Devils’ regular-season opener Thursday night in Pittsburgh. He’s unsure if he’ll be ready physically, though.

“It was a tough three or four days I spent up in Canada there. But, I think hockey always helps to forget things,” he said. “You just do your thing. When that puck comes in 100 miles an hour, you’ve got to start thinking about the puck. But, physically, we’ll see. This practice was kind of a little hard on me, not doing anything for four days and having the full squad.”

Devils coach Pete DeBoer had said since the start of camp that Brodeur would be his man in net for the opener. Now, he’ll wait and see how the 41-year-old future Hall of Famer feels this week before deciding if he or Cory Schneider starts.

Whenever Brodeur plays his first game this season – the opener in Pittsburgh or Friday night’s home opener against the Islanders – he’ll be thinking of his father.

“I will all the time,” he said. “I always do. It’s just in a different way now.”

Brodeur knew his father was nearing the end when training camp began three weeks ago, but losing him was still difficult.

“It’s a part of your life that changes tremendously,” he said. “Having a big family, I don’t know if it’s harder or easier, but you could see everybody around being hurt by what happened. It’s just, I guess, part of life. In our family, it was the first time it really happened so close, so it was definitely difficult.”

Brodeur tried to spend as much time with his father as possible in recent weeks. He went to Montreal to see him for “two, three days” just before camp began. The Devils’ preseason game in Montreal on Sept. 23 gave him another opportunity to visit him in the hospital.

“I got a really good chance to spend some decent quality time while he was still able to communicate with us,” he said.

ELIAS ON IR: To get down to the 23-player roster limit Monday, the Devils sent RW Cam Janssen to Albany (AHL), placed LW Patrik Elias (undisclosed injury) on injured reserve and designated LW Mattias Tedenby (lower-body) as an injured non-roster player. Elias’ move was backdated to last Tuesday’s preseason game in Philadelphia -- the last time he skated before Monday’s practice. That makes him eligible to come off IR Wednesday, meaning he could still play in the opener. “We’re certainly hoping [Elias will play Thursday] ... and if that happens we’ll have to make a [roster] move,” Devils GM Lou Lamoriello said.

Return to ice helps Devils’ Martin Brodeur move on after death of father

Tuesday, October 1, 2013

BY TOM GULITTI

STAFF WRITER

NEWARK – Martin Brodeur was back on the ice Monday morning, back where the Devils’ goaltender has always been able to block out what’s going on in his life outside hockey.

Brodeur played in two of the Devils’ six preseason games, going 0-2 with an 4.24 goals-against average.

Patrik Elias returned to practice and said he felt fine. Elias said he’ll be ready for the opener.

“The injury is gone,” he said. “I’ll be fine.”

The Devils must have their opening night 23-man roster submitted to the NHL by 5 p.m. today.

Cam Janssen, who cleared waivers, was the only player that did not practice. He will be assigned to Albany (AHL).

For some reason we have a lot of family photos,” he chuckled, alluding to his family, it was the first time it really happened so close, so it was definitely difficult."

Forsberg tried to spend as much time with his father as possible in recent weeks. He went to Montreal to see him for “two, three days” just before camp began. The Devils’ preseason game in Montreal on Sept. 23 gave him another opportunity to visit him in the hospital.

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Patrik Elias returned to practice and said he felt fine. Elias said he’ll be ready for the opener.

“The injury is gone,” he said. "I’ll be fine."

The Devils must have their opening night 23-man roster submitted to the NHL by 5 p.m. today.

Cam Janssen, who cleared waivers, was the only player that did not practice. He will be assigned to Albany (AHL).

"I'm not worried about toughness," coach Pete DeBoer said. "The people we have here play a hard game."

With a full squad, this is how coach Pete DeBoer broke down his two power play units:

First unit-- Marek Zidlicky and Travis Zajac on the points with Ryane Clowe, Patrik Elias and Jaromir Jagr up front.

Second unit-- Andy Greene and Adam Larsson/Peter Harrold on the points with Adam Henrique, Michael Ryder and Damien Brunner up front.

I asked Jagr if he thought he could help the Devils in shootouts, an area in which they struggled last season.

"When i was pretty good on the shootouts there was no shootouts in the league. That was 20 years ago," Jagr said with a laugh.

"Let's hope we're going to beat everybody in regulation time."

He said he "doesn't mind" being used on shootouts but thinks younger league. That was 20 years ago," Jagr said with a laugh.

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"Let's hope we're going to beat everybody in regulation time."

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Lines today:

Ryane Clowe-Patrik Elias-Damien Brunner
Rostislav Olesz-Travis Zajac-Dainius Zubrus
Adam Henrique-Andrei Loktionov-Michael Ryder
Ryan-Carter-Stephen Gionta-Steve Bernier
Mattias Tedenby-Jacob Josefson-Jaromir Jagr
Defense pairings:
Bryce Salvador-Marek Zidlicky
Andy Greene-Adam Larsson
Alex Urbom-Mark Fayne
Anton Volchenkov-Peter Harrolld
Goalties:
Martin Brodeur, Cory Schneider
Star Ledger LOADED: 10.01.2013
718803 New Jersey Devils

Return to ice helps Devils’ Martin Brodeur move on after death of father

Tuesday, October 1, 2013

BY TOM GULITTI

STAFF WRITER

NEWARK – Martin Brodeur was back on the ice Monday morning, back where the Devils’ goaltender has always been able to block out what’s going on in his life outside hockey.
"Brock and Matt Donovan basically picked up where they left off last season. That's why they're still here," Snow said. "They came in and both had great training camps and have well-earned spots on the roster."

There were a variety of veteran players on waivers Sunday, the sort that might once have attracted Snow's interest for a thin squad. At the end of last season's hurried January training camp, Snow plucked four players off waivers; three of them -- defensemen Brian Strait and Thomas Hickey and forward Keith Aucoin -- played roles in last season's playoff run. Strait and Hickey earned multiyear contracts.

Joe Finley was the fourth of those claimed off waivers last season. Finley cleared waivers for the Islanders on Monday and was sent to Bridgeport, a victim of the newfound blue-line depth. Nelson beat out fellow former first-round pick Ryan Strome, center Johan Sundstrom and wing Anders Lee for a spot.

Also sent to Bridgeport was another former first-rounder, defenseman Calvin de Haan, as well as goaltender Anders Nilsson, who lost out on the opening-night roster's backup goaltender job to Kevin Poulin.

Reinhart is an intriguing case. At 19, he still has one year of junior eligibility left and the Isles have nine regular-season games to see what the defensemen has to offer before deciding to send him back to Edmonton of the Western League or burn the first year of his entry-level deal.

This year's first-round pick, Ryan Pulock, impressed Snow and the coaching staff enough so that there was a decent discussion about whether to keep him up for the nine-game look. Pulock was returned to Brandon of the WHL Monday.

"Griffin was one of the best players on the ice for us every game he played," Snow said. "He's here for now. Where that leads down the road, I can't say. We definitely like what we have."

Notes & quotes: Defenseman Travis Hamonic, who left Sunday's preseason game in Ottawa early after a big hit, was evaluated Monday night for a possible concussion. He was not placed on injured reserve, so the Islanders are hoping he is ready for Friday's season opener against the Devils. Right wing Cal Clutterbuck (leg laceration) will begin the season on IR. He's still about a month away from returning.

Newsgday LOADED: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718805 New York Rangers

New hybrid icing in store as NY Rangers get set to open season

By Pat Leonard / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 1:59 AM

No lockout this season. No ugly labor standoffs. Just hockey to be played in the NHL, on time, beginning with three games on Tuesday night.

Montreal hosts Toronto, Winnipeg visits Edmonton, and Chicago will raise the Stanley Cup championship banner before hosting Washington.

"The first week of the regular season, you just know," Rangers forward Brad Richards said last week in Vancouver, anticipating the lift players will feel as October hits. "You get the butterflies back. Other games will be on TV. You're in hockey mode again."

Last season did not begin until Jan. 19 due to the labor dispute. But now, with a 10-year collective bargaining agreement in place, the hockey world is hoping for future prosperity as another full season gets underway.

Change will be in store this season, as the players voted on Monday to approve the immediate use of hybrid icing, which the NHL experimented with in the preseason.

Hybrid icing, used in the AHL while the NHL was locked out last season, allows linesmen to blow the play dead when they anticipate an icing and can determine at the faceoff dots that the defensive player will reach the puck first.

The rule encourages player safety — and has been endorsed by Rangers defensemen including Marc Staal and Michael Del Zotto — since serious injuries have resulted from high-speed chases as forwards race down ice seeking to cancel icings.

MINOR MOVEMENT: Forwards Darroll Powe and Brandon Mashinter and defenseman Stu Bickel cleared waivers at noon on Monday, keeping them in the organization with the Hartford Wolf Pack, the Rangers' AHL franchise.

New coach Alain Vigneault had said Sunday that while Powe did not make the opening day roster, the versatile penalty-killer "did everything that a player is asked to do — come to camp in shape, put your best game on the ice" — and that the Rangers hoped he would be available for a call-up this season. They got their wish.

Bickel lost out to Justin Falk as the seventh defensemen because management felt Bickel needed to play more minutes before returning to the club.

The Rangers had off Monday and will practice Tuesday and Wednesday in Greenburgh before flying to Phoenix for Thursday night's opener against the Coyotes to open an 11-day road trip.

New York Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013
718806 New York Rangers

Callahan may return to Rangers next week

By Larry Brooks
September 30, 2013 | 8:16pm

Carl Hagelin won't be eligible to make his season debut until the Rangers' 11th game on Oct. 29 at Nassau Coliseum, against the Islanders, after being placed on long term injury reserve Monday in conjunction with the submission of the club’s 2013-14 roster.

But the news is better concerning Ryan Callahan, the Blueshirts' other winger with a wounded wing, who was put on injured reserve and thus will be eligible to play as soon as he is deemed fit by the medical and training staff.

The captain has been ruled out of Thursday night’s opener in Phoenix, but may be able to play as soon as next week’s California Tour when the Blueshirts will be in L.A. on Monday, San Jose on Tuesday and Anaheim on Oct. 10.

Hagelin and Callahan both underwent surgeries to repair damaged labrums immediately following the Rangers’ second-round elimination by the Bruins. The surgery on Hagelin was more complex than the one on Callahan. Thus, the longer recovery time.

The move to place Hagelin on LTIs frees up to $2.25 million of cap space until the winger is restored to active duty.

The Blueshirts, who had the day off Monday, will skate at their practice facility Tuesday and Wednesday before leaving for the opening portion of their nine-game trip. The club will return home following Game 5 in St. Louis on Oct. 12 before matches in Washington on Oct. 16, New Jersey on Oct. 19, Philadelphia on Oct. 24 and Detroit on Oct. 26. The Garden opener is Oct. 28 against Montreal.

Darroll Powe, Stu Bickel and Brandon Mashinter cleared waivers and were officially assigned to the AHL Wolf Pack. The 28-year-old Powe has not played in the minors since a short stint with the AHL Phantoms in 2008-09.

New York Post LOADED: 10.01.2013
718807 New York Rangers

Rangers’ style switch puts focus on Nash

Tuesday, October 1, 2013

The Record

This is about Rick Nash now and how much more production he can give the Rangers.
This is about Nash now, even if hockey is never about one player, because he’s the Rangers’ one, true, offensive superstar.

And this is about offense now for the Rangers because, heaven knows, it hasn’t been for a while at Madison Square Garden, where the Rangers slog out 2-1 and 3-2 wins thanks to the brilliance of goalie Henrik Lundqvist.

This is about offense and Nash now because Alain Vigneault is the coach and not John Tortorella. Vigneault’s Canucks were one of the NHL’s better teams in terms of goal production and power play efficiency in his seven seasons.

Nash is the Rangers’ best threat since Jaromir Jagr set a team record with 54 goals under Tom Renney — another coach who ran afoul of the Blueshirt faithful because of a lack of offense — in 2005-06.

Yes, the Rangers, who open the season Thursday at Phoenix, have other playmakers. Center Derek Stepan was their leading scorer last season, captain Ryan Callahan is more than just a blood-and-guts forechecker, center Derick Brassard has flourished since his April trade from the Blue Jackets. Speedy left wing Carl Hagelin keeps defenses off balance, though, like Callahan, he’ll start the season injured.

And, after Brassard, Ryane Clowe, now with the Devils, and defenseman John Moore were added, the Rangers finished last season on a 10-3-1 run, averaging 3.6 goals instead of 2.4 prior to the trades.

But Nash is the linchpin of sustaining that. At 6-foot-4, 213 pounds and able to play either wing with a mentality akin to an NBA power forward, center Derick Brassard has flourished since his April trade from the Blue Jackets. Speedy left wing Carl Hagelin keeps defenses off balance, though, like Callahan, he’ll start the season injured.

His first season with the Rangers after a long-expected trade from Columbus was OK. He had 21 goals and 21 assists in 44 games during the lockout-shortened season.

Yet he had just three goals and six assists on the power play, notched just three game-winning goals, then added just one goal and four assists in 12 postseason games and was scoreless on the power play.

But this is Season 2 as a Ranger and a full 82-game schedule at that. Nash is in the prime of his career.

This is the stage he claimed he sought when he arrived from the Blue Jackets.

The Rangers need him to the tune of 40 goals and 40 assists.

This is about him meeting that standard.

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.01.2013
718808 New York Rangers

Carl Hagelin to miss first 10 games of season

Originally published: September 30, 2013 7:02 PM
Updated: September 30, 2013 8:05 PM
By STEVE ZIPAY steve.zipay@newsday.com

Rangers left wing Carl Hagelin, recovering from offseason surgery on his left shoulder, was placed on long-term injured reserve and will miss the first 10 games of the regular season. Forwards Darroll Powe and Brandon Mashinter and defenseman Stu Bickel cleared waivers and will report to AHL Hartford. The moves leave the Rangers about $1.3 million under the NHL’s $64.3-million salary cap.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718809 New York Rangers

NHL prognostications: Season begins tonight … make your picks

01 October 2013, 4:36 am by Carp in Hockey New York Rangers NHL
Rangers Report

Happy October, or as we call it, hockey season.

As you may or may not know, I have correctly predicted the outcome of every division race and every playoff series for several seasons. Or maybe not.

Anyway, here are my picks for each of the new division in this numbingly dumb new realignment. It’s going to be increasingly difficult, especially in the 16-team East, to make the playoffs for teams who previously benefited from being in weak divisions (looking at you, Southeast).

In case you need a refresher, there are four divisions (the Metropolitan—gag—the Atlantic, the Central and the Pacific. The top three teams in each division make the playoffs. Then there are two wild cards to be awarded based on record, and it could be that one division will have five playoff teams and the other three. Also, as if we needed a lot more games with no passion, no juice, and reduced playoff implications, every team will play a home-and-home against every team in the other conference.

Without further ado, my picks (next to each team are the latest odds to win the Stanley Cup, according to Bovada (www.Bovada.lv, twitter: @BovadaLV):

Metropolitan (cough, cough)

Pittsburgh (15/2)
Rangers (20/1)
Washington (25/1)
New Jersey (50/1)
Columbus (40/1)
Islanders (33/1)
Philadelphia (22/1)
Carolina (40/1)

Atlantic

Boston (10/1)
Ottawa (20/1)
Detroit (16/1)
Montreal (28/1)
Toronto (18/1)
Tampa Bay (33/1)
Buffalo (100/1)
Florida (150/1)

Central

Chicago (6/1)
Nashville (50/1)
St. Louis (12/1)
Winnipeg (66/1)
Minnesota (22/1)
Colorado (50/1)
Dallas (40/1)

Pacific

Los Angeles (12/1)
Vancouver (16/1)
San Jose (18/1)
Anaheim (25/1)
Phoenix (66/1)
Edmonton (20/1)
Calgary (100/1)

My preseason Stanley Cup pick:
offensive skills are indisputable, the Lightning deemed he wasn't physically a draft choice, Jonathan Drouin, back to the Halifax Mooseheads of the September gives way to the grim knowledge that a prospect is not quite emergence as rising star – but their primary shortcomings came defensively. a bid to get up to the salary-cap floor, they threw a bunch of free-agent or final opportunity) to salvage their stalled careers. Two years ago, mostly in was pruning, they went the other way and were busy adding. Florida has It was the same hard decision the Florida Panthers made two years ago with intelligently, decided patience would be ultimately be their reward.

That happens all the time incidentally – when the cheery optimism of early September gives way to the grim knowledge that a prospect is not quite ready for prime time.

The Tampa Bay Lightning made a similar decision, opting to send their No. 1 draft choice, Jonathan Drouin, back to the Halifax Mooseheads of the No. 1 line with Brad Richards and Rick Nash, but was so underwhelming that even with Carl Hagelin and Ryan Callahan unavailable for their opener, he was shipped out. That happened all the time incidentally – when the cheery optimism of early September gives way to the grim knowledge that a prospect is not quite ready for prime time.

The Panthers interest me because at a time when virtually everybody else competitive. The Panthers were crushed by injuries during the bowl, but if Thomas can come anywhere near the level of goaltending play he was deemed more ready to play.

It was the same hard decision the Florida Panthers made two years ago with another Quebec League product, Jonathan Huberdeau, and it paid dividends when Huberdeau made it to the NHL last year and shone. The Panthers interest me because at a time when virtually everybody else was pruning, they went the other way and were busy adding. Florida has become kind of a Last Chance Texaco for NHLers, seeking a second (or third or final opportunity) to salvage their stalled careers. Two years ago, mostly in a bid to get up to the salary-cap floor, they threw a bunch of free-agent signings up against the wall – adding Tomas Fleischmann, Kris Versteeg, Scottie Upshall and Ed Jovanovski – and unexpectedly saw the team coalesce, make playoffs, and end a league-high 10-year drought on the postseason sidelines. This fall, they've tried a version of the same tactic. Hot on the heels of new, more affluent ownership, they signed goaltender Tim Thomas, defenceman Tom Gilbert and Ryan Whitney and forward Brad Boyes to one-year deals; and then reacquired tough guy Krys Barch, who was with them two years ago, during that unexpected surge to the playoffs. The Panthers are a mystery.

Theoretically, they should be challenging Calgary in the NHL’s basement bowl, but if Thomas can come anywhere near the level of goaltending play he demonstrated for Boston a few years back, they could be unexpectedly competitive. The Panthers were crushed by injuries during the lockout-shortened season – the only real bright light, Huberdeau’s emergence as rising star – but their primary shortcomings came defensively. Not only were they the worst in the NHL, they were miles away the worst defensive team in the NHL, posting a cumulative 3.50 goals-against average, with playing time divided relatively equally amongst Jacob Markstrom, Scott Clemensen and Jose Theodore. For comparative purposes, consider Colorado was 27th, with a 3.07 GAA; Florida was almost half a goal worse than one of the leastest teams in the league. If Thomas can remedy that, the Panthers may be a team worth watching.

Before the start of last year, the St. Louis Blues took a chance on free-agent defenceman Wade Redden, but this time around, they passed on the chance to add Whitney, the former Oiler, former Duck, and former Penguin as a depth rearguard.

Centre Gil Brule, whose primary claim to fame was picking up a hitchhiking Bono prior to a U2 concert a couple of years back, didn’t catch on with the Phoenix Coyotes either.

Brule may be the best object lesson for any team rushing teenage prospects to the NHL. The sixth player chosen overall in the 2005 NHL entry draft, the Columbus Blue Jackets put him on their roster for seven games that first year and a full 78 the next, even though he wasn’t physically mature enough to play. His development stalled almost immediately and now some eight years later, at 26, is facing a career crossroads. It’s why, with Joe Colborne now in Calgary and likely to get a chance to play a key role on the rebuilding team, the prospects of Sean Monahan staying beyond a short NHL trial are greatly reduced. But Calgary is a team, like Tampa, that should be focused on the long term with its prospects. As impressive as Monahan was in camp, they must surely know that the game changes when the legitimate NHLers start to play for keeps. Instead of the makeshift defence corps that you see playing half-heartedly in the pre-season, that’ll be a focused Shea Weber or Ryan Suter they’re suddenly facing.

Of course, for some teams, injuries took care of their numbers game. The Anaheim Ducks are depleted on the backend, with Sheldon Souray out for two months recovering from a training injury. The Ducks had hoped Sami Vatanen would crack the lineup, and though he will likely be on the roster, he’s been hurt lately too – as are forwards Jakob Silfverberg and Emerson Etem, both of whom will eventually play prominent roles in the post Bobby Ryan era.

And in L.A., it was strictly a numbers game – their top line in Manchester last year, Linden Vey with Tyler Toffoli and Tanner Pearson, will be the top line in the minors again, at least at the start of the season. Matt Frattin won the No. 2 wing spot on the line with Mike Richards and Jeff Carter, and, like a lot of teams, the Kings don’t want their A prospects, either limited to a handful of minutes on the fourth line, or sitting out. It was the same deal in Minnesota – Jason Zucker was farmed out because a trio of youngsters, Charlie Coyle, Mikael Granlund and Nino Niederreiter were deemed more ready to play.

THE REAL IMPACT OF REALIGNMENT: Apart from placing teams in their correct geographic divisions, the primary implication of realignment is that it brought hope to the bottom half of the Western Conference. For years now, the West has been the stronger of the NHL’s two conferences, but that all changed when the Detroit Red Wings shifted east as part of a three-team switch. Essentially, the other two teams – Columbus Blue Jackets and Winnipeg Jets – are a wash, two non-playoff teams, with young cores, hopping to get better. But Detroit has been in the playoffs for 22 consecutive years and Detroit gave the Chicago Blackhawks the biggest push in last year’s playoffs. The Red Wings were just a so-so team in the first half of the lockout-shortened season, but they got better and better as the year went along.

Detroit is going to be a handful again – and as one of 16 teams chasing eight playoff spots, is going to push somebody out. Over in the West, the percentage to qualify for postseason play is significantly higher – 57 per cent compared to 50, on the basis of eight of 14 qualifying.

There are six teams that would likely concede playoff spots to: the Chicago Blackhawks, the St. Louis Blues, the Vancouver Canucks, plus the three California teams – San Jose Sharks, Los Angeles Kings and Anaheim Ducks. Over an 82-game schedule, all have enough depth and experience to get over the playoff Mendoza line.

What’s left is a mash of teams on the way up, on the way down or trying to find a place in the soft squishy middle of the NHL pack, where most teams reside, thanks to the evils of parity.

The Winnipeg Jets? Getting better but still searching for their first playoff spot since returning to the NHL? The Minnesota Wild? They squeezed in as the eighth seed last year after four years out of the playoffs, thanks in part to the free-agent acquisitions of Ryan Suter and Zach Parise. But Minnesota didn’t
score a lot, changed a fair bit of their supporting cast and ultimately needs to see Charlie Coyle, Mikael Granlund and some of their hotshot prospects evolve into contributing NHL players.

It is that way in Edmonton too – a great young nucleus in place that may still be a year or two away from joining the playoff party. Taylor Hall made great strides last year, but Nail Yakupov isn’t there yet and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Sam Gagner start the year on IR, leaving a massive gap in their top six.

How about Nashville? The Predators sunk to 14th last year, and wrote a lot of it off to injuries, but their modus operandi hasn’t changed. The additions – Matt Cullen, Viktor Stalberg, Matt Hendricks, Eric Nystrom – all qualify as NHL journeymen. They will go as far as Shea Weber and Pekka Rinne take them – and last year, it wasn’t far enough.

The Colorado Avalanche was even worse – dead last in the conference – a team with a lot of young talent on paper that couldn’t get it together on ice. That’s the advantage of having Patrick Roy as the new coach presumably. In his previous life running the Quebec Remparts, Roy is used to the inconsistencies and mistakes that young players make.

The Coyotes stability saga is over and it will be interesting to see how certainty echoes in the dressing room. For years, the Coyotes successfully played the us-against-the-world card to help motivate a team run on a shoestring. Now that their futures are secure, will there be a temptation to exhale? Who knows?

The season will give us answers there – and answers in Dallas too, where the Stars will give Tyler Seguin a chance to renew his rivalry with Hall – Taylor vs. Tyler, the 2013-14 chapter - in the same conference.

In Calgary, it’s worse than anywhere – on paper anyway – but the hope in Cowtown is that a series of European goaltending flashes will join the NHL and make an immediate impact. As coach Bob Hartley likes to say: “A goalie can bring lots of good lipstick to an organization.”

Eight months from now, the season will have sorted itself out into winners and losers, with the usual number of surprises and disappointments and injuries wreaking havoc with somebody or other. But for now, with teams on the ice playing for keeps Tuesday night, let’s permit them all a little wishful thinking. Anyone can tell you, it never lasts too long.

AND FINALLY: The Coyotes signed centre Mike Ribeiro as a free agent for a number of reasons: Newly stable ownership allowed them to increase the player budget and coach Dave Tippett has a history with Ribeiro, dating back to their days together in the Dallas Stars’ organization. Ribeiro was a targeted addition, added so that Martin Hanzal and Antoine Vermette could play further down the depth chart, as the team’s second and third-line centres, which is where their skill sets suggest they should play. According to Tippett, Ribeiro fills an organizational void that they had ever since Ray Whitney left as a free agent, during the height of the team’s financial woes, when they were reluctant to offer a multi-year contract to a player who was 38 at the time.

Ribeiro was a key player on the Washington Capitals’ highly rated power play, which scored 44 goals last year, most in the NHL. Phoenix, by contrast, had the No. 25 ranked power play, which, considering their depth on the blue line, with Keith Yandle and Oliver Ekman-Larsson, should have been better.

According to Tippett, Ribeiro “adds an element of that high skill. We had that element a couple of years ago in Whitney, a guy that could make other players around him better. Now, getting it at centre ice, it puts everybody else in the right position. We’ve had Marty Hanzal in that position for a couple of years. Marty’s a really good player, but he’s a better guy coming from the second hole, and can play against top players, or play as a shutdown guy. So he just adds an unbelievable skill set that we believe can help players like (Mikkel) Boedker, (Shane) Doan and (Radim) Vrbata; help our power play. He’s a player we didn’t have – and when you can add a player like that, it gets everybody else in the roles they should be.”

The Coyotes planned to start the year with a No. 1 line of Ribeiro, Boedker and Doan. Hanzal, Vrbata were two-thirds of the second line, with a number of different players, including Lauri Korpikoski and Guillaume Latendresse, getting auditions to play a top-six role. Vermette and David Moss were penciled in as two-thirds of the third line, with the other spot also still in a state of flux.

“I don’t think we consider ourselves a powerhouse by any means,” said goaltender Mike Smith, “but obviously, adding a player like Ribs and the dynamic game he brings to our team, I think we were lacking that player before. We have a lot of underrated players that are in their right roles now. I think you’ll see we have great depth and our D, it’s a strong area of our team. Hopefully, that can transfer into some good play out there.”

But as team captain Shane Doan acknowledged, how the Coyotes adjust to their newly secure state will go a long in determining how successful their year is and ultimately, if the franchise can turn it around financially as well.

“I guess the phrase is, ‘potential’s got a lot of people fired,’” said Doan, with a laugh, “so we’ve got to make sure that the potential we think we have is displayed out on the ice. We think we have a good team and we’re capable of being good. That’s our goal – to take that next step and be consistently one of the teams that everyone has to compete with.”

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Olympics Loom Large Over N.H.L.

A full schedule after a lockout-shortened season, a new divisional setup, outdoor games galore, the Chicago Blackhawks seeking their third Stanley Cup in five years. Those are all solid story lines for the 2013-14 National Hockey League season, which begins with three games on Tuesday. But make no mistake, much of the season will be about the Winter Olympics.

The Sochi Games will cast a long shadow over the season, until Feb. 9, when the N.H.L. pauses to allow nearly 150 players to fly to Russia for the 12-day tournament.

If those dozen days produce anything like the 2010 men’s tournament in Vancouver, which was capped by Sidney Crosby scoring the golden goal for Canada against the United States, it will be worth the wait.

The Olympic question will hang over every N.H.L. game. Will the Buffalo Sabres’ Ryan Miller rebound from three middling seasons to tend goal again for the United States, or will it be the Los Angeles Kings’ Jonathan Quick? Who will man the nets for the Canadians: Roberto Luongo, Corey Crawford, Carey Price or Cam Ward? Can Crosby stay healthy enough to play for Canada, and can his Pittsburgh Penguins teammate Evgeni Malkin stay healthy to play for Russia? When N.H.L. play resumes on Feb. 26, it will be the playoffs and the Stanley Cup finals, making this a season of two climaxes. Here is a look at some of the stories to follow.

New Coaches

Canadians call Vancouver Lotus Land because, supposedly, it is so laid-back. But the city has been the scene of plenty of civil disturbances over the last two decades, including two riots having to do with the Canucks.

So, it seems, Vancouverites take their hockey as seriously as does John Tortorella, who signed a five-year deal in June to coach the Canucks. Throw in the highly contentious Vancouver hockey news media, a citywide 24/7 obsession with the game that Tortorella never experienced as head coach in New York or Tampa and Tortorella’s own tripwire temper, and you have the recipe for a perfect storm.

He was on good behavior when the Rangers visited for an exhibition game last week, but do not count on that lasting.

He has already demanded that his players stop using their Twitter accounts, which just happens to be something Roberto Luongo, the Canucks goalie, is famous for.

“I think it’s stupid,” Tortorella said last month.

Other new coaches to watch: Rangers Coach Alain Vigneault, the former Canucks coach, is as good-natured as Tortorella is hair-triggered; Patrick Roy, in his first N.H.L. coaching job, takes over the Colorado Avalanche, whom he led to two Stanley Cups as a goaltender; Lindy Ruff, the former Sabres coach, is now in Dallas after he protested long and loud that the Stars beat Buffalo for the Stanley Cup on an illegal goal in 1999; and Dallas Eakins makes his N.H.L. coaching debut with a young Edmonton Oilers team of unfulfilled promise.

New Uniforms

The Columbus Blue Jackets made the biggest catch of the off-season when they signed Nathan Horton, a free-agent wing, from the Boston Bruins.
Horton has scored 402 points in 591 N.H.L. regular-season games, but more
important are his 36 points in 43 playoff games during the Bruins’ Stanley
Cup championship run in 2011 and their 4-2 loss to the Blackhawks in the
finals last spring.

Now ensconced in the East, the Blue Jackets, behind their president for
hockey operations, John Davidson, are making a run at respectability. They
have right wing Marian Gaborik, the former Rangers sniper; goalie Sergei
Bobrovsky, the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, and now Horton, a playoff
hero. All they have to do is make the playoffs, something they have done only
once in 12 seasons. They just missed last season, finishing ninth in the West
Conference.

Other key players putting on new sweaters: Tyler Seguin (Stars, from
Bruins), Jaromir Jagr (Devils, from Bruins), Cory Schneider (Devils, from
Canucks), Jarome Iginla (Bruins, from Penguins), Bobby Ryan (Ottawa
Senators, from Anaheim Ducks), Daniel Alfredsson (Detroit Red Wings, from
Senators), Valteri Filppula (Tampa Bay Lightning, from Red Wings), Vincent
Lecavalier (Philadelphia Flyers, from Lightning), Tim Thomas (Florida
Panthers, from a year off).

New Divisions

The N.H.L. restructured its divisions to allow Detroit and Columbus to move
to the Eastern Conference and Winnipeg to move to the Western
Conference. The shuffling eases the travel burden on Western teams and
adds some longer trips for the Rangers, the Islanders, the Devils, the Flyers
and the Penguins.

Now those five teams are joined by the Blue Jackets, the Washington
Capitals and the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference’s
Metropolitan Division. But for sheer hockey gravitas, there is the new Atlantic
Division: the Montreal Canadiens, the Toronto Maple Leafs, Detroit, Boston,
Buffalo and the Ottawa Senators, and for all their snowbird fans in the
Sunshine State, the Florida Panthers and Tampa Bay.

New Rules

Players will be penalized an additional two minutes if they take off their
helmets to fight, so in a preseason game Krys Barch, then of the Devils, and
Players will also get a two-minute penalty if their sweaters are tucked into
back and throwing punches. Gallant said, “I wasn’t trying to make a mockery
of the N.H.L.” The loophole was subsequently closed.

Players will also get a two-minute penalty if their sweaters are tucked into
their pads. Presumably, this will keep the labels of nonlicensee companies
off N.H.L. telecasts, but it will ruin the on-ice silhouette of Alex Ovechkin,
who, like Wayne Gretzky before him, tucks his sweater in. Ovechkin’s
opinion of the rule: “Everybody wants to do his own thing. It’s stupid.”

Most significant, the players’ association voted Monday to allow hybrid icing
as a way to reduce dangerous races for the puck. Many players said they
were confused by the rule during a preseason trial, but they approved the
change anyway. The problem: the rule will not eliminate the most dangerous
high-speed races into the end boards.

New Classics?

Maybe the New Year’s Day Winter Classic had lost some of its novelty, and
maybe it had not. But the six outdoor stadium extravaganzas on tap will make
up some of the revenue lost in last season’s lockout. In addition to the New
Year’s Day Winter Classic game between the Red Wings and the Maple
Leafs at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor (expected attendance: 105,000),
outdoor games will be staged at balmy Dodger Stadium, Yankee Stadium
(twice), Soldier Field in Chicago and B.C. Place in Vancouver.

Dates to Circle

WARM AND FUZZY DEPARTMENT Teemu Selanne’s farewell visit to
Winnipeg (Ducks at Winnipeg Jets, Oct. 6); Coach Lindy Ruff’s return to
Buffalo (Stars at Sabres, Oct. 28); Rick Nash’s return to Columbus (Rangers
at Blue Jackets, Nov. 7).


718812 Ottawa Senators

Senators’ Pageau finds role model in Canadiens’ Brière

By Ken Warren | on September 30, 2013

OTTAWA — For Jean-Gabriel Pageau, there was little chance that instant
National Hockey League success last spring would go to his head. His idol,
14-year veteran Daniel Brière, wouldn’t let him get ahead of himself.

Brière, now playing for Montreal Canadiens, offered Pageau plenty of sage
dvice during the summer.

“One of the mistakes I made in my second and third year (of pro hockey) was
that, when I was sent down (to the minors), I had the tendency to pout a little
bit,” says Brière, a Phoenix Coyotes first-round draft choice in 1996 who
needed five seasons to establish himself as a full-time NHL player. “I would
think, ‘I was there last year, why can’t I stay this year?’ And that’s what I
warned him against. Whatever happens, you’ve got to keep pushing. Even if
you get sent down, you’ve got to show them that they made a mistake, and
there are 29 other teams watching, so you never know.”

Pageau, the Ottawa Senators rookie centre who already has a playoff hat
trick to his name, took those words to heart.

Just in case you weren’t paying attention during training camp, Pageau was
one of the Senators’ top players. Fittingly, perhaps, he scored the team’s final
goal of the pre-season in Sunday’s 4-1 loss to the New York Islanders. He
also made a loud statement with his determination to shut down Toronto
Maple Leafs centre Nazem Kadri early in the exhibition schedule, smashing
him hard into the boards and ending up in the middle of a scuffle that ended
with blood dripping down Pageau’s cheek. That came after a standout rookie
tournament in London, where Pageau dominated.

If Pageau hadn’t delivered, it likely would have been him and not Mika
Zibanjad, who heard the disappointing news about a demotion back to
Binghamton of the American Hockey League on Monday as the Senators
pared the roster to 22 players.

“Danny gave me good tips,” Pageau says. “Just to make sure I give
everything I have and do all the sacrifices. I think he’s really good for that.
During the summer, we played summer hockey together, and I just tried to
apply his tips.”

They may be almost a generation apart and Brière is at the tail end his career
while Pageau is just getting started, but the similarities go on and on.

Brière, who turns 36 on Sunday, is a supremely gifted, but undersized
center (5-10, 181 pounds) who eventually found a way to succeed against the
bigger boys in the big leagues. Pageau, 20, is a two-way centre whose size
may not have been as much of an issue, but it certainly helped. Pageau also
made a loud statement with his determination to shut down Toronto
Maple Leafs centre Nazem Kadri early in the exhibition schedule, smashing
him hard into the boards and ending up in the middle of a scuffle that ended
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bigger boys in the big leagues. Pageau, 20, is a two-way centre whose size
(5-9, 172 pounds), hasn’t stopped him from working harder than his
competition.

From the beginning, Pageau followed in Brière’s skate marks. He attended
the same Gatineau high school and played for the same Gatineau Intrepide
midget AAA team as Brière had before embarking on his own junior career
with the Gatineau Olympiques.

While Pageau grew up watching Brière put up big numbers in Phoenix,
Buffalo and Philadelphia, the two didn’t meet until Pageau was 15. Brière’s
actions told him about the rising teenage star, so he invited
Pageau and his uncle to Philadelphia to watch him play a Game 7 playoff
game against Montreal.

“You hear about the best player in the area and he drove down to the game,”
Brière says. “He came to the dressing room and I gave him a stick. And, after
that, you started hearing more and more about him. From everyone around,
all I kept hearing was how much he was for his age, how dedicated he was,
how serious he was in wanting to play in the NHL. When you see a kid like
that, that really wants to take it to the next level, it’s great. You try to help
them.

“You can tell in his attitude. He’s one of those kids that always wants more.
He’s very competitive. And one thing I told him, ‘It’s one thing to get to the
NHL. There are a lot of guys who get there. It’s also about moving forward,
about staying there for many years.’”

Pageau remembers everything about that first visit. As fate would have it,
Pageau made his NHL debut in Philadelphia last spring, five years after
meeting his idol for the first time. The only unfortunate part of the story was
that Brière was injured and didn’t play. That time, Brière came to see
Pageau.

“I think that (playoff game) gave me a little push, that I really wanted to play
there one day,” Pageau says. “Last year, I had my chance. Danny wasn’t
playing, but he came to see me after the game and he congratulated me. It
was nice of him.”
Scanlan: Zibanejad latest to receive Sens tough love
by Wayne Scanlan on September 30, 2013

Over so soon?

Leafs in pre-season NHL action at Canadian Tire Centre, September 19, 2013, in Kanata, Ontario. (Wayne Cuddington / Ottawa Citizen)

718814 Ottawa Senators

Chris Phillips – Joe Corvo

Goal

Craig Anderson

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.01.2013

718813 Ottawa Senators

The Senators 22-man roster, minus Zibanajed

Here’s what the 22-player roster looks like. Thoughts?

by Ken Warren on September 30, 2013

Milan Michalek – Jason Spezza – Bobby Ryan

Clarke MacArthur – Kyle Turris – Cory Conacher

Zack Smith – Stephane Da Costa – Chris Neil

Colin Greening – Jean-Gabriel Pageau – Erik Condra

Matt Kassian

Defence

Marc Methot – Erik Karlsson

Jared Cowen – Patrick Wiercioch

Chris Phillips – Joe Corvo

Eric Gryba

Goal

Craig Anderson

Robin Lehner

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.01.2013

718814 Ottawa Senators

Scanlan: Zibanejad latest to receive Sens tough love

Over so soon?

by Wayne Scanlan on September 30, 2013

Mika Zibanejad (L) looks to pass the puck with Nikolai Kulemin (R) closing in during the third period as the Ottawa Senators take on the Toronto Maple Leafs in pre-season NHL action at Canadian Tire Centre, September 19, 2013, in Kanata, Ontario. (Wayne Cuddington / Ottawa Citizen)
Speaking of scoring, new captain Jason Spezza appeared on the newly re-branded TSN 1200 in Ottawa to declare himself fit and ready to start the season. Spezza said the word is out on last year's pesky Sens.

“We understand we’re not underdogs anymore,” Spezza said. “We’ve made a name for ourselves around the league as a really hard-working team, a team that can be hard to play against and we have to make sure that stays our identity.”

After a full day off on Monday, the Senators return to the ice Tuesday at 11 a.m. They have three practice days prior to Friday’s opener in Buffalo against the Sabres. On Saturday, they visit the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.01.2013
718815 Ottawa Senators

**Zibanejad to Binghamton**

In a surprise move, the Ottawa Senators are expected to assign Mika Zibanejad to Binghamton of the American Hockey League.

by Ken Warren on September 30, 2013

In a surprise move, the Ottawa Senators have assigned 20-year-old forward Mika Zibanejad to Binghamton of the American Hockey League.

Zibanejad, who appeared to have established himself as a National Hockey League regular with his play late in the 2013 season and with a decent playoff performance, was the odd man out when the Senators announced their opening day roster in a media release on Monday.

The contract situation of other players played a role in the Senators’ decision.

The club won’t play its home-opener at the Canadian Tire Centre until Oct. 17 against the New Jersey Devils. The club will travel to Buffalo and Toronto this weekend, then return home before heading to Los Angeles on Monday.

They’re champing at the bit to get going after reporting for medicals on Sept. 11.

“We’ve been looking forward (to the start of the season) since we came to camp,” said defenceman Marc Methot. “We’re pretty much in game shape.

“Then you come in here and you play a bunch of pre-season games, so it’s a lot of work. We’re really anxious to get going.”

The Senators will have three days of practice before heading to Buffalo on Thursday.

“It’s been a long training camp. At the same time, we’re all professionals, we’ve got to show up and put in the work,” said goalie Craig Anderson.

“Pre-season you’ve got to put in the work and create good habits.”

“You’re not just going to flip a switch and play well. You’ve got to start at ground zero and work your way up. We’ve got to use this next week to practice and get ourselves ready.”

OFF THE GLASS: After being in Ottawa for a month, Bobby Ryan said if he re-did that popular streeter video for the club’s website asking about “the new guy Bobby Ryan,” he’d probably be recognized a lot more. “There’s been a little bit of a change. That’s probably coming from the media and the fact that the video did so well,” said Ryan. “People have noticed it, and seen it in the city. It’s been a little different the past couple of weeks.” ...

GM Bryan Murray said the club has 22 players on the roster but is paying 23 contracts because Jim O’Brien is making $675,000 in Binghamton. “We have the 23 one-way contracts now, and one guy will play now. If we have a need then we can reach and get somebody from down there, and if he’s playing well we’ll have a real chance for that to be the case,” said Murray.

AROUND THE BOARDS

The groin injury didn’t give captain Jason Spezza as much time to skate with Bobby Ryan as he would have liked. “It would have benefitted us to play a few games,” said Spezza. “There’s nothing like live fire in games when you’re playing big minutes against the other team’s top (defencemen). There’s going to be a little bit of feeling out as the season goes on, but we’ve had lots of time to have conversation. He’s grasped the system. He’s played well. We’ll be fine once we get going.” ...

Spezza told TSN 1200 on Monday he’ll clash at the bit to get going. “Better (to have this happen) now than during the season,” said Spezza. “I’d like to think I’m learning from mistakes in my past a little bit. I’ve pushed through injuries in the past and they linger, especially in the pre-season. My plan was to play four or five games. Things don’t always go as planned. The trainers really cautioned me to be careful with it because it’s something that can linger for a long time.”

THE LAST WORD

If Mayor Jim Watson needs any proof building a casino at the Canadian Tire Centre would add value to the franchise, all he has to do is look at the sale of the Florida Panthers. The sale of the club was approved Friday by the NHL’s board of governors to New York businessman Vincent Viola for a whopping $250 million. That’s way more than anybody thought the Panthers were worth, but part of the deal of the sale includes the building of casino next to the B&B&T Center in Sunrise. No wonder the Panthers were busy signing G Tim Thomas, D Ryan Whitney and D Tom Gilbert on the weekend. The casino will create more traffic and add a revenue source for the Panthers. That’s what Eugene Melnyk was trying to create in Ottawa before the bid was shot down by city council.

TICKETS TO BINGO

Defencemen Ben Blood, Mark Borowiecki, Cody Ceci, Fredrik Claesson, Tyler Eckford, Daniel New, Troy Rutkowski, Michael Sdao and Chris Wideman; forwards with forwards Corey Cowick, Jakub Culek, David Dziurzynski, Derek Grant, Wacey Hamilton, Danny Hobbs, Mike Hoffman, Ludwig Karlsson, Darren Kramer, Jim O’Brien, Andre Petersson, Shane Prince, Matt Puempel, Buddy Robinson, Cole Schneider, Mark Stone and Mika Zibanejad; goaltenders Scott Greenham, Andrew Hammond and Nathan Lawson. F Curtis Lazar, the Senators first-round draft pick (17th overall) in the 2013 draft, will return to the WHL’s Edmonton Oil Kings.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013
718817 Ottawa Senators
Stephane Da Costa answers bell after Senators read riot act

By Bruce Garrioch, First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 06:04 PM

Reading the riot act to Stephane Da Costa apparently worked.

That could be why the Senators decided to go the route without Mika Zibanejad as final cuts were made Monday.

Senators GM Bryan Murray told reporters the club warned Da Costa to get his act together in the summer and he responded by making the team coming out of camp.

"We called in Da Costa at the end of last year and said, 'Wake up, if you don't get stronger and you don't work harder this summer you won't have any future as an NHL player,' " said Murray. "This guy has come in, in great shape, and worked hard, and I think he's been a real good performer throughout camp.

"Likewise with (Jean-Gabriel) Pageau. He just had the chance in the playoffs through camp. He came out of camp, and the guy worked and is one of our better players in camp. So how do you keep him off the team? If we're going to be good on our word, and that is work hard and you get a chance."

Da Costa's effort might have been the biggest surprise in camp. Coach Paul MacLean told TSN 1200 in an interview Monday the club wants a further look at Da Costa.

"Stephane has had a very good training camp, very consistent from start to finish," MacLean said. "We've asked him in the past to work on some aspects of his game N conditioning, strength, competition levels and his ability to play without the puck.

"Those are things he obviously did a lot of work on, and those are things that we have to respect him for embracing, that and making those changes in his game."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

Ottawa Senators send Mika Zibanejad to AHL Binghamton

By Bruce Garrioch First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013

The Senators had some harsh words for Mika Zibanejad as he headed to the minors.

The Senators pared their roster to 22 players to start the season and the decision to assign the club's top pick in the 2011 NHL entry draft to its AHL affiliate in Binghamton was the only surprise among the final cuts.

The 20-year-old Zibanejad didn't have a great camp, didn't fit in on the right side with Clarke MacArthur and Kyle Turris, and was unseeded for a job by the strong play of Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Stephane Da Costa in camp.

GM Bryan Murray told Zibanejad during a meeting Monday morning at the Canadian Tire Centre he didn't step up to the challenge when others were battling for jobs.

"The other guys stepped up way above him in camp, and he didn't do anything about it," said Murray in a conference call with reporters Monday afternoon. "When you let two guys come in and take your job, we said that to him.

"You saw how Pageau and Da Costa (were) playing and you didn't step up and say, 'I'll better pay attention and win my spot here.' We felt he let that happen ... I thought Mika kind of sat there, maybe he took it for granted, but he certainly didn't do what we expected to happen."

Don't think for a second this move is permanent.

Sending Zibanejad down didn't require the No. 6 overall pick in the draft to clear waivers because he's on an entry-level contract. The decision not to keep two extra forwards meant Zibanejad was the one to lose the draw.

He isn't the first high-profile Senators prospect to be sent to the minors, and won't be the last. Defenceman Erik Karlsson played 12 games with the Baby Sens in 2009-10 before being called up for the balance of the season.

Management always insists when final cuts are made the players make the decisions for them. In this case, it doesn't sound like Zibanejad made it difficult at all for Murray to send him back to Binghamton.

"Performance is the main thing, and always is," said Murray. "We felt that Da Costa and Pageau had better camps (than Zibanejad). They were more ready to help the team right now than Mika was, and we indicated that to him.

"Go down and play and get the intensity of your game to where we think it has to be to help us here then we'll address the issue in the near future if it has to be addressed."

The Senators aren't down on Zibanejad, who played 42 games with the club last season after Jason Spezza needed back surgery, but they feel if he isn't competing, then he isn't effective.

"We like the fact that he can skate and really shoot the puck," said Murray. "We like the fact that he's got a fairly good-sized body. What he has to do is get involved more often around the net, more often in the forechecking to retrieve the pucks.

"It's great when you have the puck, but you've got to go get the puck sometimes. That means you have to be physically and mentally involved in the game to do it. We just thought it took him awhile last year to get started. At camp it looked to me like he played fine with the puck."

With the roster in place, Murray is confident the Senators are well-positioned for the start of the season. There will be nine new faces on the roster that didn't start the 48-game schedule last January.

"I think we have a good team. We didn't score very well at the end of camp. That was a little disappointing," said Murray. "I'd like to see us score a little bit easier and a little bit better, but I think we have a good looking team.

"Our goaltending and our back should be really strong. We'll have to wait and see if we can score enough goals. Can our best players play like our best players every night?"

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers need better depth at center

Sam Carchidi

Take away Claude Giroux and the Flyers' centers struggled mightily last season.

Giroux collected 13 goals and 48 points in the lockout-shortened, 48-game campaign.

The other players who spent some time at center - Brayden Schenn, Danny Briere, Sean Couturier, Max Talbot, Adam Hall and Scott Laughton - combined for just 23 goals in 178 games.

Prorated over an 82-game season, that's an average of 10.6 goals for the non-No. 1 centers.

And, so, yes, the Flyers are relying heavily on free-agent signee Vinny Lecavalier, the team's second-line center, to shoulder some of the load.

Lecavalier has scored 20 goals or more in each of the last 12 full seasons.

General manager Paul Holmgren has especially liked how Lecavalier has looked with winger Wayne Simmonds on his right side.

"The two of them seemed to have some chemistry right away," Holmgren said earlier in training camp. "They both like to control the puck down low. They move around and maybe there's something there."

In addition to production from Lecavalier - who, in essence, takes the place of Briere (six goals in 34 games), now with Montreal - the Flyers need third-line center Couturier (four goals in 46 games) to emerge. Schenn, who had eight goals in 47 games last season, will begin the season at wing.
The Flyers were one of the NHL's worst teams in even-strength situations last season, causing general manager Paul Holmgren to make a significant summertime move.

Enter center/philanthropist Vinny Lecavalier, the former Tampa Bay star who owns a number of the Lighting's records.

Lecavalier, 33, signed to a five-year, $22.5 million free-agent deal in July, gives the Flyers some much-needed size (6-foot-4, 215 pounds) up the middle. He also gives them a terrific playmaker, veteran leadership, and dominance in the faceoff circle.

And his presence means teams can't just concentrate on stopping Claude Giroux and his linemates.

"By adding that other piece, it doesn't have to be Claude and his line that other teams only have to focus on as a big player," coach Peter Laviolette said. "Now you put Vinny in that spot and even the development of Sean [Couturier] this year, and you start to put some depth in the line combinations."

In five-on-five situations last season, the Flyers had a 0.86 goals-for/goals-against ratio. Only Colorado, Calgary and Florida - three teams that also didn't make the playoffs - were worse.

Stanley Cup champion Chicago led the league with a staggering 1.52 five-on-five ratio, meaning it scored 1.52 goals for each one it allowed in those even-strength situations.

Lecavalier, who had 10 goals and 32 points in 39 games during the lockout-shortened 2013 season, will give the Flyers better matchups. He will center the No. 2 line, with Wayne Simmonds (15 goals) and Brayden Schenn (eight) as his likely wingers.

"They forecheck really hard. They're really hard on the puck and it's going to give us lots of opportunities," said Lecavalier, an affable sort who served as the Lightning's captain. "The more games you play together, the better it is."

The Flyers need Lecavalier to stay healthy. He has missed time with injuries in each of the last three seasons, including a broken left foot that sidelined him for nine games in 2013. Before the last three years, he had played between 77 and 82 games in five straight seasons. If you omit the shortened 2013 season, Lecavalier has scored at least 20 goals in 12 consecutive years.

The Flyers are counting on that streak growing.

Pride of the Lightning

In Tampa, Lecavalier will always be revered. He'll always be the 23-year-old kid who helped lead the Lightning to the 2004 Stanley Cup. He'll always be legendary for his charity work.

Lecavalier's foundation built a pediatric cancer and blood disorder center that bears his name at a St. Petersburg children's hospital

While his philanthropy has never waned, Lecavalier's on-ice performance has dipped in recent years. For that reason, critics say signing Lecavalier was risky because of his age and the fact that his production has dropped in each of the last four seasons.

That, along with the $37 million left on Lecavalier's deal, is why the Lightning decided to use a compliance buyout on the last seven years of his contract.

Lecavalier, whose 52 goals topped the NHL in 2006-07, was asked if he felt he had something to prove.

"I do, but not to prove Tampa wrong or anything," he said. "For me, it's another challenge the way the year went last year with injuries and not winning. . . . I want to have a good year and help this team out as much as I can. Everybody has something to prove every year. We're all going to push forward."

The Quebec native has not set any personal goals.

"I've never set numbers," he said. "I want to produce, obviously, and help this team as much as I can and be consistent."

An unselfish player, Lecavalier said he sometimes has to remind himself to shoot more often.

"I think it's going to be good, because Simmer and Schenn both get the puck to the net, too, and the other guy will get the rebound and we'll have opportunities."

Tampa played a trapping style, as opposed to the Flyers' attacking system.

"The big difference for me this year is getting the puck in the offensive zone and keeping it - and not just one opportunity and then you're out," Lecavalier said.

Last season, the Flyers lost a majority of board battles and spent too much time in the defensive end. They hope Lecavalier will help change that.

"We've got to play in their zone," he said. "A good defense [is] if you're in their zone a lot more than yours."

After spending 14 years in Tampa, Lecavalier is excited to be in a city that fills the Wells Fargo Center for every home game.

"I hear it from other guys. They tell me this is a very special place," said Lecavalier, who, like many of his teammates, has settled in Haddonfield with his family. "Not just for hockey, but for sports in general. Philadelphia is great, great sports town, . . .

"I wanted to be in a hockey market. I'm not going to lie," Lecavalier added.

"Just playing against this team, in this building, this is like a family here. From all the players who have played here, I see all the guys coming back, all the guys living here. You can see this is a tight organization and tight family, and it's something I wanted to be part of."
“There’s 16 teams in our conference right now. They added Detroit, who is a perennial playoff team. Then you’ve got an up-and-coming team in Columbus, who was knocking on the door last year.”

The only joke in the Metropolitan Division is the name. The Blue Jackets, Hurricanes and Capitals are the newcomers to the Flyers’ division. Carolina figures to be the least competitive this year, but they’ve been to the Stanley Cup final (twice) and won more Stanley Cups (one) than the Flyers have in the last 13 years.

Columbus is playing most of its games in the Eastern time zone for the first final (twice) and won more Stanley Cups (one) than the Flyers have in the last 13 years. Columbus was knocking on the door last year. “There’s 16 teams in our conference right now. They added Detroit, who is a perennial playoff team. Then you’ve got an up-and-coming team in Columbus, who was knocking on the door last year.”

“Every game is a good game, every game is a big game,” Holmgren said. “I don’t think you can have nights off when you’re playing an Eastern team.”

It’s one message Hartnell’s general manager is working to convey in order for everyone to keep their jobs.

“We’ve got to win hockey games,” Laviolette said. “I’m not going to circle the division games and say, ‘We need these games and well, let’s hope we do OK in the rest of them.’ They’re all important.

“Division games bring out the rivalry and bring out the best in you. Certainly, guys are motivated when they see teams in their division.”

Kimmo Timonen said he’s excited to see some of the other teams in the West - since the Flyers only played against the East last season. For the first time in almost 10 years, the Flyers will visit every arena at least once and fans in Philadelphia will see every team at least once.

That also means slightly more travel for the Flyers, which turns up the temperature a few more degrees. The Flyers will fly 34,294 air miles over 41 road games, just about 5,000 more miles than 2010-11.

“I don’t think you can have nights off when you’re playing an Eastern team,” Scott Hartnell said. “You might get away with it more against a team in the West when you need it for your standings, but every point does count. We’ve got to realize that.”

It’s one message Hartnell’s general manager is working to convey in order for everyone to keep their jobs.

“Every game is a good game, every game is a big game,” Holmgren said. “There’s no gimmes anymore.”

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013
718823 Philadelphia Flyers

Key story lines for the upcoming NHL season

Posted: Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 3:01 AM

Division story lines

1. Sergei Bobrovsky won the first major individual trophy in Blue Jackets history when he captured the Vezina last season. Can Bobrovsky help guide the Eastern Conference newcomers back to the playoffs for the first time since 2009?

2. Is this the year Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin can both stay healthy? Crosby missed 12 games last year, Malkin sat out 17. The good news is that Crosby, who still finished fourth in league scoring, has been concussion-free for 18 months.

3. What will the Rangers look like under new coach Alain Vigneault? All of the preseason chatter is about a fresh start for everyone in New York under a decidedly less defensive-oriented coach. Can that get Brad Richards and Rick Nash back on track?

4. Alex Ovechkin closed with 23 goals in 23 games for Washington, which finished with a 17-4-2 record. So, are the Capitals more like that 17-4-2 team or the one that started the season 10-14-1?

5. Many predict the Devils to be the worst team in the division. New goaltender Cory Schneider looked impressive in the preseason. How much will New Jersey miss the retired Ilya Kovalchuk?

Other changes

* Despite mixed review, players approved the use of “hybrid” icing and it will no longer be an automatic whistle when the defending player touches the puck. The linesman will make a judgment call near the faceoff circle to either allow play to continue to blow it dead in an effort to avoid catastrophic injuries.

* Net frames are shallower by a total of about 14 inches, which is designed to increase space behind the net for playmaking opportunities.

* Goaltenders had the maximum height of their leg pads shrunk by 10 percent, which will result in less five-hole coverage by an average of 2-3 inches.

* Players must keep their helmets on while fighting. The NHL already closed a loophole by penalizing players who simultaneously removed each other’s helmets.

* Players will be penalized for tucking in their jerseys, which is a violation of the new uniform guideline. Wayne Gretzky and Jaromir Jagr are appalled.

FRANK SERAVALLI
Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013
718823 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers get cap compliant

FRANK SERAVALLI, October 1, 2013, 3:01 AM

THERE’S MORE than one way to skin a cap.

Yesterday’s 5 o’clock deadline to be salary-cap compliant has been hanging over the Flyers’ brass all summer, yet it took the management team nearly all of the allotted time to get its roster set.

In the end, it was more a question of “when” and “how” than “who.”

By sending forward Adam Hall and defenseman Bruno Gervais to the AHL, general manager Paul Holmgren said the Flyers cleared the $64.3 million upper limit by an estimated $25,000. That’s an impressively small margin compared to the overall cap.

Yet, for the high-spending teams like the Flyers, the first day is the toughest. For at least the first day of the 195-day season, teams must include the salary of their injured players, like Chris Pronger’s $4.94 million deal.

“When we put Chris on long-term injury, it gives us salary-cap freedom,” Holmgren said. “We were looking at a couple different scenarios [yesterday], but nothing really came to fruition [to reduce salary]. This was about filing the right roster and getting us in the best position. It’s making sure the dollars fit.”

Holmgren said he would like to keep at least one extra player at each position, meaning it’s likely Hall will be added back to the roster today.

The Flyers saved themselves from further cap trouble by waiting to sign veteran defenseman Hal Gill to a deal, though it seems like that might happen today. Gill, 38, was in camp on a tryout contract that expired at midnight. He has been a free agent the entire training camp.

It’s unlikely the Flyers would have used him in practice yesterday without the intention of signing him.
Defenseman Marc-Andre Bourdon (concussion) was placed on the injured list for the rest of training camp. He is ready to play tomorrow night against Toronto.

Voracek, 24, said he doesn't see any reason to doubt whether he will be back for the regular season, missed the last two games of the preseason with an upper-body injur yet Holmgren wouldn't commit to keeping him past the first nine games of the season. After that, his entry-level contract would kick in.

"I like the way Hal played in training camp," Holmgren said. "He's a consummate professional, he knows how to play the game. I think he is the same speed he was 10 years ago."

Even Gill knew the long odds facing him at the start of camp.

"I was happy to be at a camp and be playing, but I was realistic about the numbers," Gill said. "But it's still work to be done, trying to find a spot for me. You can be aware of [the numbers], but you can't let it affect you too much."

Scott Laughton also remains with the team for the second opening night in a row, yet Holmgren wouldn't commit to keeping him past the first nine games of the season. After that, his entry-level contract would kick in.

"We'll continue to use the time to evaluate him," Holmgren said. "He's a 19-year-old kid, we want to make sure we do the right thing, for us and also for him. If you're playing 10 to 12 minutes a night and continuing to practice at a high tempo, it's not going to hurt his development."

Voracek ready

Jake Voracek participated in yesterday's full, 2-hour practice, which focused mainly on special teams. Voracek, the Flyers' leading goal scorer last season, missed the last two games of the preseason with an upper-body injury after crashing into the post a week ago against New Jersey.

Voracek, 24, said he doesn't see any reason to doubt whether he will be ready to play tomorrow night against Toronto.

"If I feel the same way I felt today, I think I will be ready to play," Voracek said.

Slap shots

Defenceman Marc-Andre Bourdon (concussion) was placed on the injured non-roster list. He does not count against the salary cap . . . There are no re-entry waivers this season, so Adam Hall and Bruno Gervais would not need to be subjected to waivers in order to return to the NHL roster . . . Tomorrow night's opponent, Toronto, opens the season tonight in Montreal.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013

Hartnell ready for fresh start with Flyers

Sam Carchidi, Posted: Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 2:02 AM

After beginning last season out of shape and then suffering a broken left foot and never getting into a rhythm, shaggy-haired Flyers left winger Scott Hartnell is a new player this year.


A massive drop-off - from a career-best 37 goals in 2011-12 to just eight in the lockout-shortened 2013 campaign - served as his motivation.

"He's in the best shape of his life," general manager Paul Holmgren said after Monday's practice in Voorhees. "His body fat is 7 percent lower than it's ever been, so he did the work in the offseason that we asked him to do."

Hartnell, 31, struggled with his conditioning at the start of last season, Holmgren said.

"When we came out of the lockout, I think a lot of older players in the league - I don't just mean Scott - but you get into November [without the season underway] and your motivation just wanes on you as an older player. He wasn't in great shape when he came, and then he broke his foot three games in and he struggled."

Holmgren paused.

"But he was [ticked] at the end of the year that we didn't make the playoffs; he was [ticked] at his game and he did something about it this summer, so I'm excited for Scott to see what he can do with the shape he's in. He's playing on a good line, and playing with a good player in Claude [Giroux], and hopefully he can get back to the year he had before."

When Hartnell returned after missing 16 games because of his injury, "he was probably in worse shape than when he broke his foot because he couldn't do anything," Holmgren said. "But to his credit, he came back and he tried out there. There were games where he looked OK, and other games where he looked like he couldn't keep up. He admitted to me in his end-of-year meeting, 'I looked like a third-line player.' "

Holmgren chuckled.

"I think my comment was, 'Yeah, and a bad one.' But like I said, he did the work. I'm happy and proud of him for doing it. Now he has to continue it."

Hartnell, whose team opens the season Wednesday against the visiting Toronto Maple Leafs, said his goal is to get off to a quick start. "You want to get wins, mainly, but you want to get hot early. You want to get a couple goals early, get a couple of points and get the confidence going in the first part of the season."

"We have to hit Wednesday running."

Hartnell will be on the top unit, one that is expected to include Giroux and Jake Voracek, who took part in his first full practice Monday since he injured his lower back while crashing into the post in a 2-1 preseason loss to New Jersey last Tuesday.

"I feel a little better every time I skate," Voracek said after Monday's practice. "We have to hit Wednesday running."

Voracek was on a line with Sean Couturier and Max Talbot, but he is expected to be on the No. 1 unit Wednesday. He was on the Flyers' top power-play unit Monday.

Voracek is excited to have Hartnell back at 100 percent.

"Obviously he's a huge part of our offense," said Voracek, who led the Flyers with 22 goals last season. "He's a gritty player in front of the net and does so much dirty, hard work. He's looking great out there."

Coach Peter Laviolette agreed.

"He came into camp as a determined guy, to try to make sure we start the right way," Laviolette said.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013

Philidelphia Flyers Notes: Flyers look to avoid slow start again

Sam Carchidi, Posted: Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 2:02 AM

The Flyers open the season Wednesday against visiting Toronto, and last season's disappointing start is still fresh on their collective minds.

The Flyers began last season 0-3 and 2-6 and never recovered, missing the playoffs for just the second time in the last 18 seasons.

"Starting the way we did was frustrating, and you try to climb back right away," captain Claude Giroux said Monday after a 21/2-hour practice in Voorhees. "I think the first few games, Toronto and Montreal, are going to be pretty big games for us."

The Flyers play eight of their first 12 games at the Wells Fargo Center.

"We need to get a different start from last year, starting Wednesday," defenseman Kimmo Timonen said. "The team game is going to be the issue - [and showing] consistency. Last year we didn't win two games in a row too many times. That's going to be the key for us moving forward. We've got to be able to win games in a row."
The Flyers didn't win more than two straight games last season until they took the final four games.

Hall, Gervais demoted

The Flyers set their roster by loaning forward Adam Hall and defenseman Bruno Gervais to the AHL Phantoms. Hall could return when the Flyers place Chris Pronger on the long-term injured list and open cap space.

According to general manager Paul Holmgren, the Flyers are about $25,000 under the $64.3 million cap.

If Pronger ($4.9 million cap hit) is put on long-term injured reserve, the Flyers would also have enough room to offer veteran defenseman Hal Gill a contract. Gill is a free agent.

Hall, Gervais demoted. The Flyers loaned forward Adam Hall and defenseman Bruno Gervais to the AHL Phantoms. Hall could return when the Flyers place Chris Pronger on the long-term injured list and open cap space.

According to GM Paul Holmgren, the Flyers are about $25,000 under the $64.3 million cap.

If Pronger is put on LTIR, the Flyers would also have enough room to offer defenseman Hal Gill a contract. Gill is a free agent.

Power-play focus

The Flyers, taking advantage of having a healthy team for one of the few times in camp, did lots of work on their power play Monday.

A year ago, they were strong on the power play (21.6 percent success rate, third in the NHL) and penalty kill (85.9 percent, fifth), but struggled in even-strength situations.

The top power-play unit Monday: Scott Hartnell, Giroux, Wayne Simmonds, Jake Voracek and Timonen.

The No. 2 unit: Brayden Schenn, Vinny Lecavalier, Matt Read, Andrej Meszaros and Mark Streit.

Quotable

Giroux, who had finger surgery after a bizarre golf injury last month: “I haven’t given up golf, but hopefully this summer I won’t have much time to play” if the team is deep in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Breakaways

Two seasons ago, coach Peter Laviolette called Giroux the “best player in the world” during the playoffs. “I stand by my words,” he said after Monday’s practice. . . . No announcement yet, but signs are pointing to Ray Emery starting in goal Wednesday against Toronto, which opens its season Tuesday in Montreal.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 10.01.2013

Flyers' roster will change before opener

Kimmo Timonen talks about starting the season off right

September 30, 2013, 6:15 pm | Staff

TORONTO -- A rule change involving icing the puck will be in effect for the start of the NHL regular season after it was approved by the players.

The NHLPA gave the go-ahead for the rule change that makes icing a race to an imaginary line across the faceoff dots instead of the puck, which was given a trial run during the preseason.

Previously, a player had to actually touch the puck after it crossed the red goal line. Icing is called when a team, in an effort to reduce pressure in its own zone, dumps the puck down the ice. When icing is called, play is brought back to the offending team's zone for a faceoff.

The rule change is to prevent serious injuries, such as the one that sidelined Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Joni Pitkanen for the entire season (see full story).

The roster the Flyers turned into the NHL Central Registry Monday afternoon isn’t the roster they will open the season with on Wednesday against Toronto.

For now ... the Flyers have assigned Adam Hall and Bruno Gervais to the Phantoms. They cleared waivers on Sunday.

General manager Paul Holmgren said the club's roster has 21 players: two goalies, 12 forwards (including Scott Laughton) and seven defensemen, in this case, Erik Gustafsson being No. 7.

Fellow defenseman Marc-Andre Bourdon is listed as injured, non-roster.
Here is the roster, as of now:

Forwards
Sean Couturier, Claude Giroux, Scott Hartnell, Scott Laughton, Vincent Lecavalier, Matt Read, Zac Rinaldo, Jay Rosehill, Brayden Schenn, Wayne Simmonds, Max Talbot, Jakub Voracek

Defencemen
Braydon Coburn, Erik Gustafsson, Nicklas Grossmann, Andrej Meszaros, Luke Schenn, Mark Streit, Kimmo Timonen

Goaltenders
Ray Emery, Steve Mason

Later this evening, the Flyers will place Chris Pronger on long-term injury (LTIR) which will give them enough salary cap room to move Hall back onto the roster on Tuesday. Holmgren said Hall would come back.

Pronger’s cap hit is $4.9 million.

The LTIR move would also allow the Flyers to offer Hal Gill a contract as the club’s eighth defenseman. If Gill’s number is reasonable, that shouldn’t be a problem.

“He said we would talk,” Gill said.

Said Holmgren: “There is nothing really there at this point.”

Holmgren was to speak with Gill later Monday. His tryout expires at midnight Monday but can be extended.

“Once we file Chris on long-term, we have more flexibility with our cap,” Holmgren said.

You could sign Gill, too?

“Theoretically,” Holmgren replied. “I like the way Hal played in training camp. He is a consummate professional and knows how to play the game.”

By Wednesday, Holmgren said he wants to have at least 22 bodies on the roster. The limit is 23.

Right now, he said the Flyers are $25,000 under the $64.3 million salary cap.

As for Laughton, Holmgren said it was “too soon” to fully commit to keeping Laughton here a full season. In other words, a final decision on Laughton will be made after nine games are played.

“He’s a 19-year-old kid and we want to make sure we do the right thing,” Holmgren said. “For us, obviously, but also for him.”

Tags:
Philadelphia Flyers, Toronto Maple Leafs, roster, Hal Gill, Adam Hall, Bruno Gervais, Chris Pronger, Tim Panaccio

Voracek returns to practice, ready for opener

Jakub Voracek returned to full practice on Monday and says he will be ready to go Wednesday when the season opens at the Wells Fargo Center against Toronto.

Voracek injured his lower back last week after being taken down into the goalpost during a pre-season game against New Jersey.

You know Voracek must be feeling good because he is growing his scruffy beard and is allowing his hair to get long again, as well.

“There is no way I can have a good look,” he kidded.

“Today’s practice, basically for the first time, I feel a little better every time I skate. We’ll see what happens on Wednesday.”

Asked if there was any doubt that he might not play in the opener, he replied, “I don’t think so. If I feel the same way I felt today, I should be ready for Wednesday.”

Power play

The Flyers did quite a bit of special teams work on Monday, especially, with the power play.

In fact, the practice began with just the first unit on the ice and finished with the first unit, nearly two hours later.

Voracek worked with the top unit — Claude Giroux, Wayne Simmonds, Scott Hartnell with Kimmo Timonen and Voracek at the point.

The second unit was Brayden Schenn, Vinny Lecavalier, Matt Read, and Andrej Meszaros and Mark Streit at the point.

Lines

If Voracek can’t play against Toronto, Schenn replaces him on the first line.

Lecavalier should center Schenn and Simmonds if all lines are healthy.

Scott Laughton and Adam Hall alternated between Jay Rosehill and Zac Rinaldo. Assuming full health, the third line should be Sean Couturier between Max Talbot and Read.

Tags:
NHL, Philadelphia Flyers, Jakub Voracek, Tim Panaccio

In next practices, Flyers must focus on cohesion

Tim Panaccio

TORONTO -- A rule change involving icing the puck will be in effect for the start of the NHL regular season after it was approved by the players.

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The rule change is to prevent serious injuries, such as the one that sidelined Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Joni Pitkanen for the entire season (see full story).

The regular season begins on Tuesday for some NHL clubs.

For the Flyers, it begins Wednesday when they open at the Wells Fargo Center against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

That extra day of practicing, going back to Sunday, figures to be fairly important given how disorganized the club looked in preseason.

The focus right now appears to be getting a solid defensive scheme down for all five skaters on the ice. Coverage breakdowns, gap exposures, chasing the puck instead of owning it, were of significant concern in preseason.
That the Flyers only played two of seven games with a full lineup represents a mistake by management that can’t happen again. In trying to evaluate 60-plus players, the Flyers didn’t get enough time to mesh the group of 23 who are actually going to play here this season.

That mistake could become magnified if the lack of cohesion carries over into the regular season.

Which is why this week’s practices will likely reinforce systems play, especially from the defensive zone forward.

"Everything is very similar," said Braydon Coburn, who played pretty well in preseason. "It’s all about execution. I think our preseason was one of poor execution and it hurt us.

"It’s preseason, guys coming in and getting used to each other again. You go from summer hockey to everything being so structured. Those things are ok. You can learn from them. Just move on and correct them.”

Coburn said the overall breakdowns on both sides of the puck has been reinforced in the video sessions. Other players said just bearing down and playing better one-on-one will solve things.

"We’ve talked about it in the room and gone over video," Coburn said. "Everybody knows what needs to be fixed. It’s mental mistakes … There were mistakes that happened, moreso in the last game [at Washington], but there are some good things that happened and we will build on the good things and correct the bad.”

Veteran Hal Gill, who hopes to get a contract on Monday if the Flyers can get under the cap and free up some money, said there was a lot of learning that had to be done.

"As a team we need to make sure everyone is on the same page, that there is a commitment to defense," Gill said. "That is what we worked a lot on [Sunday] and you saw that in practice. Making clean plays, being responsible defensively. When you do that, your offense and creating offense comes off that.”

He admitted the poor 1-5-1 record was not something he would have expected from this group.

"Yeah, it’s definitely something to work on," he said. "But you also have to remember it is preseason and everyone is learning the system. We have new faces – myself included. There are things that are easy fixes once you see the mistake on film. You correct it. That is a learning process in camp.”

Another newcomer, Vinny LeCavalier, admitted he is a bit behind the learning curve, having played so long with one team in Tampa Bay.

"I’m playing a new system, it’s a little bit different and sometimes, even myself, you make a few mistakes," he said. "It’s all about adjusting and learning from the mistakes you make. We have video sessions for that. I think we did a lot of good things.

"The season starts Wednesday. We have to make sure we’re sharp and we keep things tight in our zone. After that, we’re a good skating team. Go skate and play in their zone.

"A good defense, if you are in their zone a lot more than your own, you will get opportunities. If you play well defensively, there will be good outcomes.”

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718830 Philadelphia Flyers

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2013-14 NHL season preview: Pacific Division

Tim Panaccio

TORONTO – A rule change involving icing the puck will be in effect for the start of the NHL regular season after it was approved by the players.

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The rule change is to prevent serious injuries, such as the one that sidelined Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Joni Pitkanen for the entire season (see full story).

We began our four-part series previewing the 2013-14 NHL season with a look at the Central Division on Sunday.

Today, we break down the Pacific Division.

Capsules may not include latest injury or roster updates.

1. Anaheim Ducks

Really have to wonder what would have happened had the Ducks, not the Red Wings, won Game 7 in the opening round of the playoffs last year.

Regardless, the Ducks, winners of their first Pacific title a year ago, are back and they look pretty strong. However, the trade of Bobby Ryan to Ottawa represents a huge offensive deficiency for them, even while welcoming back Dustin Penner after his sojourn with the Kings. Penner won his first Cup with the Ducks in ’07 and another two years ago in L.A. Could he, Ryan Getzlaf (49 points) and Corey Perry be a line once more? Can Viktor Fasth retake the starter’s job from Jonas Hiller? Forever young Teemu Selanne is good to go again.

2. Los Angeles Kings

The Kings got dashed in a short series against Chicago, ending their chance for a second Cup. Three of those losses came by a goal. It was that competitive. They welcome another ex-Flyer in Dan Carcillo while the roster lost Penner and backup goalie Jonathan Bernier. Like the Flyers, injuries greatly impacted L.A.’s fortunes last season. One thing is certain: The Kings no longer have a No. 1 and No. 1A goalie tandem. Willie Mitchell needs to show he’s fully recovered from knee surgery. Coach Darryl Sutter is big on “hunger” and needs his veterans – Anze Kopitar, Mike Richards, Jeff Carter -- to find it again. The Kings are still among the best in the west.

3. Phoenix Coyotes

Forward Mike Ribeiro never felt he got the kind of monetary respect for his value in Washington. Will he get such in the desert after signing a four-year, $22 million deal as the Coyotes’ major acquisition during the offseason? Ribeiro is now reunited with coach Dave Tippett, who had him during some productive years in Dallas. All the rumors the past two summers surrounding defenseman Keith Yandle being traded never came to fruition. The Coyotes need a bounce-back season from Mikkel Boedker (seven goals). Goalie Mike Smith needs to be healthy after various ailments during the lockout year.

4. Vancouver Canucks

Another one of those western clubs that had some upheaval in the offseason with John Tortorella replacing Alain Vigneault. Torts promises to tone down his image in a western Canadian city where his “big stick” PR approach simply won’t go over. Truth is, the Canucks could use a little of his brimstone because things have gotten rather stale with the Sedin Twins & Co., having failed to give the city a Stanley Cup despite a pretty consistent lineup, save for hiccups in goal. For whatever reason, the team falls in the post-season with a 2-12 playoff record since it led 2-0 against Boston in the 2011 Cup Final. Vancouver didn’t add any high-priced free agents and failed to get rid of Roberto Luongo’s contract, too. Need we say more? A healthy Ryan Kesler would be nice.

5. San Jose Sharks

At this point, you really have to wonder if the best years in the Sharks’ franchise history are now behind them. Too many players have come and gone and too many chances for a Cup or Western Conference championship have eluded them. Frankly, the club from a few years ago that lost to Vancouver was better suited to make a Cup run than this current roster, which is now minus Douglas Murray, Ryane Clowe and Scott Hannan. Meanwhile, Joe Thornton (34) is now a year older with very obvious declining stats. He’s not an 80-point player anymore. It remains doubtful whether ex-Penguin Tyler Kennedy can push this team to new heights. Also, no Raffi Torres (knee surgery) for quite a while.

6. Edmonton Oilers

New coach (Dallas Eakins), new GM (Craig MacTavish) but will the results on the ice be any different? How will the Oilers finally get back to the playoffs, where they haven’t been since losing the Cup to Carolina in 2006? Nine new faces are on the roster for Eakins, including defensemen Andrew Ference and Denis Grebeshkov, plus winger David Perron. Despite getting...
three No. 1 overall draft picks in the last four years, the Oilers haven’t been able to get over the hump on the fastest sheet of ice in the league. Edmonton will be without Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Sam Gagner for a while because of injuries and that’s going to really hurt the Oilers through November while placing more pressure on Taylor Hall and Nail Yakupov.

7. Calgary Flames

Seems the Flames are forever caught in the throes of turnover and tumult. And it continued right into the fall with Brian Burke taking over the reigns as director of hockey operations, while GM Jay Feaster’s overall power gradually evaporates on a club that hasn’t seen the playoffs since 2009. The Flames didn’t land an impact player in free agency. Then again, this is not a destination, either. So Feaster went the trade route to bring in Shane O’Brien, David Jones, and TJ Galiardi. It won’t be enough in the competitive Pacific. No more Jarome Iginla. It’s Mike Cammalleri and Lee Stempniak’s team now. They were tied for the club lead at 32 points last season. The Flames are hoping prospects Sven Baertschi and Sean Monahan make the final roster cut. Hey, no Kipper in goal.

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718831 Phoenix Coyotes

Phoenix Coyotes’ blue-line competition remains red-hot

By Sarah McLellan azcentral sports Mon Sep 30, 2013 9:40 PM

The competition for ice time on the Coyotes blue line hasn’t stopped now that training camp is over.

“I don’t think it ever will,” defenseman Michael Stone said.

The team submitted its 23-man roster to the league Monday, and it included eight defensemen since Rusty Klesla (concussion and whiplash) was moved to injured reserve.

Coach Dave Tippett expects to utilize all eight players, but the final spot next to injured reserve.

Rundblad impressed in the preseason with seven assists and has been working with the power-play unit.

“That’s one of the greatest strengths of his game,” Tippett said.

That would position Stone and Chris Summers as the odd men out. Stone’s asset is his booming shot, but that won’t keep him in the league. Moving the puck quicker and “defending harder” are at the top of his to-do list.

“Rundblad has probably been better than Stoney,” Tippett said. “It’s great that (Stone) recognizes that. He’s trying to improve his game. Ultimately, we’re going to need everybody at some point.

“We know what Stoney can do. He had a real good second half of the year last year. If he gets back to that level, he’ll be a good player for us.”

The players might disagree, but Tippett has no problem having too many men and not enough spots in the lineup.

“That competition for jobs pushes everybody to a new level,” he said. “One guy is struggling, that means you have another guy that can jump in and do the job for you. Those are all positives for our team, even though the player might take it as a negative. (Stone’s) going to play better. Ultimately, him trying to make himself better will make everyone else around him better.”

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718832 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins hoping substance matches style in quest for Cup

By Josh Yohe

The Penguins’ forwards can dazzle the opposition on most nights, earning style points like perhaps no team during this generation.

But does enough substance exist from this group to propel the Penguins to another Stanley Cup?

“I sure hope so,” left wing Tanner Glass said. “And I think so.”

The Penguins entered the 2012 and ’13 postseasons as an offensive juggernaut seemingly capable of winning Stanley Cup titles the way Wayne Gretzky’s Oilers and Mario Lemieux’s Penguins did, by outscoring teams. This era of NHL hockey, though, requires more than unmatched skill. And the Penguins know it.

All of the Penguins’ talent — and they scored a whopping 26 goals in six games against the Flyers — wasn’t enough to win that series.
Entering the 2013-14 campaign, scoring goals doesn’t appear a significant problem for these Penguins. They’ve led the NHL in scoring the past two regular seasons and are a good bet to make it a trifecta. Crosby is universally regarded as the game’s finest player and he will be flanked by wingers Chris Kunitz and Dupuis, both of whom use a simple style that complements the star center seamlessly.

“You could see it after the first day of practice,” defenseman Matt Niskanen said. “Those guys were flying, in midseason form.”

The Penguins’ second line likely would be the top line of any other NHL team.

Malkin is healthy after dealing with nagging injuries last season, and right wing James Neal enjoyed a terrific training camp and is coming off two seasons that saw him among the NHL leaders in goals. The duo will be joined either by Jussi Jokinen, who has a cap of playing well with skilled players, or talented youngster Beau Bennett, whose slick passing has impressed Malkin and Neal.

But what about the third and fourth lines?

Center Brandon Sutter, coming off an adequate if unspectacular season, is a lock to man the third line. Veterans Craig Adams and Joe Vitale figure to see most of their time on the fourth line. Otherwise, the bottom two lines remain a mystery.

Either Bennett or Jokinen will play on the third line when not on Malkin’s unit. The likes of Matt D’Agostini, Chuck Kobasew, Glass and Dustin Jeffrey will battle for the other positions.

“I think we have a lot of good players for those lines, guys who can make it work,” assistant coach Tony Granato said.

“But we’re still in the process of seeing who the best fits are.”

On paper, the Penguins are exquisitely skilled and not particularly gritty. General manager Ray Shero and coach Dan Bylsma have long maintained that they prefer the Penguins be “difficult to play against,” which means they prefer to employ physical, gritty players.

Time will tell if this lineup is equipped for playoff success. For all of the duo’s dominance in the 2009 postseason, Crosby and Malkin were hardly unstoppable against Detroit in the Stanley Cup Final. It took a whole team – and a versatile group of forwards – to win hockey’s Holy Grail.

“We’ve all worked hard to be better this season,” Vitale said. “We’re hungry to be better than last year.”

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718833 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins’ Letang to open season on injured reserve

By Rob Rossi

The Penguins will begin the NHL season without their top defenseman and backup goalie.

Kris Letang (lower body) and Tomas Vokoun (blood clot) were designated for the injured-reserve list on Monday as part of moves made to the set the roster and enhance their salary-cap flexibility. More moves are expected before the Penguins open the regular season against New Jersey at Consol Energy Center on Thursday night.

One of those moves will be the recall of winger Beau Bennett, who was re-assigned to Wheeling of the ECHL on Monday. Bennett, slated by Penguins coaches to play on the second and/or third line, did not need to clear waivers for his re-assignment.

Winger Chris Conner, who did clear waivers on Monday, remained part of the Penguins’ set-date roster. Conner is expected to be re-assigned to the AHL to clear the way for Bennett’s return to the Penguins.

The Bennett move is mostly procedural and similar to one the Penguins made with winger Eric Tangradi prior to the 2010-11 season. Tangradi, who did not need to clear waivers for a re-assignment, was sent to Wheeling as part of roster maneuvering. He was recalled and available to play in the opener that season.

The Penguins’ roster moves left them with 13 forwards (12 on NHL contracts), eight defensemen (seven) and two goalies (one). Included among forwards was winger Matt D’Agostini, who has missed nearly two weeks of practice because of a lower-body injury.

D’Agostini was not announced to be on injured reserve.

The Penguins also did not announce if Letang and/or Vokoun were designated for the long-term injury (LTI) list. A player on LTI cannot play in 10 games and for 24 days, and a club is provided temporary cap relief.

The Penguins arrived at camp around $1 million over the NHL’s $64.3 million cap. All teams were mandated to be cap compliant by Monday afternoon.

One way the Penguins were able to get under the cap was the re-assignment of defensemen Simon Despres to the AHL. Despres, who did not need to clear waivers, joined forward Andrew Ebbett as players headed for Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

Derrick Pouliot, the Penguins’ first of two 2012 first-round draft picks, was returned to his junior club (Portland) on Monday, but Olli Maatta remained in the NHL.

Both players are 19 and impressed coaches during camp, but Maatta, the 22nd overall pick in 2012, was viewed as having a more rounded two-way game.

Maatta can only play in nine games or the Penguins must keep him all season. He can only play in the NHL or with his junior club, London, because of an agreement between the league and the Canadian Hockey League.

Coach Dan Bylsma has said he would prefer to keep only seven defensemen on the roster — an indication that Harrison Ruopp’s promotion from the AHL on Monday could be temporary.

Ruopp could be returned to the AHL in favor of placing another forward on the 23-man roster.

The Penguins also were trying to reach terms on a one-year contract with forward Chuck Kobasew, who participated in camp on a professional tryout deal. Management and Kobasew had not agreed on salary as of Sunday.

The veteran minimum is $550,000, but Kobasew was seeking closer to $900,000.

Kobasew was not among the 23 players to make the Penguins roster on Monday.

To add Kobasew and be cap compliant, the Penguins would likely need to return Maatta to his junior club.

General manager Ray Shero was not available for comment.

Note: The NHL and its Players Association approved the adoption of hybrid icing for this season. Hybrid icing is a mixture of touch and no-touch icing. It provides a linesman discretion to blow the whistle and stop play if he believes a defending player will reach the puck first.

Tribune Review LOADED: 10.01.2013

718834 Pittsburgh Penguins

Roster for Penguins opener not etched in stone yet

By Shelly Anderson / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The word is Wheeling is nice this time of year, but Beau Bennett might not hang around long enough to notice.
The Penguins assigned the promising winger to Wheeling of the ECHL Monday, likely the most prominent move they made in advance of a 5 p.m. NHL deadline when teams had to be in compliance with a 23-man roster limit and the $54.3 million salary cap.

It is believed that Bennett's "demotion" is temporary, simply a paper move to be in compliance, and that he will be recalled in conjunction with at least one other move in time for him to be in the lineup Thursday when the Penguins open the 2013-14 season against New Jersey at Consol Energy Center. Bennett is the team's only forward who does not need to be exposed to waivers to be sent to the minors.

The team made a similar move in 2010 with Eric Tangradi, who was recalled after less than 24 hours in Wheeling. Being sent to Wheeling, only about an hour's drive from Pittsburgh, makes more geographic sense for essentially a procedural move than assigning a player to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the higher-level American Hockey League.

Bennett, 21, is slated to play left wing on either the second forward line, centered by Evgeni Malkin, or the third line, centered by Brandon Sutter.

Penguins general manager Ray Shero wasn't available to talk about the team's roster moves, but Sunday he hinted at a temporary move or two when he said that the roster for the opener might look different than the one submitted Monday.

In addition to the Bennett assignment, defenseman Kris Letang and goaltender Tomas Vokoun were placed on injured reserve. Letang got what is believed to be a knee or lower leg injury Friday in practice, and initial indications were that it was not serious or long term. Letang will miss the season opener, but, if the IR designation is retroactive to Friday, he would be eligible to come off IR before the home game Saturday against Buffalo.

Vokoun has been out since Sept. 21, when he had a procedure to dissolve a blood clot in his pelvis. He has been cleared for light workouts, according to his agent, Allan Walsh, but it has not been determined how long he might be out. If the Penguins feel he will miss at least 10 games and 24 days, he could be switched to long-term injured reserve, which would give them some salary-cap relief.

With Letang out, the Penguins recalled Harrison Ruopp from Wilkes-Barre. Ruopp, a stay-at-home defenseman, who missed most of the preseason because of injury.

In something of a surprise, the Penguins reassigned defenseman Simon Despres, a 2009 first-round draft pick, to Wilkes-Barre. Despres does not need to clear waivers for such moves, but it's unclear whether the Penguins plan to clear a roster spot and recall him before the opener.

Despres, 22, has played in 51 games and another six playoff games with the Penguins over the past two seasons. The Penguins had two defensemen in training camp who were 2012 first-round draft picks. Derrick Pouliot was returned to his junior team, the Portland Winterhawks, but Olli Maatta remained on the NHL roster. Maatta could stay with the Penguins for up to nine games before being returned to his junior team, the London Knights, or he could stick in the NHL the full season. He and Pouliot are not eligible to play in the AHL this season.

Forwards Andrew Ebbett and Chris Conner were placed on waivers Sunday. They were not claimed by noon Monday. Ebbett, like Despres, was assigned to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League, but Conner remained with the Penguins.

Winger Chuck Kobasew, who drew a lot of praise from coach Dan Bylsma while on a professional tryout during training camp, is not among the 23 players on the roster. He can continue to practice with the team if both sides agree to continue his tryout, but the Penguins would have to sign and make room for him before he could play.

Here is the 23-man roster, which includes 13 forwards, eight defensemen and two goaltenders:


Penguins make moves before roster deadline

By Shelly Anderson / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Penguins made several roster moves in advance of a 5 p.m. NHL deadline under which their 23-man roster must be set.

The most eye-catching move was sending winger Beau Bennett to Wheeling of the ECHL. That is most likely a procedural move to make the roster compliant with NHL rules, and Bennett likely will return shortly. General manager Ray Shero on Sunday hinted that something like that might happen, saying the roster that is submitted today might not change before Thursday's season opener against New Jersey at Consol Energy Center.

Defensive Kris Letang was placed on injured reserve. He suffered what is believed to be a knee or lower leg injury Friday in practice, and initial indications were that it was not serious or long-term. Letang will miss Thursday's season opener, but if the IR designation is retroactive to Friday, he would be eligible to come off of IR before Saturday's home game against Buffalo.

Also placed in IR was goaltender Tomas Vokoun, who has been ruled out for the opener because of a blood clot problem.

Defensive Derrick Pouliot, a first-round draft pick in 2012, was returned to his junior club, the Portland Winterhawks.

The Penguins also sent defender Simon Despres and winger Andrew Ebbett to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League. Ebbett cleared waivers, and Despres does not need to clear waivers for such an assignment.

Winger Chris Conner also cleared waivers but remains on the roster.

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718835 San Jose Sharks

Familiar faces in new places

By David Pollak

JAROME IGILNA, Bruins: The former Calgary captain vetoed a trade to Boston last spring and ended up in Pittsburgh. No hard feelings, though as he signed a one-year, $6 million deal with Boston as a free agent. So how much gas is in the tank at 36?

TYLER SEGUIN, Stars: Boston soured on Sequin as his production dropped amid reports of hard partying. Dallas gives him a chance to resurrect his game and reputation, but at a steep price as skilled Loui Eriksson went to the Bruins in the trade.

DANIEL ALFRIDSSON, Red Wings: Ottawa's captain since 1999, Alfredsson shocked the Canadian capital by signing a one-year, $5.5 million deal with Detroit. Both a desire to win the Stanley Cup (he's 40) and a bargaining impasse prompted the jump.

TIM THOMAS, Panthers: The goalie who was instrumental in Boston's 2012 Stanley Cup championship is back after a year in self-exile. His politics may play better in Florida than New England, but will the saves still be there?

JAROMIR JAGR, Devils: New Jersey had to do something when Ilya Kovalchuk bailed for Russia after most free agents had found new homes. The Devils decided Jagr, even at 41, was their best option. Jagr split last season between Dallas and Boston.

VINCENT LECAVAILER, Flyers: How awkward. Tampa Bay decided to buy out their longtime captain rather than take a $7 million cap hit for the next seven seasons. Philadelphia soothed his feelings with a five-year, $22.5 million contract.

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718837 San Jose Sharks
NHL full of changes

There will be changes in the game on the ice as well as realignment and a new playoff format when the NHL starts the 2013-14 season. Here are the highlights:

They're finally changing the size of the nets. Oh, the goal-mouth opening remains the same, but the frame isn't as deep or as wide behind the goal line. That makes for quicker wraparound attempts and more space for players on offense to set up behind the net, all of which is designed to increase scoring.

"When you look, I think you can see there's a lot more room back there," Patrick Marleau said. "It'll probably work out to be a little more offense from that, but I think you've still got to look at making the goalie equipment a lot smaller."

But Sharks goalie Antti Niemi didn't sound too concerned, saying the offensive advantages were somewhat offset by the fact the puck would bounce differently off the back base of the net, throwing off attacking forwards.

The NHL did make goalie equipment somewhat smaller, setting up a new system that tailors the maximum height of goalie pads to the size of the goalie, based on ice to knee and knee to pelvis measurements. In Niemi's case, the pads are one inch shorter.

"It's exactly the same thing otherwise," Niemi said. "You've just got to be careful about the five hole."

Still, Niemi didn't seem worried about a slightly larger gap between the top of his leg pads when he goes down to block a shot in the butterfly position.

The NHL is switching to a hybrid icing rule designed to reduce injuries. This season, the defending team is no longer required to touch the puck after it crosses the goal line if the defender was the first across an imaginary line between the dots in the faceoff circles in front of his own net.

The league experimented with the hybrid system during the exhibition season, and it was adopted after a vote of the players Monday.

Sharks were divided on the change. While Dan Boyle welcomed it, fellow defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic said there was confusion over when the puck still had to be played and that increased, not decreased, risk.

The NHL also made a move to decrease the likelihood of injuries when players fight. Concerned over players hitting their heads on the ice, the league now calls for an additional minor penalty to anyone who removes his own helmet before squaring off.

Sharks coach Todd McLellan gave two reasons that he hopes players follow this rule.

"When you sit for seven minutes, that's almost half a period," he said. "But it's also common sense. We don't need a bunch of guys taking their helmets off and smashing their heads."

Visors are also now required for players who have less than 25 games experience in the NHL, but there is no longer an additional penalty for instigating a fight while wearing a visor.

The NHL is also getting a lot fussier about how players wear their uniforms, with conformity the apparent goal.

No jerseys tucked into hip pads, something that would not have sat well with Wayne Gretzky in his playing days. All jersey sleeves must extend into the cuff of the glove. No unapproved T-shirts showing at the collar. That kind of thing.

"The jersey thing? That's one that's going to take getting used to," defenseman Scott Hannan said. "Guys get comfortable in their gear, but it is what it is."

By David Pollak

Rules changes to increase scoring, reduce injuries

NHL preview: Ranking all 30 teams

By David Pollak and Curtis Pashelka

Under the new NHL format, the top three teams in each division qualify for the playoffs, plus two wild card teams indicated here by an asterisk. Here are predictions for the 2013-14 season:

WESTERN CONFERENCE

PACIFIC DIVISION

1. Los Angeles Kings -- Maybe the Sharks should have won that second-round playoff series and are the better team. But with Raffi Torres about to miss half the season or more, it's hard to pick San Jose ahead of the Kings going forward. The Sharks only scored 10 goals in seven games against Jonathan Quick and until there's evidence that's changed, Los Angeles is still the Pacific team to beat. An improving Slava Vovynov gives the Drew Doughty-led defense a little more offensive pop and the already strong forward corps led by Anze Kopitar, Mike Richards and Jeff Carter gets a little nastier with the arrival of Daniel Carcillo.

2. San Jose Sharks -- The knee injury to Torres makes the Sharks vulnerable if it taps into any lingering self-doubt after their playoff loss to the Kings. But GM Doug Wilson's "refresh and reset" roster should still be able to execute Coach Todd McLellan's high-energy, high-speed approach, and San Jose should still be a tough foe on most nights. Much will also depend on how the rookies come through as Tomas Hertl, Matt Nieto and Freddie Hamilton could all be in the opening night lineup. One area that should not be a concern is goal, where Antti Niemi has proven to be reliable and, at times, stellar.

3. Anaheim Ducks -- Another team with a split personality, the Ducks stormed out of the gate and won the Pacific last season despite finishing 8-9-2 down the stretch. Secured with eight-year contract extensions, Ryan Getzlaf and Corey Perry still spearhead the offense and, now 43, Teemu Selanne is back for one more farewell tour. The biggest change? Motivated by salary cap economics, GM Bob Murray sent Bobby Ryan to Ottawa for promising and less expensive Jakob Silfverberg. Defenseman Francois Beauchemin should again get the most minutes on the blue line. In goal, like last year, Jonas Hiller and Viktor Fasth should each see plenty of pucks.

"4. Edmonton Oilers -- One of these seasons, the Oilers will live up to the promise of the likes of Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins at forward and Justin Schultz on defense. Thanks to realignment it might be this one. With Detroit and Columbus parked in the East (yes, the Blue Jackets are good now), the playoff path in the West is a little easier. New GM Craig MacTavish added some useful experience by bringing in forward David Perron and d-man Andrew Ferrence to help new coach Dallas Eakins try to get the most of the young talent. Devin Dubnyk provides decent enough netminding.

5. Vancouver Canucks -- Acerbic coach John Tortorella has quite the challenge ahead. Goaltie Roberto Luongo's monster contract made him un-tradeable so Vancouver had no choice but to deal Cory Schneider instead. Nobody, including Luongo, saw that coming. Swept by the Sharks in the playoffs, the Canucks looked exposed and vulnerable. The Sedins did not work their magic and even Ryan Kesler and Alexandre Burrows weren't up to their usual standard of annoyance. The only off-season addition to a mediocre defense was Yannick Weber. Realignment did the Canucks no favor either, scuttling the softer Northwest Division they had dominated for five seasons and throwing the California teams in their path.

6. Phoenix Coyotes -- The most important development here is the fact the NHL found a buyer for the Coyotes and a new lease with suburban Glendale that puts relocation on the back burner, not the front one where it's been for three seasons now. The team's biggest asset continues to be Coach Dave Tippett, who will be reunited from their Dallas days with Mike Ribeiro, the team's biggest off-season pickup (four-year, $20 million). Second biggest asset? Goaltie Mike Smith, edging out longtime captain Shane Doan and highly regarded defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson. Tippett's teams are always in the playoff hunt, but the competition could be too stiff for Phoenix.

7. Calgary Flames -- No Miika Kiprusoff in goal (retired). No Jarome Iginla at right wing (traded at deadline). And a city recovering from floods that dumped water and mud into the Saddledome's lower bowl. Poor Calgary, and, on the ice at least, that's not likely to change. The Flames' lineup has recognizable
names up front — Mike Cammalleri, Lee Stempniak, Jiri Hudler — but all are about one line too high in the depth chart. In goal, the Flames go from Kiprusoff to another Finn, Karri Ramo, who has had success in the KHL, but middling to poor starts in 48 previous NHL games. That four-year playoff drought is about to reach five.

CENTRAL DIVISION

1. Chicago Blackhawks — When the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup in 2010, you knew they had to dismantle their lineup for cap purposes and you could see them sliding down the standings. Not this time. Yes, solid role players such as Dave Bolland, Viktor Stalberg, Mikhail Frolik and Antti Niemi, but Chicago has the depth to fill in behind them. Goalie Corey Crawford now has Nikolai Khabibulin as his back-up, but that’s about the only new face in the locker room. And the team’s core including Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook must have learned something from whatever cup hangover they had to deal with last time.

2. St. Louis Blues — If any Central team will make things interesting for the Blackhawks, it’s their longtime rivals in St. Louis. The Blues may drop off slightly on offense with Magnus Paajarvi and Derek Roy replacing David Perron and Andy McDonald, but there’s still plenty of potential goals coming from Chris Stewart and Patrik Berglund. And the addition of veteran Brenden Morrow in training camp was a big plus. Meanwhile, their imposing defense led by Alex Pietrangelo, Jay Bouwmeester and Kevin Shattenkirk is back in full. And the only problem in goal, presuming everyone’s healthy, is which one of three capable netminders to play — Brian Elliott, Jaroslav Halak or Jake Allen.

3. Minnesota Wild — The pricey free agent signings of Zach Parise and Ryan Suter in 2012 paid only minimal dividends last season as the Wild smeared into the playoffs, only to face Chicago in a first-round series that ended in five games. A full season with Jason Pominville in the lineup and the growth of onetime Sharks prospect Charlie Coyle should get the Wild to the post-season again. Gone is the NHL’s hit-leader, Cal Clutterbuck, and in his place reformed bad-boy Matt Cooke. Also departing as the Wild dealt with the drop in salary cap was Devin Setoguchi, who was dealt to Winnipeg for a second-round draft pick.

4. Dallas Stars — New general manager, new coach and as many as five new faces in the starting lineup. Guess they draw line at that fifth year without a playoff appearance in Big D. But the new names at the top — GM Jim Nill from Detroit and longtime Buffalo Coach Lindy Ruff — have the proper pedigree. The acquisition of Tyler Seguin from Boston was a calculated risk from Detroit and longtime Buffalo Coach Lindy Ruff — have the proper pedigree. The acquisition of Tyler Seguin from Boston was a calculated risk, but Chicago has the depth to fill in behind them. Goalie Corey Crawford now has Nikolai Khabibulin as his back-up, but that’s about the only new face in the locker room. And the team’s core including Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook must have learned something from whatever cup hangover they had to deal with last time.

5. Edmonton Oilers — There’s not a ton of change on the surface level. Devan Dubnyk is just a year removed from his Calder Trophy-winning season and has the edge over Cam Talbot in net. But left-wing Jordan Eberle is a new guy, on the other side of the (albeit non-existent) Edmonton offense. A full season with Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Taylor Hall on the top line will be interesting. The Oilers didn’t make a big mistake when they signed him to an eight-year contract extension.

6. Montreal Canadiens — Hockey’s most decorated franchise had a big improvement in the lockout-shortened 2013 season, as the Canadiens overhauled their operations and went from missing the playoffs to finishing second in the now-defunct Northwest Division. Now Montreal, which lost to Ottawa in five games in the first round, is hoping a few more tweaks can take it to the next level, as the Canadians brought in Daniel Briere and big bodies George Parros and former Shark Douglas Murray. Still, any success Montreal enjoys will come from its returning corps, which includes Norris Trophy winner PK Subban, and forwards Max Pacioretty, Tomas Plekanec, Brian Gionta and Andrei Markov. Although the Canadiens are not favored to win the division title, they should still safely make the playoffs.

7. Winnipeg Jets — The Jets are coming off a bit of a sweeper season in which they made the playoffs again after years of disappointment, but lost in the first round to Boston in a Game 7 they should have won. Toronto aims to take another step forward this season as Dave Bolland was acquired at the draft and draft and with the addition of Daniel Alfredsson and Stephen Weiss to go with John Michael Liles. But the first line of Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader, and goalie Jimmy Howard, will need to have a strong year to get the Red Wings back to the conference finals.

8. Toronto Maple Leafs — The Leafs are off the bit of a sweeper season in which they made the playoffs again after years of disappointment, but lost in the first round to Boston in a Game 7 they should have won. Toronto aims to take another step forward this season as Dave Bolland was acquired at the draft and draft and with the addition of Daniel Alfredsson and Stephen Weiss to go with John Michael Liles. But the first line of Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader, and goalie Jimmy Howard, will need to have a strong year to get the Red Wings back to the conference finals.

9. Calgary Flames — The Flames are off the bit of a sweeper season in which they made the playoffs again after years of disappointment, but lost in the first round to Boston in a Game 7 they should have won. Toronto aims to take another step forward this season as Dave Bolland was acquired at the draft and draft and with the addition of Daniel Alfredsson and Stephen Weiss to go with John Michael Liles. But the first line of Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader, and goalie Jimmy Howard, will need to have a strong year to get the Red Wings back to the conference finals.

10. Ottawa Senators — Few teams went through as much upheaval in the offseason as the Senators, who lost captain Daniel Alfredsson to Detroit in free agency and traded for Bobby Ryan in a massive deal with Anaheim. Clarke MacArthur was also signed from Toronto to boost an offense that ranked 27th in the NHL in goals scored. The big question for Ottawa will be if they can stay healthy, as Jason Spezza, Erik Karlsson, Milan Mihalek and Craig Anderson all missed significant time last season. Thanks to its defense, though, which was bolstered by the addition of Joe Corvo from Dallas, the Senators should be in the mix for a playoff spot this season.

11. Buffalo Sabres — The Sabres are going through a rebuilding phase and appear headed for another playoff-less spring. Veterans Jason Pominville, Jordan Leopold and Robyn Regehr were all dealt last season and UFA-to-be Ryan Miller and Thomas Vanek could be the next ones to go. Coach Ron Rolston had the interim tag removed from his title in the summer, and could be a good choice to shepherd Buffalo through its growing pains. Buffalo’s special teams were awful last season, as the power play ranked 29th out of 30 teams and the penalty kill was 26th. In the meantime, look for
Vanek, Cory Hodgson, Drew Stafford to lead the offense and Christian Ehrhoff and Tyler Myers to lead the defensive corps.

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

1. Pittsburgh Penguins -- The Penguins went into an offseason with some unknowns, but came out of it having resigned Evgeni Malkin, Kris Letang and Chris Kunitz. Those players, along with Sidney Crosby, should make Pittsburgh the team to beat in the Metropolitan Division. The Penguins' goaltending situation, though, is a little unsettled. Tomas Vokoun is out indefinitely with a blood clot in his pelvis, so the onus is on Marc-Andre Fleury to regain the form that he showed in 2009 when Pittsburgh won the Cup. If he struggles, Pittsburgh's other option is Jeff Zatkoff, who has no NHL experience.

2. Washington Capitals -- Clearly, the Capitals need Alex Ovechkin to be a productive player if they hope to challenge for the division title. Because after a slow start last season, Ovechkin caught fire, finished with 56 points, led Washington to the playoffs and won the Hart Trophy. Washington lost Mike Ribeiro to free agency, but picked up Mikhail Grabovski for the second line. Defensively, Mike Green showed his value last season when he was healthy, and if goalie Braden Holtby can recapture the form he showed last season, the Capitals will challenge for the division crown.

3. New York Rangers -- After his coaching style wore thin in the dressing room and with the team's upper management, John Tortorella was shown the door and replaced by the more level-headed Alain Vigneault. The style of the former Canucks coach should rejuvenate Brad Richards, keep Rick Nash and Derek Stepan as offensive forces, and serve young players well. Having a healthy Marc Staal will make a big difference, and goalie Henrik Lundqvist is well-established as one of the best in the league. If New York stays healthy, a division title isn't out of the question.

** 4. New York Islanders -- The Islanders have stockpiled high draft choices for years and some of that talent started to mature last season, when New York made the playoffs for the first time since 2007. Along with John Tavares, who had 28 goals in 2013 and was a nominee for the Hart Trophy, Matt Moulson, Michael Grabner and Kyle Okposo all became legitimate scorers. The defensive corps is also young, but does have Andrew MacDonald and Lubomir Visnovsky to lean on for experience. Goalie Evgeni Nabokov isn't getting any younger at 38, and as Sharks fans know, he has a ceiling in terms of playoff success. But if he can have another strong season, the Islanders may be in the playoffs back to back years for the first time since 2003 and 2004.

5. Columbus Blue Jackets -- Few people pegged the Blue Jackets to contend for a playoff spot at the start of the lockout-shortened 2013 season. But thanks to the efforts of Vezina Trophy winning goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, Columbus finished strong and nearly made the postseason. The Blue Jackets need Bobrovsky to display that same magic touch to contend for a playoff spot this year, although they should be improved on offense with Marian Gaborik feeling more comfortable in his surroundings and the addition of Nathan Horton from Boston. Gaborik, Brandon Dubinsky and Artem Anisimov form a solid top line, but can Columbus' other forwards continue to contribute?

6. Philadelphia Flyers -- Although they signed Vincent Lecavalier and Mark Streit, the Flyers may benefit most by who they don't have anymore -- Ilya Bryzgalov. The enigmatic goalie could not live up to the expectations of his massive contract and the last seven years of his deal was bought out by the team. Leadership and goal-scoring aren't problems in Philadelphia, as Claude Giroux is a legitimate MVP candidate and Scott Hartnell should bounce back from an injury-shortened 2013 season. If young players such as Brayden Schenn and Sean Couturier continue to grow, and Ray Emery and Steve Mason provide some consistent goaltending, the Flyers could surprise some people.

7. Carolina Hurricanes -- The Hurricanes should again have one of the better offenses in the Eastern Conference and Eric and Jordan Staal, Jeff Skinner and Jiri Tlusty. The question for Carolina will be in net, as it looks for Cam Ward to regain the form he showed at the start of last season before he went down with a knee injury -- torpedoing the Hurricanes' hopes for a playoff spot. If Alex Semin shows up on a regular basis to boost the power play, Ward stays healthy and some newcomers are able to contribute, Carolina could be a sleeper team in its new division.

8. New Jersey Devils -- It certainly doesn't appear as if the Devils will challenge for a playoff spot this season -- not after Ilya Kovalchuk retired (and signed with SKA St. Petersburg of the KHL) and David Clarkson signed with Toronto. The bulk of New Jersey's offense will come from the top line of Patrik Elias, Travis Zajac and the ageless Jaromir Jagr, who, along with Michael Ryder, was signed to make up for the absence of Kovalchuk. Former Shark Ryane Clowe will add needed toughness and New Jersey does have insurance in net, as Cory Schneider was acquired from Vancouver to spell Martin Brodeur and eventually take his spot as the No. 1 goalie. They'll need to be stellar for the Devils, because the goal-scoring could be in short supply.

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718839 San Jose Sharks

NHL realignment will bring every team to San Jose

By David Pollak

SAN JOSE -- Even before the first puck drops Tuesday night, 2013-14 is already a season of big-time change in the NHL.

The Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets no longer are in the Western Conference, but the Winnipeg Jets are. There are four divisions, not six, and while the Sharks are still in the Pacific, three Canadian teams -- the Vancouver Canucks, Edmonton Oilers and Calgary Flames -- have moved into San Jose's division, and the Dallas Stars have moved out.

And for the first time since 1997-98, each franchise will play home and away games against every team in the other conference. That means annual visits to the SAP Center by the likes of the Boston Bruins and Pittsburgh Penguins.

All of that translates into travel that has the Sharks flying more miles -- 57,612, according to ontheforecheck.com -- than any other NHL team.

Still, nobody in San Jose is complaining, at least publicly.

"It's the right thing to do for the fans," general manager Doug Wilson said of the increased Eastern Conference mileage.

"We'd always be in the top five of most miles traveled anyway," Sharks captain Joe Thornton said. "We deal with it, we're fine with it."

Realignment also means a new Stanley Cup playoff format. No longer will teams be seeded based on point totals among conference teams. Instead, the teams that finish in the top three spots in each division advance to the postseason, where they are joined by two wild-card teams from each conference.

In each conference, the division winner with the most points will face the wild-card team with the fewest. That allows for the possibility, for example, of the Sharks meeting a team from outside the Pacific in the first round. But overall, the system is designed to pit division foes against each other.

"That," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said, "is where the true rivalries will come out. Ours with Vancouver evolved over two playoff series. It hasn't really evolved over the regular season."

At the same time, at least one longtime rivalry is given short shrift by all the changes. The Sharks have met the Detroit Red Wings in the postseason five times, more than any other foe. The only way they will meet in the new system is in the Stanley Cup finals.

While teams in the West log thousands of miles more than those in the East, they do have better odds of making the playoffs, as both Western divisions have seven teams each while the two in the East have eight.

All of which combines to create an unbalanced schedule as far as conference and divisional play. Within the Pacific, for example, the Sharks face the Los Angeles Kings five times, one more than the Canucks.

Is that going to lead to some teams claiming they had a tougher task than others?

"I think it all evens out in the end game," Sharks forward Tommy Wingels said. "Our sport is a little different. As you see in playoff series, there's parity from the top of the league to the bottom of the league. At the end of the year, you have five or six teams battling for a couple playoff spots and every team is really in it throughout the year."

Realignment has been in the works since the Atlanta Thrashers became the Winnipeg Jets in June 2011 because it made no sense for a Manitoba-based team to compete in the same division as those in the Southeast United States.
Three rookies on Sharks opening night roster

San Jose Sharks keeping three rookie forwards

By David Pollak

SAN JOSE -- The Sharks will open the coming NHL season a lot younger than they closed the last one.

Rosters were set at noon Monday, and San Jose will have three forwards playing in their first NHL game when the season begins at home Thursday night against the Vancouver Canucks.

Nineteen-year-old Tomas Hertl, the team's first-round pick in the 2012 draft, is set to become the youngest San Jose starter since Marc-Edouard Vlasic in 2006. Hertl, who turns 20 on Nov. 12, had been expected to make the team and ended up on a top line with Joe Thornton and Brent Burns.

But training-camp injuries to Raffi Torres and Adam Burish also created openings that have been filled by Matt Nieto, 20, and Freddie Hamilton, 21. Also securing a place is goaltender Alex Stalock, 26, who started 10 games in his first NHL season.

Hertl and Nieto are among nine Sharks rookies expected to be on opening night, which would be a season first. "It's a start, but there's plenty of work to do," Stalock said on Monday.

Rosters were set at noon Monday, and San Jose will have three forwards playing in their first NHL game.

The complete roster is as follows:


Defensemen (7): Dan Boyle, Justin Braun, Jason Demers, Scott Hannan, Dan Hamhuis, Dan Boyle, Justin Braun, Jason Demers, Scott Hannan, Matt Irwin, Brad Stuart, Marc-Edouard Vlasic.

Goaltenders (2): Antti Niemi, Alex Stalock.

Staff

SAN JOSE - The Sharks have finalized their opening night roster.

Among the players to make the team are rookie forwards Tomas Hertl, 19, Matt Nieto, 20, and Freddie Hamilton, 21. Also securing a place is goaltender Alex Stalock, who won the battle to be Antti Niemi’s backup over Harri Sateri.

Raffi Torres (right knee surgery) is on injured reserve and will miss at least three to five months, while Marty Havlat (offseason pelvic surgery) is expected to be placed on injured reserve before the start of the regular season.

Adam Burish (lower body) and Brad Stuart (lower body) are questionable for the season opener. Anthony Stewart, in camp on a tryout, was released.

If Hertl, Nieto and Hamilton all play on opening night, they will become the first Sharks players to suit up that are younger than the franchise, which played its first game on October 4, 1991.

The Sharks open their 23rd season on Thursday, Oct. 3 against the Vancouver Canucks.

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Three rookies on Sharks opening night roster

Staff

SAN JOSE -- Maybe it truly was an open competition for the Sharks' backup goalie position, as Sharks brass said it would be all summer long. Or, maybe it wasn't. Regardless, the expected has occurred as it will be Alex Stalock on the far end of the San Jose bench on Thursday night when the club opens up its 23rd NHL season.

[KURZ: Three rookies on Sharks opening night roster]

"It's a start, but there's plenty of work to do," Stalock said on Monday. It's not a surprise, in that Stalock is more experienced than fellow training camper Harri Sateri, has been with the organization longer, and has historically posted better numbers.

The 26-year-old Minnesota native, who has three games of NHL experience and a career-threatening injury on his resume, expressed gratitude towards the organization for re-signing him after a nerve injury in his left leg in AHL Worcester on Feb. 4, 2011 sidelined him for nearly a year. It happened just three days after Stalock recorded a win in his first NHL appearance against Phoenix in relief of Antti Niemi.
In 38 games with Worcester last season, Stalock was 17-16-4 with a 2.60 goals-against average and .912 save percentage for the offensively-starved club that missed out on the postseason. It was his fourth season with the Sharks’ primary minor league affiliate, although he played just five AHL games between Worcester and Peoria in 2011-12 while recovering from the nerve injury.

He split time with Sateri last season, but if he remains Antti Niemi’s backup in 2013-14, he’ll probably have to get used to seeing the net much less frequently. Niemi, a Vezina finalist a season ago, prefers to play as much as possible and could get upwards of 70 starts if he remains healthy and effective.

Stalock understands that. Part of his role as backup, though, will be to keep Niemi on his toes and perhaps even push the 30-year-old Finland native.

“You need to play to stay on top of your game, and he loves to do that and he’s able to do it,” Stalock said of his partner.

“Throughout the whole organization there is going to be everybody pushing each other, like you want every year. Especially up here, to help to continue to make Nemo better and take another step, and at the same time push each other, I think is good.”

Adam Burish suffered a “setback” from his lower body injury, but could return to the ice as soon as Tuesday, McLellan said. It’s fair to say he’s questionable for opening night.

Defenseman Brad Stuart is close to game-ready after rehabbing a lower body injury of his own. “We’re hoping that he’s ready for Thursday,” McLellan said.

Tommy Wingels, in the place that Torres would have probably occupied.

Nieto looks to be penciled in on the Sharks’ third line with Joe Pavelski and Tommy Wingels, in the place that Torres would have probably occupied.

Regardless of which players stick around for the duration of the season – and McLellan said that there were several on their way back to Worcester that deserved a chance to play NHL games – there’s no hiding the excitement of having an opening night roster spot in the best hockey league in the world.

The injury will likely keep Murray off of the ice for the first Sharks-Canadiens matchup at the Bell Centre on Oct. 26. Montreal visits San Jose on March 8.

Among the forwards, Hertl’s making the cut is the least surprising. The team’s first round pick in 2012 showed in the preseason that he’s skilled enough to play at an NHL level, scoring three goals and an assist in four games, and his big six-foot-two, 210-pound frame should help him better withstand the rigors of an NHL schedule.

He’ll be on the wing of Joe Thornton and Brent Burns when the Sharks open up on Thursday against Vancouver.

“Tomas being my linemate, it’s been a lot of fun,” Thornton said. “Me and Burnzie have been smiling a lot, just enjoying his company out there. I think with getting some young guys in here, it adds a little bit more enthusiasm in the room.”

The 34-year-old captain of the Sharks, Thornton has already seen Hertl progress from the start of camp three weeks ago.

“It’s like you see your kid, you go on the road once a week and then you come back and see him and he’s huge,” said Thornton, who welcomed his second child to the world this summer. “I think that’s what you’re going to see with Tomas this year, each week he’s going to get better and better. Every week he’s been here he’s gotten better, and it’s a good sign.”

Joe Thornton on Tomas Hertl
Murray, 33, was traded to Pittsburgh last season just prior to the trade deadline for a pair of second round picks. The Sharks traded one of those picks to Detroit at the 2013 draft in order to move up two places and select defenseman Mirco Mueller 18th overall.

Murray spent the first six-plus seasons with the Sharks, scoring six goals and 53 assists for 59 points in 451 games.

Tags:
SAN JOSE Sharks, Douglas Murray, Montreal Canadiens, Top Stories, Kevin Kurz, Sharks 2013 Training Camp

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.01.2013

718845  St Louis Blues

Blues hope power play is clicking from the start

4 hours ago  By Jeremy Rutherford jrutherford@post-dispatch.com

Opening night for the Blues in 2012-13 was a game to remember, a 6-0 crushing of Detroit in front of an overflow crowd of 20,035.

The secret to the six-spot that night was the power play, finishing four for five with the man-advantage.

In the weeks ahead, the unit scored at least one goal in 12 of the Blues’ first 14 games, converting 19 of 53 chances (35.8 percent) and claiming the No. 1 ranking in the NHL.

The Blues would be hard-pressed to match those totals from the outset again, but when they open the 2013-14 season Thursday against Nashville, the team says it’ll be ready.

The Blues scored on just four of 25 power-play opportunities in the preseason (16 percent), but that was with a potpourri of prospects. This week, as the lineup was whittled down to its regulars, the club spent significant time ironing out the details.

“Right now, that’s the main focus,” forward Alexander Steen said, “trying to get to that point so once the puck drops Thursday, everything is clicking.”

Once again, the Blues will be trotting out three groups of forwards and two groups of point personnel.

In training camp, one group was made up of David Backes, Patrik Berglund and T.J. Oshie, another consisted of Derek Roy, Chris Stewart and Vladimir Tarasenko and a third featured Brenden Morrow, Jaden Schwartz and Vladimir Sobotka. Meanwhile, the two-man point crews were Jay Bouwmeester and Alex Pietrangelo, and Kevin Shattenkirk and Steen.

The purpose of having three units, in part, is keeping players fresh, but it’s also designed to give a variety of players a chance to produce.

Stewart led the Blues with six power-play goals in 2012-13, followed by Berglund with five, but if they’re not scoring, head coach Ken Hitchcock has options. Nine other players on the roster had at least one power-play goal last season and that doesn’t include Schwartz, who didn’t have any, and Morrow, who had two with Dallas and Pittsburgh.

“It can’t be just a given that you go out there all the time,” Hitchcock said. “I think sometimes, that’s what we’re guilty of. We don’t trust other people to put them out there to get the big goal. That’s why we’ve practiced with three units from day one and we’re going to keep doing that.

“You’re going to go with what’s having success instead of, ‘Let’s hope these guys can do it.’ I want to know that they’re going to work and give us a chance, and so I’m not going to put people on the ice if they’re not earning that ice time just based on they happen to have skill. I don’t think good teams work that way and we’re not going to work that way.”

Oshie said the topic of competition for power-play ice time has been filtering through the Blues’ locker room.

“We’ve got guys that can step in at any position if someone is not performing,” he said. “There’s been a lot of emphasis on that.”

There’s also been an emphasis on putting players in the proper positions. In the past, Steen has started the season at the point only to find himself moved around out of necessity. Oshie has been at the point and in front of the net, again out of necessity.

Going into the new season, Steen has returned to the point, a situation that Hitchcock likens to having former Blues defenseman Al MacInnis and Chris Pronger at that spot.

“I like the bomb,” Hitchcock said. “He’s got great timing on the one-timer and it’s accurate. It was a little wild two years ago, but it’s not wild anymore. She’s on the net and it’s coming fast and hard and that’s what we like.”

Steen enjoys the role.

“Yeah, I’ve gotten comfortable there over the years, with the one-timer,” he said. “You sort of see everything unfolded in front of you. You’re able to jump into holes and things like that.”

Steen has spent the preseason working on his chemistry with Stewart, who will be positioned in front of the net.

“Stewy knows that whenever I get the puck in a certain situation … if it’s in the middle, if it’s by the top of the face-off circle, he knows where I want to go,” Steen said. “He’s either able to take the goalie’s eyes (away) or get open with his stick. He knows exactly what to do.”

Oshie’s new piece of property is the half-wall, where Andy McDonald and David Perron have played in the past. Oshie hasn’t played there since his days at the University of North Dakota.

“For myself playing a new position, all of this practice has helped me as well,” he said.

But while Oshie’s creativity should make him a good fit there, the Blues will need to continue making strategic changes throughout the year.

In 2012-13, after picking up a goal in 12 of its first 14 games, the unit got on the board in only one of its next nine games and just nine of its last 34. The team closed the season ranked No. 12 in the league (19.5 percent).

“You’ll see that other teams will start sitting on something and you’ve got to adjust,” Steen said. “You just have to talk before the game, ‘We ran that last game, so if they sit on it, this is what we’ll do.’” A good power play always adjusts but stays true to the original plan and structure.

A good power play also doesn’t worry about its success rate, said Hitchcock, who might be right. A year ago, Chicago won the Stanley Cup despite having the 19th-ranked unit during the regular season. Runner-up Boston was 26th during the year.

“The power play, you just want to score big goals at the end,” Hitchcock said. “Where you are in the league is not relevant, but man, when you need a goal, you’ve got to have it. I’ve seen the best power plays percentage-wise and they never scored when it mattered. It’s when the game is on the line, can you get a big goal when you need it?”

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.01.2013

718846  St Louis Blues

Stronger, leaner Halak hoping injuries are a thing of the past

By NORM SANDERS — News-Democrat

ST. LOUIS — While there are three goalies capable of starting for the St. Louis Blues –including top prospect Jake Allen in the minors -- some may consider it a surprise to see Jaroslav Halak back in the No. 1 role.

Limited to 16 games because of two groin injuries last season, Halak also took his case for more playing time to Blues coach Ken Hitchcock during the first-round playoff loss to the Los Angeles Kings.

"It's behind us, there's nothing I can do about last season," Halak said. "Just learn from it."

Halak re habbed the groin and is back with the Blues after spending the summer in St. Louis for the first time instead of returning to his native Slovakia.
The veteran goaltender wasn’t just here for Fair St. Louis and the summer concert series at Verizon Amphitheater, either. He did some serious work with Blues strength and conditioning coach Nelson Ayotte and other personal trainers, changing to a healthier diet while hitting the workouts far harder in an effort gain strength and put the groin issues in the past.

As a result Halak lost 14 pounds, but more importantly lowered his body fat from 13.5 percent to 8 percent.

"It was kind of a mix of everything, cardio and working out with Nelson trying to make myself stronger," Halak said. "It’s paid off so far. He’s been pushing me."

Early in camp, Hitchcock felt Halak looked quicker and more mobile on his skates.

"Jaro’s had a great summer, he’s stayed here and with his training probably has taken it to a level it hasn’t been to before," Blues General Manager Doug Armstrong said. "He looks great and he’s focused. He’s excited about the challenge that lies ahead of him.

"He’s given himself the best opportunity to be able to log a lot of minutes and to stay healthy."

And after a rigorous summer of running on a treadmill, tough exercise and an improved diet, Halak is hoping Blues fans will see his best goaltending yet.

"I signed for four years," Halak said of the four-year, $15 million deal he signed after being traded here following a magical playoff run with Montreal, a deal that expires after this season. "I had some goals and I haven’t accomplished them yet. For now I’ve got one more year and I’m looking forward to this one. There’s always a new challenge.

"Over the course of the season everybody goes through some adversity, goes through some ups and downs. One day at a time, that’s my approach." Halak’s balky groin has been an issue at times. He also was injured during the 2012 playoffs in a collision with teammate Barret Jackman.

The frustration was evident during an injury-marred 2012-13 that saw Halak go 6-5-1 with three shutouts in 16 games, a 2.14 goals-against average and .899 save percentage.

"It was that kind of season; I couldn’t stay healthy," said Halak, who has 16 shutouts in 119 games with the Blues. "I worked out hard this summer to try to make the area I got hurt a little stronger and hopefully it will stay good for the season. I feel good now, I have no discomfort whatsoever. We’ll see how it goes."

During the preseason, Halak offered a mixed bag of results. He was 1-1 with a 2.37 goals-against average and .891 save percentage, allowing six goals on 55 shots.

A year ago, Halak’s injury was followed by inconsistency from Elliott that preceded a hot streak by then-rookie Allen.

Both Halak and Elliott can become free agents after this season and Allen is waiting for another opportunity, so the Blues’ goaltending will be under the microscope this season.

What was considered a major strength two seasons ago when Halak and Elliott combined for 16 shutouts and the NHL’s best-goals-against average has once again become at least an area of concern.

"I feel good on the ice, that’s probably the most important thing," Halak said. "Obviously whoever plays the best will play, that’s the bottom line. Everybody has to bring their best every game."

"It’s up to me now to try to maintain everything and keep building on the summer. Just keep getting better."

So what did Halak learn during his first full summer in St. Louis, besides avoiding the region’s toasted ravioli, cheese fries and the scrumptious frozen custard at Ted Drewes?

"Everybody said it was going to be hot and it wasn’t too bad," he said. "Everybody said it was the coldest summer in a long time so I enjoyed it. I had fun."

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718847  Tampa Bay Lightning

For Bolts captancy, one difficult decision to make

By Erik Efrendsson | Published: October 1, 2013

TAMPA — The Lightning iced their full 23-man roster for practice on Monday, but before the regular season gets under way on Thursday in Boston, one more key spot needs to be filled — the captancy.

Tampa Bay saw the role open this summer when Vinny Lecavalier’s contract was bought out.

The new captain and alternate captains will be announced tonight during an invitation-only event at Mahaffey Theatre in St. Petersburg.

While there are many strong leaders on the Lightning, the captancy role comes down to two candidates: Marty St. Louis and Steven Stamkos.

“There are captains that have been quiet and captains that have been vocal,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “But you have to have a presence, there is no doubt. So, whoever our captain turns out to be will have a presence.”

With Lecavalier now in Philadelphia, St. Louis and Stamkos are the players most widely associated with the team. But more than being the faces of the franchise and perhaps the team’s top two players, both have many of the leadership qualities needed for the title.

“You see both of them working together, how hard they work, it’s contagious,” center Nate Thompson said. “They both are (vocal) when they need to be. When they both say something everyone listens, because it’s usually something pretty important and it usually goes a long way.”

St. Louis has worn a letter on his jersey for nearly a decade as an alternate captain and is the only remaining player from the 2004 Stanley Cup team. The 38-year-old commands respect and is somebody younger players naturally look to when first stepping into the locker room.

“He’s a leader in all regards. Whether it’s leading by example or in the room being vocal, he does it all,” Stamkos said of St. Louis. “Some guys are just one or the other, but he does both.

“You can’t teach that — you either have it or you don’t, and Marty has that in him. He is a heart-and-soul kind of guy, and he’s been doing it in this league for a long time and he’s definitely deserving.”

St. Louis’ experience and inspiring story — the undrafted and undersized wing is a six-time All-Star, two-time scoring champion and one-time league MVP — would seem to make him a natural for the role.

But Stamkos inspires in his own way. Tabbed a future star when he entered the league as the 2008 No. 1 overall draft pick at age 18, Stamkos understands the work required to be an elite player. He is a two-time Rocket Richard Trophy winner as the league’s top goal scorer, but he is not content just to score goals.

“I think Steven, the kind of player that he is, the way he plays the game, he plays pretty hard,” St. Louis said. “And Steven is a guy that can be vocal. He is developing into a pretty good leader, so on top of that he plays the game at a high level.

“I think he understands how you play in this league, how you survive and how you dominate. It’s a whole other level of hard work and he gets it.”

Leadership in the locker room is about more than just one person, so it goes beyond the player who wears the “C” on his jersey and the two who wear an “A” as alternate captains. Leadership is about a group, a handful of players who guide the direction of the team, carry the message from the coach and make sure everybody is pulling in the same direction.

“It’s not just one guy, but one guy has to be the leader of that group as well,” Cooper said.

And there is a certain reverence that comes with being the captain of a hockey team.

“Hockey is the one sport where you are actually physically recognized as the leader. You are the guy that everybody looks to. You are the one that is
accountable for your team, and there is just a ton of importance put on that. I don't think in all the other sports there is anybody like the captain of the hockey team. "For me, it's the highest honor possible."

NOTE: Hybrid icing will be in effect for the start of the season after it was approved by the players. The NHLPA gave the go-ahead for the change that makes icing a race to an imaginary line across the faceoff dots instead of the puck.

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718848 Tampa Bay Lightning

Stamkos, St. Louis stump for each other as Lightning captain

Damian Cristodero, Monday, September 30, 2013 9:34pm

TAMPA — Steven Stamkos on Monday said there has been no discussion between him and the coaching staff about the Lightning's open captain position.

But Tampa Bay's star center consistently has lobbied in the media for the job to go to Marty St. Louis.

"So, hopefully, they read the paper," Stamkos said.

Coach Jon Cooper has not disclosed the candidates to wear the C, but it is believed it will be either St. Louis, the iconic face of the franchise, or Stamkos, one of the league's most dynamic players.

The reveal is tonight at an invitation-only event at the Mahaffey Theater in St. Petersburg, the end of an evaluation Cooper said took all training camp.

"There's nobody like the captain of a hockey team," Cooper said at the Tampa Bay Times Forum. "For me, it's the highest honor possible. You're the guy everybody looks to. You're the one who's accountable for your team. You have to have a presence, no doubt. ... Whoever our captain turns out to be, he'll have a presence."

The Lightning has been without a captain since June, when Vinny Lecavalier, who held the job since 2008, was bought out of his contract. St. Louis and Stamkos were alternates.

St. Louis, 38, is a former league MVP, a two-time points champion and a three-time winner of the Lady Byng Trophy for sportsmanship.

Stamkos, 23, has more goals, 185, than any player since the start of the 2009-10 season.

They are part of the same mutual admiration society.

"The way he plays the game," St. Louis said when asked why Stamkos would make a good captain. "Steve can be vocal, and he's developing into a pretty good leader. On top of that he plays the game at a high level. He understands how you play in this league, how you survive, how you dominate. It's a lot of hard work. He gets it."

But Stamkos countered with this about St. Louis: "Whether it's leading by example or in the room being vocal, he does it all. You can't teach that. You either have it or you don't, and Marty has that in him. He's a heart-and-soul type of guy. He's paid his dues a long time in this league. He's definitely deserving."

Both said it won't matter who is captain because leadership in the locker room is best done by a group.

Cooper believes that, too, and said, "I like where we're at in that situation ... but one guy has to be the leader of that group."

"I think everyone is going to be comfortable with who it's going to be," right wing Teddy Purcell said. "But it's going to be a collective group and all about a team-first mentality, so it doesn't really matter who gets it."

Reminded Stamkos once said if he had to put money down on the captaincy it would be on St. Louis, Purcell smiled:

"Probably not a bad bet."

Moves: Forwards Mike Angelidis and Dana Tyrell cleared waivers and were assigned to AHL Syracuse. Defenseman Matt Taormina also cleared but will stay with the Lightning on injured reserve because of a previously undisclosed upper-body issue. He is out indefinitely.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 10.01.2013

718849 Toronto Maple Leafs

Blair: Leafs and Raptors are not even on the same page

JEFF BLAIR

TORONTO — One of Toronto’s favourite sons didn’t only help turn the page on the 2013 sports scene Monday. Fresh off the disappointment of the Toronto Blue Jays’ 74-win season, rap star Drake ripped out the page, crumpled it, then set it on fire.

The Toronto Maple Leafs will start the 2013-14 NHL season Tuesday in Montreal against the Canadiens. In the very least, they’re expected to earn a playoff berth — let’s just call them a comfortable sixth place in the Eastern Conference, okay? — and maybe win their first playoff round, which is entirely within the realm of possibility.

On paper, this is a better lineup than the 2012-13 version, if for no other reason than James Reimer and Jonathan Bernier have clearly taken the tussle for the No. 1 goaltender’s spot to heart. If Reimer’s showing of spine during the preseason, after last season’s Game 7 playoff meltdown against the Boston Bruins, is a sign of club-wide short memory, that’s all to the good.

It’s almost enough to allay fears about an NHL team that still lacks an easily identifiable first-line centre, has seen new questions raised about blueliner Jake Gardiner after a preseason regression and has unnerving salary-cap issues and a looming contractual negotiation with sniper Phil Kessel.

"You want to have that first game, but just like life you have to look at the big picture, right?" Reimer said Monday, after the Leafs workout at the Air Canada Centre, when he was asked who should start in goal Tuesday. "It’s definitely not the end of the world, and you have to look over the full season. We want to win games."

From this vantage point, there is plenty of steak behind the Maple Leafs’ sizzle — certainly, in comparison to the Toronto Raptors.

Head coach Dwanye Casey’s basketball team opens training camp Tuesday. And the failed promise of the Blue Jays’ Summer of Munenori has sensitized locals to the point where hip-hop star Aubrey Drake Graham’s appointment as “global ambassador” for the Raptors, announced with great fanfare Monday, along with the 2016 NBA all-star game coming to Toronto, will be seen in some quarters as something to divert attention from the Raptors’ on-court challenges.

Truth is, a percentage of the Raptors fan base wants the team to tank and get a shot at homegrown franchise player Andrew Wiggins, the consensus No. 1 pick in the 2014 NBA draft.

That tanking is even on the agenda reinforces the different phases of the Maple Leafs’ and Raptors’ development.

Leafs head coach Randy Carlyle said “from a coach’s perspective, this roster is better than last year’s,” and coupled with a style of play that can get an opponent’s attention in the flash of an elbow, there is a new-found respect for the Leafs around the league, not to mention an identity.

That isn’t the case with the Raptors, beyond all this talk of tanking; in the tilted world of NBA officiating they have been an afterthought, far too often victimized by questionable calls in a league run by reputation.

Casey wants a return to defence first – he didn’t even mention the word “playoffs” in a meeting with his team, instead throwing out some statistical goals defensively he will put in place – but he wants intelligent defence, cutting down on what he calls “those reaching and touching, cheap offensive fouls” by one or two a game.

Casey wants his team closer to 20th in the NBA in fouls, as opposed to 30th, and a case in point is second-year man Jonas Valanciunas.
“A lot of his weight is on his heels when he’s playing defence,” the coach said. “We need to get his upper body positioned so it’s like he’s in a chair, instead of bent over, because when you’re bent over, your first reaction is to reach out.”

One of the highlights of the Raptors announcements Monday was hearing Tim Leiweke, Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Ltd. president and chief executive officer, talk about Drake’s new CD “dropping this week.”

It’s going to be a big deal, because Drake is a big deal. Hopefully, the product executive officer, talk about Drake’s new CD “dropping this week.”

Cody Franson will be the second unit.

Phaneuf and Carl Gunnarsson will be the top pair, while Jake Gardiner and Cody Franson will be the second unit.

If Rielly is going to play, either Tuesday against the Canadiens or Wednesday in Philadelphia against the Flyers, it may come at the expense of Gardiner. He didn’t play as well in training camp as he did in the 2013 playoffs, and Carlyle has indicated he is not overly impressed with the 23-year-old.

Veteran defenceman John-Michael Liles, who lost his job to Rielly, cleared NHL waivers Monday and is ticketed for the Marlies. (There is a chance Liles and his rich contract could be traded to Calgary, as Flames president Brian Burke signed him to that deal when he was running the Leafs, and the Flames are thin on the blue line.)

Enforcer Frazer McLaren (broken pinky finger) was placed on the long-term injured reserve list, which means a reprieve from the Marlies for winger Troy Bodie.

“McLaren saw the hand specialist and he’s still a ways away,” Carlyle said. “He’s in a position where the healing process started, but it takes time to heal those small bones.”

By putting McLaren on the long-term list, the Leafs cleared just enough salary cap space to bring in Bodie, who cleared NHL waivers at noon (EDT) Monday. He will probably join centre Jay McClement and Colton Orr on the fourth line.

Mirtle: Five predictions for the Maple Leafs season

JAMES MIRTLE

MONTREAL — Now it’s time for the encore.

The Toronto Maple Leafs stunned a lot of the hockey world last season by finishing fifth in the Eastern Conference, a record built primarily on good special teams, solid goaltending, opportune scoring and some good fortune, too.

With a significant number of new additions — David Clarkson, David Bolland, Mason Raymond, Paul Ranger and Jonathan Bernier at the top of the list — the debate this year is whether or not they can repeat their success, especially in a revamped division and with expectations much higher.

With that in mind, here are a handful of bold predictions for the Leafs season, which opens in Montreal on Tuesday night:

1. Toronto will again lead the NHL in fights

Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren may have missed most of training camp with injuries, but that won’t cause any problems for coach Randy Carlyle on the toughness front.

There will still be plenty of punching in this lineup.

Orr has recovered in time for the season opener, and it’s expected Troy Bodie will be recalled from the AHL in order to fill McLaren’s spot for the two or three weeks he will be out with a broken finger.

Even in the post Brian Burke era, the Leafs have tied a lot of their identity up in their willingness to fight, and Carlyle — who won the Cup with a Ducks team that liked to drop the gloves — will definitely ensure that continues.

They ran away with the fighting majors title a year ago and added David Clarkson to the party, meaning there shouldn’t be much drop off.

Whether or not that helps them win games will, once again, be great fodder for debate.

2. The salary cap will be a season-long concern

Leaves GM Dave Nonis and capologist Claude Loiselle did some mighty deft work to get Toronto under the cap by a mere $65,833 in time for opening night, but that’s going to make for a balancing act that will last all season.

McLaren’s injury will likely result in him spending some time on long-term injured reserve, which buys the Leafs a little more room in that they can call up someone to replace his salary and temporarily exceed the cap in doing so.
Once McLaren returns, however, Toronto must get back under the $64.3-million limit and that will take some clever manoeuvring to make happen.

Making the Leafs situation considerably worse is the fact they have $5.5-million in “dead” cap space dedicated to two buyouts (Darcy Tucker and Colby Armstrong), one demotion (John-Michael Liles) and two retained salaries (Matt Frattin and Ben Scrivens).

Expect Toronto to use a very small roster all season and perhaps even rely on the CBA’s new emergency exception rule a few times if they run into injury issues.

3. James Reimer will win the goaltending battle

He will have a chance to earn starts away from Jonathan Bernier, a former first-round pick who has been pegged as a future NHL star for years and years now.

But James Reimer hardly sounds like a goalie planning to go quietly into the night.

“I was the starter here last year and I had no intention of giving that up whether they brought in Bernier or [Henrik] Lundqvist or someone who’d never played an NHL game before,” Reimer said during training camp.

For what it’s worth, Reimer won the preseason battle, as he was significantly better statistically in the four games he appeared in (.923 save percentage) than Bernier (.891). But this will likely be a showcase that stretches through the first 30 or 40 games before a winner can begin to be crowned, especially given all of the assets (and salary) the Leafs gave up to land Bernier.

But here’s why Reimer is a better bet to win out: He has started nearly double the NHL games Bernier has (100 to 54), for a weaker team, and has better career numbers to show for it (.915 save percentage to .912).

From a small Manitoba town of less than 200 people, Reimer comes across as an “aw shucks” type, but he is also extremely competitive and has clearly come to play hard based on his work in camp and preseason.

Ever the underdog, he appears ready to surprise people yet again.

4. Goal scoring will be harder to come by

One of the pillars of Toronto’s rise a year ago was a terrific offence, as the Leafs scored more than all but five other teams (3.02 goals per game) and had by far the league’s best shooting percentage (11 per cent at even strength).

This is a team with a lot of firepower, from Phil Kessel, to Joffrey Lupul, James van Riemsdyk and Nazem Kadri, but those kind of shooting numbers simply aren’t sustainable over more than the 48 game season they just had.

Expect them to fall back into the 2.80 or so goals per game range and have to rely more on their defensive play to win games. Being outshot heavily over a full season isn’t often a recipe for success, even when you can pick corners better than most teams in the league.

5. Realignment will make their road to the playoffs even tougher

The NHL took the old Northeast Division, added the Detroit Red Wings and two Florida teams, upped the travel schedule and named it after an ocean (Atlantic) a ways away from many of the teams in the group.

What it should add up to is a much more difficult road to the postseason for Toronto.

Their main competition is going to come from the Red Wings, Boston Bruins, Montreal Canadiens and Ottawa Senators, four teams that the majority of pundits are rightly picking to make the playoffs this year. While the low end of the division is weak, the Leafs will have to beat out a very solid team to qualify or rely on the crossover to narrowly take the last spot from a Metropolitan Division club.

Overall, the schedule makers also didn’t do them many favours, as Toronto’s schedule is littered with odd road trips due to the new alignment and the fact it’s an Olympic year.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.01.2013

Toronto Maple Leafs still have a roster move or two to make ahead of opener

DAVID SHOALTS

TORONTO — Morgan Rielly gets to go to Montreal, Frazer McLaren may be headed to the long-term injury list and Troy Bodie may get a ticket to the season-opener as well, as the Toronto Maple Leafs shaped their roster ahead of Monday’s 5 p.m. NHL deadline.

“He’s with our hockey club. He’s one of our seven defencemen,” Leafs head coach Randy Carlyle said after Monday’s practice about Rielly, 19, who was taken fifth overall in the 2012 NHL entry draft.

Carlyle searching for answers to the fill voids left by suspensions, injuries

Chicago Blackhawks goalie Corey Crawford makes a save on a shot by Detroit Red Wings right wing Daniel Alfredsson during an NHL exhibition game

However, Carlyle refused to discuss the Leafs’ roster for Tuesday’s opener against the Montreal Canadiens other than to say he expects to start with 12 forwards and six defencemen.

That means a trip to the long-term injury list for enforcer Frazer McLaren. He suffered a broken pinky finger in training camp and it’s been slow to heal. Given his position as a frequent fighter, a place on the long-term list beckons because the finger needs to be completely healed before McLaren can play.

“Frazer McLaren saw the hand specialist and he’s still a ways away,” Carlyle said. “He’s in a position where the healing process started but it takes time to heal those small bones, especially in that area for that type of player and his job description.”

By putting McLaren on the long-term list, the Leafs will free up just enough salary-cap space to bring in Bodie, who cleared NHL waivers at noon Monday. He can fight and will probably join centre Jay McClement and Colton Orr on the fourth line.

Aside from Rielly and Bodie, the other newcomers on the Leafs roster will be defenceman Paul Ranger, who returns to the NHL after a three-year absence due to personal reasons, goaltender Jonathan Bernier, rookie forward Carter Ashton and forwards Mason Raymond and Dave Bolland.

Under NHL rules, Rielly can play nine games before the Leafs must make a decision about keeping him or sending him back to junior hockey. If he plays a 10th game, Rielly has to stay with the Leafs for the rest of the season.

“We feel strongly that Morgan is a young kid that’s shown a lot of potential and has played well in training camp,” Carlyle said. “There’s a lot of positives taking place with a young player.”

“Obviously, with the 10-game or nine-game scenario we have some flexibility,” Carlyle said. “But the first thing we going to consider is, is the player helping our hockey club and are we helping him by doing what we’re doing?”

Carlyle declined to say whether James Reimer or Bernier will start in Tuesday night’s game

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By: Kevin McGran Sports Reporter, Published on Mon Sep 30 2013

BELL CENTRE

FACEOFF: 7 p.m.

TV: CBC
The Leafs have almost $640,000 in salary cap space with McLaren on long-term IR (minimum 10 games and 24 days). The club saves $925,000 with Liles in the AHL, but $2.8 million of his salary still counts against the cap.

Leaf coach Randy Carlyle said the club has “ideas” about Rielly, but nothing etched in stone.

“It’s always a big decision . . . obviously we feel strongly about him,” Carlyle said. “He’s a young lad, he’s shown a lot of (upside). The first pre-season game, he impressed . . . he separated himself from other guys. Then the idea was to play him in as many exhibition games as possible. That was his baptism, and he separated himself.

“The nine-game scenario is there, so we have some flexibility right now. Obviously we have to consider: Is he helping our club, and are we helping him?”

The Leafs practised with a first line of Tyler Bozak between Phil Kessel and James van Riemsdyk. Nik Kulemin appears set to take the suspended David Clarkson’s place on the second line with Joffrey Lupul and Nazem Kadri.

The third line looks like Dave Bolland between Mason Raymond and possibly Ashton, with Jay McClement, Colton Orr and Bodie on the fourth.

McLaren “is still a ways away,” Carlyle said. “Twelve forwards and six defencemen, I see us playing that way. The forward lines you saw today, there’s probably only one change (coming Tuesday).”

The Maple Leafs won three of five against the Montreal Canadiens last year, with Phil Kessel’s three goals, five assists leading all scorers on both teams . . . Brendan Gallagher’s two goals, two assists led Montreal. . . . Goalie Carey Price was 1-3-0 with a 4.13 GAA against Toronto. . . . Montreal made some significant changes including adding former Philadelphia Flyers sniper Danny Briere as a free agent, and ex-Ducks enforcer George Parros, another free agent who can help the Habs match the Maple Leafs physically this season. Parros and Gionta are listed as probable with minor injuries.

**SCOUTING REPORT**

By: Mark Zwolinski Sports reporter, Published on Mon Sep 30 2013

**LEAFS INJURY**

Frazer McLaren (finger)

**CANADIENS INJURIES**

Davis Drewiske (shoulder)

Doug Murray (upper body)

Alexei Emelin (knee)

George Parros (shoulder)

Brian Gionta (biceps)

**SCOTTING REPORT**

By: Mark Zwolinski Sports reporter, Published on Mon Sep 30 2013

Morgan Rielly and Carter Ashton shared a similar, under-the-gun viewpoint when the Maple Leafs finalized their roster Monday afternoon.

“My life is on the line,” Ashton said as the Leafs, with salary cap and injury considerations weighing heavily, decided to keep the two for Tuesday’s opener in Montreal.

Ashton meant his hockey life, and he wasn’t being melodramatic. The Leafs manoeuvred all weekend long via the waiver wire to get to the 23-man limit by Monday’s deadline. They also put Frazer McLaren on long-term injury reserve, providing more cap relief and opening another roster spot for Troy Bodie, who cleared waivers.

As it was, the club practised one forward short Monday.

Toronto opens the regular season with back-to-back road games in Montreal and Philadelphia, which was announced after the Leafs had approved a pre-season schedule that ended with consecutive games against Detroit on Friday and Saturday. That final tuneup was played with lineups heavy with minor leaguers. Most regulars got the night off and there was no Sunday practice.

Toronto focused on forechecking Monday, while Ashton and Rielly tried to harness their excitement about making the cut.

“It’s a great feeling, but I haven’t proven anything yet,” Rielly said. “This morning when I got here, I had an idea things were looking pretty good. It’s a good feeling, and my goal was to play here this season. It’s a good feeling but really it’s only a good start.”

Both realize their first NHL stints could be short-lived.

The Leafs haven’t tipped their hand on Rielly, but they won’t keep him in the NHL if he doesn’t see enough ice time. They have nine games played to decide. He might play sparingly and still benefit greatly from the experience and regular practice. He’s seventh on the depth chart.

Toronto also has John-Michael Liles with the Marlies after the veteran cleared waivers Monday.
The first opportunity to use long term IR comes Monday, and the Leafs may alter McLaren’s injured status there to gain more cap relief (McLaren would have to agree to the long term IR assignment first).

Should the Leafs make that move, they would gain more space: from under $100,000 in cap space to $637,000.

For the time being, the club is one forward short, with their season opening roster practised on a line with Mason Raymond and David Bolland; roster tinkering is expected.

The club must submit its season opening roster Monday by 3 p.m., so more roster tinkering is expected.

David Clarkson practised on a line with Mason Raymond and David Bolland; but Clarkson is suspended for the first 10 games of the season, so while he practised with the team, the actual spot on that line is open for now.

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.01.2013
718857 Toronto Maple Leafs

Maple Leafs: Keeping Morgan Rielly was the only move: Cox

By: Damien Cox Sports Columnist, Published on Mon Sep 30 2013

Of course you keep Morgan Rielly. We knew that two weeks ago.

First of all, right now he’s as good as anyone else who could occupy the No. 7 slot on the Leaf defence, whether it’s T.J. Brennan or John-Michael Liles.

Beyond that, if you send him to Moose Jaw now, he’s gone for the year.

We’ll see if he gets to play. But despite all the hand-wringing over the salary cap implications, keeping Rielly was always a straightforward play.

Now, he’s either good enough to play on Randy Carlyle’s blue line, or he’ll be sitting in the press box and so will be back in the WHL before long. The Leafs appear at this point to be managing this 19-year-old defenceman intelligently.

Other Monday morning considerations:

Many of the same folks who forecast the Jays as a playoff team are now saying they’re one starter away from being a contender next season. They aren’t. The one-starter-away chatter is the same as the reasoning behind keeping John Gibbons, that it was all about the rotation and only the rotation . . . Terry Francona is evidence of the difference a manager can make . . . Like iodine on a wound, decisions of the past year keep haunting the Jays. First the Red Sox, and John Farrell, clinicians against the Jays, then ex-Jay Henderson Alvarez threw a no-hitter on the final day. Now wait for Farrell to garner manager-of-the-year honours. Stings . . . Don’t be surprised Jonathan Drouin is headed back to Halifax. He’s always been a bit of a late bloomer — two years ago he started the season in midget hockey before joining the Mooseheads — and Lightning GM Steve Yzerman would never be one to put an unprepared teen in the NHL just to prove he was a good pick . . . Be surprised speedy Chris Krieder can’t crack the Ranger lineup. But of course you won’t hear about Kreider being persecuted by the Rangers between periods on Saturday nights . . . Colton Orr will start the season as the lone muscle in the Leaf lineup. But David Clarkson and Frazer McLaren will be along shortly . . . Carter Ashton may be a Leaf only as long as GM Dave Nonis doesn’t see a more able body on the waiver wire . . . When people ask me whether Milos Raonic can be a top five player in the world, I’ve always pointed to Tomas Berdych as a similarly sized player with a similar set of tools. So it was interesting that Raonic beat Berdych to win in Bangkok on the weekend . . . The Hamilton Tiger-Cats are an utterly confounding team. Henry Burris reminds me of Damon Allen in this regard; it’s shocking how an otherwise great career quarterback can look so horrible sometimes . . . Lane Kiffin seemed almost to be begging to fired at USC. Still, it’s weird to see an NCAA coach canned so early in a season. Or partway though a season . . . If you want to understand Carlyle’s hesitation and sometimes frustration with Jake Gardiner, watch Gardiner when he doesn’t have the puck, not when he has it. With it, he’ll always be a crowd pleaser. Without it, he too often looks like he’s either not paying attention or doesn’t particularly care about that part of the game . . . The Habs are keeping 6-foot-6 Jarred Tinordi after adding him. With it, he’ll always be a crowd pleaser. Without it, he too often looks like he’s either not paying attention or doesn’t particularly care about that part of the game . . . Here’s a look at some of the notable moves:


June 30: Within weeks of scoring the Stanley Cup-winning goal, David Bolland comes to his home-town team from Chicago for a package of picks. Mimico native is expected to bring the grit in critical moments that coach Randy Carlyle felt he was missing.

July 4: The Leafs create a buzz (and open up some cap space) when underused centre Mikhail Grabovski is bought out by the team. Grabovski then rips Carlyle in a profanity-laced tirade.

July 5: Nonis nabs his prized free-agent catch in another Mimico native, former New Jersey Devil David Clarkson. The GM also re-signs centre Tyler Bozak to a five-year deal offering some stability down the middle.

Sept. 11: After a long summer of frustrated talks that seemed headed for a holdout, centre Nazem Kadri agrees to a two-year deal worth just under $6 million.

Sept. 22: When a line brawl erupts in a preseason contest versus Buffalo, Clarkson leaps over the boards to defend leading scorer Phil Kessel. The next day, the highest-profile new Leaf gets dinged with a 10-game suspension.

Sept. 26: Defenceman Cody Franson ends his holdout just in time, signing a one-year deal.

Oct. 1: Leafs will begin season in new eight-team Atlantic Division here in Montreal with a date against their Original Six (and still division) rival Canadiens.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013
718859 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs victims of own popularity

By Rob Longley, Toronto Sun

MONTREAL - After a breakthrough season and heart-breaking end to the playoffs, it was a busy summer for the Leafs and general manager Dave Nonis. Here’s a look at some of the notable moves:

May 13: Leafs fall 5-4 in overtime to the Boston Bruins in Game 7 of an Eastern Conference quarter-final. When the dust settles and the pain eases, general manager Dave Nonis gets down to business to build on the forward steps taken last season.


June 30: Within weeks of scoring the Stanley Cup-winning goal, David Bolland comes to his home-town team from Chicago for a package of picks. Mimico native is expected to bring the grit in critical moments that coach Randy Carlyle felt he was missing.

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Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013
718859 Toronto Maple Leafs

Leafs' offseason, from OT to opening night

By Rob Longley, Toronto Sun

MONTREAL - Randy Carlyle knows there will be no sympathy coming from the NHL head office, from any of his opponents and for those who love to laugh at the Leafs just on principle.
But in ways far beyond the control of the coach, management and the players, sometimes it sucks to be the Maple Leafs.

As Carlyle and his team embark on a challenging start to a challenging assignment — earning a repeat playoff berth in a tougher, realigned division — the opening week couldn’t offer a more stern assignment.

Not only do the Leafs open up on the road against their historic Original Six rival Habs here on Tuesday night, they will jet off to Philadelphia immediately following the game and meet the Flyers in their own season opener the next night.

Carlyle was blunt enough the other day to label it as a “competitive disadvantage” and a situation that probably wouldn’t be faced by any other team in the league. You can almost hear the Habs fans outside of the Bell Centre laughing at that one, but it’s hard to dispute that the schedule (not to mention the 10-game suspension to forward David Clarkson) will make it difficult to sprint out to the quick start every coach craves.

“It’s a new one,” Carlyle said when asked if he’s ever started an NHL season with games on the road on consecutive nights. “And open two buildings.

“There’s not a lot of sympathy coming from the league. It’s tough. I’m not real happy with it.”

Nor should he be, but if he’s looking to place blame, Carlyle could start with the corporation he works for and the monster influence it carries. The team that haters love to kick when it’s down (and even when it’s not, it seems) may not have been a model operation on the ice in its recent past, but in the board room it can be dominant.

Call it the price you pay to be the Maple Leafs, but all that fiscal success comes with a cost. Everybody loves winning, but owners like money more and that historic reality of the Leafs is still in effect.

And when it comes to the rough start to the 2013-14 season, start with television. TSN successfully lobbied to have its Wednesday night national schedule debut with the Leafs and the league complied with the Flyers -- a guaranteed ratings blockbuster.

It didn’t take long for CBC to object, likely at full volume. With the big-ticket rights the public broadcaster shells out, Hockey Night in Canada wasn’t about to let TSN get the jump on the first Leafs telecast.

The result? Tuesday here in Montreal.

The schedule is further complicated by the fact that the pre-season slate is in place first leaving the Leafs with a home-and-home against the Red Wings on Friday and Saturday, a day off Sunday then must one day to prepare for the rough start.

As Carlyle said, there won’t be sympathy in any quarters -- especially for a franchise that pulls so much weight with the league and the networks that cover it. But what has resulted is the rather odd predicament of Leafs “partners” who stand to benefit from any success the team has in the form of big ratings inadvertently creating a situation that makes winning more difficult.

Then there is the achingly overdue pre-season, another work-place annoyance for Carlyle. The coach, like his players, clearly had enough of training camp a week before it was done.

In the eight-team Atlantic Division, though, the Leafs were one of just three teams to play eight exhibition games, one more than the rest. The Habs played seven and wrapped up the pre-season last Thursday.

Their second opponent in the back-to-back debut, the Flyers, had just six dates (including a split-squad day), finished on Friday and have been waiting at home for their Wednesday home opener versus the Leafs since.

Could the Leafs scale back? Of course they could, but with the prospects of a full Air Canada Centre (even if it’s to watch predominantly AHL personnel as Saturday’s scrimmage with Detroit turned out to be) the money has always carried more weight than the coach.

A side note to all that TV exposure: Let’s just say if Phoenix forward Paul Bissonnette was a Maple Leaf, there isn’t much chance his 10-game suspension for leaving the bench wouldn’t have been reduced to three.

The main reason for the reduction was the lack of video available to make the full suspension stand. There was no such missing evidence when Clarkson did essentially the same thing to run down Buffalo’s John Scott.

To his credit, Carlyle hasn’t sounded like a coach reaching for excuses before they’re even necessary. And realistically, does a rough opening two nights really signal the end of the world? The Leafs catch a break of their own for their Air Canada Centre opener against the Sens, who play in Buffalo the night before.

No, it doesn’t spell disaster. But with the new, tougher division, Clarkson out for most of the opening month and the pressure to build off last season’s successes, a fast start may be critical.

Being weighed down with the complications that come with the Maple Leafs being such a money machine won’t make it any easier.

LEAFS UNDERDOG IN OPENER

With the new season finally about to start, the Maple Leafs are in familiar territory.

Underdogs.

With the benefit of home-ice advantage and no doubt the fact that they finished six points in front of the Leafs last season, the Canadiens are the clear choice of oddsmakers in Tuesday night’s curtain-raiser at the Bell Centre.

At most sports books on the Las Vegas strip, the Habs are listed as the minus-135 choice, meaning that to profit $100 you would have to lay out $135. The underdog Leafs are listed at plus-115, meaning that a $100 wager would return you a profit of $115.

As for the new and possibly improved tandem of James Reimer and Jonathan Bernier in the Leafs net? Oddsmakers are still expecting some scoring in the opener with the over/under total being set at 5.5.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

718860 Toronto Maple Leafs

Rielly impresses as fans get first glimpse in Montreal

By Joe Warmington, Toronto Sun

MONTREAL - Who cares that summer is over?

For hockey fans, the Maple Leafs opening up the season against the Canadiens in Montreal is akin to Christmas in October.

It’s like being a kid in a candy store.

Not just for Leafs fans here for Tuesday’s season opener hungering for growth after last season’s playoff experience.

But for an actual kid who made this team.

Critics are wondering just how well Leafs prospect Morgan Rielly will adjust to the rigours and pace of the NHL when the teenager suits up for his first big league game — which could be Tuesday.

Time will sort that out.

But whether he plays in game one at the Bell Centre or in the Leafs home opener at the Air Canada Centre Saturday, he has got the how-to-treat-the-fans part down pat already.

He was on the receiving end of the baptism by fire of being a hockey star outside of the team’s hotel Monday.

He’s just 19.

Won’t be 20 until around playoff time next spring.

You’d think it would be the kid looking for autographs from the adults but this time it was the other way around.

“Everybody wants his autograph,” said Marc Primeau, a collector who stakes time it was the other way around.

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“Everybody wants his autograph,” said Marc Primeau, a collector who stakes time it was the other way around.
“He is with our hockey club,” Leafs coach Randy Carlyle told the Sun’s Terry Koshan Monday. “We feel strongly Morgan is a young kid who has shown a lot of potential.”

It’s unknown if he will suit up in Montreal but it didn’t matter to Primeau, who has spent 30 years grabbing autographs from the greats include Guy Lafleur, Henri Richard and Larry Robinson.

“I don’t re-sell any autographs,” he insists.
He also wanted to get new Leaf netminder and Montreal native Jonathan Bernier, who like fellow goalie James Reimer was terrific with the fans.  

Most of the Leafs went out for dinner as a team and walked together three blocks from the hotel. There is an air of confidence to their strut — Nazem Kadri, Joffrey Lupul, Phil Kessel all walking with a swagger. Rielly was one of them.

As Koshan writes, Rielly has cracked the lineup — for now. Coach Carlyle has ten games to decide on whether they want to keep him for the season or send him back to the Moose Jaw Warriors of the WHL.

For now, he’s a Maple Leaf and seemed to be loving every minute of it.

“Thanks so much,” he said to fans congratulating him on earning a roster spot.

Born March 9, 1994, he wasn’t even alive when referee Carey Fraser didn’t call that high stick in the playoffs of 1993 on Wayne Gretzky against the blue and white’s Number 93, Doug Gilmour.

Gilmour knows what he’s going through since he made his NHL debut ten years before at age 20 in 1984.

“I know Montreal on opening night against the Leafs will be electric,” Killer told me. “I won’t be able to watch much because I will be in Belleville with my team (the OHL’s Kingston Frontenacs) but I know it’s going to be a dandy.”

Gilmour has high hopes for this season.

“I can’t wait to see how they do.”

It’s one hot ticket here. The Bell Centre box office has just a few single seats at $199.

Meanwhile, autograph hound Primeau was pleased because he loves to get players early before they become jaded.

“I really wanted to get Rielly.” He got him.
And now he waits to see how he turns out.

Leafs Nation is curious too.

Yes folks, summer is over, fall is here. Winter will soon arrive and for Leaf fans hoping for a long playoff run, bring on spring.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

718861 Toronto Maple Leafs

Meet the 2013-14 Maple Leafs

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

2. D Mark Fraser

(45 GP, 0-8-8, 85 PIM)

Age: 27

Last year: Lockout was a blessing as game-ready defender jumped from Marlies to Leafs. Led Toronto with a plus-18.

This year: Almost 100% healed from a shot block that cracked his skull. Will wear a visor, but says he’ll fight again if needed.

Did you know: Bought vintage designer sportswear from 1976 Montreal Olympics, similar to what his father Hugh wore when competing in track.

3. Dion Phaneuf

(48, 9-19-28, 65 PIM)

Age: 26


This year: Had it been a full season, Raymond might have played the most since 2009-10 when he appeared in all 82 games.

This year: Shooting for sixth season with 10 or more goals. Great speed made him good addition to Leafs track team.

Did you know: During the lockout, played for the same Orebro club team in Sweden as Carl Gunnarsson.

12. LW Mason Raymond

(AHL: 51, 8-17-25, 54 PIM)

Age: 28

Last year: Had been a full season, Raymond might have played the most since 2009-10 when he appeared in all 82 games.

This year: Shooting for sixth season with 10 or more goals. Great speed made him good addition to Leafs track team.

Did you know: During the lockout, played for the same Orebro club team in Sweden as Carl Gunnarsson.

15. D Paul Ranger

(AHL: 51, 8-17-25, 54 PIM)

Age: 29

Last year: Only Kevin Marshall had a better plus-minus than Ranger’s positive 16 on the Marlies.

This year: Had strong camp after personal issues kept him out of hockey three years. He might re-establish himself as the top-four defenceman he was in Tampa Bay.

Did you know: While on hiatus, Ranger spent some time as assistant coach of a bantam team in Whitby.

19. LW Joffrey Lupul

(16, 11-7-18, 12 PIM)

Age: 29

Last year: For second straight season, had more points than games played. Ranked sixth in the NHL at 1.12 points a game.

This year: What freak injury could befall Lupul next? He hopes the curse is through, but team wants him to dial back high risk plays a bit.

Did you know: Part of ESPN’s revealing summer photo shoot, celebrating athletes’ physiques.

21. LW James van Riemsdyk

Age: 28

Last year: Ranked 11th in ice time in the NHL (25:10). Nudged his career plus-minus into positive territory and played 600th career game.

This year: Expect more debate about whether he’s overrated, especially in a contract season where he is willing to negotiate during regular schedule.

Did you know: Leafs had a record of 8-1 when the captain scored last season.

4. D Cody Franson

(45, 4-25-29, 8 PIM)

Age: 26

Last year: Led all Leafs blueliners in assists and points. Tied Lupul for most playoff goals with three.

This year: Last of the restricted free agents to sign, agreeing to a one-year deal on Thursday. Leafs want him to use his body and hard shot more often.

Did you know: Nashville chose two defencemen ahead of Franson in ’05 draft, Teemu Laakso and Ryan Parent, neither of whom lasted in the NHL.

11. C Jay McClement

(48, 8-9-17, 11 PIM)

Age: 30


This year: Leaf brass, all familiar with McClement from the Western Conference, have made him the defensive Jay-of-all-trades.

Did you know: Was named The Hockey News winner of the Guy Carbonneau Award for NHL’s top penalty killer.

12. LW Mason Raymond

(AHL: 51, 8-17-25, 54 PIM)

Age: 28

Last year: Had it been a full season, Raymond might have played the most since 2009-10 when he appeared in all 82 games.

This year: Shooting for sixth season with 10 or more goals. Great speed made him good addition to Leafs track team.

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Did you know: While on hiatus, Ranger spent some time as assistant coach of a bantam team in Whitby.

19. LW Joffrey Lupul

(16, 11-7-18, 12 PIM)

Age: 29

Last year: For second straight season, had more points than games played. Ranked sixth in the NHL at 1.12 points a night.

This year: What freak injury could befall Lupul next? He hopes the curse is through, but team wants him to dial back high risk plays a bit.

Did you know: Part of ESPN’s revealing summer photo shoot, celebrating athletes’ physiques.

21. LW James van Riemsdyk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player ID</th>
<th>Player Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Last Year</th>
<th>This Year</th>
<th>Did you know</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Carl Gunnarsson</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Last year: Almost surpassed his career high in assists in just half a season, while battling a painful hip condition. This year: Is expected to partner Phaneuf as team’s busiest pairing. A career plus-2 in 224 regular season games as a Leaf. Did you know: Is often mistaken for teammate McClement and vice versa, signing each other’s hockey cards by mistake.</td>
<td>This year: Has nine games to prove himself ahead of defencemen such as Gardiner before a decision to return him to junior. Did you know: His back-to-back three-point games last year were only accomplished in past quarter-century by two other Leafs: Mats Sundin and Doug Gilmour.</td>
<td>His Moose Jaw coach Mike Stothers was a Leafs defenceman for 18 games in 1987-88.</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>James Reimer</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Last year: His .924 save percentage was the highest by a Leaf since the NHL began recording the stat in 1983-84. This year: Must continue to clean up some details, such as rebound control, stick-handling and also win some shootouts (0-5 in 2013). Did you know: One of only 13 goalies in team history with 10 or more shutouts.</td>
<td>This year: Less carping now about his first-line centre role, as he hopes to assist a 40-goal year for Kessel. Did you know: Had the Leafs’ only short-handed goals in regular season and playoffs.</td>
<td>One of only 13 goalies in team history with 10 or more shutouts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Nazem Kadri</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Last year: Seven-game point streak was a highlight, though production waned at the end. Often made something out of nothing on offence. This year: Pressure will be on him after a protracted contract squabble, but could lead to a big pay day. Has to work on faceoffs. Did you know: His back-to-back three-point games last year were only accomplished in past quarter-century by two other Leafs: Mats Sundin and Doug Gilmour.</td>
<td>This year: Significantly improved his penalty minutes from 49 to 23, a career-high. Did you know: His back-to-back three-point games last year were only accomplished in past quarter-century by two other Leafs: Mats Sundin and Doug Gilmour.</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Morgan Rielly</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Last year: Quick maturation process continued with Moose Jaw of WHL, Team Canada juniors and late-season stint with Marlies. This year: Has nine games to prove himself ahead of defencemen such as Gardiner before a decision to return him to junior. Did you know: His Moose Jaw coach Mike Stothers was a Leafs defenceman for 18 games in 1987-88.</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Carter Ashton</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Last year: Three game-winning goals for the Marlies and one of their penalty-minute leaders. This year: Needed to put himself on the map in camp and did so, playing the physical brand of hockey Carlyle wanted. Did you know: He was picked 29th in the draft, his father Brent 26th. Between them, they’ve played for five Canadian NHL teams.</td>
<td>This year: Only appearance was a 10-game appearance with the Leafs at the start of last season. Did you know: Has 10 goals in 13 career games against the New York Islanders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Troy Bodie</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Last year: Strong play after Jonathan Quick was hurt helped Kings get into playoffs and put him on Leafs’ radar. This year: Looks to add to his relatively thin resume of 63 NHL games and beat Reimer for the No. 1 job. Did you know: First NHL win came in London, England, when the Kings beat the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 to open the ’07-08 season.</td>
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51. D Jake Gardiner  
(12, 0-4-4, 0 PIM)  
Age: 23  
Last year: Overcame December concussion in AHL and had a meaningful role in Leafs' playoff push.  
This year: Must prove he can handle physical pace in his zone to beat out other offensive-minded blueliners.  
Did you know: Attended University of Madison, Wisc., whose student body once included aviator Charles Lindbergh.  
63. C David Bolland  
(35, 7-7-14, 22 PIM)  
Age: 27  
Last year: Won a second Stanley Cup with Chicago, scoring the title-winning goal against Boston. But was a minus-seven in regular season, lowest on the Hawks.  
This year: Joins David Clarkson in a Toronto home coming. Should solidify third-line centre/superpest role.  
Did you know: Has 43 playoff points in 67 games.
71. RW David Clarkson  
(48, 15-9-24, 78 PIM)  
Age: 29  
Last year: Ranked first in goals (15) and power-play goals (6) with New Jersey and tied Ilya Kovalchuk for game-winners with five.  
This year: Starts with 10-game suspension for leaving the bench to fight. His cap hit will hurt the team in that span. Returns Oct. 25 vs. Columbus.  
Did you know: Once attended a hockey camp run by fellow Mimico, Ont., native and future Devils teammate Brendan Shanahan.
81. RW Phil Kessel  
(48, 20-32-52, 18 PIM)  
Age: 25  
Last year: Finished in top 10 of NHL scorers for the second straight year. Only Steven Stamkos, Sidney Crosby and Martin St. Louis had more multi-point games than Kessel’s 16.  
This year: Trying to join Sundin as second Leaf to lead team in goals in five or more consecutive seasons. Major distraction looms as his contract runs out.  
Did you know: Needs 13 goals to join the top 30 in team history.

LANCE HORNBY and TERRY KOSHAN, Toronto Sun

TORONTO - If Maple Leafs head coach Randy Carlyle still picks his goalies based on how well they do against certain teams in certain buildings, it will be hard not to go with James Reimer on Tuesday.  
In three starts at the Bell Centre, Reimer is 2-0 with a .939 save percentage. He’s 4-3 in his career. Jonathan Bernier is a Quebec native, but wasn’t strong in Montreal when he made random visits with the Kings.  
Carlyle never reveals a starting goalie the day before a game, teasing people off waivers ... Joffrey Lupul and Jay McClement will be Dion Phaneuf’s alternate captains this year.

Carlyle didn't hesitate when he was asked about the Canadiens' strengths.  
"Speed," Carlyle said. "They have a well-rounded lineup. They have speed, a world-class goaltender in Carey Price, they went out and added more competitiveness to their mix. They have a tough guy now in George Parros, a big rugged defenceman in Douglas Murray."  
The Leafs, Carlyle figured, will have to be on their toes. Puck protection will be crucial.  
"Montreal is a transition team, and if you turn the puck over, you are going to be playing in your own zone all night. They rely specifically on their skill set and their speed through the neutral ice to attack, and if we turn the puck over it is going to be a long night."

Both Reimer and Bernier said that Carlyle’s call to give whoever didn’t start in Montreal the assignment in Philadelphia on Wednesday would make sitting out Tuesday a lot easier to stomach.

"Maybe lots of guys say they feel good to play somewhere, whether it’s Montreal, Ottawa or someone who comes from there and plays in here, Winnipeg or Boston."

Bernier didn't sound like he was inviting too many family members in anticipation of the start. "There are plenty of games I'll play in this year," Bernier said.

He won't be wasting his time on game day. With few Leafs on the team who speak French the past couple of years, Bernier is sure to be mobbed by the local press.

WELCOME BACK CARTER

Carter Ashton became a forgotten man in the shortened 2013 season. After a quiet 15 games with the Leafs the year before, he spent the whole campaign with the Marlies. But a strong camp, the Frazer McLaren finger injury (courtesy of himself) and David Clarkson’s suspension moved him to opening night plans on the fourth-line wing.

"He’s earned the opportunity, there’s nothing sugar-coated about it," Carlyle said. "The guy has come out, worked hard, played the game at a pace that separated himself with his work ethic. He’s a big-bodied kid who gets in on the forecheck. And we’ve stated before, you’re going to have to have young players in your lineup."

Ashton was told Saturday he had made the team, but managed to keep it quiet until Monday.

"I’ve grown up, definitely matured as a player," said Ashton, who was acquired from Tampa Bay in 2012 for defenceman Keith Aulie. "I’ve used these past years in the AHL for experience. I’ve thought about coming back every day. You prepare yourself and take advantage of the opportunity."

BIG ON SIZE

With John-Michael Liles through waivers and assigned to the Marlies, the Leafs don’t have one player under six feet.  
Is that by design on the part of Carlyle?

Does size matter?

"In some situations it helps and it does matter," Carlyle said. "The big man is now playing in the NHL, but the rules have allowed the smaller man to have an imprint in the NHL also. If you have courage, you will be first on pucks. And there are lots of small guys playing in the league who have courage."

"But if all things were equal, I would take a bigger player."

HABS ON SPEED

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"Speed," Carlyle said. "They have a well-rounded lineup. They have speed, a world-class goaltender in Carey Price, they went out and added more competitiveness to their mix. They have a tough guy now in George Parros, a big rugged defenceman in Douglas Murray."

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"Montreal is a transition team, and if you turn the puck over, you are going to be playing in your own zone all night. They rely specifically on their skill set and their speed through the neutral ice to attack, and if we turn the puck over it is going to be a long night."

LOOSE LEAFS

All six Leafs who were placed on waivers on Sunday -- goalie Drew MacIntyre, defencemen Liles, T.J. Brennan and Korbinian Holzer, and forwards Trevor Smith and Bodie -- cleared and were sent to the Marlies, with Bodie expected to rejoin the Leafs in Montreal. The Leafs did not claim any players off waivers ... Joffrey Lupul and Jay McClement will be Dion Phaneuf’s alternate captains this year.

"It's a fun barn to play in," Reimer said of the Bell Centre, where Leafs fans are able to buy up tickets. "Playing in a rink where there is a great atmosphere and a great rivalry, it's fun.
Looks like Carlyle pointing to Reimer

By Rob Longley, Toronto Sun

MONTREAL - The goalie competition has just begun for the Maple Leafs, but Round 1 appears to be settled anyway.

Get ready for Reim Time on Tuesday night at the Bell Centre. Word around town is that James Reimer, after a strong pre-season, will get the call for the Leafs in Tuesday’s season opener vs. the Habs.

Leafs coach Randy Carlyle opted not to reveal his hand this week over who would get the start this week other than Reimer and newcomer Jonathan Bernier would split the back-to-back road games in Montreal and Philly.

Complicating the coach’s decision was the fact that Bernier has family in Montreal and was a prized off-season acquisition from the Los Angeles Kings. Reimer meanwhile, has historically been strong against the Habs.

The decision will become apparent at Tuesday’s morning skate, but barring a change of heart, expect last year’s No. 1 to get the first call.

TORONTO - Same calendar year, same road city, same season-opening suppositions about the Maple Leafs.

Just as in January, the Leafs are in Montreal for Game 1, with questions about goaltending, new defencemen (young and old) and whether they’ve upgraded enough up front.

It’s not even safe to project their return to the playoffs, with last season’s fifth-place showing now mitigated by an 82-game schedule, realignment and improvements made by most of those seven teams that finished within nine points. Even if the Leafs overcome issues such as scheduling (back-to-back this week in two tough barns), plus the David Clarkson suspension and get into playoff contention, you can bet the May Meltdown in Beantown will be revived as a lively second-half subject.

But before the reality of the long season gripped the dressing room, there was some levity. Monday was one of the most high-spirited practices Randy Carlyle has run in training camp, with numbers down to a manageable 21 and the tension of making the cut finally broken for players such as Morgan Rielly and Carter Ashton. With John-Michael Liles clearing waivers, $925,000 US of his $2.95 million salary went against the cap to squeeze the Leafs less than $100,000 under the $64.3 million limit.

At the end of friendly head-to-head sprints between the blue lines to close the workout, Carlyle called the team to a corner of the Air Canada Centre, out of media ear shot, to share a private joke and a parting directive.

"You always have a message," Carlyle said Monday in wrapping up 19 days, eight exhibition games and the rookie tournament. "You try to (convey) that we're here for keeps now boys, this is the real thing. Now it's time to start preparing ourselves mentally, between the ears, for tomorrow night."

Clarkson practised, but as of Tuesday, his 10-game suspension kicks in and mucker Troy Bodie was expected to replace him on the roster. Winger Frazer McLaren opens the season on injured reserve with a broken finger. Phil Kessel, banished for the final three exhibition games for his role in the same brawl against the Sabres, returns against the Habs.

As far as the Game 1 goalie goes, Carlyle is choosing between someone who plays well in Montreal (James Reimer) and someone from there (Jonathan Bernier).

In January, Reimer came to Montreal anxious to show he was healthy enough to resume being the No. 1. He was among many observers surprised by Carlyle’s decision to use Ben Scrivens, who'd been playing during the lockout. Reimer was upset, but had a great year and says he won't get ticked off if newcomer Bernier goes in first. Whoever backs up starts Wednesday in Philadelphia and then Carlyle’s pick could get harder as he looks to the home opener on Saturday against Ottawa.

"You want to get in that first game, but it's not the end of the world," Reimer said. "You look at the big picture. You have to (think) it over the full season.

Since Bernier was acquired, opinion has been split on who "deserves" the bulk of early season starts: Reimer, who had a .924 save percentage, or Bernier, who costs much more in salary. Both looked good in camp.

"We'll find out at warmup," said Bernier, who credited his new coach with having a great poker face on the subject. "It would definitely feel nice, a confidence boost. But it's a long season.

"Reims and I are going to battle for the No. 1 job, which means we'll push each other. Good things happen to those teams. Some guys like to know if (they'll start) every game, some don't. You just have to be ready and make every day count."

Paul Ranger, back in the NHL after a few years, could be an x-factor on the blue line, while the 19-year-old Rielly might stay beyond his nine-game trial. While disappointed that Clarkson is out until Oct. 25, there is optimism Joffrey Lupul can beat the injury bug, that Nazem Kadri can excel as the full-time second-line centre and that free agent Dave Bolland will make the third line Carlyle’s most reliable, Ashton, meanwhile, beat out a number of young challengers for a fourth-line role.

"I'd like to see a team that's strong in foreshewing," Carlyle said. "We're a skating team, but we have to do things that allow us to skate. We have to execute to a higher level than in the pre-season, in puck recovery and transitioning the puck out of our zone through the neutral zone.

"I've tried to recognize strengths and build on those. If we have deficiencies, as every team does, I try to improve on those. We feel better about our team than at this time last year. That's all."

Starting Tuesday, such guarded optimism will be put to the test.

RANGER BACK IN THE GAME

At age 29, Paul Ranger is a little old to get too worked up about a season opener.

But Tuesday’s game in Montreal can be called his second coming in the NHL, more than three years after leaving the game at the height of his career to deal with personal issues. Ranger had all of last season in the AHL and five September exhibitions to start getting his mind and body back where he was in 2009 with the Tampa Bay Lightning. But hearing the national anthems at the Bell Centre will mean it’s the real thing.

“I’m still kind of soaking it in,” Ranger said Monday morning. “I don’t know how to describe it yet. We’ll see how it plays out tomorrow.”

Coach Randy Carlyle has paired the 6-foot-3 Ranger with young defencemen such as Morgan Rielly and veteran pro Mark Fraser, during the absence of Fraser’s regular partner, Cody Franson. Ranger could see work in a variety of roles this season.

As Ranger spoke on Monday, waves of media came and went through the dressing room, the kind of attention he never received with the Bolts and no doubt jarring for someone who’d been out of any pro sports spotlight for so long.

“It’s different,” he said of life as a Leaf. “There’s a little more tension. But overall, it’s something you learn to deal with. It’s a skill.”

TORONTO Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

718865 Toronto Maple Leafs

NewLook Habs looking to prove toughness against Leafs

By Chris Stevenson, QMI Agency

MONTREAL - The NHL regular season – the whole deal this time after last year’s lockout-shortened sprint – gets underway Tuesday night and there are always a lot of questions waiting to be answered:
How many goaltenders will blame their new, smaller pads for the first five-hole goal they surrender?

How ridiculous will it be if the NHL fines another coach for his “player selection”?

Does it get any better than having the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs meet to open the season?

The answers:

Every one of them.

Very.

No.

To expand on the last one, with apologies to all other fans in the other Canadian cities, it’s safe to say the Habs and the Leafs are the two most popular teams with the largest fan bases in our country, so nothing quite says hockey or opening night like Leafs-Habs.

The old rivals will be meeting for the 720th time in the regular season and Tuesday night’s opener is particularly intriguing because it has the potential to poke a finger right into a sore spot for the Habs.

There have been questions about the Canadiens’ toughness for years and after they were beat and beat up in their quick and inglorious elimination at the hands of the Ottawa Senators last spring, the question lingers.

Travis Moen.

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Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin went out and traded for big winger George Parros, the pounder from Princeton, to address the issue over the summer.

Parros, who had surgery for a torn rotator cuff during the summer and didn’t play in a pre-season game, pronounced himself ready to go for Tuesday night and is expected to play on a line with fellow grinders Brandon Prust and Travis Moen.

Brian Burke is gone as Toronto GM, but the Leafs finally play with the truculence and testosterone which he famously promised, so they are likely to give an early indication as to how the Canadiens can tickle their own truculence meter.

“It’s going to be a physical game. They often are, especially against this team,” said Parros.

Prust, who is far from a heavyweight, did the heavy lifting when it came to answering opponents’ physical challenges last season. He led the Habs with 10 fights last season and the arrival of Parros will take a lot of the heat off him.

But Parros said you’re wrong if you think his arrival is going to address all of the Habs’ perceived weaknesses.

“I’ve been brought in to play a certain role and I’m going to do it. This team had a lot of success without me and hopefully it will have more with me,” Parros said Monday. “It’s not one guy who’s the missing piece to the puzzle. It’s a whole new year and I’m looking to have as much success as we can with me around.”

Habs winger Max Pacioretty made it clear that Montreal’s tough guys will be expected to do more than just bang.

“There’s a lot of toughness on that line, but they can play some minutes, as well,” Pacioretty said. “They’re not just guys who go out there for one reason and one reason only. It’s important to have a fourth line like that. Teams that have won recently have had great fourth lines.”

The Canadiens will also get some grit in a pretty big package on the blue line with the debut of rookie defenceman Jarred Tinordi.

The 21-year-old American earned the chance to start with his rugged play in pre-season and if there was any doubt, he became one of the six when it was announced Monday veteran defenceman Douglas Murray is out for 4-6 months with an upper-body injury suffered in practice Sunday.

Tinordi handed out some crushing open-ice hits in the pre-season and stood in there when challenged after a couple of them.

Over the last few years, the Bell Centre has been a pretty welcoming place for opponents. The Canadiens had the fewest wins in the league on home ice (16) in the last full season.

Canadiens defenceman P.K. Subban, like a lot of people, is looking forward to seeing what the Canadiens bring this season.

“It’s like a dog when it’s in its cage, maybe it’s behaving. But when you let it out of its cage, maybe it’s a different story,” he said with a smile. “We’ll see what happens when we let these animals out (Tuesday) night.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013

718866 Toronto Maple Leafs

Morgan Rielly with Maple Leafs ... for now

By Terry Koshan,Toronto Sun

TORONTO - Morgan Rielly is a Maple Leaf.

That we know as the Leafs embark on the 2013-14 regular season.

What’s unknown are the fine particulars: When the 19-year-old defenceman will dress for a game and whether the Leafs will keep him after he has played in nine games (assuming he does) or return him to the Western Hockey League.

“We have a few ideas as far as what our plan is,” Leafs coach Randy Carlyle said on Monday after the Leafs practised at the Air Canada Centre.

“With the nine-game scenario we have, we have some flexibility. The first thing we are going to consider is (whether) the player going to help our hockey club and are we helping him by doing what we are doing?

“He is one of our seven defencemen. We feel strongly Morgan is a young kid who has shown a lot of potential and played well in training camp and there are a lot of positives. We just have to measure if he is going to be productive, both for him and our hockey club and to play in the NHL this year. It is a difficult decision.”

If Rielly plays in a 10th game the first year of his three-year entry-level deal will kick in and he won’t be going back to junior.

For Rielly, the details didn’t matter a heck of a lot. He was told on Saturday night after the Leafs beat the Detroit Red Wings in the pre-season finale to report to the rink on Monday, but wasn’t informed definitively he had made it. Like the rest of the hockey world, he figured it out on Sunday when the Leafs started to pare their roster, but still did not want to draw a conclusion.

“I have not proven anything yet,” Rielly said. “I’m not sure what is going to happen over the course of the next two or three weeks. I have a long way to go.

“That’s my goal — I want to prove I am able to play in this league and I’m just going to do that by playing well. It’s all I can do. Just keep working hard and keep focused.”

In a sense, it’s already a win for Rielly. Less than two years ago, he was at home in West Vancouver, undergoing intense rehabilitation after a major knee injury. It’s somewhat hard to believe now that he played in just 18 games for the Moose Jaw Warriors in his draft year.

“You know, there were times when I did not think this would be possible, so it’s a pretty good feeling,” Rielly said after a crowd of reporters moved away from his stall in the Leafs dressing room. “I didn’t know what my future held, and I am pretty happy that we are here now and that’s all in the past.”

The argument has been made that Rielly would be better off with one more season in junior, during which he would play a prominent role for the Canadians at the 2014 world junior in Malmo, Sweden. It still could happen, if Carlyle and his staff decide that Rielly isn’t completely ready for the rigours of a full NHL schedule.

But Rielly was so far ahead of his peers in the first game of the rookie tournament in London, Ont., in early September that the Leafs realized he didn’t need to play again in the exhibition event.

Rielly’s overall performance picked up steam in the pre-season, when he skated in six of Toronto’s eight games.

“He got better every day, I feel,” Leafs captain Dion Phaneuf said. “He might be young, but he does not play like the age that he is. Him being here to start the season is an accomplishment, but I’m sure he wants to keep earning his spot and probably wants to stick around for the full year.”
Rielly rotated into practice drills on Monday. Phaneuf was with Carl Gunnarsson, Cody Franson with Mark Fraser and Jake Gardiner skated alongside Paul Ranger.

“I would like to improve every area of my game,” Rielly said. “You have to get used to the pace and it’s a bit more quicker. You are playing against grown men.

“I have thought about (the possibility of his first NHL game) a lot over the last couple of weeks. I just hope the chance comes.”

FOLKS AWAIT WORD ON NHL DEBUT
Andy Rielly is on standby.

The father of Maple Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly will spend the next little while waiting by the phone, wondering if that next call is from his son, calling to say he will be making his National Hockey League debut.

If so, expect the elder Rielly to be on the next flight out of town.

“If something happens, I’m available,” Andy Rielly said with a chuckle on Monday from his office in West Vancouver, where he owns a lumber business. “I made sure I didn’t take any holidays this summer (in case Morgan cracked the Leafs roster).”

The support of his father and mother, Shirley, is something Morgan Rielly will have on his mind when he does take that first shift.

“I called home (with news of making the Leafs) and they were both pretty emotional,” Morgan said. “There was quite a bit of hard work they put in (over the years). I would not be playing here if I did not have them.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.01.2013
718867 Toronto Maple Leafs

Can the Toronto Maple Leafs and coach Randy Carlyle be too tough?

More from Michael Traikos | @Michael_Traikos

TORONTO – On Saturday, Randy Carlyle and Mike Babcock, the head coaches of the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Detroit Red Wings, were invited to be guest speakers at the same coaching clinic at the Air Canada Centre. In terms of same-page cohesion, this was like having Felix and Oscar from The Odd Couple host a seminar on home decorating.

Joe Colborne trade: What the move means for the Toronto Maple Leafs

Carlyle and Babcock are opposites. Carlyle likes big teams. Babcock likes small teams. Carlyle prefers fourth-line players who can fight. Babcock prefers players who can make you pay if you take penalties. Or so the thinking goes.

In reality, Carlyle does not see much difference between the Maple Leafs and the Red Wings or how he and Babcock coach. Carlyle would take Pavel Datsyuk ahead of Colton Orr any day of the week, just as Babcock would gladly find a spot for David Clarkson among his roster of Europeans.

“I laugh at it at times,” Carlyle said. “There’s a perception that [the Leafs] only play the one way. But in reality, we have a lot of skilled players in our lineup. People look at us and say, ‘We led the league in hits and we led the league in blocked shots and we led the league in fights.’ Well, that was a byproduct of what we are.”

What the Leafs finally are is Randy Carlyle’s team. That became apparent by the decisions that were made this summer. Carlyle did not work the phones and acquire David Bolland in a trade from the Chicago Blackhawks or personally sign Clarkson to a seven-year contract worth US$36.75-million. But his fingerprints were on the moves.

The two players are Carlyle-type players. They are skilled, but they also come with intangibles like on-ice toughness and character. Bolland, who has won two Stanley Cups in the last four years, is affectionately known as a rat; Clarkson led the New Jersey Devils in both goals (15) and penalty minutes (78) last season.

[The fighters are] the safety valves and they understand what their jobs are. It is comforting to know that they’ve got my back. I’ve got their backs too.

On a team that ended a seven-year playoff drought by playing a style seemingly predicated on fighting and intimidation, the thinking is that both players should make Toronto even tougher to play against this year.

But how much is too much? As evidenced by the pre-season game against the Buffalo Sabres, in which Clarkson hopped over the boards to help Phil Kessel from being hurt in a fight, you can sometimes hurt your team more than your opponent by constantly dropping the gloves.

The 10-game suspension that Clarkson received for leaving the bench illustrated that Carlyle-type hockey has its risks. Namely, players who are in the penalty box more than on the ice are wasting roster spots. But Carlyle is OK with this as long as the bottom-six grinders are protecting the top-six stars, so that at the end of the day Kessel and Nazem Kadri will feel safe and can perform at a higher level.

“It’s just a support system,” Kadri said. “[The fighters are] the safety valves and they understand what their jobs are. It is comforting to know that they’ve got my back. I’ve got their backs too.”

In Detroit, there are no enforcers. The only people who have Datsyuk’s back are the referees, something that will not change with the team’s move to the Atlantic Division this year.

“Would I like to have a big, tough guy in the middle of the lineup? Yeah,” Red Wings GM Ken Holland told Yahoo! Sports’ Nick Cotsonika. “But I haven’t really bought into having fourth-line guys that don’t have much skill and are one-dimensional players. I guess I put more of a premium on goals.”

Toronto also puts a premium on goals. But whereas other teams might spread out their scoring, the onus is on the top three lines to provide the offence. That formula worked last season. It did not matter that Orr, who averaged less than seven minutes and was second in the league with 13 fights, had one goal or that Frazer McLaren, who averaged five minutes and had 12 fights, had three goals.

The Leafs still ranked sixth in scoring (3.02 goals per game) while the Red Wings were 20th (2.54). At the same time, Toronto led the league in hits (1,626), blocked shots (826) and fights (44). Detroit was in the bottom three in all categories.

Frank Gunn/The Canadian Press

“I think it’s misrepresented when you say, ‘It’s Randy Carlyle’s style of hockey,’ ” the Leafs coach said. “There isn’t a coach in the league that doesn’t want their players to compete hard, to take a check to make a play, to stand up for one another’s well being or if someone is being taking advantage of.

“I’m sure Mike Babcock wants his team to play aggressively or hard. No one would say Pavel Datsyuk or Henrik Zetterberg don’t play hard. They’re skilled players but they also play hard. That’s their model.”

The model that Carlyle is using today is the same one that he used to win a Stanley Cup in Anaheim and has since influenced teams like Boston, Los Angeles and St. Louis. Even Montreal has a pair of former Anaheim enforcers (George Parros and Travis Moen) on a fourth line with Brandon Prust.

“It’s absolutely a winning formula,” said retired forward Brad May, who was a part of that championship Ducks team in 2006-07. “There’s no question that the top players have to score, but it’s also about getting them into a situation where they can score by protecting them and having that comfort level.”

Again, how much is too much? Is Toronto really a better team with two fourth-line players who can fight rather than score? Is skill and speed not scarcer than size?

“I don’t think a goon team works in this league,” said one Western Conference GM. “There’s very few teams where you go in there and think you’re going to run a team out of the building and it’s going to be like the ’60s or ’70s and you can intimidate a team.”

Maybe not, but Toronto looks like it is going to try. Or, at the very least, go down punching.

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718868 Toronto Maple Leafs
Clarkson will not be able to play until Oct. 25, after serving a 10-game suspension earned for jumping off the bench to join a brawl in a pre-season game against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Nathan Denette/The Canadian Press

Mason Raymond, Dave Bolland, David Clarkson, Carter Ashton, Jay McClement and Colton Orr.

He did not name his starter on Monday.

The hardest the management team was facing.

I don't see us playing without having 12 forwards," Carlyle said. "I don't think it's a good idea for clubs to be using this as an excuse as to whether or not they make the playoffs."

All this means, of course, is that there will be problems elsewhere. The league just announced a new partnership with Advil, which is a good reminder than the talk of concussions died down in the shortened season, even if the concussions themselves did not. Thanks to the voting over hybrid icing, it is probably the first year where nobody knew the rules until the day before the season began; thanks to the new conference alignment, there is some fresh uncertainty.

The bounces of the game, the little mistakes, the injury that sidelines your best player for six weeks — all those are magnified when there's only so much road to run."

"Frankly, the addition of a team, seven versus eight [in a division], those aren't the teams that are really competing for the playoffs," Bettman told The Canadian Press this week. "It's really the top five or six teams that are doing it. I don't think it's a good idea for clubs to be using this as an excuse as to whether or not they make the playoffs."

The top three teams in each of the four divisions will make the playoffs, and then two wild-cards will round out the field regardless of division, and then the first couple rounds will be intra-divisional matchups, unless they're not.

"We could sit here and I could tell you systems-wise what Chicago's going to do, St. Louis, Nashville, Vancouver, L.A. — I can tell you what they're going to do on their power plays, penalty kills, everything like that," Detroit goaltender Jimmy Howard told reporters earlier this month. "But to be honest, I can't really tell you much about the Eastern Conference and what they're going to be doing.

Of course, the East doesn't know much about Detroit, either. They will learn.

In hockey, 'deserve' is a tricky question, the way the puck can bounce. Everyone will learn. The nets are shallower, which should give creative players more angles to play with, and hard-hitting defencemen more decisions to make. Goalie pads are a little smaller, and Patrick Roy is back again, and Martin Brodeur is about to leave, and if he hurries the Devils might even make the playoffs, somehow. Roberto Luongo is back working solo,
Steve Bosch/Postmedia News

And that’s what this season is about. Chicago deserved to win the Stanley Cup last season; every team that made the playoffs deserved to get in. In hockey, ‘deserve’ is a tricky question, the way the puck can bounce. But they earned their way there. They deserved it.

Would it have happened after a longer regular season, with more chance of injury, of fatigue, of the vagaries hockey brings? Impossible to know, and the season is in the books. But now luck will have less of a role, hot streaks will have less of an impact, the rhythms will change and flatten into their familiar. The NHL is really back, well and true. Settle in, and buckle up.

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Washington Capitals

Three rookies beat the odds to make Capitals’ roster

By Katie Carrera,
Published: September 30 at 4:23 pm

When Connor Carrick heard the list of players trimmed from the Washington Capitals’ training camp roster around noon Sunday, he went back to his hotel room, asked the maid if he could have a minute and called his parents.

Nothing was official yet, but there were only seven defensemen left on the roster and he was one of them.

“Called my dad, he told me to shut up about eight times. My mom did the scream, cry mix. It was a pretty cool moment,” Carrick recounted Monday. “The word [salary] cap gets thrown around and I don’t know how that works, so I went to the mall, tried to take my mind off it, go grab something to eat, walk around. I came back and the situation was still the same. Woke up this morning, my name was still here.”

Tom Wilson and Michael Latta were out to dinner when they saw on Twitter that the Capitals had sent Mathieu Perreault to the Anaheim Ducks. They didn’t want to get too excited, but knew that the team had just freed up a roster spot and some salary cap space.

“It just started to look like there might be a little more space for the young guys to be on the final roster,” Wilson said. “I talked to my agent, talked to my parents and said this might be good news. Just kind of rode out the rest of the day, and woke up this morning came to the rink and was reassured that my stall was still here.”

All three rookies entered training camp as prospects with varying odds of seeing any time in the NHL this season. It took some salary cap maneuvering on the part of General Manager George McPhee to trade Perreault and clear his $1.05 million salary cap hit from the Capitals’ books, but after impressing the coaching staff with what Coach Adam Oates called “great camps,” Carrick, Wilson and Latta will all start the year in the NHL.

Whether Wilson, 19, would remain with the Capitals has been the subject of great debate. The big right wing can only play in the NHL or the OHL this season, but with a multifaceted performance in the preseason, Wilson forced the organization’s hand.

“By Tom having such a great camp, it put more pressure on George to make decisions. I think he’s earned the right to be here,” Oates said. “It affected the puzzle, and it’s always about our puzzle first. Because of that I was experimenting with Eric [Fehr] and Marty [Erat] in terms of who’s going to go where. I know what Perry can do, unfortunately we had to make a move.”

Oates said he wished Perreault luck and that the organization “did right by” the 25-year-old center, giving him an opportunity to play elsewhere rather than keeping him as a 13th forward.

While Wilson was always part of the consideration for the NHL roster, Carrick emerged as having developed beyond his years in camp. He’s assertive and decisive on the ice, as well as a strong skater and puck handler. It’s unclear if Carrick, who can play in Hershey this year should the Capitals decide he needs time in the AHL, will suit up in the season opener, but the possibility certainly exists.

“He makes great decisions, he can handle the speed and physicality of the game, had a great camp and has just been improving over the last year on a daily basis,” Oates said. “Obviously, we want to get him minutes he’s played a lot of minutes but he’s got two guys in front of him that demand minutes. We’ll try to figure that puzzle and that’s what it’s always about.”

Latta, part of the trade that brought Erat to Washington last spring, is pleasantly surprised to be sticking around. When he arrived at camp and saw the large number of forwards Latta, 22, figured he would need to bide his time and wait to be recalled. He’s yet to make his NHL debut but the preseason offered encouragement that he could bring something to the table.

“This is kind of my first real preseason and I’m thankful they gave me a real shot and gave me a lot of games,” Latta said. “I was kind of nervous coming in but in the preseason I felt I could play at this level – contribute. Maybe not score as much as the [AHL] but I can provide a role, be hard on the PK, be hard on the forecheck, play a simple role and help the team out.”

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Washington Capitals

Brooks Laich: ’I’m in’ for season opener

By Katie Carrera,
Published: September 30 at 1:28 pm

After taking part in a third consecutive practice with his teammates, Brooks Laich was grinning at his stall in the Capitals’ dressing room at KCI Monday morning.

“I’m in,” Laich said. “Oct. 1 was the date that I had circled to be ready for. I would like to have had a couple more exhibition games but I felt great out there today and I’m in as far as I know. It’s their call, but 100 percent, I feel great and I’m ready to go.”

Coach Adam Oates said he would confer with head athletic trainer Greg Smith, but if Laich is prepared, expect him to face the Blackhawks Tuesday night.

“If he’s ready to go, he’ll play,” Oates said.

Laich, who missed all but nine games last season with a lingering groin injury that ultimately required surgery, teased his left hip flexor on Sept. 5 when he first skated at KCI after returning to Washington for the start of the summer. He’s been limited to off-ice workouts throughout much of training camp and only played in one preseason game.

“It’s been a tough year but I’ve learned a lot and done a lot of work to get myself back to where I am. A little more prep would have been great but I just want to feel healthy on the ice,” Laich said. “Today I felt great and was able to do everything I wanted. So big smile today and ready to go tomorrow.”

If Laich plays, expect a ripple effect in the lines that the Capitals used in today’s practice. He’s expected to slot on to the second line as left wing, which would push Martin Erat to the third unit. Depending whether Erat or Eric Fehr serve as the third line center, the other will likely be on the left wing of that line with Joel Ward on the right. That would leave some combination of Jason Chimera, Jay Beagle, Tom Wilson, Aaron Volpatti and Michael Latta as the fourth.

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Washington Capitals

NHL 2013-14 divisional previews and predictions

By Neil Greenberg,
Published: September 30 at 11:13 am
Neil Greenberg’s previews and predictions for the realigned NHL in 2013-14:

Metropolitan Division

A divisional title for Pittsburgh will be tougher than it looks, especially with Marc Andre-Fleury, who had a .909 save percentage on the road last year, in net. Still, with Coach Dan Bylsma behind the bench and forwards Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and Norris Trophy nominee Kris Letang on the ice, this is still the team to beat in the East.

Predicted order of finish:

- Pittsburgh Penguins 98
- New York Rangers 97
- Philadelphia Flyers 94
- Washington Capitals 94
- New York Islanders 91
- Carolina Hurricanes 91
- Columbus Blue Jackets 90
- New Jersey Devils 89

Atlantic Division

Boston’s offense could see an improvement over last year (Jarome Iginla and Loui Eriksson will replace Tyler Seguin, Jaromir Jagr, Rich Peverley and Andrew Ference) and will complement a defense comprised of young blueliners and netminder Tuukka Rask, who has a .929 regular season save percentage in each of the past two years and is a dark horse for the Vezina Trophy, awarded to the league’s best goalie.

Predicted order of finish:

- Boston Bruins 97 points
- Ottawa Senators 96
- Montreal Canadiens 95
- Detroit Red Wings 93
- Tampa Bay Lightning 92
- Toronto Maple Leafs 88
- Buffalo Sabres 86
- Florida Panthers 80

Central Division

Reigning Stanley Cup champion Chicago will face some stiff competition from St Louis for divisional supremacy, but it will be hard to bet against the only team in the salary cap era to have won the Cup twice. The Blackhawks are well coached by Joel Quenneville, have plenty of star power in their top six (Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane and Patrick Sharp) and are always one of the top puck-possession teams in the NHL (more than 53 percent of even-strength shots in their favor over the past three seasons).

Predicted order of finish:

- Chicago Blackhawks 97
- St. Louis Blues 96
- Dallas Stars 92
- Colorado Avalanche 88
- Winnipeg Jets 88
- Nashville Predators 87
- Minnesota Wild 83

Pacific Division

If there is a team that can unseat Chicago as Cup champs, it is Los Angeles. Ignoring special-teams play and lead-protecting situations, the Kings had possession of the puck 57.3 percent of the time last season, the highest percentage in the league. Expect great goaltending from Jonathan Quick and a bounce-back season from Anze Kopitar to fuel a Pacific Division title and deep playoff run.

Predicted order of finish:

- Los Angeles Kings 95
- Phoenix Coyotes 91
- San Jose Sharks 91
- Edmonton Oilers 91
- Anaheim Ducks 90
- Vancouver Canucks 89
- Calgary Flames 83

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718873 Washington Capitals

A look at the lines as Capitals prepare for season opener

By Katie Carrera,
Published: September 30 at 11:02 am

With their roster freshly trimmed down to 23, the Capitals were back on the ice Monday morning for one more practice before heading to Chicago prior to the regular season opener Tuesday.

It also offered a first look at the line combinations that Washington might use in the opener.

Johansson-Backstrom-Ovechkin
Erat/Laich-Grabovski-Brouwer
Chimera-Fehr-Ward
Volpatti-Latta/Beagle-Wilson
Alzner-Green
Erskine-Carlson
Hillen-Oleksy
Carrick
Holtby, Neuvirth

At face value, those combinations seem to indicate that Brooks Laich is questionable for the opener. Laich has been bothered by a left hip flexor injury since before the start of camp but has taken part in three straight practices. He’s only skated in one preseason game, though, and the Capitals might continue taking the cautious approach.

If Laich doesn’t play, it looks like Martin Erat will slide into the second line left wing spot, while Eric Fehr will get to extend his experiment at center as the pivot on the third line.

More to come after practice wraps up.

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718874 Washington Capitals

For better or worse, Mikhail Grabovski brings emotional game to Caps

By Mike Harris
Monday, September 30, 2013

Mikhail Grabovski has scored 91 goals and recorded 117 assists the past five seasons. Clearly, he has skills.
One word, he said, drives it all.

"Emotion," Grabovski said shortly after practicing with the Capitals for the first time following his free-agent signing with the team. "I'm an emotional guy. I play with emotion, with speed, with energy."

It is the emotion that stands out. That can be a good thing, when it translates into a productive center who isn't afraid to dig pucks out of corners, who can control the puck and quickly get it to the right place. That can be a bad thing, when it translates into a player who may get frustrated too much, who may lash out when he isn't happy.

What are the Capitals getting with Grabovski, the 29-year-old Belarusian they signed to a one-year, $3 million deal to be their second-line center? Is he the guy who was frustrated by his use last season in Toronto? The one who finally exploded when the Maple Leafs waived him in July and called coach Randy Carlyle an idiot modified by an expletive in an interview with TSN.ca?

Or is he the guy who had 51 goals and 57 assists the previous two seasons? Is he the one emotion makes into a sparkplug or into a hothead?

The Capitals are banking on the sparkplug as they open the 2013-14 season Tuesday night in Chicago against the defending Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks. Grabovski will anchor a line that will include wingers Troy Brouwer and Brooks Laich, a line that could be very dangerous if all three can maintain a high level.

Early returns are promising. The 5-foot-11 Grabovski had a goal and seven assists in four preseason games.

"He's going to be a great addition for us," Laich said. "On the ice, you see first his speed takes over. He's got great hands and he's got an underrated shot. I think once he gets more comfortable with the puck and his linemates, he's very capable of making plays for himself."

Said Brouwer, "It seems like he skates and sees the ice pretty well."

All good so far. But Grabovski hasn't been around the Caps a month yet. If things weren't glowing at this stage, there would really be a problem. How will things be when there's the inevitable rough patch every player and team hit over the course of an 82-game season?

The Caps were comfortable enough to take that chance, and they think things will be just fine.

"We don't want to put too much pressure on him," Caps coach Adam Oates said. "I'm sure he's very motivated. He's not happy about what happened to him at the end of [last] year. We're just looking for him to play good hockey for us."

Happy hockey leads to good hockey and Laich thinks his new linemate is in a place where he can stay happy.

"Off the ice, he fits in great," Laich said. "He's very talkative, a good guy, likes to joke around. He was really on board right from the start. He keeps saying how much better he likes things over here over previous places he's been. I think we have a very welcoming locker room, but he's really opened up already."

And the emotion, Laich added, shouldn't be viewed as a bad thing.

"I'd say that's great. I will play with a passionate player any day," Laich said. "It means he cares. I think sometimes people underestimate him because of his size, but he's a feisty little devil. I've played against him. Second, third opportunities, he'll dig his nose in there. He doesn't give up on plays. That's the kind of attitude we want to have around here."

That's the type of attitude Grabovski promises he'll bring. He said all he wants to know is what is expected of him and he'll do his best to deliver.

"Every day of my life," he said, "I try to be better and better. I tell myself all the time I can be better. I try to work my [butt] off, is that how you say it in English?"

That's it indeed. Grabovski's command of the language is quite good, which makes on- and off-ice communication much easier. He knows all forms of English, as his summer tirade against his former coach showed.

"Everybody sees the bad words," Grabovski said, chuckling a bit. "They don't see the good words. I say lots of good words, too. I try to help every player who ever play with me. Wherever the coach puts me in the lineup, I try to do my best."

He said the Capitals made it clear they wanted him and had a plan for him. He wouldn't be left wondering about his role. When center Mike Ribeiro signed with Phoenix in the offseason, the Caps had a glaring hole and they're calling on Grabovski to fill it.

"This is a team that really wants me," he said. "That is important to a player, to know that someone likes you. You can play better for this team. Secondly, I like that atmosphere in the rink. You play against Washington, it is always a great place to play hockey. They have a lot of players who are great players. You can see guys are hungry to play and win games. Skilled players here. Smart players."

Oates spent time in the offseason talking to Grabovski and was fine with the Caps signing him. He's played with emotional players and coached some, too. He knows what he's getting. He doesn't want Grabovski to change.

"I want a guy to be himself is what I want," Oates said. "Hopefully we talk often enough that we keep him going the right way."

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718875 Washington Capitals

LOVERRO: Capitals have tools for success as they open season in new division

By Thom Loverro

Monday, September 30, 2013

The Washington Capitals will embark on a new era in the franchise's history when they open the season Tuesday in Chicago against the defending Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks.

They will officially leave the Southeast Division behind.

The National Hockey League has buried the Southeast Division with the new realignment going into effect this season. Instead of the Capitals being in the Southeast Division, along with Carolina Hurricanes, Florida Panthers and Tampa Bay Lightning, Washington is now a member of the newly-named Metropolitan Division, along with seven other teams, including the Pittsburgh Penguins, Philadelphia Flyers, New York Rangers and New York Islanders.

On paper, this does not bode well for the Capitals, because the Southeast Division was very good to this franchise, as you can see from the seven division championship banners that hang in the rafters at the Verizon Center.

Then again, the last time the Capitals went beyond the second round of the NHL playoffs was the 1997-1998 season, when they won the Eastern Conference finals and were swept by the Detroit Red Wings in the Stanley Cup finals — the year before they entered the newly-created Southeast Division.

That was general manager George McPhee's first year on the job, by the way.

Owner Ted Leonsis has never known anything but his Southeast Division success, purchasing the team from Abe Pollin during its first Southeast Division campaign.

I think it's safe to say that many who care about the Washington Capitals would just as soon leave their Southeast Division legacy behind and move on to something more fulfilling. Matching their last season before the Southeast Division was created — an Eastern Conference title and a Stanley Cup finals appearance — would go a lot further than those division banners on display at Verizon.

Whether it's the Metropolitan Division or the Southeast Division, the song remains the same — playoff failures for the Capitals during the golden era of Alex Ovechkin.

Here you have a player who has now won three Hart Trophies as the league's Most Valuable Player, yet there is a bad taste lingering during the Ovechkin era from the team's playoff failures — and his playoff failures.

Last year, Ovechkin won his third MVP, yet the Caps were gone from the playoffs after losing 5-0 in Game 7 at Verizon Center to the Rangers in the first round. It was another disappointing exit, but the continued failure had a rationalization out to ease the pain — a rookie coach, Adam Oates, dealing
CHICAGO — The Stanley Cup-winning Chicago Blackhawks now have their championship rings.

The Minneapolis, Minn.-based jeweler Justens says it presented the rings to the team during a private Sunday night ceremony in downtown Chicago. The jeweler says the rings feature the Blackhawks logo with diamonds, emeralds and rubies.

It has the words "Stanley Cup" and "Champions" etched on it. Each ring is personalized with team members' names and numbers.

The inside of the rings has writing too. It says "One Goal" and has the playoff series score.

The total? Each ring has 260 diamonds and gemstones for a total 14.68 carats.

The Blackhawks won the NHL championship in June with victories over the Boston Bruins. They open the 2013-14 season Tuesday night against the Washington Capitals.

By: Stephen Whyno,
Posted: 09/30/2013 10:46 AM
Last Modified: 09/30/2013 1:43 PM

The Winnipeg Jets are in the Western Conference, the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets are in the East and all is right with the NHL. Right?

Not quite. Realignment into four divisions — the eight-team Metropolitan and Atlantic in the East and the seven-team Central and Pacific in the West — will solve some travel problems but also create more questions.

Uneven playoff odds between the conferences is where the debate starts. Buffalo Sabres forward Ville Leino and others have questioned whether having 16 teams for eight spots in the East is "really fair" compared to 14 teams for the same amount of playoff berths west Out West.

"It's going to be so many percentage points tougher for us to qualify for the playoffs, and every team on our side," Toronto Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle said. "(It) kind of makes you scratch your head over the course of the summer: Why is that happening in this side and not the other side?"

The short answer is that teams in the Western Conference still have tougher travel than those in the East, something that could be argued as a trade-off for shorter playoff odds.

"Within your conference and your division, you're balanced against everybody else you're competing against," commissioner Gary Bettman said.

"And, frankly, the addition of a team, seven versus eight, those aren't the teams that are really competing for the playoffs. It's really the top five or six teams that are doing it. I don't think it's a good idea for clubs to be using this as an excuse as to whether or not they make the playoffs."

But the balance isn't perfect. Teams play some division foes five times and others four times, and three games against conference rivals outside the division make for some uneven scheduling. For example, the Jets host the Kings twice and travel to Los Angeles once, while the Minnesota Wild have to play twice at Staples Center and get the Kings at home once.

One thing that is uniform is that every team will see every other team at least once on the home and on the road. Players gave that change rave reviews.

"I think it's great for the fans, they get to see all the players," Edmonton Oilers forward Jordan Eberle said. "Maybe the Sidney Crosbys, the (Alex) Ovechkins, who were only there once every two years, now they get to see them every year."

That was part of the allure of realignment. Of course there are other benefits.

New York Islanders winger Matt Moulson said it got "monotonous" to play division rivals so often, and though that won't go away, there's much more variety over 82 games.

"A lot of people like to compare the East versus the West and how those teams are different and what it takes to get to the playoffs in each conference," Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews said. "I think you'll see maybe less of a contrast because the teams are playing each other more often. I think it'll be exciting in a way to see different teams on a more regular basis and almost a relief in a way to not have to play those rivalry games, those division games that you're used to seeing those teams over and over throughout the regular season."

Teams will still play either 29 or 30 games within their division, and the new playoff format puts a heavier emphasis on division play. The top three teams from each make the playoffs, plus two wild cards from each conference.

Then, the playoffs happen within the divisions until four champions are crowned and move on to the conference finals. Of course it's possible that the Montreal Canadiens come out of the Metropolitan Division playoffs or the Vancouver Canucks out of the Central if they qualify as wild cards.

Changing how teams get into the playoffs and adding that cross-over potential has created plenty of unknowns going into this season.

"It's going to be a lot different," Nashville Predators captain Shea Weber said.

"I think it's tough to really understand the whole thing. It's new to everyone, I think it's going to take a little adjustment period."

Likewise, New York Rangers defenceman Marc Staal figures that the new alignment and playoff format are "going to take a year to feel it out."
Byfuglien's return to duty today ends, for now, any question that he might have been seriously injured Friday night in Saskatoon when he fell legs-first into the boards late in the game.

After trying briefly, Byfuglien was not part of Sunday's practice.

The Jets meet the Edmonton Oilers in Game No. 1 of the season Tuesday night at Rexall Place.

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718879 Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg Jets players make pact to be more accountable to one another

By Ken Wiebe

BANFF, Alta. — The Winnipeg Jets have made a verbal pact.

While spending the past three days in a bustling resort doing some team building and getting two intense on-ice workouts in to prepare for Tuesday’s 2013-14 NHL season opener against the Edmonton Oilers, they looked each other in the eye and opened the floor for an important conversation.

This isn’t the kind of deal with the Devil<ital.> where you sell your soul for one shot at glory, but rather, a real commitment for putting in the required sweat equity that can help the Jets get to point where they become a perennial contender.

“As a group, we came up with ideas about how we want to play and about how we want to handle ourselves every day,” said Jets captain Andrew Ladd.

“It’s something we can look back upon throughout the year and say, we talked about this, we agreed upon this and everybody was in. It’s a reminder of what we want to become and how we want to play.

“We need to be accountable to each other.”

As Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff pointed out Monday afternoon, this type of commitment is not unique to the Jets’ organization.

All 30 NHL clubs have a goal of winning the Stanley Cup this morning.

Some teams will quickly fade from that discussion as they find themselves in rebuilding mode, others will surprise and make some noise, while the rest will underachieve or disappoint.

For the Jets, the buy-in has taken place and now it’s time to put their words into action.

“This is part of coming together as a team and anybody who has been part of a team knows that it’s important the bonds are created and start early,” said Cheveldayoff. “If you want to be successful, these are the tried and true things that need to happen.”
There’s been plenty of chatter during training camp that the Jets plan to be a tougher team to play against.

Now that the games actually count, it’s time for the Jets to show us — and themselves — if that’s possible.

“We’ve got to use our speed, our size,” said Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien. ‘When you’re battling for a puck, you want them to think, ‘oh man, I’m sick of battling against these guys.’ You want to make it tough. It doesn’t matter where it is, they’re going to have to work for what they get.”

Jets winger Evander Kane took that premise a step further.

“We need to play with emotion right off the hop,” said Jets left-winger Evander Kane. “And when I say emotion, I don’t mean be emotional and love hockey, I mean be physical and be a mean team to play against.

“I don’t want to say violent, but a mean team to play against. We should want to intimidate with our speed, our physicalness and by finishing checks. That’s something we really need to incorporate into our game early in the season and we need to carry that out throughout the year. Going into the Western Conference, we need to play angry and that will help us.”

Most national projections having the Jets finishing sixth or seventh in the Central Division, but the Jets aren’t worried about being motivated by outside forces.

When a franchise hasn’t been to the playoffs since 2007, the motivation is internal.

“We’re here to win, bottom line,” said Byfuglien. “We’ve got to figure out how we’ve got to do it. We’re not going to be a pretty team to watch, but we’re going to get it done. Simple and easy. Just work on being consistent.”

Byfuglien is projecting big things ahead for this group.

“We’ve got the players and the attitude right now is right,” he said. “We’ll be just fine.”

Just how good the Jets can be is up for them to show.

Grant Clitsome starts season on injured reserve for Winnipeg Jets

By Ken Wiebe

First posted: Monday, September 30, 2013 08:48 PM CDT
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BANFF, Alta. — Grant Clitsome aggravated a lower-body injury, forcing the Winnipeg Jets to do some last-minute tinkering to their 23-man opening day roster that was submitted on Monday afternoon.

Clitsome suffered the injury initial after blocking a shot against the Boston Bruins on Thursday and while he made it through Sunday’s workout feeling good, the defenceman left the ice early on Monday and was placed on the seven-day injured list, retroactive to Saturday — meaning he could be available for the Jets home opener on Friday if he doesn’t suffer a setback.

The Jets also assigned defenceman Zach Redmond and forward Patrice Cormier to the St. John’s IceCaps of the American Hockey League.

Cormier and defenceman Adam Pardy cleared waivers on Monday, but Pardy (who is on a one-way contract worth $600,000) will remain with the Jets, largely because of the injury to Clitsome.

Jets head coach Claude Noel said both Paul Postma and Pardy were options to suit up on Tuesday night in the opener against the Edmonton Oilers — though Postma is the more likely option.

Redmond has a strong training camp, but by sending him down, he’ll be able to log big minutes as he continues his comeback from a serious skate-cut injury that threatened his life back in February when Antti Miettinen accidentally stepped on his right leg near the end of the morning skate.

Cormier, meanwhile, had a strong camp of his own but was beaten out for the spare forwards jobs by Matt Halischuk and Anthony Peluso.

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718881 Winnipeg Jets

Jacob Trouba has made huge strides, is ready for NHL debut against Oilers

By Ken Wiebe

BANFF, Alta. — Jacob Trouba has a good reason for changing to No. 8.

It serves as an ode to his early years as a hockey player and helps him grounded.

“In fifth grade, I was playing for (Detroit) Little Caesars (AAA team) and I was the last person to make the team, so they gave me No. 8,” Trouba said after completing a final practice in Banff, Alta. with the Winnipeg Jets. “It’s kind of stuck my whole career. Seeing the eight is kind of a humbling thing, just to remember where I came from. Nothing really changes when you get to this level.

“You’ve still got to remember what got you here and the people who got your here. It’s just a little reminder to me.”

After dreaming of this moment, the Jets 2012 first round pick is about to make his NHL debut on Tuesday night against the Edmonton Oilers.

“It’s something I’ve been waiting for, for a long time,” said Trouba, who left the University of Michigan Wolverines program after a successful freshman season to sign with the Jets last April. “This is my goal. This is why I left school.

It’s pretty special to be here. At the same time, I haven’t proven anything in this league yet. It could be over tomorrow for me. You’ve got to keep getting better and battling every game.”

Despite plenty of competition and jockey for position on a crowded blue-line during his first NHL training camp, not only has the 19-year-old Trouba nailed down a roster spot, there’s a good chance he’ll start the season on the second pairing with fellow American Zach Bogosian — since Grant Clitsome is out with a lower-body injury.

Making the achievement even more impressive is the fact Trouba struggled in his first pre-season game against the Washington Capitals but quickly put the performance behind him and showed during the next five games that he belongs.

“He made huge strides from Game 1 to Game 2 and he’s really played quite well here through the rest of training camp,” said Jets head coach Claude Noel. “He’s been pretty much a bright light for us.”

Trouba’s teammates have certainly noticed the strides he’s taken since his pre-season debut.

“Since then, it seems like he’s taken steps every game to get better,” said Jets captain Andrew Ladd. “He looked at things that maybe he hadn’t done right and improved upon them. To come that far in that short a period of time is a testament to how hard he’s worked to try to figure the game he needs to play.”

“The kid has been pretty smooth,” added Jets blue-liner Dustin Byfuglien. “He’s been fun to have around.”

In addition to his even-strength play, Trouba figures to see time on the second power play unit and could kill penalties.

Trouba certainly appreciates the vote of confidence he’s been given by the coaching staff and is working to continue his progression while recognizing there will be growing pains to endure.

“It means a lot,” said Trouba. “Having that trust means you can play with a little more confidence. I’m lucky they’ve shown that confidence in me and now I’ve just got to keep earning it.”
We need to get back to that. It’s huge having such an advantage at home. In the first year that it was going to be a hard place for away teams to play. We need to get back to that. It’s huge having such an advantage at home. We need to definitely take advantage of that.”

The Jets are 36-23-6 at MTS Centre since the beginning of the 2011-12 season. However, their record in Year 1 was much better than it was in Year 2. Last year, they were a middling 13-10-1 after going 23-13-5 the season before.

As they prepared to face the Oilers Tuesday night in the season opener in Edmonton, the Jets were still reeling somewhat from a 1-4-3 pre-season that concluded with a 5-0 loss to the Boston Bruins last Friday.

If they can use the schedule to their advantage and get the rarefied air of a good start, all that will be quickly forgotten.

New Jets right-winger Michael Frolik got off to one of the best starts in NHL history last year with the eventual Stanley Cup champion Chicago Blackhawks, who opened the season with a 21-0-3 record.

“What happened in Chicago is something that doesn’t happen often,” Frolik said. “But it’s very important to have a good start. It boosts your confidence right away. It wasn’t perfect during the exhibition games, but it’s just exhibition games. It doesn’t count. We learned some things and we’re working on it.”

Decent starts don’t always translate into playoff positions. The Jets went 3-1-1 last season in the first five games, but were back below .500 by Game 9. In 2010-11, when they were still in Atlanta, the Thrashers were 19-11-5 by mid-December and still sowned enough to miss the playoffs.

A bad start was costly in 2011-12, when the Jets lost the first three games and sat at 3-6-1 by Game 10.

The odds are with teams that get off to good starts and are stacked heavily against those that don’t.

“Most playoff teams win about 75% at home and .500 on the road,” Jets left-winger Evander Kane said. “You’re probably in the playoffs every season if you do that. We want to take advantage of all of our home games and use our building to our advantage. On the road, I thought we did a lot better job last year and we need to continue to get better on the road this year. It’s funny how things fluctuate at home and the road. You want to try to be the same wherever you’re playing.”

One player who could really use a good start is goaltender Ondrej Pavelec. He has taken some heat in the off-season over his inconsistency and less-than-average save percentage and needs to be at the top of his game all season long.

And a good start for the team might help ease the transition for prized rookies Mark Scheifele and Jacob Trouba, who are being counted on to help bring the team up a notch from a season ago.

One thing is for sure, if October is a lousy month for the Jets, despite having the majority of games at home, the rest of the season will be an awfully difficult mountain to climb.
camp wound down were Paul Postma, Zach Redmond and free-agent signee Adam Pardy. All but Trouba and Redmond have one-way contracts.

If there's one Jets blue-liner poised for a breakout season, it's Bogosian. He's over his injuries from last season, he has a fat new contract, and he's just entering the prime of his career.

"He's going to be a big part of it," Huddy said. "He took steps again last year. I know he was hurt a fair bit, but he's got more steps to go just to be consistent in his game.

"... Bogo's still learning the game. He's just a kid still. He wants to get better. He wants to be the guy that can be counted on out there in all situations. He's going to get to a point where he's going to be able to be one of those guys."

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BANFF, ALTA. - Winnipeg Jets defenceman Dustin Byfuglien was back on the ice Monday and is good to go for Tuesday's season opener against the Edmonton Oilers.

Byfuglien, who missed Sunday's workout, suffered a suspected left knee injury on Friday night with just under seven minutes left in the 5-0 loss to the Boston Bruins when he crashed into the boards.

While the news was good for Byfuglien, Grant Clitsome left the skate early with a lower-body injury and has been placed on the seven-day injured reserve list, retroactive to last Saturday, making him available for Friday's home opener if he's ready.

The Jets got down to their 23-man roster by re-assigning forward Patrice Cormier and defenceman Zach Redmond to the St. John's IceCaps of the American Hockey League.

Byfuglien will be paired with Toby Enstrom, Zach Bogosian will play with rookie Jacob Trouba and Mark Stuart will be with Paul Postma or Adam Pardy — who cleared waivers but will open the season on the active roster.

The forward lines were the same as they were on Sunday: Andrew Ladd with Bryan Little, Evander Kane with Olli Jokinen and Michael Frolik and Eric Tangradi with Jim Slater and Chris Thorburn.

Anthony Peluso and Matt Halischuk are the extra forwards.

September 30, 2013 9:31 am

By Ken Wiebe

Byfuglien looks ready for Tuesday's Jets opener

By Ken Wiebe

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Rocky Mountain hijinks for Jets

By Ken Wiebe

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BANFF, ALTA. - Winnipeg Jets centre Bryan Little. "It was a bit of everything. We played blindfold to a round of golf at the Banff Springs Golf Club.

"It was pretty much an open floor and it was a group discussion of what we wanted to do as a team, as far as goals and creating an identity," said Bogosian. "We're all men in here, we're all professionals and we need to be able to take criticism from each other. We need to make sure that we push each other to be the best that we can every day, that's in practice and in games."

The Jets skated for roughly 75 minutes on Sunday, working on a variety of games.

"No, it's not like cramming for an exam. Just trying to do some things that get us focused on the things we were looking for," said Noel.

That may be true but the evaluation process takes on new significance once the regular season starts.

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Vancouver Canucks

Canucks grab defenceman Stanton off waiver wire

September 30, 2013. 9:31 am

Elliott pap

By Jim Jamieson, The Province

New faces, fresh questions for Canucks

September 30, 2013
In the early days following the hiring of John Tortorella, Vancouver Canucks GM Mike Gillis introduced the new head coach at a season ticket holders event and referred to him as “the reset.”

Gillis, of course, was referring to a previously stated need to get on a different page following two straight early playoff exits.

While Tortorella’s upfront style has been a refreshing departure from the low-key Alain Vigneault, it was expected that some significant player moves would be coming. But, now, nearly three months after the free agency window opened and six pre-season games, it’s not clear how much the team on the ice is different from the one that was swept by the Sharks in the first round last May.

Yes, there are some new faces, but also a boatload of question marks.

Though there was a stated goal of infusing youth, none of the club’s young prospects made the final cut. First-round draft picks last June Bo Horvat (ninth overall) and Hunter Shinkaruk (24th overall) had impressive camps as did last year’s first-rounder Brendan Gaunce, and all look to have good careers ahead of them. But it’s likely going to be a year or two before they can be expected to make an impact at the NHL level.

After that comes the questions. Will off-season free agent signings Brad Richardson, Mike Santorelli and Yannick Weber provide an upgrade to last season’s roster? Will just-acquired Zac Dalpe or Ryan Stanton?

We’re about to find out, beginning Thursday in San Jose.

Here’s how the team breaks down, based on Monday’s official roster setting:

FORWARD
The Canucks will have three new forwards in Richardson, Santorelli and Dalpe. All slot in somewhere in the bottom six. Keys will be for Ryan Kesler and David Booth to stay healthy after two injury-marred seasons. The Canucks need to show they have the offensive depth to improve from a season where they finished a poor 19th overall in goals scored and 22nd on the power play.

DEFENCE
The Canucks’ top five of Dan Hamhuis, Kevin Bieksa, Jason Garrison, Alex Edler and Chris Tanev is as deep a quintet as you’ll find in the league, but the returning Andrew Alberts had a rough pre-season and it’s still to be determined where and how newcomers Yannick Weber and Ryan Stanton fit in. The good news is this back end has the offensive chops to overcome some of the possible goalscoring issues up front.

GOAL
The Canucks won’t suffer at all with Roberto Luongo back and motivated to regain his spot as Canada’s starting Olympic goaltender. But for the last three years the excellent Cory Schneider was the other half of the tandem and new backup Eddie Lack still has to prove he belongs in the NHL.

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71888 Vancouver Canucks

It took too long for Courtalln to come out of fog

By Ben Kuzma, The Province
September 30, 2013

Geoff Courtalln still endures occasional post-concussion symptoms that ended his NHL career more than a dozen years ago.

However, they pale in comparison to the ongoing headaches, nausea, dizziness, sensitivity to light, memory loss, sleep deprivation and depression that kept him in a fog for far too long.

A disturbance in brain function from more than a dozen concussions during a 17-year run with five teams — including 246 points in 292 games with the Vancouver Canucks from 1991-95 — put Courtalln on a path to find the right treatment and point those with similar afflictions in the right direction.

“It’s always unpredictable, really,” said the 50-year-old Duncan native. “Ninety per cent of the time it’s OK, then 10 per cent I have different headache issues or I do get vertigo every once in a while. And so that’s still a problem. I have tried lots of different treatments to make a difference, and Valentus has helped me a lot.”

Valentus Clinics specializes in brainwave optimization through a series of sensors attached to the head — much like an EKG to assess the heart — which read the electrical output of the brain. It creates a map to show how the brain is functioning, and with a concussion that program gets scrambled. The activity is read and fed back to the brain to create a mirror feedback. The process allows the brain to adjust through musical tones — and Courtalln noticed an improvement in his first visit to the Oak Bay head office of Valentus in June, 2011.

“The first 1½ hour treatment was wow — I started feeling better,” said Courtalln. “The biggest thing I noticed is that I was able to sleep and feel more rested afterward. Bright lights really bothered me a lot and now they don’t seem to bother me as much.

“I still have memory issues. In the past, I could remember everybody’s name and phone number really easily and that’s one thing, I guess, as you get older you lose.”

What Courtalln has gained is a better understanding of the cumulative damage that led to his career-ending injury. An elbow to the head from Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Bryan Berard on Oct. 16, 1999 — the second concussion in less than a year for Courtalln, then a St. Louis Blues winger — was the result of being in a vulnerable state.

Call it professional pride or the pressure to perform, it was the ultimate call to attention for Courtalln after the hit. He’d been punched in the head by Owen Nolan of the San Jose Sharks 11 months earlier. That concussion and the ensuing post-concussion symptoms forced him to miss the last half of the 1998-99 regular season.

Then came the Berard blow.

“I remember it, but to be honest I shouldn’t have been playing then,” he admitted. “I was lax in the way I tried to go around and I jumped around him. All he did was lift his elbow up to sort of slow me down, and caught me on the chin, and knocked me out cold very easily.”

That led to a tearful NHL goodbye at age 37, after amassing 799 points in 1,048 games, because his health and the ability to lead a normal life were at risk. And when Courtalln saw concussions end the budding career of Steve Pleau, the son of Blues general manager Larry Pleau, it hit home. The younger Pleau had three concussions in a short span with the University of New Hampshire and had to retire.

“Larry basically didn’t want to watch me continue to get knocked out,” said Courtalln. “My wife (Kathy) and I had talked it over several times because she was always worried about me getting hurt permanently, and it was dangerous to keep playing.

“I’ve been fortunate that I’ve been able to train and be healthy fitness wise and that has kept me going. I quit drinking 40 months ago and that made a huge difference, because the alcohol was a problem with my brain. It caused a lot of different mood swings and depression for sure. I struggled a lot.”

When Courtalln was forced to retire, the NHL started asking players a series of questions as a baseline to establish brain health. When a player suffered a concussion or post-concussion symptoms, those same questions were asked to determine the ability to perform. That morphed into the NHL’s quiet room, the fuzzy and questionable 15-minute timeout after an apparent concussion. The concept is to determine through verbal and physical response with medical personnel whether a player should be allowed to return to the ice.

Even Rule 48, which addressed blind side and targeted hits to the head, has failed to reduce concussions, which has only heightened a critical need for better assessment and treatment.

“I’ve told several GMs they should look into neuro feedback to really establish a baseline of where a guy is at,” said Courtalln, who has become an advocate for a better understanding and treatment of concussions. “That’s what they do at Valentus. The first 1½ hours are an assessment and printout of the entire test. That’s more scientific than just asking a lot of questions.”

Then again, you’re trying to change a macho culture. Players finish their checks and absorb them. They are wired to push hard and never quit, and don’t want to let their teammates down or risk losing their spot on the roster. Handsomely paid, they play through pain and there have been too many
Cutting-edge concussion technology making a difference

By Ben Kuzma, The Province

September 30, 2013

In confronting compacted schedules and gruelling travel demands, NHL teams reference rest and recovery. They are also buzz words within the medical community in an ongoing quest to diagnose and treat the effects of concussions and post-concussion symptoms.

Dr. Susan Simpson, Ph.D., is a psychologist and director of the brainwave optimization program at the head office of Valentus Clinics in Victoria. Her title sounds as complicated as the subject matter.

The cutting-edge technology is making such a huge impact in the lives of concussion clients — like former NHL winger Geoff Courtnall — that a Vancouver branch of the Valentus Clinics will open this month.

In the very basic understanding of concussions, Dr. Simpson said what anybody can do after suffering a concussion is quite simple. It’s after that where treatment can be more complex if post-concussion symptoms like dizziness, sensitivity to light, headaches, vomiting, mood swings and depression persist.

“The most immediate need is rest — physical and cognitive rest,” she said. “Depending on the (concussion) severity, it needs to be fairly radical with staying at home and minimal activity — not out in the sun or even on the computer with games. Really resting.

“It’s kind of like if you broke a bone in your leg. We’re all educated on that and understand to stay off of that leg and avoid putting any kind of stress on that bone for it to heal, A concussion is like that with the brain. It’s like sprain in the brain — you have to allow it to rest so it can recover.”

The passage of time will usually determine the next level of treatment. And for those who have endured months and years of post-concussion symptoms, the positive results of brainwave optimization have returned patients to normalcy in their lives.

“A concussion doesn’t show up on a CT scan or an MRI — we use EEG (Electroencephalography),” added Dr. Simpson. “We’re looking at the electrical activity of the brain. And that’s what concussions seem to affect — the electrical output of the brain. It tends to interfere with the structural organized patterns of the brain. When we do an initial assessment with the EEG, we can often find disturbances in the brainwave patterns that are correlated with a concussion.”

And that’s where it gets really interesting. Much like the sensors when performing and EKG (Electrocardiography) to measure the electric activity of the heart, a similar process is done with the brain. The reading process doesn’t use electricity to stimulate the brain but electric output from the brain is mapped and what program it’s using is determined. With a concussion, that program gets scrambled and the activity that is read is fed back to the brain.

“Humans function on feedback,” explained Dr. Simpson. “We’re constantly seeking input and the brain takes that input and adjusts everything — our physiology, chemistry, behaviour and muscles. We’re taking that brainwave activity and the computer software is converting it to feedback in visual feedback and shows what the brain is doing now in real time.

“Most importantly, it’s converting it into musical tones. The person is sitting in a comfortable zero gravity recliner and relaxed and focused on breathing and being receptive. The brain is listening to itself as music. For the brain, that’s like looking at a mirror of itself.”

In layman’s terms, it’s like going to the gym. There are ample mirrors at a workout facility for obvious reasons. There’s a level of vanity that comes with peering at your flexing, but the mirrors also serve a function. If you’re doing a bicep curl, you check the rotation in a mirror to ensure the proper technique.

The image in the mirror provides the feedback to adjust movements accordingly, much like the brainwave optimization process.

“The brain is always seeking that mirror feedback,” continued Dr. Simpson. “We providing that by the musical tones that represent the brainwave activity. Again with the gym analogy, it’s like having a personal trainer added to that who gives you tips on how to make that movement more effective. With the brainwave optimization feedback and musical tones, we include a few other tones to encourage the brain to go in the direction that we want it to.”

One of the biggest misconceptions is that patients seek treatment because of number of symptoms, but they don’t relate them to something that may have occurred recently or especially in the past. The cumulative result of impacts is often overlooked.

“I can’t tell you how many times somebody has come here for various reasons — being depressed or not sleeping — I ask about head injuries and they say: ‘No, no, no’,” added Dr. Simpson. “We do an EEG assessment and it gets them to thinking they remember one at some point. That’s common. When you’re involved in such a violent sport like hockey, impacts can be minor but they add up. That tells me with very minor injuries that people are giving away some function but not realizing it because it’s so subtle over time. All of a sudden, there’s the one injury and they think that’s the cause.”

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718890 Vancouver Canucks

Fixing the NHL: How to cure the concussion epidemic

By Ben Kuzma, The Province

September 30, 2013

It’s like putting a bandage on a gaping wound.

The NHL expected Rule 48 to have an impact on reducing a rash of concussions because blindside hits and targeting the head would no longer be tolerated. However, interpretation of the circumstances surrounding those blows — direction, intent and whether the recipient put himself in a vulnerable position — has led to a wide discrepancy in determining either a minor or match penalty. Supplementary discipline can be applied by the league and two game misconducts under the rule means an automatic one-game suspension. That’s certainly not a big deterrent with careers in jeopardy from blows to the head.

The culture of the game and the bravado it promotes with bigger, stronger and faster players schooled to finish their checks and intimidate the opposition has helped fuel the problem. It’s not surprising that a recent study revealed that despite the implementation of Rule 48 in the 2008-09 season, it did little to curb the number of concussions in 2010-11 and 2011-12 — the seasons reviewed and published in the journal Plos One. By comparison, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman maintained at his state-of-the-game news conference during the 2013 Stanley Cup final that the frequency of concussions on a game-to-game basis was trending slightly downward. Clearly, something has been lost in translation. On several occasions, I’ve witnessed players absorbing brutal hits to the head, fall to the ice, struggle to get off and then return to the game.
The diagnosis and treatment of concussions have rapidly advanced — and the 15-minute timeout in the quiet room under medical supervision with memory questioning and cognitive tests is a step in the right direction — but the impacts that cause them haven’t decreased.

“Players want to win and with a lot of the hits, it’s a fine line of trying to hurt guys or trying to make the big hit and not hurt the guy,” said former NHL winger Geoff Courtnall, who had to retire in 1999 after suffering what he believed to be his 12th career concussion from an elbow to the head. “It’s pretty difficult to catch a guy with his head down and not want to lay him out without knocking him out.”

If stopping the action persists then the reaction from the NHL much be stiffer. There’s an old-guard element to the manner in which governors guide the game and nobody wants to see the physical element curtailed. Puck battles and position battles are a foundation of the game but that shouldn’t come by employing any means to win those battles.

In the NFL, even incidental helmet-to-helmet contact on the quarterback is believed to be his 12th career concussion from an elbow to the head. “It’s pretty difficult to catch a guy with his head down and not want to lay him out without knocking him out.”

There’s no such thing as a slight or minor concussion. Those labels are applied because some players return from a brain bruise in a week and some are sidelined for months. Dan Hamhuis had two concussions in a seven-week period and the Vancouver Canucks defenceman had only minor symptoms and was able to return.

It took former Canucks defenceman Willie Mitchell five months to emerge from the darkness and the fog after being checked from behind by Evgeni Malkin of the Pittsburgh Penguins Jan. 16, 2010, and having his head rammed into the end boards. Malkin was penalized for boarding.

Helmet technology has improved to help cushion blows and players wear mouthguards to protect themselves from the whiplash effects of impacts the head. Daniel Sedin had those advantages but missed a dozen games when concussed March 21, 2012, on an elbow to the chin from Chicago Blackhawks defenceman Duncan Keith, who was suspended for five games. It kept the Swedish winger sidelined until Game 4 of a first-round playoff series loss to the Los Angeles Kings and it led to one chilling conclusion about preventing concussions.

“I’ve always said it’s going to come down to the players,” he stressed. “You can do whatever you want, but players don’t seem bothered about getting five or 10 games (suspensions). Once they get more respect for each other, it will clean it up.

“Guys are fighting for jobs. If they know they can get a big hit in, they’re going to do it and not be too worried about a five-game suspension. They’re going to be in the league.”

Not if the NHL makes any contact with the head — intentional or not — a major penalty and not if suspensions are much more severe. That would be a start to ending the concussion epidemic.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718891 Vancouver Canucks

John Tortorella: No beauty, but not all beast

By Rafe Arnott, The ProvinceSeptember 30, 2013

The latest Canucks head coach has overcome long odds to put together one of the prettier resums in hockey, the one that sits buried under his bullying reputation. He’s a Jack Adams finalist for two different teams. He won the award, won a Stanley Cup, and been part of the U.S. Olympic staff.

By Rafe Arnott, The ProvinceSeptember 30, 2013

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718892 Vancouver Canucks

Canucks claim young D-man Stanton off waivers from the Hawks

September 30, 2013, 10:32 am
Jim Jamieson

The Canucks had to make a few moves on Monday to comply with the NHL’s season-opening 23-man roster, but they managed to do that while acquiring young defenceman Ryan Stanton off waivers from Chicago.

With Zack Kassian’s suspension eating up a roster spot for the first five games of the season, it meant sending just acquired Jeremy Welsh to the minors and putting Jordan Schroeder (fractured foot) on Injured Reserve. The Canucks also sent June’s first-round pick Hunter Shinkaruk (24th overall) back to his Medicine Hat junior club. That left them with 13 forwards, eight D-men and two goalies.

Stanton, 24, is a stay-at-home D-man who blocks shots and practiced with the Blackhawks throughout their Stanley Cup winning run last spring, but has played just one NHL game. He’s played three full seasons in the AHL after being signed by the Hawks in 2010 as an undrafted player with the WHL’s Moose Jaw Warriors.

Canucks assistant GM Laurence Gilman said Stanton should fit in well on the team’s blueline group.

“We’ve been looking for a left-handed defenceman that has playing attributes and solid character,” said Gilman. “Ryan is a player we’ve been watching for some time now. We believe he can he play anywhere in our top eight to top six.”

The 6-foot-2, 196-pounder had a tough blueline crew to break into and became the odd man out when Chicago signed free agent Michael Kostka in the summer.

Stanton collected 25 points (3-22-25) and 126 penalty minutes with the IceHogs last season.

“I was really thrilled when I heard the Canucks had picked me up,” said Stanton, who spoke with The Province on his way to the airport to fly to Vancouver on Monday.

“I guess I’m a bit of a late-bloomer, but I feel I’m ready to show I can be a full-time player in the NHL. I’m really looking forward to the opportunity.”

Stanton said he hasn’t met new Canucks coach John Tortorella, but his shot blocking is something the coach is looking for.

“Shot-blocking is a big part of my game and being solid in my own end is something I take pride in,” said Stanton.

Stanton had quite a spring with the Blackhawks. He was called up after Rockford was eliminated from the AHL. He even got to take a turn around the ice with the Stanley Cup.

“I’ll always remember that,” he said. “You see what it takes to get that far. All the grind and sacrifice. I learned so much, practicing against guys like (Jonathan) Toews and with D-men like Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.01.2013
718893 Vancouver Canucks

Another season, another promise of a reset in Vancouver

DAVID EBNER

VANCOUVER — The Globe and Mail
Published Monday, Sep. 30 2013, 8:26 PM EDT
Last updated Monday, Sep. 30 2013, 8:28 PM EDT

The Vancouver Canucks promised a “reset” after being swept from the start of the NHL playoffs last spring — a change in thinking led by new head coach
John Tortorella, who will oversee an opening-night roster that features the same core of players but one that is younger than last season.

The Canucks’ 23-man roster features 13 forwards, eight defencemen and two goaltenders, with the late additions being 23-year-old forward Zac Dalpe, acquired in a trade with the Carolina Hurricanes last weekend, and 24-year-old Ryan Stanton, picked up off waivers, officially announced Monday.

Chicago Blackhawks’ Jonathan Toews celebrates with the Stanley Cup after his team defeated the Boston Bruins in Game 6 of their NHL Stanley Cup Finals hockey series in Boston, Mass., June 24, 2013.

The bet is on the veterans to produce a different result this season, under the guidance of Tortorella, with the hope the Canucks are more than a one-line team powered by the Sedins twins, Henrik and Daniel. The hope is that the team will receive significant contributions from players who were injured last year, such as Ryan Kesler and David Booth.

“Changing the coach and changing the voice is the biggest change you can make,” team president and general manager Mike Gillis said in an interview Monday. “You are trying to get more out the same group, that’s what everybody’s doing.”

The roster could likely be in considerable flux. The team probably won’t, for instance, carry eight defenceman all year.

The Canucks enter the season with some salary cap breathing room, which they have not had in recent years, and the fluctuating gap of between $1.2-million (U.S.) and $1.9-million or so, depending on the roster configuration, gives the team some flexibility to make moves, Gillis said.

The likes of 20-year-old defenceman Frank Corrado is one likely an addition later in the year, the GM said. Corrado was sent to the Utica of the AHL to benefit from significant ice time.

After the Canucks were swept in the first round in May by the San Jose Sharks, Gillis declared the team needed to get younger and bigger.

The team is younger, even without Corrado, or the 18-year-old rookies who received considerable attention in training camp. The declarations of the push for youth, from Gillis and Tortorella, had eyes focused on the team’s 2013 first-round picks, Bo Horvat and Hunter Shinkaruk, but they failed to crack the roster. Horvat was sent back to junior on the weekend, and Shinkaruk got the same news Monday.

Still, Vancouver’s average age is a fair chunk lower than it was in January, standing at 28, down from 28.9 at the start of the truncated 2013 season.

Subtracting the likes of veteran Manny Malhotra and adding players such as Mike Santorelli, the Canucks now rank around the middle of 30 NHL teams in average age, rather than fourth-oldest, as they previously were.

In size, the team remains about the same, and again roughly in the middle of the league. An average height of close to 6-foot-2 is a smidgen higher than last season, and the average weight is 202 pounds, down a couple from 2013.

The newest arrivals show up with a lot to prove. Dalpe has 10 points in 41 NHL games over three seasons and has, to start, a five-game window to advertise his worth while Zack Kassian is out with a suspension. Stanton has 30 days on the main club, having come off waivers, and will have to battle to get on to gameday rosters.

“We’re looking at this season very optimistically,” Gillis said of the Canucks in general. “I like where we sit. I like our roster. These guys are hungry.”

Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.01.2013

718894 Websites

ESPN / Rule changes for 2013-14 season

By Scott Burnside

You have all committed the new realignment configuration to memory by now. Quick, are the New York Rangers, who are within spitting distance of the Atlantic Ocean, in the Atlantic Division? No. Good. Carry on. -- But you might have forgotten some of the more subtle rule changes that will go into effect this season.

For instance, you might have read that the NHL is cracking down on style violators, insisting that all players keep their jerseys uniformly untucked. This means you, Alexander Ovechkin and Alexander Semin, and never mind that thousands of youngsters have imitated the style because it looks cool in a retro-Gretzky way.

The move to uniformity came out of the last GMs’ meetings and was part of the discussion at the summer competition committee meeting. We sort of get it. You don’t want players freelance accessorizing their gear, adding buckskin fringe à la old Neil Young or sequins or laces with bells on them. As one GM told ESPN.com, some of the guys were starting to look like “hobos.” So a little decorum isn’t a bad thing.

But does it really matter if a player tucks in his jersey? Really? If it makes officials’ jobs easier because they can see the numbers more clearly, we get that, but the player’s name on the back should also help in terms of identifying players for a foul. And does the NHL want to add more work for its officials? We can’t get the head shot rules right, but let’s make sure players all look the same, and we’re going to give on-ice guys more work to do to make sure that happens. After the embarrassing show put on by the Toronto Maple Leafs and Buffalo Sabres in the preseason, it just seems a little small of the league to have identified this as an issue that must be addressed.

The sweater tuck is just one area of equipment use where the league has mandated conformity. They are also requiring that jersey sleeves be worn into the cuff of the player’s glove and pant legs aren’t nipped or altered in any fashion.

The other major equipment issue this year is the mandatory use of visors for all players who have played 25 or fewer NHL games. The only shocking part of this rule is that it took this long for the players’ association to get on board with mandating the maximum protection available to its membership. But better late than never, and this ensures that within a few years only the dinosaurs will be venturing onto the ice without a visor.

Goalies’ pads will also be reduced this season. If you’ve got a degree in advanced physics from MIT you can actually follow the formula used to determine the vertical allowance in pad size for each individual goalie. Otherwise, just take our word for it, they’ll be shorter. Pads will be limited to 11 inches in width. While the goalies don’t like it, as long as this doesn’t impugn their safety, we’re good with it. Any edge shooters can get back after years of trying to find a hole in baled out goalie gear is a good edge to get back.

NHL nets will also have a different look this year, as some four inches have been shaved off the width of the goal. The actual area into which the shooters will shoot (and the goalies will naturally defend) remains constant, but the narrower width will allow for more space behind and to the side of the net. The theory is this will provide more room for offensive players to maneuver and thus create more scoring chances, although it also provides more room for defenders to make plays. Regardless, more space is better while maintaining the historical integrity of the goal size.

The players voted at the end of training camp to adopt the new hybrid icing that has been discussed for several years and was tested during the exhibition season. Basically, linesmen determine who will reach a puck that can be called for icing (i.e. will cross the end red line) based on whether the offensive player or the defending player reaches the defensive zone faceoff dot first. So, if the attacking player beats the defender to the dot, the play remains live, and conversely, if the defender reaches the dot first, the play is automatically blown dead. This is a good rule even if it puts more pressure on the linesmen to determine whose skates reach the dot first, but anything that keeps plays alive as often as possible while at the same time reducing the potential for cataclysmic injuries during collisions on icing calls is a good thing.

As an adjunct to hybrid icing, the league has taken the “attainable pass” language out of icing rules, meaning that if a player misses a pass that goes for icing, the linesmen won’t wave off the icing unless the offensive team touches the puck first (see above). In the past, if there was a clear attempt at a pass, the linesman could wave off icing even if no contact was made with the puck. We will actually miss this rule.

There are some changes to the fighting rules as well. The unsportsmanlike conduct penalty that went to a player who instigated a fight while wearing a visor has been taken out of the rule book. Also, any player that takes his helmet off before a fight will earn an extra two-minute penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct, which has led to at least one instance where
players took each other’s helmets off at the start of a fight (Krys Barch and Brett Gallant figured out this loophole).

The league should ban fighting outright, just so it doesn’t have to introduce nonsensical rules like this. The league seems prepared to allow its players to flirt with serious head injuries during the course of a fight when it’s entirely likely one or both combatants’ helmets will fly off, and they will try and penalize players who take their helmets off to start a dust-up. This is a reminder that in many ways this is still a very curious game. Try explaining this one to the next group of aliens that drops into your backyard on a Saturday night.

ESPN LOADED: 10.01.2013

DENVER -- You’ve no doubt read my colleague Pierre LeBrun’s popular "rumblings" blog. Well, this is more a rambling than a rumbling. To whit:

Cheat deals: Like most people, we’re fascinated to see how the Daniel Alfredsson experiment turns out in Detroit. But the one thing we still can’t get over is that the NHL decided not to act on Alfredson’s blunt acknowledgment that his previous contract with the Ottawa Senators was, in fact, a blatant attempt to circumvent the salary cap under the previous collective bargaining agreement. Alfredsson told reporters before training camp that when the four-year deal was signed, neither side expected Alfredsson would play in the contract’s final year -- worth only $1 million in real money even though the cap hit was $4.875 million annually. It was exactly that kind of wink, wink, nudge, nudge deal that the league had been warning teams about for years -- Alfredsson made $7 million in each of the first two years of the pact -- and which ultimately cost the New Jersey Devils this one to the next group of aliens that drops into your backyard on a Saturday night.

By Scott Burnside

ESPN / Ramblings: Alfie’s contract, Drouin’s future, Ference’s leadership and more

Kings of depth: One of the reasons to like (or fear, if you’re a Western Conference opponent) the Los Angeles Kings is the kind of depth GM Dean Lombardi has assembled in LA. The team sent Tyler Toffoli to the minors over the weekend after the youngster made a strong impression last season. He was especially impressive in the playoffs, collecting six points in 12 postseason games and earning time on the Kings’ power play. Toffoli will start the season in Manchester along with talented linemates Linden Vey and Tanner Pearson -- a group Lombardi has likened on a number of occasions to famed LA Dodgers Ron Cey, Bill Russell, Steve Garvey and Davey Lopes, who all blossomed together in the Dodgers’ farm system before becoming star major leaguers. In short, you may not see them in a Kings jersey in October, but it won’t be a surprise when, at some point this season, you see not just Toffoli, but perhaps all three making their case for a permanent stay in Hollywood.

Goalie buzz: And finally, of all the goaltending drama unfolding around the NHL -- Tim Thomas in Florida, the Jonathan Bernier/James Reimer duel in Toronto, Roberto Luongo’s return as the erstwhile starter for the Vancouver Canucks -- perhaps none has been as curious as the decision to find the heir apparent to Miikka Kiprusoff in Calgary. Now, expectations are low for the Kings’ power play. Toffoli will start the season in Manchester along with talented linemates Linden Vey and Tanner Pearson -- a group Lombardi has likened on a number of occasions to famed LA Dodgers Ron Cey, Bill Russell, Steve Garvey and Davey Lopes, who all blossomed together in the Dodgers’ farm system before becoming star major leaguers. In short, you may not see them in a Kings jersey in October, but it won’t be a surprise when, at some point this season, you see not just Toffoli, but perhaps all three making their case for a permanent stay in Hollywood.

ESPN LOADED: 10.01.2013

718896 Websites

By Pierre LeBrun

ESPN / Power Rankings: It’s a brand new day

Thank goodness the powers that be have allowed me and not Scott Burnside the honor of writing the season’s first Power Rankings. Its always so much
work to undo his mess every second week. Because, you know, nobody ever
complains about mine! On that note, here we go, the first rankings for
2013-14 season:

2013-2014 Power Rankings: Preseason 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>TEAM / RECORD</th>
<th>TRENDING</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For the first time in my career, I've picked a Cup champion to repeat. Won't be easy, hasn't been done since 1997-98 (Detroit), but if any team in the cap era has the goods, it's Chicago.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Boston</td>
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<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td>They've changed three right wingers, so perhaps there's an adjustment period, but these guys are still the Beasts of the East.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>St. Louis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Loaded up front and on the blue line, the question remains in goal. If they get goaltending, they're Chicago's biggest obstacle.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td>Just got that feeling Jeff Carter is going to have a career season. Kings are over the Cup hangover, so watch out.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>San Jose</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>If Martin Havlat can provide production this season -- meaning he's healthy enough to do so for most of the season -- it's such a big wild card to what the Sharks can do with their top nine up front.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Between Marc-Andre Fleury's confidence and Tomas Vokoun's health situation, all the questions are about the goaltending. GM Ray Shero will give it a month or so before he decides whether or not he needs to act.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Detroit</td>
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<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td>Key to the season for me is a productive second line (Alfredsson-Weiss-Franzen). I think they'll get it.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>New York</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td>Best coaching hire of the offseason in the entire league: Alain Vigneault. Given time, AV will get it right there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td>My surprise pick to win the Atlantic. The real key for them this season is the health of top players and getting more secondary scoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Anaheim</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If Corey Perry and Jonas Hiller rebound with bounce-back seasons, the Ducks have a shot at another division title.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Washington</td>
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<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The perennial Southeast winners play in a big-boy division now. Does Braden Holtby prove this season his Team Canada camp invite was justified? I say yes.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, man, is there a more delicious storyline than in Vancouver this season? The owner is on edge, the new coach is trying to be a new man, the new starting goalie is the old starting goalie who wanted out ... hold on to your seats.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
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<td>Last Week: NR</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Last Week: NR A new line I already really like: Max Pacioretty with David Desharnais and Daniel Briere.

14
Toronto
0-0-0

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Last Week: NR And the battle in net begins: Jonathan Bernier or James Reimer?
15
Philadelphia
0-0-0

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Last Week: NR Battle in net, part deux: Steve Mason or Ray Emery?
16
Phoenix
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Dave Tippett’s men are going back to the playoffs. Book it.
17
Nashville
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR I really liked David Poile’s offseason moves, Pekka Rinne is healthy and Shea Weber is going to have a monster season.
18
Edmonton
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR This is it, the Oil finally makes it back into the playoffs this season. Believe it!
19
Minnesota
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR If the kids can step up to fill the void left by Matt Cullen, P.M. Bouchard and Devin Setoguchi, they’ll be all right.
20
New York
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Mark Streit’s departure hurts on so many levels and the goaltending isn’t great, but it’s hard to bet against future Hart Trophy winner John Tavares.
21
Columbus
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Is Sergei Bobrovsky for real? Lots of doubters out there. Would be great for him to show them all wrong.
22
Dallas
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Remember the name Valeri Nichushkin, folks. People will look back in 10 years and wonder how the Stars got him 10th overall.
23
Colorado
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR So loaded up front, so thin on the back. If they can get any semblance of blue-line play this season, they’re in.
24
New Jersey
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Just a hunch but got a feeling these guys will prove everyone wrong yet again. Don’t write off the Devils.
25
Carolina
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR Jordan Staal is going to have his best-ever season.
26
Winnipeg
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR If Mark Scheifele can do the No. 2 center job, I like this team a lot more this season. They need a second line.
27
Buffalo
0-0-0

--
Last Week: NR  Do Ryan Miller and Thomas Vanek finish the season in Buffalo? Don't bet on it.

28

Tampa Bay
0-0-0

--

Last Week: NR  It's a totally different story if either Ben Bishop or Anders Lindback becomes the true No. 1 goalie. It could happen. Don't give up on Lindback yet.

29

Florida
0-0-0

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Last Week: NR  Rebuild, rebuild, rebuild. It's all about the draft picks now.

ESPN LOADED: 10.01.2013

718897 Websites

ESPN / Ramblings: Alfie's contract, Drouin's future, Ference's leadership and more

By Scott Burnside

DENVER -- You've no doubt read my colleague Pierre LeBrun's popular "ramblings" blog. Well, this is more a rambling than a rambling. To wit:

Cheat deals: Like most people, we're fascinated to see how the Daniel Alfredsson experiment turns out in Detroit. But the one thing we still can't get over is that the NHL decided not to act on Alfredsson's blunt acknowledgment that his previous contract with the Ottawa Senators was, in fact, a blatant attempt to circumvent the salary cap under the previous collective bargaining agreement. Alfredsson told reporters before training camp that when the four-year deal was signed, neither side expected Alfredsson would play in the contract's final year - worth only $1 million in real money even though the cap hit was $4.875 million annually. It was exactly that kind of wink, wink, nudge, nudge deal that the league had been warning teams about for years -- Alfredsson made $7 million in each of the first two years of the pact -- and which ultimately cost the New Jersey Devils mightily in their first attempt at a contract for the erstwhile Ilya Kovalchuk. The so-called cheat deals were, in theory, eliminated by new parameters put on contracts in the new collective bargaining agreement, and the league's position is that they are going to look forward instead of back. Good news for the Senators, but maybe in the spirit of CBA détente, the league should forgive the Devils the first round draft pick they must forfeit next spring for having done no worse than what Alfredsson admitted the Senators did in his case.

Captain Ference: I love the idea of Andrew Ference wearing the captain's 'C' in Edmonton. Head coach Dallas Eakins has many options, but Ference has the right temperament for what promises to be a demanding job. Yes, Taylor Hall may yet be the Oilers' captain of the future, but Ference comes from a culture of winning in Boston, and in Calgary before that when winning was something the Flames actually did. He's won a Cup and been to two Stanley Cup finals. He's smart, thinks through the game well and interacts well with the public and the media. When we spoke to Eakins during training camp, he talked about the variety of skill sets that Ference brings to an Oilers' table that has not seen a taste of the playoffs since 2006, and he was speaking as much about the off-ice skill set as the on-ice toughness and ability to move the puck.

Not so fast, rookie: I must admit I was surprised to see the Tampa Bay Lightning ship No. 3 overall draft pick Jonathan Drouin back to junior where the folks in Halifax will be happy to see the skilled winger. His junior teammate and No. 1 overall pick Nathan MacKinnon has long been penciled into the Colorado Avalanche's opening lineup. Likewise, No. 2 pick Aleksander Barkov will start in Florida, and Seth Jones, No. 4 in one of the greatest top-heavy draft classes in recent memory, will stick in Nashville. But GM Steve Yzerman and the Lightning staff obviously didn't feel Drouin was ready. As desperate as the Bolts are to return to the playoffs after missing out for the first time since 2006, something the Flames already did, the team decided it was best for Drouin's overall development to return to junior, where he will play significant minutes as well as be a part of Canada's effort at the World Junior Championship. Given that Yzerman spent his entire career playing in Detroit, a franchise whose trademark for the past two decades has been one of patience and never (or rarely, anyway) rushing a player to the NHL, maybe the move isn't all that surprising. As he explained to reporters in Tampa, Yzerman wants his young players playing all the time, not relegated to fourth-line minutes in the NHL or sitting in the press box. In that same vein, the Lightning also sent former No. 6 overall draft pick Brett Connolly back to the Bolts' American Hockey League affiliate in Syracuse.

The young and the discarded in South Beach: Is it just us or does this year's version of the Florida Panthers bear a striking resemblance to the one that two years ago went from a rag-tag bunch of summer signings to an unexpected Southeast Division title? We didn't have the gumption to pick the Panthers to be that kind of team this season, but with new ownership taking control last week, GM Dale Tallon has locked up former Vezina Trophy winner and playoff MVP Tim Thomas to a one-year deal, while adding useful players Brad Boyes and Tom Gilbert -- both of whom were on tryouts -- to one-year deals. Boyes played top-line minutes with the New York Islanders last year, and Gilbert will add some depth to a blue line that is still very much in transition with Erik Gudbranson hoping to evolve into a franchise blueliner. Now, a lot can go wrong, but it's interesting that two summers ago when Tallon brought in a bevy of newcomers, including Brian Campbell, Kris Versteeg, Ed Jovanovski, Tomas Fleischmann and Sean Bergenheim, few people gave head coach Kevin Dineen a chance to make it work then. With an emerging Gudbranson, defending rookie of the year Jonathan Huberdeau and Barkov, there is an intriguing blend of the young and the discarded.

Vokoun's health: We were pleased to read agent Allan Walsh's comments to Pittsburgh writer Rob Rossi regarding the health and potential recovery of netminder Tomas Vokoun, who required surgery during training camp to deal with a blood clot issue. It's not the first time Vokoun has dealt with the medical issue, but Walsh told Rossi that reports out of the Czech Republic that Vokoun's career is over and he nearly died as a result of the illness were not true. Not a knock on reporters in other countries, but a reminder that sometimes stuff gets lost in translation. Walsh told Rossi that Vokoun is looking forward to resuming his NHL career, although an exact timetable remains unknown. Vokoun's story is inspirational, as he's overcome many hurdles to carve out a solid NHL career. He was nothing but a gentleman as he took over for Marc-Andre Fleury in the first round of the playoffs for the Penguins last spring and guided the Pens to the Eastern Conference finals. Here's hoping he makes a speedy return to the game.

Kings of depth: One of the reasons to like (or fear, if you're a Western Conference opponent) the Los Angeles Kings is the kind of depth GM Dean Lombardi has assembled in LA. The team sent Tyler Toffoli to the minors over the weekend after the youngster made a strong impression last season. He was especially impressive in the playoffs, collecting six points in 12 postseason games and earning time on the Kings' power play. Toffoli will start the season in Manchester along with talented linemates Linden Vey and Tanner Pearson -- a group Lombardi has likened on a number of occasions to famed LA Dodgers Ron Cey, Bill Russell, Steve Garvey and Davey Lopes, who all blossomed together in the Dodgers' farm system before becoming star major leaguers. In short, you may not see them in a Kings jersey in October, but it won't be a surprise when, at some point this season, you see not just Toffoli, but perhaps all three making their case for a permanent stay in Hollywood.

Goalie buzz: And finally, of all the goaltending drama unfolding around the NHL -- Tim Thomas in Florida, the Jonathan Bernier/James Reimer duel in Toronto, Roberto Luongo's return as the erstwhile starter for the Vancouver
Canucks -- perhaps none has been as curious as the decision to find the heir apparent to Miikka Kiprusoff in Calgary. Now, expectations are low for the Flames (OK, that’s a bit of an understatement, especially with Mike Cammalleri’s availability for the start of the season now in jeopardy thanks to injury) but with journeyman Joey MacDonald, Swiss sensation Reto Berra and former Lightning prospect Karri Ramo jostling for the right to start on opening night, it has created at least a little buzz around the team. If we had to guess, we would go with Ramo, who got rave reviews for his play in the Kontinental Hockey League and is now trying to prove he’s NHL-ready. Our guess is he’s about to find out.

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NBCSports.com / U.S. to name Olympic team during Winter Classic

Mike Halford

The American roster for the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, will be unveiled during NBC’s Broadcast of the 2014 Winter Classic, USA Hockey announced on Monday.

The Winter Classic, to be held on Jan. 1 between the Red Wings and Maple Leafs at the Big House in Ann Arbor, will provide a tremendous background for what’s expected to be an exciting announcement. The Winter Olympics begin just five weeks after the Winter Classic, and Team USA is expected to bring three goals, eight defencemen and 14 forwards to Russia.

Today, U.S. GM David Poile met with media members and said that “approximately half” of the 2014 squad will be comprised of players that captured silver at the 2010 games in Vancouver.

In August, USA Hockey held an Olympic evaluation camp consisting of 48 invitees, 16 of whom represented America in Vancouver three years ago. They include: Zach Parise (Minnesota Wild), Ryan Miller (Buffalo Sabres), Jonathan Quick (Los Angeles Kings), Erik Johnson (Colorado Avalanche), Jack Johnson (Columbus Blue Jackets), Brooks Orpik (Pittsburgh Penguins) and Ryan Suter (Wild), David Backes (St. Louis Blues), Dustin Brown (Kings), Ryan Callahan (New York Rangers), Patrick Kane (Chicago Blackhawks), Ryan Kesler (Vancouver Canucks), Phil Kessel (Toronto Maple Leafs), Joe Pavelski (San Jose Sharks), Bobby Ryan (Ottawa Senators) and Paul Stastny (Colorado Avalanche).

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USA TODAY / Answers to pressing NHL questions

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Sports 10:21 p.m. EDT September 30, 2013

USA TODAY Sports hockey columnist Kevin Allen provides answers to eight pressing questions heading into Tuesday’s NHL season opener:

1. What are the Chicago Blackhawks' chances of repeating?

They have a better chance than any team in recent years. No team has repeated since the 1997-98 Detroit Red Wings. The Blackhawks have won twice in the last four seasons. They experienced the Stanley Cup hangover in 2010-11 and believe they have learned from that experience. Plus, their top two players, Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews, are entering the primes of their career. Their core group (Toews, Kane, Marian Hossa, Patrick Sharp, Duncan Keith, Brent Seabrook, Niklas Hjalmarsson, Bryan Bickell and Corey Crawford) remains intact.

MORE: Are Blackhawks on verge of dynasty?

2. Can Tim Thomas have an impact on the Florida Panthers?

He will make them more competitive, but probably not a playoff team. After taking a one-year sabbatical, he’ll have rust on his game. Thomas was among the league’s most effective goalies when he last played in 2011-12. Florida fans wanted Roberto Luongo, but Thomas has the potential to be as good or better. It also helps that general manager Dale Tallon upgraded his team with the recent free agent signings of center Brad Boyes and defencemen Tim Gleason and Ryan Whitney.

3. How long will winger Tomas Vanek and goaltender Ryan Miller be Buffalo Sabres?

Until just before the trade deadline. The Sabres are trying to renovate on the fly and both players will be unrestricted free agents. Vanek’s cap hit is $7.1 million and Miller’s is $6.25 million. Many teams that would want those players need to wait until later in the season when their cap hit is less stressful on their budget. It’s way too early to pick a favorite to land either player, but Vanek, who played at the University of Minnesota, has a home in Minnesota, so the Wild could be interested. The Sabres would like to re-sign Vanek, but does he want to be part of this rebuild?

4. Do the Pittsburgh Penguins have a goalie problem?

They won’t know until April, and that’s the problem. Marc-Andre Fleury’s coach likes him. His teammates have faith in him. He was solid during the 2012-13 regular season. But he hasn’t played well in the playoffs since the Penguins won the 2009 Stanley Cup. No one is sure why. He just doesn’t look like the same goalie. It’s as if he has hockey’s version of the postseason “yips.” Fleury could win 45 games in the regular season and face questions in the playoffs. 1. Backup Tomas Vokoun, who replaced Fleury last postseason, is on the shelf with a blood clot. If his absence appears to be long term, the Penguins can sign a veteran backup, such as Johan Hedberg, or go after Miller.

5. How much will realignment affect the playoff picture?

Dramatically, particularly with regard to making the playoffs. Adding traditionally strong Detroit and up-and-coming Columbus Blue Jackets makes it more challenging to make the playoffs in the Eastern Conference. The Ottawa Senators, Toronto Maple Leafs and Montreal Canadiens made the playoffs last season, and one likely won’t this season. Because the Pacific Division is so strong, the Vancouver Canucks and San Jose Sharks seem more vulnerable to missing the playoffs than in recent years. The wild card races will create a buzz because it’s possible that five teams from one division could make the playoffs and only three from the other.

MORE: Realignment adds twist to season

6. Will participating in the Sochi Olympics have an impact on NHL competition?

It’s difficult to draw any conclusions. In 2010, the Blackhawks had six top players (Toews, Kane, Seabrook, Keith, Hossa and Tomas Kopecky) reach the medal games and they won the Stanley Cup. But that tournament was in Vancouver. In 2006, when the Olympics were in Italy, meaning jet lag was a factor, the champion Carolina Hurricanes had one player in the medal games. The Detroit Red Wings had five players on the Swedish gold medal team and were the top regular-season team, but they were upset in the first round of the playoffs.

7. Should we care about the new hybrid icing and mandatory visor rules?

You should if you care about player safety. The NHL has wanted all players to wear visors for years, but players resisted, mostly because they felt it was harder to see the puck. Veterans are grandfathered in, and can play without a visor. But all new players must wear one. If you don’t see the need for hybrid icing, ask a Hurricanes fan. Defenseman Joni Pitkanen will be out all season preventing a serious injury if a player spills.

MORE: How icing rule works

8. Is there a downside to the 2013-14 season?

Fans have to say goodbye to Teemu Selanne and Jaromir Jagr. Selanne said this is his last season. Jagr said it probably is. They’re two of the top five greatest European players in NHL history, entertaining on and off the ice.

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Every athlete wants to be part of a dynasty, yet no athlete will admit to having that desire.

The first rule of dynasties is that no one talks about being one.

"I'm not going to say that word," Chicago Blackhawks forward Patrick Sharp says. "All I'm going to say is that we have a great setup in Chicago from the top down. ... We are excited in Chicago to see what we can do."

The Blackhawks have won two of the last four Stanley Cup championships, and a three-in-five run would be the best showing by any NHL team since the Detroit Red Wings won three Stanley Cup titles in six years from 1997 to 2002. The Edmonton Oilers won five championships in seven seasons from 1984 to 1990. The Oilers' run and the Red Wings' streak came before the salary cap was introduced in 2005.

The salary cap makes it challenging for general managers to keep teams together for an extended period.

CENTRAL DIVISION: What to expect this season

"I'm not really good on what a dynasty is," Blackhawks general manager Stan Bowman says. "I will leave that to the (news media). But I think we are striving to be a team that competes for the Cup every year — not for this season or the next season but a number of seasons."

Former NHL general manager Craig Button says he would call the Blackhawks a dynasty if they won another title.


NBC analyst Pierre McGuire, a former NHL coach, also views the Blackhawks as a possible dynasty-in-the-making.

"It's very hard to win multiple Cups in the salary-cap era because of roster fluctuation and parity in the league," he says. "Regular-season games are really tough, and playoff games are off the charts."

The Blackhawks are favored in Las Vegas to win another Stanley Cup, mostly because they are essentially the same team they were last season, when they ranked second in the NHL in goals scored and first in goals against.

"I like to think we can play any kind of style," Sharp says. "That's not being arrogant or cocky. That's believing in our team and what we have done in the past."

When the Blackhawks won the Stanley Cup in 2010, they were known as an offensive team. They could skate like the wind and light up the scoreboard. Today, with the core players more experienced, they are a far more complete team.

"For a couple of seasons, we were known as a high-flying, run-and-gun team, skilled offensive team, giving up a lot of scoring chances against," Sharp says. "One thing our team got better at, and the reason why we won the Cup, was we limited scoring chances against."

Chicago also started to bare its teeth against the tougher teams.

"In other buildings, we took a lot of heat about being a soft team or a skilled team," Sharp recalls. "It was, "Let's hit these guys, and they will go away.""

Today, the Blackhawks are a much grittier bunch, able to win in a variety of different ways. The addition of Johnny Oduya late in the 2011-12 season seemed to strengthen their defense.

"To me, the six defensemen that played every night for us was the best defensive corps in the league," Sharp says.

Corey Crawford has matured into one of the league's stingiest goaltenders. They can win hard-hitting games or goaltending duels or defensive battles.

"We are just getting started here," Bowman says. "I don't feel any sense of contentment about where we are at. Complacency is not a word that will be associated with the Blackhawks. They are hungry. They want to look ahead."

After the Blackhawks won in 2010, Bowman was forced by salary-cap issues to change 10 players on his roster. Although he was able to keep his core group, he had to rebuild the bottom of his roster.

This time he had a more favorable salary-cap position and only three regulars moved — Viktor Stalberg, Michael Frolik and Dave Bolland. He primarily made those moves to open up spots for his younger players.

"I think every time you have a great team you still need to add some new blood," says Scotty Bowman, the legendary Hall of Fame coach who serves as an adviser to his son.

Button says the secret of the Blackhawks' success has been their ability to find a supporting cast to go with their top players.

"You need both elements, and finding the balance both on the ice and in their salaries is key," Button says. "Stan has done an outstanding job in all facets."

Button is impressed that the Blackhawks make the tough decisions, such as moving this summer to trade Bolland. He was developed by the Blackhawks and helped them win two Stanley Cups, scoring the clinching goal last season.

"They felt they had to move him along, and they did," Button says. "They are decisive."

Bryan Bickell was expected to be one of the most-sought-after free agents this summer, but Chicago gave him $4 million a season to persuade him to stay.

The Blackhawks' hope for an extended run of success is strengthened by the fact that their top two stars, Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane, are 25 and 24, respectively. Defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson is 26, and Bickell is 27. Goaltender Corey Crawford and defenseman Brent Seabrook are 28. Duncan Keith is 30, Sharp is 31 and Marian Hossa is 34.

One of the emerging stars is Brandon Saad, 20, a rookie-of-the-year finalist and a candidate for the U.S. Olympic team. The Blackhawks believe strongly that developing their young talent is key to staying on top.

"There are a lot of different ways to win today," Stan Bowman says. "I don't think there is just one blueprint. We certainly have the way we believe in. I wouldn't proclaim all of the answers."

The team's identity centers on Toews and Kane, whose arrival in back-to-back drafts signaled the beginning of the Blackhawks' climb to the top.

"You have to have faith that your top players will get you through the tough times," Bowman says.

Bowman said during training camp that he expected Toews and Kane to be Blackhawks for life because he knew they liked the way the team did things.

"Once you find your core, you have to keep it, and we've done a really good job with that here," Kane says. "There were things set in place here before Johnny and I got here."

Sharp, Seabrook and Keith were on the roster before Toews and Kane arrived.

"We just seem to get better and better every year, and we are still a young group," Kane says. "What does that take to get better? I don't even think we know in here."

"We just like going out and competing." Joel Quenneville seems to be the perfect coach for the group. He walks the fine line between being a disciplinarian and having a friendly relationship with his players.

"I haven't played for every coach in the league, but I have to believe Joel is the best at managing an 82-game season and playoffs," Sharp says. "He's great at giving guys days off and knowing when guys are tired or need to be pushed. He has a great feeling for how our team is playing."

Sharp says Quenneville also knows how to keep the season fun for players. Sharp recalls that he dressed up as the coach for a Halloween party. He wore a white mustache and carried note cards.

"Actually, people thought I was Phil Jackson," Sharp says.
Nicholas J. Cotsonika

Parity. That has been the theme in the NHL. The standings have been packed tightly, and teams have jockeyed for position down to the last day of the regular season. The feeling has been that if you just get in the playoffs, you can win the Stanley Cup.

Still, even with the salary cap, this has been a stratified league with elite teams, middle-tier teams and bottom-feeders. No matter the system, some simply have better management, better coaching and better players. Though there have been upstarts and upsets, generally the cream has risen, and some have stayed at or near the top over time.

Chicago has a chance to become the first NHL team to repeat as Cup champs since Detroit in 1997 and ’98. (AP)

Yes, the Los Angeles Kings won the Cup as a No. 8 seed in 2012. The truth is, they underachieved in the regular season and were an outlier. Top-four seeds won the Cup every other year since 1996.

The Boston Bruins, Chicago Blackhawks, Detroit Red Wings and Pittsburgh Penguins all have made multiple Cup finals since 2008. The Kings returned to the conference finals last season with the Bruins, ‘Hawks and Pens – while the Wings went to overtime of Game 7 in the second round – and the ‘Hawks became the first NHL team to win the Cup twice in the cap era.

The stratification has been camouflaged in the regular season by the shootout and the point for an overtime loss – and by a playoff format that seeded teams one through eight in each conference. Almost every team had something on the line to the end – a playoff berth, home ice, something.

Now? We’ll see. The NHL has realigned, going from six divisions to four, giving playoff spots to the top three-to-five teams in each division. At first glance, a hard league has gotten harder – especially in the East, where 16 teams will fight for eight spots, not 14 as in the West, and one will be the Wings, who are moving from the West with their 22-season playoff streak.

“We haven’t gone through a season with this alignment,” said Ottawa Senators center Jason Spezza. “But to the eye, I think it’s going to be harder to make the playoffs, for sure.”

It will be harder to make the playoffs for some teams. But it might be easier for others, too, and it will be interesting to see how this plays out over 82 games. Even with the salary cap, shootout and loser point, will the top teams pull away and the bottom-feeders fall out more quickly? Will spots be cemented earlier? Will some get bored? Will others lose hope? Will it depend on the division?

In short, will there be more separation in the regular season? With the playoff races in each conference split in half, will the true Cup contenders stand out more than they did before?

The puck drops Tuesday night. The top 10:

1. CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

No one has repeated since the 1997-98 Red Wings, but there is no reason to think the Blackhaws aren’t capable of it. They barely made the playoffs in 2011 after winning the Cup in 2010, but GM Stan Bowman did not have to blow up the roster because of the cap this time. The core is back. Most of the supporting cast is back.

With the Wings in the East, the Hawks have only one true foil in the division, the St. Louis Blues. They have to stay sharp, stay healthy and stay the course.

“I think it’s unfair to call 2011 a hangover,” said winger Patrick Sharp. “We had half the team gone to different places. We were dealing with things that season, not the Stanley Cup hangover, more building chemistry and finding an identity as a team. This season there’s really no excuses.”

2. PITTSBURGH PENGUINS

After a Cup final in 2008 and a Cup in 2009, the Penguins seemed on their way to a dynasty. But they haven’t been back to the final since. It has always been something – injuries, defensive breakdowns, goaltending meltdowns, even scoring woes. They scored two goals in the conference final last season. Two.

“Thinking back on it, you take it as a learning experience that you can never have too many of these chances,” said winger Chris Kunitz. “You never know how quick it goes or how quick it leaves you and if you can ever get back there. We definitely know that we failed and we need to improve upon that
with the group of guys we have coming back and the chemistry we have as a team."

The Pens should be one of the best teams in the league again. But can Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin stay healthy? Will Rob Scuderi help solidify the defense? Can Marc-Andre Fleury recapture his form in goal? We won’t know much until April at the earliest.

3. LOS ANGELES KINGS

These are essentially the same guys who won the Cup in 2012. The question is whether they can play like an elite team on a consistent basis throughout the regular season and into the playoffs. If so, Jeff Carter could win the Rocket Richard, Drew Doughty the Norris, Jonathan Quick the Vezina. They could win the Pacific and, yes, the Cup again.

Where is the weakness? It’s scoring sometimes, but it shouldn’t be. After Carter and Doughty, there is Anze Kopitar and Mike Richards and Dustin Brown. Slava Voynov has been developing into an offensive force from the back end. The bottom six is solid, the defense is deep and the goaltending is as good as it gets.

4. SAN JOSE SHARKS

Losing Raffi Torres to a torn ACL is a huge blow. If you ask the Sharks, they were the better team in the playoffs last season, but they lost to the Kings because Torres was suspended for a hit in Game 1 and Quick was spectacular.

The Sharks improved dramatically after the trade deadline last season when they added Torres’s speed and shipped out some slower players — Ryane Clowe, Michal Handzus and Douglas Murray. If Torres can return from his injury in time for the playoffs, it will be like adding him at the deadline twice in two seasons.

[NHL Awards Watch: Picking the major trophy winners]

This team might be hitting a sweet spot. Veterans Dan Boyle, Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau still have something left and should have plenty of motivation in the last years of their contracts, while Logan Couture and Joe Pavelski are rising to the fore. The defense is solid. Antti Niemi was a Vezina finalist last season.

"Hopefully we can continue to pick up where we left off last year," Couture said.

5. BOSTON BRUINS

The core remains from the team that won the Cup in 2011 and went back to the Cup final last season. But there have been significant changes to the supporting cast.

Out: Andrew Ference, Nathan Horton, Jaromir Jagr, Rich Peverley, Tyler Seguin. In: Loui Eriksson and Jarome Iginla, most notably. Eriksson is in his prime and should thrive in Boston with his two-way style. Iginla is fading, but he should be better than he was in Calgary and Pittsburgh, surrounded by better players, playing right wing, his natural position.

The Bruins have to integrate the new pieces and stay focused through the 82-game grind when all that matters is the playoffs. They are built on team play and emotion. When something is out of sync, when they aren’t engaged, they play below their ability. Perhaps the new division and a new rival will help.

"It’s going to be challenging, but at the same time, that’s what you want as a player and as a team," said center Patrice Bergeron. "You want challenges, and I think Detroit is going to be one of them."

6. ST. LOUIS BLUES

The Blues are a trendy Cup pick for the second straight season. They are a lot like L.A. — a deep, heavy, defensive team that is a pain to play against. They should have an excellent tandem in goal with Jaroslav Halak and Brian Elliott, if Halak stays healthy and Elliott plays up to his potential. They have a stacked blue line led by Alex Pietrangelo, a Norris candidate, and Jay Bouwmeester, who logs lots of minutes. They can roll four lines up front.

"We feel like we've got a great team and we're poised for a good run," said captain David Backes.

Yet this is a team that got swept by the Kings two years ago and lost four straight to them in the playoffs last year after winning the first two at home. Have they learned from that? Are they still missing something? They need someone to emerge as a go-to goal-scorer. Can Backes score 30 again?

Can Chris Stewart be a dominant power forward? Can Vladimir Tarasenko tear it up in his second NHL season?

7. OTTAWA SENATORS

The Senators weren't supposed to do anything last year. Their best players were hurt for long stretches — Spezza, Milan Michalek, Erik Karlsson, Craig Anderson. They made the playoffs, anyway, and beat the Montreal Canadiens in a crazy first-round series. Now we will see what they can do with health, experience and expectations.

Captain Daniel Alfredsson is gone. But the Sens added Bobby Ryan and Clarke MacArthur up front. The steady Marc Methot has proven to be an excellent partner for the skilled Karlsson, and Jared Cowen is coming into his own on the blue line. Anderson and Robin Lehner are outstanding in goal.

"It's easy to be one of those teams that nobody expects to do anything and do something, but when you're expected to win games, it's another thing," Spezza said. "I don't think we're surprising anybody now. We have to make sure we're ready to go. It's a hard step to go from just being a playoff team to trying to have a chance to win. Hopefully we can make that step."

8. DETROIT RED WINGS

The Wings had to win four straight to make the playoffs last year. But they made it for the 22nd straight season, and they took the eventual champions to overtime of Game 7 in the second round. They added Alfredsson and Stephen Weiss, and now they're headed to the East, a move that should invigorate them with easier travel and more Original Six matchups.

Some think the Wings will have to adjust. The Wings are built on skill; six of their seven division rivals were among the top 11 teams in fighting last season. But the Wings feel the rest of the new Atlantic Division will have to adjust to them, and a player from a former Western Conference rival said: "They'll win that division – easily."

Maybe. The youngsters will have to keep growing the way they did last season and in the playoffs – guys like Danny DeKeyser, Brendan Smith and Joakim Andersson.

9. VANCOUVER CANUCKS

There will be no bigger soap opera in the NHL — coach John Tortorella trying to get the Sedin twins to block shots while dealing with the Vancouver media, goaltender Roberto Luongo taking back his starting job because the Canucks couldn't trade him and had to ship out Cory Schneider instead. It could be a disaster. It could also be a heck of a success story if somehow everything clicks. This team came within a win of the Cup in 2011.

"We still have the same core," said center Ryan Kesler. "That encourages me. People are doubting us. That encourages me. That motivates us. We're still an elite team. People think the window's closed. Who knows? Just something to talk about, I guess."

Kesler might be the player to watch. If any Canuck was made for Torts, it's Kesler, an intense, no-nonsense player. He was one of the best two-way forwards in the game when healthy and at his peak, and he's finally healthy again.

"He wants hard work, and he wants it every night," Kesler said. "He's not satisfied, and he wants more of you every night. I'm kind of wired that way."

10. NEW YORK RANGERS

While Tortorella goes from New York to Vancouver, Alain Vigneault goes from Vancouver to New York. He should be just what the Rangers need — a coach with a less suffocating style, on and off the ice. Tortorella seemed to wear everyone out. The Rangers' training camp slogan was "clean slate ... grab it."

"The management thought we needed a fresh voice, something that would spark us a little bit," said defenseman Marc Staal. "I think we got a little stagnant. That happens sometimes. I think we have a lot of skill, I think to be able to open up a little bit is going to get our juices flowing and back at it and get those guys the puck in scoring areas. I think we're anxious to get into the new system."

It will help that Staal is back from an eye injury. It would help if Brad Richards can get back to form. Henrik Lundqvist might be the best goaltender in the game, but to win the Cup, the Rangers need to give him more of a margin for error.

"We did have a great run with Torts, some fun years," Lundqvist said. "It was interesting to have a coach that challenged you the way he did, so I'm really
thankful for that. In the end, we didn't manage to get where we wanted to. We want to win. That's the ultimate goal now. I guess you can see it a fresh start.”

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