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737531 Toronto Maple Leafs’ Frazer McLaren trades blows with Philadelphia Flyers’ Jay Rosehill during second period N
ANAHEIM – Having had to recover from a left knee injury before last season’s playoffs, Cam Fowler could understandably experience fear the moment he took an awkward spill onto the surface at Anaheim Ice.

“When you feel something that’s uncomfortable, you obviously get a little frightened,” Fowler said. “You hope it’s not too bad. You don’t know until you get evaluated but as a player, it’s not a great feeling especially when it happens in practice.

“Whenever you have something like that, it’s a tough thing to deal with.”

It doesn’t look too bad for Fowler. The Ducks’ top defenseman suffered an apparent undisclosed injury to his left leg Thursday, one that looked particularly bad when he was unable to put any weight on it after catching an edge during a hard skating drill.

Fowler missed Saturday’s exhibition finale against San Jose. His status for Thursday’s season opener in Pittsburgh is very much in doubt but he is feeling much better about the four-game trip the Ducks start out on.

“Over the next couple of days after the initial point it happened, I started to feel OK and know that it wasn’t going to be something that was going to keep me out long term,” Fowler said. “That helped me mentally prepare for everything.”

Fowler went through a skating session Monday under the guidance of Ducks assistant coach Scott Niedermayer. He lost an edge during one drill and slid spread eagle on the ice but smiled and got right up for more work.

The Ducks leave for Pittsburgh on Tuesday and Fowler will be with them. But Fowler, who said he felt minimal pain Monday, voiced caution over giving a return date.

“I mean, it’s a day-by-day thing,” Fowler said. “Just keep improving every day, which is all that we’re worried about right now. When that times comes, we’ll make a decision. It’s too early to really put a timeline on it.”

Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau was encouraged, saying Fowler “skated pretty well today.” There are two planned practices before Thursday’s opener but if Fowler can’t go, the Ducks will figure to employ the same defense rotation they used Saturday.

Usual partners Hampus Lindholm and Francois Beauchemin would remain with Clayton Stoner playing alongside Ben Lovejoy and Bryan Allen drawing in with Sami Vatanen.

The Ducks have been dealing with injuries throughout training camp. Dany Heatley has yet to resume skating after straining his groin muscle. Kyle Palmieri appears to have suffered a setback as he comes back from a high ankle sprain that kept him out of the preseason.

Boudreau said Heatley is expected to go on the trip but wasn’t as definitive on Palmieri.

“He’s just not ready,” Boudreau said of Palmieri. “I don’t know if he had a setback or ... he’s just not ready. Again, you just don’t want to push that.”

The Ducks may have to put Palmieri on injured reserve, which could free up an extra opening-night roster spot. They trimmed their roster to 26 on Monday by sending goalie Jason LaBarbera to Norfolk (Va.) of the AHL after the veteran cleared waivers.

If Heatley also isn’t ready to go, it means the Ducks might carry two forwards who might have been options to send to Norfolk. Rickard Rakell and William Karlsson remain as they’re battling for the third-line center spot, with Rakell seemingly having a slight advantage.

The Ducks have yet to name their alternate captains but strong favorites would be Beauchemin and Corey Perry. Both have had the “A” on their sweaters in their last two exhibition games.

Boudreau said that the matter has been discussed among the coaching staff and management, with the new alternates to be announced either Wednesday or Thursday.
Justin Hodgman
Position: Center.
Age: 26.

Last season
Hodgman spent last season in the Kontinental Hockey League in Russia, splitting time among three teams and amassing 11 goals and 26 points through 49 games. After playing in Europe since 2011, Hodgman wanted to try his luck again at the NHL and signed a one-year, two-way deal with the Coyotes July 1.

2014-15 outlook
Hodgman made the initial 23-man roster out of training camp, capitalizing on the team's need for depth up the middle. He was a standout at camp from the beginning and scored four times in preseason games. It isn't a given that Hodgman will stick with the Coyotes for the entire season, but he's shown flashes of offensive flair so far and could be especially reliable in his own end and at faceoffs.

Camp focus
Puck control and limiting turnovers has been a priority for Hodgman through the preseason. Being a smart, responsible player is part of his style, so showcasing that to the coaching staff has been important.

"This is, obviously, my ultimate goal, and I'm happy to be part of the 23 for now," he said.

Quick hits
-Most memorable goal: Triple-overtime goal with Fort Wayne to win the International Hockey League championship in 2009. "That was pretty cool."
-Hockey idol: Jarome Iginla.
-Celebration move: "I had one in Russia, but it's definitely not going to fly over here. It was like on the knees, kissing the jersey. It was pure European, and the fans loved it over there. But I definitely wouldn't bring that this way."
-Slapshot or Miracle: Miracle.
-Best hockey hair: Antoine Vermette.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 10.07.2014
Brandon McMillan
Position: Left wing.
Age: 24.

Last season
McMillan was a call-up from the American Hockey League in February and established a regular role with the Coyotes. He played in 22 games, scoring twice and adding four assists. During the summer, he signed a one-year, two-way contract to remain with the team.

2014-15 outlook
McMillan might not remain with the Coyotes for the entire season, but he certainly proved in training camp that he wants to. He's found chemistry on a line with center Joe Vitale and winger B.J. Crombeen, and that unit could provide the Coyotes with energy while also being responsible defensively. Look for McMillan to be on the penalty kill but also pay attention to his speed. That could help the Coyotes create scoring chances.

Camp focus
McMillan battled a groin injury early in camp but is back to normal now. Developing more chemistry with Vitale and Crombeen would certainly motivate coach Dave Tippett to keep the trio united to started the season.

"I figured out my role and how I have to play," McMillan said.

Quick hits
- Most memorable goal: First career playoff goal. "I was just coming down the middle of the ice with some speed, got a pass and beat the defenseman and came in on goal quick. Shot five-hole. It was one of my nicer ones."
- Hockey idol: Joe Sakic and Steve Yzerman.
- Celebration move: Nothing. "I just kind of go with it and most of the time, it's so exciting scoring goals. Do whatever you feel."
- Slapshot or Miracle: Slapshot.
- Best hockey hair: "I'd have to go myself with the hockey mullet I've got going on right now."

Arizona Republic LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Coyotes have been the launching pad for more than a few players seeking a rebirth in their careers, with goalie Mike Smith perhaps being the poster boy. He persevered from a minor-league demotion to be the team's highest-paid player.

Another revival could take place this season, although it's unlikely to be as noticeable. And considering backup Devan Dubnyk is attempting to rebound from a season that had the opposite trajectory of Smith's journey, working without the spotlight might actually be best.

"You can tell he's having fun with it," goalie coach Sean Burke said. "That's what he needed to do — come into a situation where he doesn't have the pressure of the Canadian media. He's not trying to carry a team for 60 games. He can just get his game back, and I've liked what I've seen."

Despite a disappointing performance last season (11-19-3 with an .891 save percentage and a 3.43 goals-against average) that led to Dubnyk being traded twice — from his post as a No. 1 in Edmonton to, ultimately, a spot in the minors with the Canadiens' farm team — he arrived at Coyotes training camp with his confidence rebuilt.

All it took for that to happen was the Coyotes' willingness to take a chance on him by signing him to a one-year deal July 1.

"It feels comfortable to just be back in a place where I feel they're comfortable with me," Dubnyk said. "I don't have to think twice about what happened last year. It's a unique situation to be able to come in that way after having a season like last year, so I'm grateful for that."

Practice and preseason games have only helped strengthen this partnership. Dubnyk recognized that he was playing too aggressively last season with the Oilers, and so he and Burke have worked on correcting his approach.

Positioning is key, but Burke doesn't want Dubnyk to get so comfortable in his butterfly that he hopes the puck just hits his 6-foot-6 frame. Burke believes combining Dubnyk's size with his athleticism will enable him to be more effective with his movements.

"I want him to play a very aggressive game within the confines of being controlled and composed," Burke said. "Sometimes it's a little bit of a misconception that aggression means you have to be out challenging. You can be very aggressive and play the whole night in the blue."

Adjusting to a backup role after being a starter isn't necessarily an easy transition, but pressure certainly becomes less of a factor. Removing that from his routine could be another tweak that helps Dubnyk rediscover his game and boost the Coyotes when Smith needs a night off.

"Practice becomes my game, and I just need to be real sharp in practice," Dubnyk said.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 10.07.2014
Torey Krug: Bruins defense ready to step up

By Anthony Gulizia

It’s not as if the Bruins have never been challenged to overcome any adversity along the blue line before.

Look no further than last season, when defensive stalwart Dennis Seidenberg injured his ACL and MCL in December and had season-ending surgery. Adam McQuaid dealt with lower body injuries that limited him to 30 games.

Seidenberg and McQuaid are healthy, but now the Bruins will open the season Wednesday without defenseman Johnny Boychuk after he was traded to the Islanders.

Torey Krug said on Monday that the defense is ready to step up in the wake of Boychuk’s departure, and that it was difficult to see the six-year Bruin leave town.

“Everything that happened with Johnny, it was tough to see,” Krug said in a conference call Monday. “He was such a big part of the locker room, not only on the ice, but a big guy socially. Everyone got along with him and he made everyone feel comfortable in the locker room.

“It’s very important that guys don’t try to do too much, try and take on additional roles they probably shouldn’t. Some guys here will have to play a little bit more now and I think everyone takes that challenge and runs with it. I think going through what we did last year with Seids going down and at different points of the season, other guys going down, I think using that experience we gained at that time will definitely help us out.”

It has been a trying preseason for Krug, who did not join the Bruins until last Monday after a breakout year in 2013.

Krug and forward Reilly Smith were not signed before camp started and did not return until they received matching deals of one-year, $1.4 million.

Despite his late start, Krug said he feels ready both physically and mentally for the season opener.

“I’m ready to go,” Krug said. “The portion of camp I missed was tough. Mentally, it was draining. I was stressed quite a bit, but that’s just part of it. I learned a few lessons going through that whole process and I’m here and ready to play hockey.

“I thought it was just about getting my timing back. For me, I feel like I’m up to speed after the last two games. I played decent minutes. I’m very confident. I feel like I’ve said that a lot, but I got rid of that rust for sure these first two skates.”

Boston Globe LOADED: 10.07.2014
For the Bruins, it was only 16 days from the first day of training camp to the final preseason game Saturday. It seemed so much longer.

The lead-up to the start of the 2014-15 season against the Philadelphia Flyers tomorrow night at the Garden has been unlike any other in recent memory for an organization that treasures stability and tranquility.

"It has been a strange year," said B’s president Cam Neely during camp. "It was something we haven't really had to deal with, not like this. The last few years, our roster has been pretty much set in August. So, yeah, it's been unusual in that regard."

Even now, the process of figuring out how all the pieces of the B’s puzzle fit together is not finished.

The Bruins consider a strong start imperative.

"It’s important, especially this year," said center Patrice Bergeron in pool quotes made available yesterday. "I think we haven’t really had a start this busy for a few years, so it’s definitely something where we have to get off to a good start.

"We have to establish a connection with all the new players and everyone is going to have to make sure we’re dialed in and that we definitely need to carry on what we’ve accomplished already. We need to keep getting better, game after game and go from there."

The Bruins are a consensus preseason pick as the top team in the Eastern Conference — generally ranked behind only the defending Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles Kings and the Chicago Blackhawks overall. Yet the B’s clearly have taken a step back, given the loss of free agent first-line right winger Jarome Iginla and top-four defenseman Johnny Boychuk.

"Jarome Iginla certainly brought some offense to our game and a strong element on the right side of that line," said Neely. "He was a physical player who complemented (Milan) Lucic and (David) Krejci very well.

"Will we lose some offense? Possibly. But as you’ve seen for years, we always try to build a balanced attack. Our goals-for as a team is usually very good. Last year, I think we were No. 3 (with 261 goals; behind only Chicago’s 267 and Anaheim’s 266)."

Scoring balance is a good thing for an NHL team. But it’s also good to have a true sniper or two. The Bruins have lost talented scorers Phil Kessel, Tyler Seguin and Iginla in the past several years, and enter this year with little margin for error offensively. Goal-scoring by committee can work — but only if key forwards like Lucic, Krejci, Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and Loui Eriksson deliver consistent, productive years.

If those guys hit dry spells, this team could be battling nightly to win close and low-scoring games.

"You hope a guy like Marsh (Marchand) has a big year,” said Neely. "He looks really good, much better than last year at this time. You hope he’s going to get off to a really strong start, which he didn’t do last year.

"With Loui, it took him a while last year to get adjusted, and then he had the concussions. Hopefully he’s more comfortable in this environment now and his offense will pick up."

Few experts would predict the Bruins will be able to match last season’s regular-season record (54-19-9) and Presidents’ Trophy.

"Expectations of being the Presidents’ Trophy winner again?” said Neely. "Well, I don’t know about that. That’s a hard act to follow. But we’re going to be a competitive team. There is a lot of hockey to be played. Who knows what's going to happen along the way?"

With recently signed free agents Torey Krug and Reilly Smith missing most of camp — and the departures of Iginla, Shawn Thornton, Chad Johnson and Boychuk, there have been plenty of opportunities for a slew of young players to get very good looks.

“I would say that if I’m a young guy in this organization, it was a great opportunity," said Neely. "There were openings. There were guys who have been developing down in Providence who deserved the opportunities."

In the end, though, the Bruins’ ability to contend for the Cup will be based on team defense and stingy system play. This is a team that knows how to win.

“I just think we’ve got so many of the same core guys who’ve played together for a long time," said Neely. "They know each other, they know what to expect from the coaching staff and defensively we’re going to be as solid as we always are."

B’s notes

The team spent the past two days in Vermont on its annual team-building trip. The team passed along quotes from Bergeron and Krug.

"It was an awesome weekend," said Krug. "I think anytime you go away with your teammates, it’s always fun, first and foremost and we were up at the Vermont Police Academy, hanging out, having a good time. We went through a bunch of different educational exercises and training. We had a lot of fun with it. It was a great weekend. . . .

"Now everyone’s just eager to get this thing going. I think we have a very excited, hungry group and we’re just looking forward to (tomorrow).”

Boston Herald LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Bruins have made the Green Mountain State of Vermont their destination for team-building weekends over the last few years, and that’s where they were once again this fall after hopping on a bus Saturday night following the exhibition finale vs. Detroit.

It’s always a little different each year, and this time around the Bruins helped build team morale and chemistry at the Vermont State Police Academy.

“It was an awesome weekend. I think anytime you go away with your teammates, it’s always fun, first and foremost,” said Torey Krug. “We were up at the Vermont Police Academy, hanging out having a good time - we went through a bunch of different educational exercises and training. We had a lot of fun with it, and it was a great weekend.”

With the influx of new faces over the last couple of seasons for the Black and Gold, the team-building aspect takes on an entirely different level of importance. Familiar faces like Andrew Ference, Nathan Horton, Shawn Thornton and Johnny Boychuk have exited in the last couple of years, and so a new wave of players need exercises like this to understand what the Bruins are all about.

“Every year it’s important, and this year we had a few more guys — you know, new guys that might be part of the team. It definitely was even more important this year to do it,” said Patrice Bergeron. “I think it’s always nice to kind of get to leave here as a team, and be somewhere where you’re basically here for 48 hours.

“You can establish some chemistry by doing these activities and working on leadership and trusting each other. It always helps.”

It’s been a staple of the Black and Gold program shortly after both Peter Chiarelli and Claude Julien arrived, and the Bruins have made the playoffs for seven years and running. So while some like LA Kings coach Darryl Sutter might scoff at the notion of team-building trips at the start of the season, the Bruins seem to be quite happy to continue getting away for a few days before the regular season grind begins.

Joe Haggerty serves as Comcast SportsNet’s NHL Insider. Read more from Joe here, or follow him on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
Slow starts for Lucic and Seidenberg?

Much of the focus over the last couple days has been on the player that will no longer be with the Bruins - Johnny Boychuk.

But like it or not, he's gone. It's time to focus on the players who are still here.

Guys like Milan Lucic and Dennis Seidenberg. But speaking of those two, just how healthy will they be to start the year?

Both have had limited offseasons due to injury, but are back skating and set to go to start the season. They'll be expected to carry some of the load with Jarome Iginla and Boychuk now gone.

Joe Haggerty and Kevin Walsh discuss this and more on the Great American Hockey Show.

Joe Haggerty and Mike Giardi bring you The Great American Hockey Show throughout the year.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Haggerty's Morning Skate: Monday, October 6

*Good SI piece on the analytics stats people getting scooped up by NHL teams, and why it's happening.

*Ryan Miller is still learning to listen to all of the voices in the dressing room of the Vancouver Canucks.

*Bruce Garrioch has the Ottawa Senators prospects prepared to learn their fate as the NHL rosters get finalized.

*Bob McKenzie explains the origin of the name behind the Corsi stat, and it's actually pretty funny.

*Curtis Glencross has strengthened his core, and is hoping to avoid some of the injury problems that plagued him last year.

*The Philadelphia Flyers invaded Cape Cod for their team-bonding exercises this past weekend.

*Dan Shaughnessy says that the winter will belong to the Boston Bruins rather than the New England Patriots despite last night's feel-good win.

*For something completely different: an excerpt from Bob Ryan's book about Larry Bird that I will absolutely be reading.

Joe Haggerty serves as Comcast SportsNet's NHL Insider.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Caron, Warsofsky and Cunningham clear waivers

The Bruins were looking for more flexibility with their roster over the weekend, and placed Craig Cunningham, Jordan Caron and David Warsofsky on waivers so they could potentially send them to Providence to start the season. All three cleared waivers at noontime on Sunday per a league source, and Warsofsky reported to camp with the P-Bruins over the weekend.

Cunningham and Caron both went with the rest of the Bruins to team-bonding exercises in Vermont this weekend, and are still very much in the running for final roster spots on the NHL club when the lists are due at 3 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon. Caron had a fairly strong training camp performance including a couple of assists in a win over the Washington Capitals, and Cunningham is a gritty, younger fourth line center option for the Bruins should injured Gregory Campbell ultimately be unable to start the season.

All of this means that the offensively-challenged Caron probably hasn't seen his last day with the Bruins despite being placed on waivers. Peter Chiarelli said the final roster is most definitely up in the air to start the season, and it could be in flux for the first few weeks of the season.

"[I want to] just see how the team performs to start the season," Chiarelli said. "We have a couple of combinations and permutations that we can start our roster at. So you may see a couple of recalls, and the fact that we put Cunningham and Jordan on waivers doesn't mean that they're cut"

"It means it gives us flexibility to move them up and down. So [we're] just kind of piecing the roster together, getting the roster done on Monday and preparing for Wednesday."

It wasn't surprising that Caron and Cunningham cleared waivers, but it's mildly surprising a young, inexpensive puck-moving defenseman like Warsofsky passed through unclaimed. The 24-year-old had six goals and 32 points along with a plus-8 for the P-Bruins last season, and scored his first NHL goal for Boston while serving as an injury replacement in the middle of the season.

Joe Haggerty serves as Comcast SportsNet's NHL Insider.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Reinhart will start with Sabres

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

Sam Reinhart has cleared the first hurdle. When the puck drops Thursday to start the Sabres’ season, he’ll be wearing a Buffalo uniform. That was always his goal, but it wasn’t the main one.

“I came with the mentality I’m going to soak everything in,” Reinhart said Monday. “I feel I’ve learned more than I can ever imagine from all the veteran guys here, and I’m going to keep trying to learn every day from them.”

Reinhart’s base of knowledge has increased through every step. He learned a few things during development camp, rookie camp and training camp. The center picked up plenty of tips during five preseason games. He’ll certainly get an education when Columbus visits First Niagara Center to start the 2014-15 campaign.

“I’ve heard a lot about how exciting it is to play an NHL regular-season game and the atmosphere,” Reinhart said. “I’m definitely looking forward to that possibility.”

He spoke prior to coach Ted Nolan making Reinhart’s appearance official, but the 18-year-old had a good idea he was staying when he showed up for practice. The Sabres skated without Mikhail Grigorenko and Zac Dalpe, who were assigned to Rochester. That left the team with 13 forwards, an ideal number with final rosters due this afternoon. The Sabres have 24 healthy players, one more than the limit.

“As the group gets down to these numbers, it definitely gets exciting,” Reinhart said.

Though he was expected to make the team after being selected second overall in the NHL Draft, Reinhart’s spot on the roster wasn’t a given. Grigorenko outplayed him, but that wasn’t enough to earn the center an opening-night spot for the third straight season.

Grigorenko will skate for the Amerks after starting in Buffalo and getting sent back to his junior team the previous two years.

“I’m happy about my camp, and I thought I did everything I could,” said Grigorenko, who had a goal and assist in five exhibitions. “I worked hard. You can’t control those things. I did everything I could. I have no regrets with myself and the way I played.

“I personally think I probably earned at least the start of the season here and one more chance. They thought I should go to the AHL.”

Nolan said the 20-year-old’s improvement made the decision difficult.

“The one thing we talked about earlier was hopefully these guys make it tough on us,” Nolan said. “That was certainly a tough one. Grigorenko made head and heels way above where he was, as far as I was concerned, last year to where he was this summer. He should be a little bit disappointed.

“He almost convinced us to do something to keep him. He’s real, real close. He’s knocking on the door. Right now he just needs a little more seasoning.”

Grigorenko was disappointed, but he says he won’t let it linger because he wants to be back.

“It depends how I play down in Roch,” Grigorenko told The Buffalo News. “I’ll just go there and work as hard as I worked here. I will try to be the best player, and I want to be the first guy to be up.

“Score goals, get points and that’s it, work hard. I guess if I’m the first guy on the scoresheet, I’ll be the first guy to be up.”

Grigorenko got the demotion news from General Manager Tim Murray.

“They told me I worked hard and they liked what they saw, but they think it’s going to be good for me to go there,” Grigorenko said. “I thought I played well. For me the most important thing is I competed, I skated, I was hitting. I was really involved in the game. It was really good for me.”
Sabres’ Nolan will reveal captain, assistants today

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

The Sabres’ captaincy has resembled a roulette wheel during recent years. It seemed someone new was wearing the “C” with every twirl around the ice.

Ted Nolan plans to change that. Buffalo’s coach will name one captain and two alternates for the season, with the announcement likely coming today.

“You’ve got to make decisions,” Nolan said Monday. “You say, ‘Hey, this is our leadership,’ and you go ahead with it.”

The favorites to earn letters are Brian Gionta, Josh Gorges, Zemgus Girgensons, Matt Moulson, Drew Stafford and Tyler Myers.

“There’s a lot of leaders on this team,” Nolan said. “If you passed around A’s, you could probably pass around six or seven of them. If you want to pass around captains, you can probably pass around three or four of them.

“Unfortunately, you can’t do that. We’ll have three guys in that position, and then we’ll have a leadership group on top of it.”

... The Sabres have 24 healthy skaters and need to be at 23 by the NHL’s roster deadline this afternoon. It’s likely one defenseman will be cut. Buffalo, which demoted forwards Mikhail Grigorenko and Zac Dalpe on Monday, still has nine blue-liners: Myers, Gorges, Andrej Meszaros, Andre Benoit, Mike Weber, Rasmus Ristolainen, Tyson Strachan, Nikita Zadorov and Jake McCabe, who skipped Monday’s workout for a “maintenance day.”

“I did my best and I’m still here,” Zadorov said. “Maybe I’m going to be here.” Like center Sam Reinhart, the Sabres can dress junior-eligible Zadorov for nine games without his contract kicking in.

“They didn’t tell me yet,” said the 19-year-old, who was picked in the first round of last year’s draft. “Hopefully, good things will happen.”

... The Sabres open the regular season Thursday when Columbus visits First Niagara Center. The Blue Jackets will have their leading scorer back. Center Ryan Johansen, who had 33 goals and 30 assists last season, ended his contentious holdout Monday by agreeing to a three-year, $12 million contract.

“Obviously, I’m very pleased to get this over with,” General Manager Jarmo Kekalainen told reporters in Ohio. “I talked to Joey briefly already and just basically told him, “Get your butt over here and let’s get to work.”

The sides were millions apart as recently as last week, with team President John Davidson referring to agent Kurt Overhardt’s demands as “extortion.” They settled for $3 million the next two seasons and $6 million in 2016-17.

“We’re not going to be in a rush to get him into the lineup if he’s not ready for it, but we’ll have to see,” coach Todd Richards told reporters.

“There’s always going to be that shot of adrenaline, that excitement to play. He’ll have that, but it’s how well-conditioned he is when he settles down.”

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.07.2014
Grigorenko headed to the Amerks, per agent's tweet

Kevin Oklobzija's Hockey O-zone

The reassignments by the Buffalo Sabres to the Rochester Americans have begun, at least according to Mikhail Grigorenko's agent.

Jay Grossman (who also represents goalie Andrey Makarov) tweeted that Grigorenko is being sent to the Amerks.

After bouncing between major junior and the Sabres the past two years -- when he was too good for the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League but not good enough for the NHL -- the third-year centerman is finally eligible to play in the American Hockey League.

That's a good thing for him. While he performed well in training camp with the Sabres, he can use a good two, three or four months with the Amerks. He'll get ample ice time, he'll be used in all situations, he'll face expectations to be a scorer, and he'll have a chance to truly build confidence, so he knows he's ready to contribute in the NHL.

The kid has talent and size. He was selected with the 12th overall pick of the 2012 draft.

He has been a leader and star in junior. Now he needs to thrust himself into the same role as a pro. He needs to know what it's like to face hounding, smart checkers night after night, and to show he won't just survive but also succeed and thrive.

This is a process. Proper development takes time for most players.

Grigorenko produced four assists in nine games with the Amerks at the close of the 2013-14 regular season, when he was eased into duty and not used as a featured element in the lineup. He didn't have a point in the five playoff games against the Chicago Wolves.

In 18 games with the Sabres last season, he had 2-1-3. He also scored 15-24-39 in 23 games with the Quebec Remparts of the QMJHL.

Over the course of the season, including the World Junior Championships with Russia, Grigorenko played for five head coaches: two with the Sabres and one in junior, in the WJC and in Rochester.

Other reassignments will likely be announced today by the Sabres.

NHL teams must reach the roster limit of 23 by 5 p.m. Tuesday. That means waiver-eligible players must be waived by noon today in order to clear by noon Tuesday. Of course, a team can still waive a player later in the week, as long as they reach the roster limit of 23 before Tuesday's deadline (teams can carry only 21 or 22 players, if they so desire).

From tweets by the contingent of reporters at Sabres practice this morning, veteran winger Zac Dalpe and rookie defenseman Jake McCabe also aren't in practice. That's a pretty good sign that they are Rochester-bound.

Dalpe is an elite AHLer who can score and McCabe will provide mobility and a little offensive flair on the blue line.

UPDATE (2:54 p.m.): Actually, only Dalpe is Rochester-bound, for now.

Dalpe went on waivers and, if he clears at noon on Tuesday, will join the Amerks. McCabe was given what Sabres coach Ted Nolan termed a "maintenance" day, so he didn't practice due to an unspecified injury.

Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 10.07.2014
Johnson: Flames get no help from NHL schedule-maker to start season

By GEORGE JOHNSON, Calgary Herald
October 6, 2014 11:38 PM

What malevolent being, what manner of depraved, twisted sadist, came up with this opening couple of weeks?

The Marquis de Sade?

"Being on the road," acknowledged Calgary Flames' skipper Mark Giordano, "is always tough. But especially, I think., at the very start of the year, going into other buildings for home openers or the first couple of starts for teams. They're going to be excited. The fans will be pumped.

"So, no doubt, these going to be difficult games but in saying that, we also come back for a good home stretch afterwards. So if we can come back holding our own, on the good side of .500, we'll have put ourselves in a good spot."

That, holding their own, will take some doing. And the good side of .500? In itself would be a statement of sorts.

On a day coach Bob (The Rebuilder) Hartley announced as the unofficial kickoff to the 2014-2015 regular-season campaign, 48 hours prior to actual puck-drop, attention shifted to the torture test, the grisly gauntlet, that awaits them starting on Friday three hours north of here.

For a 27th-place group endeavouring to improve its lot in life, getting off to a respectable launch, being able to feel good about themselves, mounting a strong early foundation to build upon, would seem imperative to long-term well-being.

So beyond the stout-hearted assurances of rising manfully to challenges, the buddy-buddy talk of knitting together as a group on their travels, lies the stark reality of what awaits them.

One at home, followed by a half-dozen on the road.

Ewwwww . . .

A sputtering start, a rocky first few outings, and they could, confidence shaken, slip below the surface of the water and sink without trace. That's certainly the perception from the outside, anyway.

"You'd always prefer to play at home," concedes old hand Matt Stajan. "A homestand's always more enjoyable, a lot more comfortable, for everybody.

"But at the end of the day, you play 41 home, 41 away. The schedule is what it is. We can't change it. It's one home game and then we go. We don't make excuses. We'll make up those six road games some other time in the season."

Wednesday's season opener against the Vancouver Canucks in the comfy-cosy confines of the Scotiabank Saddledome is followed, in order, by a visit to Edmonton. Then off to St. Louis. Nashville and, shudder!, Chicago back-to-back. They finish up at the Jackets and Jets.

Well, at least the heathens didn't stuff a three-stop California swing in there as a coup de grace. Thank providence for small mercies.

Still, it shapes up as a Slaughterhouse Six.

Outside of the 16-22-3 Oil, each and every team awaiting the Flames over the length of the trip played above break-even on home ice last season. In fact, they finished a collective 115-63-28.

Joe Colborne swears on a stack of Gideons that he didn't go to bed weeping silently into his pillow the day the schedule was released.

Believe they're licked before they've settled in, and they most certainly will be.

"Sometimes, it can almost be a blessing," he argues. "Early in the year you get a road trip like this and it forces the new guys to bond.

"We had such a close-knit group on the road last year — which is, in my mind, we had such a strong second half. Doing stuff together just because you don't want to be locked in the hotel room all the time. That can kinda help bring a team together. Like, Hills (Jonas Hiller) is a pretty quiet guy, but you go for dinner with him a couple times and he's already coming out of that shell a little bit with the guys.

"I mean, we went into Chicago last year and played one of our best games, came out with a win. I LOVE Chicago. There won't be any problem with us coming out and being tired, not after you hear that national anthem.

"That's the attitude I'm taking. Honestly, I'd rather have the road trip early in the season.

"I'm pumped for it."

Boss Hartley, too, was busy accentuating the positive when the subject of the upcoming odyssey was introduced into conversation (then again, Hartley always says he's the most upbeat guy in any room you care to enter).

"We feel," he said, managing to keep a straight face, "it's a good setup for us. A good test. A big test. We have, what, three or four new veterans? A couple of kids.

"It's gonna be good. If you'd asked me would I rather start six at home or six on the road, I'll take the six on the road right now.

"I think we're well conditioned. It's gonna give us a pretty good gauge of where we're at as a group."

That it will.

George Johnson is the Herald's sports columnist. E-mail him at gjohnson@calgaryherald.comOn Twitter/GeorgejohnsonCH

The goalies themselves don’t know.
Nur do reporters. Nor do fans. Nor do the Vancouver Canucks for that matter.

Soon, though, everyone will learn the identity of the Calgary Flames’ starting netminder for Wednesday’s season opener at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

“I think it’s a great thing,” says Jordan Sigalet, goalie coach of the Flames. “You go into the season and you don’t know who you want to start yet. That’s never a bad thing when both guys are pushing. You can see that push in both of them.

“All guys want the net. It’s going to make each of them better.”

Which the National Hockey League’s recently completed pre-season showed:
* Karri Ramo — 1.50 GAA, .939 save percentage
* Jonas Hiller — 1.51 GAA, .931 save percentage (Last season, the six-foot-two goalies posted identical .911 save percentages.) But if Ramo had been troubled by the lack of a starting-goalie declaration, he was hardly showing it.

Following Monday morning’s session at the Stampede Corral, Ramo calmly peeled off gear and happily answered questions. As usual.

“I don’t really mind,” says Ramo, shrugging. “I don’t care when I know.”

While a terrific amount of hype is often dedicated to a team’s netminding rotation — especially early in the winter — it can be overblown.

“Obviously, it’s Game 1 — but it’s just Game 1,” says Ramo. “It’s going to be like that the whole year. It’s going to be the same thing — you don’t know well ahead what’s going to happen, who’s going to play. At least the way I see it, nothing has changed since Day 1.

“Every day you have to be at your best. Every game you have to be at your best.”

And he would know.

A year ago, Ramo had been the victor in the three-headed goalie showcase. He got the first-string nod. Joey MacDonald would back him up. And Reto Berra headed to Abbotsford of the American Hockey League. But after falling 5-4 in a shootout to the Washington Capitals in the season opener, Ramo got stapled to the bench for five straight dates.

So much for that.

“It was — and is — a competition for the full year,” he says now.

Both gents are keen to make the most of it.

Hiller, 32, needs to show that the rocky finish to the 2013-14 season was not an indication of declining skills.

“I’m sure there’s a lot for him to prove to himself,” says Ramo. “I don’t think Jonas really, really cares what other people think. It’s much more for him. He knows he’s a good goalie.

“We’re both eager to play and prove people wrong.”

And Ramo? He wants everyone to know that his splendid finish was no fluke.

After sitting out 15 games with a knee injury, he went on an impressive 6-3-0 run, including a 1-0 decision at New Jersey. (Jaromir Jagr, in the other dressing room, claimed it was the finest single-game display he’d ever seen.) Lots of positives to draw on.

“But, same as the bad things, you can’t carry them on for too long,” says Ramo, who wound up with a 16-15-4 record. “Things are never going to go the same way. Everything’s going to be new again. You have to fight again.

“Positive things in the past, I remember them. Maybe in the darkest moments you can go back . . . and watch a tape. Otherwise, it’s not like I wake up and I’m (thinking about) what happened.”

Besides, coach Bob Hartley, as he has proven, bases his lineup decisions on last night — not last year.

“Yeah, that doesn’t bring me anything (now),” says Ramo, smiling. “Every game starts from zero. Everything starts from zero.

“It’s a new chance for us to succeed.”

Off ice, these Europeans are not so different, either.

“Very similar personalities,” Sigalet says. “Really laid-back guys. They have a calm demeanour to them — that helps when your teammates see that. Pretty even-kneed, level-headed guys.”

Hartley told reporters the other day that Hiller and Ramo have become fast friends.

“No, we are the biggest enemies,” counters Ramo, chuckling. “No, it’s good. I’ve always had a good relationship with other goalies. Jonas is no different. If we are fighting . . . it’s not good.”

In the dressing room, they’re near neighbours — only the stalls of Paul Byron and Raphael Diaz separate them. The language of choice for the Finnish and Swiss goalkeepers is English.

But not a lot needs to be said.

“We both understand the situation, both being around hockey for many years,” says Ramo. “It’s not like we don’t see the situation for what it is.”

Sigalet says this is ideal — established vets scrapping for minutes — for the team and him.

“They’ve got to this level for a reason,” the first-year coach says, “so you’re not coming in to revamp their games. You’re coming in to work with what’s made them successful.

“They’ve both been great, to work with each other, to push each as well — which we’ve seen in pre-season.”

Calgary Flames

Flames notes: Diaz parleys impressive camp audition into one-year deal

By Kristen Odland and Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald
October 6, 2014
11:39 PM

The audition process is over and Raphael Diaz is still here.
And, after a late afternoon deal on Monday — just over 48 hours prior to the puck drop of the Calgary Flames 2014-15 season on Wednesday — the paper work was complete.
The 28-year-old blueliner impressed enough to land a one-year gig, reportedly worth $700,000.

Good news for the Flames, in need of depth on the blueline.
And good news for Diaz, in need of an employer.

"Raffi had a good camp for us," said Flames general manager Brad Treliving. "He gives us depth . . . he's got some experience in the league. He's an intelligent, puck-moving mobile defence man.

"We're happy to get him under contract and get ready for Wednesday."

After bouncing through three different NHL clubs during the 2013-14 season — the Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Canucks, and New York Rangers — Diaz made the most of his professional tryout agreement with the Flames.

He argued his case in six pre-season dates with four assists and 16 shots on net (the same point total as Joe Colborne and the same shot total as Sean Monahan).

"I tried to give it everything," Diaz was saying earlier in the day, prior to the final details of his contract. "It's a new team and there's new players but everything was new. I played a couple games and I was really happy with what I did."

A versatile player who has experience on special teams and has 145 NHL games under his belt, Diaz made $1.25-million last season but by the end of the campaign, he was buried on the Rangers depth chart.

With the contract, the Flames are also offering Diaz a fresh start.

"He's coming off a season where he's got lots to prove," Treliving said.
"We're glad to have him here. I do think there's some value there . . . he's an excellent young man, a hard-working guy, a tremendous guy, he takes his craft seriously. He's a worker. He's fit in right with our group here. He's a well-liked guy."

LINES OF THE TIMES

Bearing in mind that Johnny Gaudreau (sick) was absent — "Well, he came in," says coach Bob Hartley, "but he was white as a ghost" — here are Monday morning's combinations:

"The boys are sharp," said Hartley. "You can tell the regular season has started right now. In their mind, they have a pretty good idea about who's on the team and what their roles are going to be.

"We're meeting with them. We've already started one-on-one meetings with them . . . about our expectations, their expectations. It's a great week."

BENNETT'S FATE TUESDAY

C Sam Bennett was around the rink Monday, but the 18-year-old did not participate in any on-ice activities at the Corral.

Hartley promised to deliver news of the kid's fate — staying here or returning to the Kingston Frontenacs of the Ontario Hockey League — on Tuesday . . . the Flames sent D Tyler Wotherspoon to the Adirondack Flames, leaving the team at 26 players remaining . . . The team's roster has to be down to 23 by Tuesday . . . C Markus Granlund (concussion), wearing a yellow caution jersey, skated with the main group. "Grans has been cleared for light contact," said Hartley . . . D Corey Potter (shoulder) did not practise . . . C Mikael Backlund, recovered from an abdominal strain, should be ready to go Wednesday. "I feel good and worked hard this summer and that's helped me pretty good coming into this camp," he said on Monday. "I still did stuff all off the ice so I feel pretty good."
After groin injury scuttled his on-ice pre-season preparation, Raymond getting up to speed quickly

By Kristen Odland, Calgary Herald October 6, 2014 11:39 PM

Yes, Mason Raymond would have liked to have played more pre-season games.
Yes, he would have liked to have practised more.
Yes, he wishes he would have been on the ice more, skating with his new teammates.

But, hampered by a lower body injury (groin), the newcomer didn't.

So now he's forced to make the most of the days leading up to the Calgary Flames 2014-15 National Hockey League season opener and use his professional experience to settle into the roster quickly.

"Being new, not knowing systems and certain things, you're just adjusting to what tendencies they like to do," said Raymond who had only played one split-squad game, the first of the exhibition docket, before Saturday's game at Winnipeg. "I think I said earlier on, when you're actually in the game and in those situations, you adapt. You need to adapt, learn those ways, and get after them quickly.

"That's part of being a professional."

Fully expected to be in Wednesday's lineup against Vancouver along with fellow training camp-sick bay resident Mikael Backlund, it'll be Raymond's first regular season game as a Calgary Flame.

The team has a pile of games in a short period of time to kick off the season, allowing Raymond to be thrown right into the mix early.

"Which is great," he said. "And we're on the road so it'll be a big learning curve for me. You want to establish yourself and set a precedent of what you want to do."

Skating with the main group for the first time Friday since the morning skate before Kraft Hockeyville at Sylvan Lake, Raymond reported he feels healthy enough to hit the ground running.

"Any player will tell you they want to get right into it," said the 29-year-old who arrives in his homeland after a season with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"As long as your body is willing and feeling it, I mean, yeah. You want to be that solution, the guy with the puck on the stick, and doing whatever you can to help the team."

Which has always, from a geographical standpoint, been his team growing up in nearby Cochrane.

With Calgary topping his list of off-season destinations, Raymond signed a three-year contract with the Flames this summer for $3.15-million per season. Prior to his setback, he had been getting a look on the team's top line. Monday's combinations had him on the left-wing with Mikael Backlund and Joe Colborne (shifted to right wing).

Over the years, the Scotiabank Saddledome has been a welcoming barn for Raymond.

As a Maple Leaf and Vancouver Canuck, he'd scored eight times in 14 games in the building — the most productive place outside of home rinks at the Air Canada Centre and Rogers Arena.

Yes, Wednesday will be memorable for many reasons.

"It's ironic how it seems to go," Raymond said. "It's good, get it going early. Once I found out I was going to be with the Flames ... I mean, you talk about circling dates on the calendar, but it'll be a special night for sure."

The Calgary Flames signed defenceman Raphael Diaz to a one-year contract on Monday.

Diaz has six goals and 39 assists along with 52 penalty minutes through 145 games in the National Hockey League. He has also played nine NHL playoff games.

The 28-year-old had two goals and 13 assists in 63 games last season with three teams — the Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Canucks and New York Rangers.

The Flames also announced Monday that they had assigned defenceman Tyler Wotherspoon to the Adirondack Flames of the American Hockey League.

Wotherspoon, 21, had four assists and four penalty minutes in 14 games with Calgary last year.
The Carolina Hurricanes placed Zach Boychuk on waivers once again, with the intention of sending the forward back to the Charlotte Checkers for a fifth season.

Boychuk, 25, was selected by Carolina in the first round (14th overall) in the 2008 NHL Draft and is coming off a season with the Checkers in which he claimed the Willie Marshall Award as the American Hockey League’s top goal-scorer (36) and was named as an second-team AHL All-Star.

Charlotte will know by noon Tuesday if Boychuk has been claimed. He was claimed off waivers by Pittsburg and Nashville during the lockout-shortened 2013 season before eventually returning to the Checkers.

Monday was the final day for NHL teams to place players on waivers to have their rosters under the 23-man limit before Tuesday’s deadline, meaning Boychuk won’t be alone on the waiver wire.

“We’ll touch base if (Boychuk) gets through waivers,” Charlotte coach Jeff Daniels told Paul Branecky of gocheckers.com Monday. “But obviously there will be disappointment because he really threw himself into training this summer hoping that this was going to be the year he sticks.”

In five exhibitions with Carolina, Boychuk was a minus-2 with eight shots on goal in 14 minutes, 42 seconds of ice time. He appeared in 11 games for the Hurricanes last season and registered four points.

The Checkers’ training camp roster stands at 24 players. Although there is no roster limit in the AHL, Daniels told Branecky his goal is “to trim the team to 22 or 23 players by this weekend’s games.”

“It doesn’t really matter when you get sent down,” Daniels said. “It’s what happens in the next week or month from now or two months from now. He needs to come down and play his game so that if (Carolina) needs a guy with injuries or whatever, he’s playing so well down here that he gets a second chance. Chucky, in the past, has always come to play.”

Boychuk ranks second all-time on the Checkers in goals (102), assists (124), points (226), power-play points (102), power-play assists (56) and game-winning goals (17).
Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Jeff Skinner out indefinitely with concussion

By Chip Alexander

In what has been a nightmarish preseason, the Carolina Hurricanes now have lost forward Jeff Skinner indefinitely to a concussion.

The Hurricanes announced Monday that Skinner, who had a team-high 33 goals last season, was concussed by a hit to the head early in Sunday’s preseason game against the Washington Capitals. On an offensive-zone play, Skinner was turning when he took an elbow in the face from Caps defenseman Matt Niskanen.

The Canes lost center Jordan Staal to a broken leg in their second preseason game, Sept. 23 against Buffalo. Staal, the Canes’ most physical player and an alternate captain, will need an estimated three to four months to recover.

Skinner, 22, was reevaluated Monday and general manager Ron Francis later confirmed Skinner was concussed. The 2011 Calder Trophy winner missed games during the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 seasons with concussions.

“He will continue to be monitored by our team doctors and go through proper protocols in the coming days,” Francis said in a statement.

Forward Elias Lindholm also was injured during the Canes’ 5-2 loss Sunday at the Verizon Center. The Canes did not practice Monday and there was no update Monday on Lindholm’s condition.

Niskanen was not penalized on the play Sunday and there was no supplemental discipline announced Monday by the NHL. Niskanen told CSN Washington’s Chuck Gormley after the game that Skinner spun into his elbow and that the hit to the head was not intentional.

“He has a history of head stuff, so you don’t want to see that. … He’s good for hockey. I hope he’s okay,” Niskanen told Gormley.

Canes coach Bill Peters said he talked with Skinner after the game and said Skinner told him he “felt fine.”

Skinner missed 16 games with a concussion after taking an open-ice hit from Andy Sutton of the Edmonton Oilers in a December 2011 game. He suffered a second concussion in Toronto in February 2013, sitting out five games.

Skinner took a big open-ice hit from defenseman Jared Cowen of the Ottawa Senators in April 2013. He sat out one game with an upper-body injury but was found not to be concussed.

Skinner and Lindholm opened Sunday’s game on a line with center Victor Rask, and Lindholm was coming off a hat trick in a 5-1 win Friday over the Sabres. Lindholm took a puck to the leg blocking a shot and left Sunday’s game limping.

The Canes, who open the regular season Friday against the New York Islanders, announced Monday they planned to assign forwards Zach Boychuk and Chad LaRose to the Charlotte Checkers, their AHL affiliate. Boychuk was placed on waivers with the purpose of sending him to the Checkers; LaRose, who was out of hockey last season, was released from his professional tryout and has an AHL contract.

The personnel moves, made before the announcement on Skinner, reduced the Canes roster to 22 players, with Skinner among the 12 forwards.

Canes coach Bill Peters said after Staal’s injury that he would replace the center “by committee.” Peters now must replace two key players – and if Lindholm’s injury is more serious, a third.
Carolina Hurricanes

Canes’ sideline reporter Chantel McCabe charged with driving while impaired

By Chip Alexander

Chantel McCabe, who serves as sideline reporter on the Carolina Hurricanes’ television broadcasts, has been charged with driving while impaired.

McCabe, 25, was charged Saturday after being stopped in the 1600 block of Glenwood Avenue.

Hurricanes team president Don Waddell issued a statement Monday saying: “We are aware of the situation and take it very seriously. Given the continuing legal process, we will not comment on this matter any further.”

McCabe also hosts the Hurricanes’ pregame show.

News Observer LOADED: 10.07.2014
Boychuk, LaRose to be assigned; Brown recalled

By Chip Alexander

The Canes on Monday said they planned to assign forwards Zach Boychuk and Chad LaRose to the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL, reducing their roster to 22 players.

Boychuk, who led the AHL in goals last season with 36 for the Checkers, must first clear waivers. LaRose, a former Canes forward, did not play hockey last season and joined the Canes camp on a professional tryout. He has been released from the tryout and has an AHL contract.

After making the announcement on Jeff Skinner’s concussion, the Canes recalled forward Patrick Brown from the Checkers. Brown was assigned Saturday to Charlotte.

The final NHL rosters must be submitted by Tuesday at 5 p.m.

News Observer LOADED: 10.07.2014
Nick Leddy, Blackhawks moving on after trade

By Chris Kuc contact the reporter

Nick Leddy's trade to Islanders sent shock waves through Blackhawks' dressing room.

Former Blackhawks defenseman Nick Leddy said trade to Islanders was a surprise.

Coach Joel Quenneville has reunited the line of Andrew Shaw, Patrick Kane and Brandon Saad.

The Blackhawks weren't on the ice Monday as the team chose to use one of the last few days before the start of the season for a team bonding trip that included time on the golf course.

Meanwhile, Nick Leddy skated with his new teammates in New York.

In the aftermath of the trade that sent Leddy to the Islanders over the weekend, both sides are chalking up the move to get the Hawks under the NHL's salary cap as business.

"There were rumors for most of the summer, (and they) kind of kept growing and growing … (but) I didn't really know," Leddy told reporters in New York. "Hockey is a business, and anything can happen. It's a relief that's over, and I'm happy to be here."

The rumors finally ended Saturday when the Hawks sent Leddy to New York for three prospects. While anticipated, the trading of a player who was a regular in the lineup and helped the Hawks win the Stanley Cup in 2013 sent shock waves through the dressing room.

"It sucks to see Nick leave the squad," veteran winger Patrick Sharp said. "Everyone knows the quality player he is and the quality person. He's going to have a heck of a chance to become the star in the league we all think he's going to be. We've said it a thousand times, it's professional sports, it's part of the gig. You lose players every season, and I think we've come to accept it."

For coach Joel Quenneville, it was another departure of a player who helped win a Cup.

"You look at your teammates and great memories, things you'll always share," Quenneville said. "That's part of the game. Nick's still young, and we expect him to grow his game. Hopefully he progresses and becomes a top defenseman. The potential's there, and he's got a better opportunity there."

Line change: When the Hawks acquired center Brad Richards as a free agent during the summer, Quenneville immediately inserted him between Patrick Kane and Brandon Saad on the second line. The trio clicked early and appeared to be set with the season approaching.

During the Hawks' final exhibition game Saturday against the Rangers in New York, Richards stayed in Chicago and Quenneville reunited Andrew Shaw with Kane and Saad, a line that was potent in the playoffs.

During Sunday's practice, Quenneville stuck with the trio, and it could start that way in the season opener Thursday night.

"It was so good last year in a short amount of time and it was right at the end of the year and it was almost like, 'Do I really want to break them up?' " Quenneville said. "It looked like we captured something there. They had a great game in New York the other day, so it looked like they were excited about the chance to get back together."

Richards skated with Bryan Bickell and Kris Versteeg, and Quenneville said the line "looked good."

Blues brothers: Four former Hawks — Colin Fraser, Brent Sopel, Sheldon Brookbank and Steve McCarthy — have been in training camp with the Chicago Wolves, the Blues' AHL affiliate.

One more to go: The Hawks reduced their roster to 24 when they assigned defensemen T.J. Brennan and Ville Pokka to Rockford on Monday. The two players are new to the organization after being acquired in the Leddy trade.
Blackhawks reduce roster to 24

By Chris Kuc contact the reporter

Blackhawks send newcomers T.J. Brennan and Villi Pokka to Rockford.

Blackhawks' roster currently stands at 24 players.

Blackhawks' official roster to start season must be submitted by Tuesday afternoon.

One more to go.

The Chicago Blackhawks reduced their roster to 24 when they assigned defensemen T.J. Brennan and Villi Pokka to Rockford of the AHL on Monday. The two players are new to the organization after being acquired from the New York Islanders on Saturday for Nick Leddy.

The Hawks' active roster stands at 24, including 14 forwards, eight defensemen and two goaltenders. Coach Joel Quenneville said Sunday the team will carry 23 players for the season-opener against the Stars in Dallas on Thursday night.

Nick Leddy, Blackhawks moving on after trade

Chris Kuc

Among those 23, Quenneville said, would be eight defensemen. That means the final cut will come from the forward ranks and it's likely Brandon Mashinter will be the odd-man out. The winger is sidelined with an injury and when cleared will no doubt go to Rockford. Mashinter became expendable when the Hawks signed veteran Daniel Carcillo to a contract Saturday.

Official rosters for the start of the 2014-15 season must be submitted to the NHL by Tuesday at 4 p.m. Central.

The Hawks were off the ice Monday and were to participate in a team-bonding trip that included a round of golf. They are scheduled to practice Tuesday and Wednesday before Thursday's first regular-season game.
Ex-Blackhawks Colin Fraser, Sheldon Brookbank start over with Wolves

BY BRIAN SANDALOW For Sun-Times Media October 6, 2014 9:32PM

Other than their Blackhawks connection and championship past, Colin Fraser and Sheldon Brookbank don’t seem to have much in common. Fraser is known for his big personality and what was once an untamed head of hair. Brookbank’s personality is a bit more reserved but friendly.

But they share many traits below the surface. Even with a combined four Stanley Cup rings and more than a decade of NHL experience, they aren’t satisfied with what they’ve accomplished. They want to get back to the highest level of the sport, and they see the Wolves — who already have former Hawks Brent Sopel and Steve McCarthy — as a vehicle to get there.

“I feel like I’m a 20-year-old kid again trying to make the NHL. It’s kind of come full circle,” said Fraser, who was assigned to the Wolves on Sunday by the St. Louis Blues. “You’ve got to get that hunger again to get back in the NHL.”

Starting in the AHL is a change for both. The 10 AHL games Fraser played last season for the Manchester Monarchs were his first in the league since 2007-08, when he was a Blackhawks prospect with the Rockford IceHogs. Brookbank’s last game in the AHL was during the same season with the Lowell Devils.

Brookbank played in 48 games for the Hawks last season, scoring two goals with five assists. He was in the Calgary Flames’ camp but was released. Now he’s back in Chicago after joining the Wolves over the weekend.

“It’s definitely a change, and you have to make an adjustment and everyone wants to be in the NHL,” Brookbank said. “This is the way to get there, so that’s why we play and that’s what this league is all about.”

If being with the Wolves is a bruise to the ego of either player, it isn’t evident. Coach John Anderson said they share a “rasp” in their games and can bring experience and leadership to the Wolves’ younger players.

None of those positive traits will show if either is sulking, and neither appears to be.

“Honestly, it’s like I’m on my entry-level deal again,” Fraser said. “You’re kind of on the outside looking in but trying to do everything you can to get there. It’s kind of the same mentality.”

That mentality is what the Wolves want to see. In the words of Blues general manager Doug Armstrong, as relayed by Anderson, “It’s hard to be hungry when you’re full.”

In that vein, Fraser and Brookbank still have room in their stomachs for more.

“We’re very, very happy to have them,” Anderson said.

The Wolves’ season opener is at 7 p.m. Saturday at Allstate Arena against the Charlotte Checkers.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Nick Leddy trade opens door for young defensemen

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter October 6, 2014 6:53PM

Defenseman David Rundblad has played in seven NHL games since Dec. 6. And, no, he hasn’t been injured.

“You always want to play games,” said Rundblad, who has been a healthy scratch a combined 64 times with the Phoenix Coyotes and the Blackhawks during that span. “It’s never fun not to play. I’m just going to try and work hard every day, and hopefully I’ll get that chance.”

Rundblad basically has been saying that since he was acquired by the Hawks on March 4. Well, he finally is going to get his chance.

The Hawks traded Nick Leddy to the New York Islanders on Saturday to clear salary-cap space. But the move, combined with the departure of Sheldon Brookbank in the offseason and a preseason injury to Michal Rozsival, has created two rare open spots in the Hawks’ lineup. So after two years of a major logjam on the back of the back end, one or two players who have been waiting their turn suddenly are going to see 15 to 20 minutes a night.

Coach Joel Quenneville chose to split up his shutdown pairing of Niklas Hjalmarsson and Johnny Oduya to give the pairings more balance. At practice Sunday, he had Rundblad paired with Oduya and rookie Trevor van Riemsdyk with Hjalmarsson, though he reserved the right to put the veterans back together when games get tight or late in periods. Journeyman Kyle Cumiskey also will be in the rotation.

“Some opportunities [are] there,” Quenneville said. “The last few years, we’ve had seven or eight ‘D’ and always had to sit out a guy with experience. This year, there’ll be opportunities for other guys to play.”

Van Riemsdyk knows the learning curve will be steep and sudden when the regular season opens Thursday in Dallas.

“When you’re out there, you just kind of watch all the guys, whether it’s Hjalmarsson or Oduya or [Duncan] Keith,” van Riemsdyk said. “All the guys are obviously great players; they all have things they bring to the table. You kind of watch them, see what they do, see how you can incorporate it into your game.”

There will be growing pains, and it likely will be a test of patience for Quenneville, who always has been a bit wary of young players. Even after three full seasons, he didn’t fully trust Leddy in crunch time and in the playoffs. But until Rozsival returns, he’ll have to lean on at least two unproven defensemen every night.

It’s not an ideal situation, but he doesn’t have much of a choice.

“Sometimes you make economic decisions when you’re doing things,” Quenneville said. “At the same time, we have some young defensemen, and we expect them to improve as we go along. There are certainly upsides in all those guys. Getting an opportunity is something they’ve been waiting for. We’ve got some guys in the minors [Stephen Johns, Klas Dahlbeck and Adam Clendening] who probably felt it should’ve been them. We’ll see how it plays out.”

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Andrew Shaw likely to play with Patrick Kane, Brandon Saad on second line

BY MARK LAZERUS Staff Reporter October 6, 2014 6:53PM

The signing of Brad Richards appeared to put an end to Andrew Shaw’s brief but highly productive time as the Blackhawks’ second-line center. Apparently not.

With Richards not making the trip to New York for the preseason finale Friday against the Rangers, coach Joel Quenneville reunited Shaw with Brandon Saad and Patrick Kane, and the chemistry that was so obvious during their short stint together in the Western Conference final last season against the Los Angeles Kings was still there. So when the season opens Thursday in Dallas, Shaw likely will be at second-line center, with Richards centering Bryan Bickell and Kris Versteeg on the third line.

“It was so good last year in a short amount of time, and it was right at the end of the year,” Quenneville said. “It was almost like, ‘Do I really want to break them up?’”

In three games together last spring, the trio combined for three goals and five assists as a line and for four goals and 15 assists overall.

“It’s obviously exciting,” Shaw said. “It’s something I worked for and have to keep working for it.”

Long Island Leddy

Defensive man Nick Leddy knew his name was at the center of trade speculation all summer, but being dealt to the New York Islanders still came as something of a surprise.

“I didn’t really know,” he told reporters in New York. “There were always rumors and always little things being said, but I really had no idea.”

Go fourth

Jeremy Morin likely will get the first crack at fourth-line left wing, but Daniel Carcillo will see some time, too — likely against more physical teams.

“His play will dictate how much and how often,” Quenneville said.
Saad, Shaw, Kane expected to reunite in Blackhawks season opener

Brandon Saad, Andrew Shaw and Patrick Kane found instant chemistry last spring.

When coach Joel Quenneville threw those three together in the Western Conference Final, it sparked the Chicago Blackhawks. Together, they were energetic and they were productive. With Brad Richards’ signing here, however, the three were broken up to start the preseason.

Well, the band is back together. And it looks like the Saad-Shaw-Kane combination will be intact when the Blackhawks open their regular season schedule.

Saad, Shaw and Kane played together in the Blackhawks’ final preseason game on Friday, a 3-2 shootout loss to the New York Rangers. Kane had a power-play goal with Shaw in front of the net, and Kane fed Shaw for the Blackhawks’ second goal that night. The group had their similar comfort level on Friday, and coach Quenneville had them together again when they resumed practice on Sunday.

"It took a little bit to get into it. We haven’t played together for a while now," Shaw said about reuniting on Friday. "Once things started clicking, the offense started to come."

So come Thursday night, when the Blackhawks open their season with the Dallas Stars, expect to see the trio reunited. Quenneville said it was tough breaking the group up entering training camp.

"It was so good last year in a short amount of time and it was right at the end of the year, and it was almost like, ‘Do I really want to break them up?’ when we look like we captured something there,” Quenneville said. "They had a great game in New York the other day. They’re excited about the chance to get back together."

Shaw, who was bumped from that combination upon Richards’ arrival, was happy to be on that line again.

"It’s obviously exciting," he said. "It’s something I’ve worked for and got to keep working for it. You’re never given anything. You have to earn it and keep earning it."

Nevertheless, Quenneville wanted to make sure reuniting those three didn’t disrupt other line combinations. Richards centered Kris Versteeg and Bryan Bickell for a new second-line look. We now we see why the Blackhawks are hesitant to number lines. Calling Saad-Shaw-Kane a third-line combination doesn’t seem right; seems more like line 2A.

Long story short, Quenneville wanted to see if he liked Richards with Versteeg and Bickell, and he did.

"I don’t mind the options going forward," Quenneville said. "That (Shaw) line was really good for us, really lit it up, and they haven’t really stopped since then. I wanted to see how that worked with Brad off the bat but, certainly, it’s something you can always go to."

Unless things go swimmingly from start to finish, and they rarely do, Quenneville will certainly use many options in his lines this season. But Saad-Shaw-Kane looked great when quickly thrown together last spring; they looked good again the other night. So as far as options go, the Blackhawks will take that one — and it’s a good one — to start.

Tags:
CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS, Blackhawks, nhl, Hockey, Brandon Saad, Andrew Shaw, Patrick Kane, Joel Quenneville, Brad Richards, Dallas Stars, Stars, Kris Versteeg, Bryan Bickell

Tracey Myers

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Regin dealing with disappointment in AHL

By Scott Powers

CHICAGO -- Peter Regin had hoped his AHL days were over.

Regin was confident he would be in the NHL all of this season when he signed a one-year deal with the Chicago Blackhawks in July. He discovered Saturday that wouldn't be the case as the Blackhawks placed him on waivers and sent him down to the Rockford IceHogs of the AHL after he cleared waivers on Sunday. He last played in the AHL in the 2008-09 season.

Peter Regin will start the season in the AHL with the IceHogs.

"A little bit disappointing, it’s been a tough couple days," the 28-year-old Regin said after practicing with the IceHogs on Monday. "Obviously it’s not exactly what I planned for. With that being said, I’m going to try to make the best of this opportunity."

Regin said he understood why the Blackhawks sent him down.

"Things do change and sometimes it’s a business and it’s no secret Chicago was over the cap over this summer," Regin said. "They were when I signed here. I knew that going into the whole thing. But I think everybody expected some trades or something to happen. Nothing really went down and you have to make adjustments, right?"

"That’s what happens sometimes. Sometimes you end up in the middle in a business decision a little bit, and you just have to deal with it and be professional and put your work boots on and show you belong there."

IceHogs coach Ted Dent spoke with Regin on Monday and also tried to paint a positive picture for him. Dent expects Regin to play a large role for the IceHogs.

"You know he really didn’t expect it,” Dent said. "You know we talked, it’s going to take him two or three days to, I guess, get his head wrapped around this situation he’s in. But from all the information I have, he’s a good teammate, he’s a good kid. Once he gets settled here the next few days, I’m sure he’ll be fine."

"Him and I just talked about it, he’s going to play a lot more minutes here than he did in Chicago I’m sure. He’s going to get an opportunity to play more of an offensive role here, probably get top-6 minutes here if you will. He hasn’t had that really in Chicago. Sometimes it’s fun. You get more minutes; you score more goals; hockey becomes fun again. That’s what we’re looking for him."

Regin saw playing in the AHL as an opportunity to improve his game.

"I’m going to make the most of it and make the best situation out of everything,” Regin said. “Hopefully when I look back at this, it was for the better. I’m going to work on my game and try to work on things that you can’t always work on in the NHL because it’s such a good league. Sometimes you have to play simple. Now I get a chance to take a step back and reevaluate my game and get back to some of the things that used to make me successful. And that’s what I’m going to try to do.”
Teravainen staying positive in Rockford

ROCKFORD, Ill. -- Teuvo Teravainen has already mastered one American saying.

When describing his situation after being assigned by the Chicago Blackhawks to the AHL's Rockford IceHogs, Teravainen said Monday, "It is what it is."

The 20-year-old native of Finland, who is considered the Blackhawks' top prospect, has quickly come to terms with the fact he's going to start this season in the AHL rather than NHL. He was told after the Blackhawks' final preseason game Friday he was being sent to Rockford.

The Blackhawks want 20-year-old Teuvo Teravainen to get more experience and further develop the feel for his game with Rockford of the AHL.

Teravainen was hopeful to make the Blackhawks' season-opening roster, but he understood why he was sent down. The Blackhawks were up against the cap and didn't have a roster spot for him.

"I know they have a good team," Teravainen said after the IceHogs' practice Monday. "There's really not a spot open there. I'm not surprised, but of course I'm a little disappointed."

Despite being in the AHL, Teravainen strongly believes he has the ability to play in the NHL now. He thought he showed that in the two preseason games, as well.

"I played like three years in pro hockey in Finland," Teravainen said. "I played with men, and it's a good league in Finland. I think I feel better now than last year when I was here. I worked hard this summer, and my body's feeling stronger. I felt good on the ice, and I felt I'm ready."

Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said Sunday that Teravainen is close to being in the NHL but believes more time in the AHL would be beneficial for him.

"Experience, we want him playing, get the feel of his game," Quenneville said Sunday. "Certainly we liked his camp. And getting exposure to systems, NHL pace, because the AHL is a good league, and get comfortable with systems and strength. Turning pro is a big step, and it'll be good for him to play in some games."

"Yes, [he] has all the ingredients. Strength and experience is what'll get him here and playing confident, sees plays. I feel he's going to play for sure."

IceHogs coach Ted Dent called Quenneville to talk about Teravainen on Sunday. Dent then spoke with Teravainen on Monday.

"I talked to Teuvo briefly this morning, so we're all on the same page now and have an understanding of what Joel wants him to improve on and how he wants him to play," Dent said. "I know Joel talked about a more north-and-south game, moving ahead, and he's a centerman, as well, staying in the middle of the ice and presenting your stick and being an option for the defensemen on breakouts. That's something that will be ongoing and teaching it as much as we can on the ice and reinforce it with video."

One of the biggest hurdles for many prospects after being demoted is staying positive. Prospects, especially younger ones, tend to get depressed and lose focus. Teravainen said he's trying to stay away from that.

"I need to be positive, just have fun here," Teravainen said. "If I'm just here and do not want to be here and not want to play here, it's not going to be good for me. I'm not going to play good then. If I want to play with the
Avalanche coach Patrick Roy has restructured his team's top two lines

Adrian Dater

Nathan MacKinnon is back at right wing and Ryan O'Reilly is a center again.

That was the biggest news at Avalanche practice Monday morning. Coach Patrick Roy shook up his top two lines as the Avs prepare for their season opener Thursday night at Minnesota.

MacKinnon, who played center most of training camp, skated Monday at right wing on a line with O'Reilly at center and Gabe Landeskog at left wing. The other top line had Matt Duchene at center, Alex Tanguay at left wing and Jarome Iginla on the right.

Asked his thoughts on the switch, MacKinnon was brief: "Same as last year. 'Factor' (O'Reilly) is a good center and it's fun to play with those guys."

O'Reilly played last season at left wing on a line with Duchene, but he was a center before that. Tanguay and Iginla had good chemistry when they skated together on a line with the Calgary Flames.

"I think it's just an adjustment. I think in preseason, we had chances but we weren't finishing," O'Reilly said. "I think Coach was looking at opportunities to mix things up here and try a different way."

"When you look at us up front, there's so many different line combinations you can do. For me personally, if there was a position I had to switch to, this is probably the easiest one for me."

Said Duchene, who skated mostly on a line with O'Reilly last season, "I'm lucky to be skating with any of these guys."

Roy was unavailable to the media Monday. He will have a season-opening news conference with team executives Joe Sakic and Josh Kroenke on Tuesday.

The Avalanche's third line Monday had Daniel Briere at center, Max Talbot at left wing and Jamie McGinn on the right. The fourth line had Marc-Andre Cliche at center, Cody McLeod at left wing and rookie Dennis Everberg on the right.

The Avs still are missing forwards John Mitchell (migraines) and Jesse Winchester (concussion). Patrick Bordeleau is on the long-term injured list.

Cutting edge. The Avalanche cut forwards Andrew Agozzino, Borna Rendulic, Ben Street and Tomas Vincour on Monday. Agozzino and Rendulic were sent to Lake Erie, while Street and Vincour were termed "nonroster, injured," meaning they probably will be sent to Erie when they recover from their injuries.

The Avs have 25 players on their roster, but three (Mitchell, Winchester and Bordeleau) will start the season on the injured list. Swedish winger Everberg is the only survivor of the rookie forwards.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Legend has it that in Samara, Russia, the nesting dolls are made upside down, in honor of their native son who's known to stand on his head. Between the pipes, Semyon Varlamov is hockey's "Ironhead." A season ago, the goalie kept the Avalanche in games with saves straight out of the circus.

But I'm hesitant to anoint Varlamov as the Nabokov of net-minding. He'll have a solid season, yes, and the Avs, who open Thursday at Minnesota, will indeed make the playoffs (but hopefully not face Minnesota again). But the guy was suffocated last season by an inordinate amount of shots. If Varly is going to contend for the Vezina Trophy, he must somehow sustain this level of success, and the Colorado defense must play better.

"Last year, he took that consistency to a whole other level," captain Gabe Landeskog said Monday, "and once a goalie does that, it's hard to stop it."

Sounds good, Gabe. But even Denver's strongest skull will give at some point. A season ago, Colorado faced 32.5 shots per game, sixth-worst in the NHL (and, yep, the other five teams missed the playoffs). Varlamov faced 2,013 shots, the most of any goalie. Dallas' Kari Lehtonen finished second with 1,888 shots against — and he played in two more games.

But Varly seemed to stop 'em all. His save percentage? Third-best at 92.7. And to get a little fancy here, check out how he did in the stat category of "goals against percentage-minus" — which is a number gauging a goalie's goals allowed, compared with the percentage of goals allowed leaguewide. Varly ranked second, right behind Vezina winner Tuukka Rask of Boston.

Avs goalie Semyon Varlamov had a career season in 2013-14, but the team needs better defense.

Everyone just assumes Varlamov, 26, will have this type of season again, seemingly forgetting the ramifications if he doesn't.

"If Varlamov can keep this up," explained the savvy hockey writer Ryan Lambert of Yahoo Sports, "that's a scenario in which the Avs are able to defeat close to a decade's worth of math that strongly suggests, and perhaps even insists, that what they're doing is unsustainable."

Lambert suggests what's likely to happen could mirror the early years of the Joe Sacco era. The Avs surged into the 2010 playoffs thanks to young talent and unreasonably resplendent goaltending by a guy named Craig Anderson. After a sunny summer of expectations, the Avs returned to the ice and back to earth.

I disagree that the 2014-15 Avs will fall off the map. They'll be a playoff team.

Because of the way hockey flows, you don't hear casual fans breaking down the Avs' defense the way you hear fans breaking down the Broncos' defense and, to an extent, the Nuggets' defense. But for all the hype about the speedy arsenal on offense, Colorado's defense must improve to prevent another open season on Varlamov.

One other reason Varly probably won't have an Anderson drop-off is due to the goalie whisperer. Francois Allaire, the revolutionary thinker and teacher, famously helped transformed Varly's game in the summer of 2013. This past summer, Varly and backup Reto Berra, no relation to Yogi, worked with the mastermind in Switzerland.

"I wasn't a bad goalie before," Berra said, "but you learn so many little details that make you so much better — you feel it as a goalie on the ice."

Varlamov, hardly a media darling, said that Allaire is "intense." Allaire isn't allowed to speak to the media except on rare occasions. Apparently when I write about something other than the Broncos doesn't qualify. But Berra summed up his contributions quite nicely, using words and hand gestures to describe the thought-transferring, Yoda-like influence of Allaire: "When he talks to me, I receive what he's saying."

Varly received his message last season.

Will the defensive players receive their message this season?
Days before opener, Avs coach Patrick Roy shakes up lines

By Adrian Dater

Avalanche center Nathan MacKinnon (29) controls the puck behind Minnesota Wild goalie Darcy Kuemper's (35) net while Minnesota Wild defenseman Jared Nathan MacKinnon is back at right wing and Ryan O’Reilly is a center again.

That was perhaps the biggest news out of Avalanche practice Monday morning, as coach Patrick Roy shook up his top two lines just three days before the season opener in Minnesota.

MacKinnon, who played at center most of training camp, skated at right wing on a line with O’Reilly at center and Gabe Landeskog at left wing. The Avs’ other top line featured Matt Duchene at center, with Alex Tanguay at left wing and Jarome Iginla on the right.

O’Reilly spent all of last season at left wing on a line with Duchene, but was a center prior to that. Tanguay and Iginla had good chemistry together when they skated on a line with the Calgary Flames.

The Avs’ third line had Daniel Briere at center, with Max Talbot at left wing and Jamie McGinn on the right. The fourth line had Marc-Andre Cliche at center, with Cody McLeod at left wing and rookie Dennis Everberg on the right.

The Avs are still missing forwards John Mitchell (migraines) and Jesse Winchester (concussion). Patrick Bordeleau is on the long-term injured list.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Avalanche makes four cuts, roster down to 25

By Adrian Dater

Four guys got cut Monday morning by the Avalanche. They are: Andrew Agozzino, Borna Rendulic, Ben Street and Tomas Vincour.

Agozzino and Rendulic were sent to Lake Erie, while Street and Vincour were termed as "non-roster, injured", meaning they’ll likely be sent to Erie once their injuries heal.

That drops the roster to 25 guys. That includes Patrick Bordeleau, Jesse Winchester and John Mitchell, all of whom are out with injuries. Bordeleau will go to long-term I.R. and Mitchell and Winchester presumably on regular injured list. The roster limit for active guys is 23, so we’ll see what shakes out in the next couple days, but it appears as if Dennis Everberg is your lone survivor among the rookie forward hopefuls.

Jamie McGinn is practicing this morning. Mitchell and Winchester are not.

Denver Post: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Dragged-out negotiations between Jackets, Johansen didn't do anyone any good

By Bob Hunter The Columbus Dispatch • Monday October 6, 2014 11:14 PM

When the Ryan Johansen-Blue Jackets contract stalemate ended yesterday, there was no celebratory cannon blast. There was no parade. There weren't even a lot of smiles.

Coach Todd Richards said he and his staff had been preparing for Thursday's season opener at the Buffalo Sabres without the young center and admitted that he can't really do much game-planning until Johansen gets here and they find out what kind of shape he is in.

General manager Jarmo Kekalainen made it sound like he had made an offer to Johansen and his agent accompanied by a cautionary statement that the season is starting and it's time for Johansen, the team's leading scorer last season, to get on board.

As Kekalainen spoke, he looked like he had indigestion.

"It was decision time," he said. "We have immigration issues we have to take care of to get him on time to start the season with us. It was just time to make a decision. We made that very clear. Either he was going to join our team or we were going to move on."

The stalemate ended the way these things usually do. After seemingly endless weeks where sides lobbed hand grenades at each other and made it sound like the other guys were trying to commit grand larceny, they came together three days before the season and signed a three-year deal that looks like it could have been sealed over the summer.

Johansen gets $3 million a year for the first two years, exactly what the team was offering, and $6 million for the third, which gives Johansen a chance to feel like this was no worse than a draw.

Anybody who has tried to buy a car understands the way these things work. The reasonable person who wants to make a common-sense deal on the first day of negotiations usually gets burned. Good negotiators drag these things out, mindful that if they wait long enough they might be able to put enough pressure on the other guy to scare him into making the deal that they want.

Understanding the system isn't the same as agreeing with it, though.

Going to the brink works fine when there are no real consequences in doing so. If you are looking to buy a new Ford Fusion and the deal falls through, chances are good there is another Fusion to bid on elsewhere. A failure in that type of negotiation might mean that you have to drive a rust-eaten Chevrolet Vega for another week.

In Johansen's case, prolonged negotiations had the potential for a negative affect on the season, both for a 22-year-old center and a 14-year-old franchise that are long on potential.

As of yesterday, Johansen had missed two-plus weeks of training camp and all eight exhibition games because he was in Vancouver, British Columbia, and no one was certain that he would be here today.

He supposedly "skated hard" while he waited for negotiations to conclude. But if that prepared him for the season, then it's fair to wonder why the rest of the team didn't simply stay home and do that as well.

Team officials made it clear they wouldn't rush him if he weren't ready, but Richards also said, "I'm not going to say no to that" when asked if it were possible Johansen could play on Thursday.

With a budding superstar eager to get in the lineup and improve on last season's 33-goal performance and a team that might need him to get off to a fast start, this is precarious ice the Blue Jackets are skating on.

A slow start with or without Johansen could doom a team that might be in a photo finish for an Eastern Conference playoff spot. But an injury to a young player trying to rush himself back is even worse.

"Joey makes our team better," Richards said. "That distraction, that story that lingers over (us), I think everyone can push past it. I'm sure there will be questions when Joey gets here the first day, but once we start playing and Joey's in, then it's just about playing hockey. It's not about the story anymore."

They can only hope.
Blue Jackets notebook: Late roster additions keep coach busy

By Shawn Mitchell The Columbus Dispatch  •  Tuesday October 7, 2014 5:02 AM

The twists and turns of a training camp like no other in Blue Jackets history has left little time for coach Todd Richards to rest his whirring mind.

The brain games ramped up again today, when Richards learned after practice that the Jackets had signed top center Ryan Johansen. Eraser, meet whiteboard: The forward lines are back in flux.

“It seems like something has happened daily that changes your roster and your thinking,” Richards said. “Some of that is based on how our young guys have played. But now, adding Joey and adding Jack (Skille, claimed off waivers); as a coach, it just gives you more options.”

Does Richards have a plan for Thursday when the Blue Jackets open the season at the Buffalo Sabres?

“I think so,” he said.

After adding Johansen and Skille, both forwards, the Blue Jackets removed three when they assigned rookie Kerby Rychel to minor-league Springfield, waived Jerry D’Amigo and placed Brian Gibbons on injured reserve. The moves brought the roster to 23 players ahead of today’s deadline. The group includes 14 forwards.

Complicating matters is the status of Johansen. He said he did not expect to arrive in Columbus until this afternoon. He must pass a physical before the Blue Jackets can assess how close he is to being ready to play in a game. Johansen pledged to play on Thursday despite missing all of training camp.

“If anybody can do it, it’s probably him,” defenseman James Wisniewski said. “He’s so strong and talented. Maybe he can step right in and not miss a beat.”

Richards wasn’t so sure.

“You just don’t know,” he said.

The defense, meanwhile, appears more settled. Ryan Murray was placed on injured reserve on Sunday because of a knee injury, and although he practiced yesterday, he is a long shot to play on Thursday, Richards said.

The Blue Jackets are set to start the season with three pairs that played together consistently during camp: Jack Johnson-David Savard, Fedor Tyutin-Dalton Prout and Tim Erixon-Wisniewski. Cody Goloubef remains as the seventh defenseman, though he could be bumped from the roster when Murray is ready.

Goloubef and Gibbons would have to clear waivers to be assigned to Springfield.

Early exits

Blue Jackets centers Brandon Dubinsky and Artem Anisimov left practice early and did not return.

“(Dubinsky) just wasn’t feeling great, a little banged up and nicked up,” Richards said. “Artie was the same way. It was more precautionary than anything.”

Richards said he was led to believe by the training staff that neither player was in jeopardy of missing the opener.

“It’s more just managing them,” he said.

Slap shots

Defenceman Frederic St. Denis cleared waivers and will report to minor-league Springfield. … The NHL and the players’ union announced that it will continue to use the increased distance between the hash marks at the faceoff circles during the regular season. The marks were moved 2 feet, 7 inches farther apart during the exhibition season. The change was made to give more room to the offensive player during faceoffs.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.07.2014
Blue Jackets: Ryan Johansen finally in the fold

By Aaron Portzline The Columbus Dispatch  •  Tuesday October 7, 2014 5:07 AM

Ryan Johansen’s contract squabbles lasted the entire summer and 2½ weeks of training camp, causing him to miss eight exhibition games and 16 days of practice. His agent, Kurt Overhardt, and the Blue Jackets traded public barbs as often as they exchanged contract proposals.

The drama ended yesterday, when Johansen signed a three-year, $12 million contract that will pay him $3 million this season and next, and $6 million in 2016-17.

"I'm glad it's over," Johansen said. "I can't wait to get there."

Johansen was flying from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Toronto last night so he would be closer to Columbus when his immigration paperwork is cleared for employment in the U.S., presumably today.

He expects to arrive in Columbus by mid-afternoon today, practice with the Blue Jackets and travel to Buffalo on Wednesday, then play in the opener against the Sabres on Thursday.

Now comes the tricky task of pretending this was never ugly.

"It’s already behind me," Johansen said. “Nothing positive comes from holding a grudge. I’ve already talked to (general manager) Jarmo (Kekalainen) and (president of hockey operations) John Davidson, and we’re on the same page. It’s all about the team and moving forward.”

Kekalainen said he didn’t want to “spend any time looking in the rearview mirror” and that he had a simple message when he spoke to Johansen just after they agreed to terms: “Get your butt over here and be ready to work.”

The Blue Jackets, already without injured forwards Boone Jenner (broken hand) and Nathan Horton (back), seemed relieved by Johansen’s signing. He was their leading scorer with 33 goals last season, tied for 11th in the NHL. But the Jackets were not celebrating. If anything, Kekalainen and coach Todd Richards seemed perturbed as they addressed the media.

“I wish this all could have been avoided,” Kekalainen said. “But there’s a business side, and you have to deal with it. We’ve always wanted the player. We’ve always understood how important Ryan Johansen is to our team.”

Overhardt said the process, however difficult for Johansen, was worth it. He bristled when asked if it paid dividends.

“Whoever is thinking this deal could have been had six weeks ago is not living in reality,” Overhardt said. “This can be a tough business, but I’m glad Ryan gets to play hockey and be a member of the Blue Jackets.”

The Blue Jackets had offered a two-year deal worth $3 million per season in June, so in essence, they got their wish for the next two seasons and they didn’t allow Johansen to redefine how young NHL players without many contractual rights are paid.

But to get the deal done, the Blue Jackets gave Johansen a robust raise for the third year of the deal, to $6 million, that will help set his future salary. He will still be a restricted free agent when this contract is finished.

Kekalainen made a “last best” offer on Sunday, and he delivered it with a message. He stopped short of calling it an ultimatum.

“We emphasized the importance of getting this done (before the season),” Kekalainen said.

Johansen was determined not to miss regular-season games, he said, and he told Overhardt as much. But he said he never grabbed the wheel of the talks from Overhardt.

“Kurt knows a lot more about this stuff than I do,” Johansen said. “I have full trust in him to do his job. This wasn’t easy. It was really frustrating being at home when you know your teammates — those guys you care about — are grinding it out and getting ready for the season.”

By late Sunday, Johansen knew a deal was coming together. He started packing.
Columbus, OH -- The Blue Jackets have assigned forward Kerby Rychel and defense man Frederic St. Denis to the Springfield Falcons (AHL affiliate) and placed forward Jerry D’Amigo on waivers. Forward Brian Gibbons was placed on Injured Reserve.

With Ryan Johansen now under contract and Jack Skille claimed off waivers, these moves mean that Michael Chaput, Cody Goloubef, Alex Wennberg and Marko Dano have made the 23 man roster.

The team is going with 14 forwards, 7 defensemen and 2 goalies when they start the season on Thursday in Buffalo.

The forwards: Artem Anisimov, Cam Atkinson, Jared Boll, Matt Calvert, Michael Chaput, Marko Dano, Brandon Dubinsky, Nick Foligno, Scott Hartnell, Ryan Johansen, Mark Letestu, Jack Skille, Corey Tropp, Alex Wennberg, Brian Gibbons, Nathan Horton (back) and Boone Jenner (hand) are on Injured Reserve.

The defense: Tim Erixon, Cody Goloubef, Jack Johnson, Dalton Prout, David Savard, Fedor Tyutin, James Wisniewski. Ryan Murray (knee) is on Injured Reserve.

The goalies: Sergei Bobrovsky and Curtis McElhinney.

This is your Blue Jackets team to start the 2014-15 campaign. The team will have a better idea of Johansen’s conditioning once he arrives in Columbus, which is expected (best case scenario) at some point on Tuesday.

Ryan Murray was skating with the team today and had some "light" contact. He still has not been cleared for full contact and will most likely not start in Buffalo.

"Just small steps and we’re not looking to rush anything", said Murray. "I got into some pushing drills at the end (of practice). Pressuring (the knee) is way different than just skating and I didn’t have any problems with it. So, that’s a good sign."

He said the knee is not one-hundred percent yet, but it is real close. "It doesn’t feel like it did, but it might take a little while to get back to feeling one-hundred percent. Pushing off is another thing that I have to get used to and another thing that I have to get better at."

What isn’t clear, but will become more so by Wednesday, is how the forward lines take shape. Some juggling will take place from what was seen during the preseason, for sure.

Jack Skille (4 goals in 16 games last year) played on Johansen’s wing during the playoff series against the Pittsburgh Penguins. With him on one side of Johansen and Hartnell on the other, it would be a good mix of speed and skill for a top line until Boone Jenner is healthy enough for his return.

It’s doubtful that Wennberg and Dano made the roster only to watch the games from the press box. So, pencil them in. With Johansen back in the fold, this pushes Letestu back down to the fourth line. Chaput might very well start the season watching from upstairs at the First Niagara Center in Buffalo. But remember, this is only conjecture at this point.

Head coach Todd Richards has been game-planning under the assumption that Johansen would not be in Columbus to start the season. While it’s good that he’s back, it does put a wrinkle into what Richards might have had planned for Thursday and beyond.

But, and this is key, the Blue Jackets have never had to deal with the problem of having this much depth at all positions in the past. In the somewhat short history of the franchise, they are blazing a new trail with the beginning of the 2014-15 season.

With the roster set, decisions still have to be made. The best guess is that those decisions won’t be concrete until the puck actually drops on Thursday evening.

It’s time to strap in for what will surely be a ride to remember, kids.

foxsportsohio.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
National predictions: Stars will make incremental improvement, still be a wild card

SPORTSDAYDFW.COM

With the NHL season days away, a number of experts are making their season predictions. Here's a sample of what some are saying about the Stars.

ESPN's Scott Burnside: "We're not quite ready to cede the Stars a spot in the top eight in spite of their great season and positive offseason moves. It's hard to make the march forward year over year and we're wondering if there will be some fallback.

Prediction: Fifth in the Central Division, "in the hunt" for a Western Conference wild-card spot.

Grantland.com's Sean McIndoe: "The forwards look fantastic. In addition to Seguin, Spezza, and Hemskey, there are also Jamie Benn and Valeri Nichushkin, so we can expect this team to do plenty of scoring. The goaltending should be fine, assuming Kari Lehtonen is OK after leaving a recent preseason game with what the team called a mild concussion. That leaves the blueline, which isn't strong and didn't get much attention over the summer. Still, it's easy to get excited about the Stars. At the very least, they should be exciting. But will they be good enough to do any damage in the Central?"

Prediction: Third in the Central, first-round playoff exit.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch's Jeff Gordon: "General manager Jim Nill acquired high-end centers in consecutive summers. First he landed Tyler Seguin from Boston, then Spezza from Ottawa. Those deals made the Stars better and the Western Conference even deeper. Dallas should feature two strong offensive lines — with Hemskey fitting in somewhere as a playmaking winger — and an outstanding power play threat. Young winger Valeri Nichushkin seems poised for a breakout."

Prediction: Fifth in the Central, second wild card in Western Conference.

SB Nation's Travis Hughes: "Despite finishing third a year ago, this is, as always, the Blackhawks division to lose. But instead of a threat from the Avalanche this year, we're expecting another upstart competitor to take a run at the top: the Dallas Stars. Led by Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin, and propelled by offseason additions Jason Spezza and Ales Hemsly, the Stars are a likely candidate to go from playoff bubble to home-ice advantage."

Prediction: Third in Central

Los Angeles Times' Helene Elliot: "Offense figures to be a strength for the Stars, who were led last season by Tyler Seguin (37 goals, 84 points) and left wing Jamie Benn (34 goals, 79 points). They since acquired quality center Jason Spezza from Ottawa, and he might thrive out of the spotlight of Canada. However, Dallas' defense is thin after 40-year-old Sergei Gonchar, Trevor Daley, and Alex Goligoski. Coach Lindy Ruff's team should be exciting, but this is a tough conference."

Prediction: Fourth in Central, first wild card in Western Conference.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.07.2014
If you’re pondering power-play potential, then you have to say the Stars are packed with purveyors of possible positive poetry.

After all, Dallas led the NHL in power-play minutes last season and finished fourth in power-play chances, so the opportunity for success should be there again. The key is whether a new-look “Supernova” man advantage can cash in.

Stars coach Lindy Ruff has combined his two newest additions — Jason Spezza and Ales Hemsky — with Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin and will mix in a defenseman for balance on the first unit.

Despite the Stars’ woes on the power play last season, Seguin finished 14th in the NHL in man-advantage scoring with 25 points (11 goals, 14 assists), and Benn added 19 points (five goals, 14 assists). Spezza, meanwhile, tallied 22 points (nine goals, 13 assists) for Ottawa.

Alliteration aside, it does seem like a combustible combination.

“We’re excited to get out there and see what we can do, but we know it’s a challenge,” Benn said. “If you look at that group, there are a lot of options, but we have to go out there and work hard and make it successful.”

The 2014-15 power play burst onto the scene with two goals and lots of chances in a 5-4 preseason win against Florida a week ago but has had its ups and downs during the rest of training camp.

Ruff has alternated Alex Goligoski and Trevor Daley as the defenseman, but he’s kept the four-man unit together for most of his special team practices. The veteran coach said he likes what he has seen from the talented group and believes the instincts of the players will guide the success of the unit.

“It’s those five guys reading off each other,” Ruff said. “It’s not so much laying it on a map and saying, ‘You’re going to be here, and you’re going to be there.’ It’s reading what’s open and giving them different looks. As long as the work ethic stays strong, the way they move the puck around ... that’s going to be a tough unit to deal with.”

Spezza and Seguin are right-handed and typically like to play the half wall, where they can see the ice and make quick passes to open teammates. That means one of the two has to try a different position, and it looks as if Seguin will move to the point and use his big slap shot to create scoring opportunities from up top.

Seguin said he is quickly adapting to the new position, and Spezza said having Seguin as a point presence creates a lot of options.

“Obviously, Seguin has a big shot back there and they have to respect that,” Spezza said. “It opens up the plays down low.”

And a few goals could also open up a few games. The Stars last season too often struggled in the third period of close games because they couldn’t cash in on power plays. Dallas has a speed advantage on most teams, and that creates the ability to draw obstruction penalties from opponents who are chasing to keep up.

So if you combine the ability to draw penalties (Dallas was fourth in the NHL with 290 power-play opportunities last season) with an increased ability to convert, the results can be devastating for opponents.

“So many games you look back on, and a power-play goal in the third period would have won it for you, or not getting one kept you from winning,” Benn said. “It can be huge.”

And the momentum that comes from scoring can change the way the game is played. Scare opponents enough with your power-play scoring, and they’ll let you skate just to avoid hooking or holding. Scare an opponent enough with your power-play scoring, and you won’t have to worry about having an enforcer on the ice.

“We want it to have it up and running,” Ruff said. “We want it to be a difference-maker.”
Report: Minor leagues to shake up; Stars to have two affiliates in same league as Allen Americans make jump up in competition

SPORTSDAYDFW.COM

According to a report by Sports Illustrated's Allan Muir, the Central Hockey League and the East Coast Hockey League are close to completing their long-rumored merger, just before both leagues start their seasons. The new league would keep the ECHL name.

Due to the timing, the two leagues will play within their respective leagues this year with little to no crossover, but future years will create an uncommon situation for the Stars. They would have two affiliates in the same league.

The CHL's Allen Americans and ECHL's Idaho Steelheads are both affiliates and they might be paired in the same conference.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Detroit Red Wings will start the season without Daniel Alfredsson. Whether they’ll finish it without him remains uncertain.

He hasn’t been with the team since early last month when back pain flared up and derailed his attempt at joining training camp. Now the Wings are days from their Thursday season-opening date against Boston — and still no Alfredsson.

That doesn’t mean that can’t change. First, it’s up to Alfredsson to decide if he can push his 41-year-old body (42 in December) through a 19th season in the NHL. General manager Ken Holland told the Free Press on Monday that he has told Alfredsson “to let me know when your body has made a decision for you.”

Detroit Red Wings star Pavel Datsyuk discusses his shoulder injury with reporters Monday, Oct. 6, 2014. Video by Helene St. James / DFP

Then the Wings will assess where they’re at with the group they’ve got.

“Based upon Daniel Alfredsson’s decision, I’ll sit down with Mike Babcock and look at our schedule,” Holland said. “If we’re seven games in and are 7-0, maybe there’s no room. If we’re 0-7 and can’t score goals — we’re going to look to see what’s going on with our team. Do we think he makes us better?”

Last season the answer was a resounding yes: Alfredsson scored 18 goals, and his 49 points in 68 games tied for the team lead. He provided invaluable leadership while Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk missed large chunks of time.

The Wings enter this season in good health overall, but there is one area Alfredsson almost certainly would boost: winding up his big right shot on the point on power plays. Beyond Niklas Kronwall, the Wings are low on qualified point men, and overall they are low on players who shoot right-handed.
There's a good possibility that a couple of players could be putting some miles on their cars this week.

The Detroit Red Wings are two moves from being roster-compliant, as forward Pavel Datsyuk remains on short-term injured reserve, even as he seems closer to returning from a separated shoulder than first expected. With Datsyuk on IR, the Wings need only to trim two players before turning in their 23-man roster by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Here's what would be the easiest thing to do: Send goalie Petr Mrazek and either defenseman Xavier Ouellet or forward Tomas Jurco to Grand Rapids. Doing so Tuesday would still enable the Wings to call them back up Thursday, to play in the season-opening game against Boston (7:30 p.m., FSD). In the meantime, the Wings would have another day to figure out alternate solutions (including the possibility that someone comes down with an injury before Thursday).

The Wings didn't put anyone on waivers today, the last day to use that route to trim someone before the deadline. That means Andrej Nestrasil is safe (for now), the result of having the most outstanding exhibition season of the club's forward prospects. He had three points in four games and further entices with his size (6-feet-3, 209 pounds).

If Datsyuk is able to play, the Wings would have to make another move. As it stands, his return seems iffy. He practiced today but he didn't engage in any physical play to test his right shoulder. It has only been two weeks since he hurt it, at which point he was tagged with a roughly four-week recovery picture.

"I'm on my way," he said. "I need skate more, see how this feel. Need contact."

Given how devastating it'd be if the injury were aggravated by returning too soon, the Wings plan to be smart about it. As will Datsyuk himself. "Hope so," he said, smiling. "I'm old enough to be smart enough."

Datsyuk practiced with Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader, as coach Mike Babcock provided a revealing first look at what the lines might look like Thursday, should everyone be available. The news wasn't good for Stephen Weiss and Daniel Cleary, as both were in gray sweaters, signifying nonplaying status. Nestrasil also was in gray.

Forward Tomas Tatar has to pass a baseline test Tuesday to get cleared after possibly sustaining a concussion Wednesday, when he accidentally was kneed in the head by an official. But Tatar said he has had no headaches nor nausea and expected no problems passing the test. He was with Jurco and Riley Sheahan in practice.

The other lines featured Johan Franzen with Darren Helm and Gustav Nyquist, and Joakim Andersson with Drew Miller and Luke Glendening.

Asked who'd play if Datsyuk can't, Babcock said, "Good question. I've got two days to think about it."

Weiss had no points and was a minus-4 in four exhibition appearances. For a guy who hadn't played since December, he's encouraged that there's plenty of improvement ahead. "I felt OK," he said. "Some games better than others. It was good to get a lot of games in. I started to feel like I was getting my game shape back.

"Now I've got to work hard and try to get into the lineup. I've got to score goals and get points. I've got to get on the board somehow."

Mitch Callahan, Landon Ferraro and Kevin Porter all cleared waivers today. Over the weekend, the Wings shipped prospects, including Alexey Marchenko, Nick Jensen and Teemu Pulkkinen, to Grand Rapids.

Contact Helene St. James: hstjames@freepress.com. Follow her on Twitter @helenestjames.
Red Wings have long odds to win Stanley Cup

The Detroit News 6:37 p.m. EDT October 6, 2014

Unlike past years, when the Red Wings were among the favorites to win the Stanley Cup, oddsmakers in Las Vegas seem them as a middle-of-the-pack team.

The Wings have 22-1 odds to win the 2015 Stanley Cup, according to bovada.net. That ranks them 14th among the 30 NHL teams. Chicago is the favorite at 13-2 while Boston, Anaheim and the defending champion Los Angeles Kings are at 10-1.

When it comes to the Eastern Conference, the Wings’ odds of winning are 10-1, ranking sixth. The Bruins are the favorites at 7-2.

In the Atlantic Division, the Wings are fourth with odds of 6-1. The Bruins are first at 5-4.

Detroit News LOADED: 10.07.2014
Detroit Red Wings

Henrik Zetterberg, Wings OK with underdog status again

Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News 8:01 p.m. EDT October 6, 2014

Detroit — Few analysts are picking the Red Wings to go deep into the playoffs this season — some say they will not make the playoffs at all. The underdog status is fine with the Red Wings, who are beginning to get used to it.

"It's been like that since Nick (Lidstrom) retired," said captain Henrik Zetterberg (Lidstrom retired after the 2012 season). "Ever since then we haven't really been a sure thing for the playoffs if you look before the season.

"Somehow we found a way to make it there, and we'll do the same this year."

What gives the Red Wings optimism is actually a key ingredient from last season's injury-marred struggle.

A batch of young players were called up from Grand Rapids and earned NHL experience, even playoff experience, and inexperienced players on the NHL roster found themselves in bigger roles.

"The biggest thing is we're all a year older," Niklas Kronwall said. "Young guys took a huge step last year. They got a taste of the playoffs. All of us are ready to take the next step."

If the Red Wings are going to make the playoffs for a 24th consecutive season, they won't do it with an array of stars and overwhelming offense.

Coach Mike Babcock mentioned Monday they'll "have to be a by-committee team," everybody pitching in with either offense, or other intangibles.

"A depth team," Babcock said. "We can do that. Being healthy will be critical for us. It would be great if Pavel (Datsyuk, out with a shoulder injury) was back and ready to play.

"When I look at our group, it's a group that will earn our way and our confidence. I don't think anyone has us pegged to win the Presidents Trophy (league's best record).

"We'll have to grind."

"No question that's the key for our success, the depth up front and getting after the other team and really skating and competing. If we do that, we'll have a chance."

The way last season ended, a five-game first-round loss to Boston, is something the Red Wings haven't forgotten.

"No one was happy," Johan Franzen said. "It was a difficult season. Not many things went our way. The only positive things was kids came up and now they're NHL players."

"That's a great thing going forward."

Datsyuk update

Datsyuk skated and participated in the entire team's practice, but still didn't face any contact and appears doubtful to open the regular season Thursday against Boston. "I need to skate more and see how it feels," said Datsyuk, who hurt himself Sept. 22 in the first exhibition game in Chicago. "I need more contact and see how it feels with the contact."

The original prognosis was approximately a month, so Datsyuk is only two weeks removed from the injury. Datsyuk was on a line with Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader at practice.

"It's a plus he was skating on a line (but) I don't think we're going to get our hopes up he'll be in the lineup (Thursday)," Zetterberg said.

Roster cuts

Forwards Mitch Callahan, Landon Ferraro and Kevin Porter (Northville/Michigan) all cleared waivers and will be assigned to Grand Rapids.
Detroit Red Wings

Jimmy Howard's ability to bounce back from inconsistent season vital for Red Wings

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

DETROIT – Strong back-to-back seasons had the Detroit Red Wings’ Jimmy Howard poised to join the ranks of the NHL’s elite goaltenders a year ago.

Then he took a step back in 2013-14.

This team doesn’t have much margin for error. Its offense isn’t potent enough and its defense not strong enough to compensate for substandard goaltending. It needs Howard to perform like he did in 2011-12, when he played in the All-Star Game, and in 2013, when he helped an injury-riddled club make the playoffs and advance to Game 7 in the second round.

Howard realizes the importance of his role, not only in the Red Wings’ efforts to extend their 23-year playoff streak but also to advance deep into the postseason.

"The previous two years I set the bar pretty high for myself. I keep reaching for that bar and pushing it a little bit higher," Howard said. "So last year was a huge disappointment, not having the consistency night in and night out.

"Can't do anything about it now. I can just look forward to the future and I can't wait for (Thursday’s season opener vs. Boston)."

"Last year was a huge disappointment, not having the consistency night in and night out." -- Jimmy Howard

Howard came into training camp feeling the best he has in 2-3 years. He said he hasn’t changed anything technically but made some adjustments in the gym that he feels could make a difference on the ice.

"We did a lot more corrective exercises this summer with my trainer (Joe Neal at 2SP Sports Performance in Madison Heights) -- pulling my shoulders back, trying to get everything corrected (with) alignment so my body moves more efficiently on the ice," Howard said.

"Over the course of the season your body can get pretty out of whack just basically the way you're standing out there. If you see me walking around in February or March, my knees are inward, my shoulders are forward. So we just basically tried to pull everything back so I'm more efficient on the ice."

He wasn't efficient last season, posting a goals-against average of 2.66 (after seasons at 2.12 and 2.13) and a save percentage of .910 (down from .923 the year before). He had an .895 save percentage in 12 starts in March.

His defense wasn’t as strong as it has been, and he dealt with some injuries (knee, hand, hip). But it wasn’t the kind of season the Red Wings expected after signing Howard to a six-year, $31.8 million extension in April 2013.

"Just the inconsistency night in and night out," Howard said. "It wasn't up to my standards."

Coach Mike Babcock credited oft-injured backup Jonas Gustavsson for "saving our season" by going 16-5-4. Young Petr Mrazek has played well when summoned from Grand Rapids and is one of the organization’s top prospects.

But the Red Wings are counting on their workhorse Howard to bounce back.

"He's trained real hard this summer. He's given himself an opportunity," Babcock said. "You earn the right to feel good about yourself through your training, your work ethic, your eating habits. Through all those things you get a way better chance for success. Like all players, if you can get off to a good start it builds confidence for you."

The Red Wings didn't need their goaltender to be the difference on most nights back in the days when they dressed a star-studded lineup.

This team will need Howard to bail them out on some nights when other facets of their game aren't clicking. He's prepared for the challenge.

"I've played a lot of hockey over the last several years, so there's been a lot of wear and tear," Howard said. "I've been able to get healthy over the summertime. I feel really good. Again, it's the best I've felt in years."
Red Wings' Stephen Weiss feels urgency after unproductive preseason; Mike Babcock ponders lineup

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

DETROIT – The Detroit Red Wings got a good look at Stephen Weiss during the preseason, playing him in six of eight games after he had been out nine months due to a sports hernia.

Weiss said he feels good, but that didn't translate into offense. He had no goals, one assist and minus-4 rating.

"I got to score goals and get points. I got to get on the board somehow," Weiss said. "I had some chances and made some plays but nothing is going in. I just got to keep creating. That'll come with more reps."

At least he's healthy and feels he's getting his game shape back.

"It's been a long time," Weiss said. "But to be honest it came quicker than I thought it would. So that's a positive sign. I worked hard this summer, skated hard. I feel like it's getting there.

"Now I just got to keep it up in practice and work hard and just try to get back in the lineup."

"I got to score goals and get points. I got to get on the board somehow." -- Stephen Weiss

Will he be in the lineup for the season opener Thursday against the Boston Bruins at Joe Louis Arena?

Coach Mike Babcock said he'll take two more days to decide on his lineup, but seemed to be sending a message to Weiss and Daniel Cleary (no goals, one assist, minus-3 in five preseason games) during Monday's practice by having them wear gray jerseys, designated for injured players and scratches.

Babcock said he's not going to read anything into Weiss' lack of production in the preseason.

"But what I'm going to do is whoever has earned the right to play on opening day is going to play," Babcock said.

Rookie forward Andrej Nestrasil, who will be on the season-opening 23-man roster that must be submitted by 5 p.m. Tuesday, also wore a gray jersey.

Weiss expects to continue feeling better.

"Some games I felt like I've been off for two years and some games I felt more comfortable with the puck, felt like things were slowing down, not happening as quickly," Weiss said. "That's all part of playing games again. But those four games in six nights was key for me, to play a lot of hockey and get back in the rhythm of playing games on consecutive nights, and the body held up nicely, so that was huge."

Here are the lines and defense pairs they skated with today. They still need to trim three players Tuesday (one will be Pavel Datsyuk, who'll remain on short-term injured reserve, and one likely will be Petr Mrazek, who'll be sent to Grand Rapids):

Henrik Zetterberg-Pavel Datsyuk-Justin Abdelkader
Gustav Nyquist-Darren Helm-Johan Franzen
Tomas Tatar-Riley Sheahan-Tomas Jurco
Drew Miller-Luke Glendening-Joakim Andersson
Daniel Cleary-Stephen Weiss-Andrej Nestrasil (in gray)
Niklas Kronwall-Jonathan Ericsson
Danny DeKeyser-Brendan Smith
Kyle Quincey-Xavier Ouellet
Brian Lashoff-Jakub Kindl
Jimmy Howard

The Red Wings released defenseman Aaron Rome and forward Jeff Hoggan from their tryouts.

Michigan Live LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Detroit Red Wings assigned forwards Mitch Callahan, Landon Ferraro, and Kevin Porter to the Grand Rapids Griffins after they cleared waivers today. The Red Wings did not place anybody on waivers today.

Their roster stands at 26 players. They need to trim down to 23 by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

They are expected to assign goaltender Petr Mrazek to Grand Rapids. Pavel Datsyuk (separated shoulder) likely will remain on short-term injured reserve.

The Red Wings would need to make one more move. One option is to assign defenseman Xavier Ouellet to the Griffins. He does not need waivers. Another option is to send down forward Tomas Jurco, who also doesn't require waivers.
Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Pavel Datsyuk progressing, still not cleared for contact; Tomas Tatar ready to play

Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

DETROIT – Pavel Datsyuk skated on line Monday during Detroit Red Wings practice, taking another step toward recovery from a separated shoulder, but gave no indication that his return is near.

Datsyuk hasn’t been cleared for contact, so it seems unlikely he’ll be ready for Thursday's season opener against the Boston Bruins at Joe Louis Arena.

"I'm on my way," Datsyuk said. "Don't say it's too close, but a good feeling.

"I need to skate more and see how I feel. I need more contact and see how it feels from contact."

The Red Wings estimated Datsyuk would be out four weeks from the time he suffered the grade 2 separation on Sept. 22.

"After two weeks I feel good," Datsyuk said. "Hopefully on my schedule and I'll just be ready to go early."

But, he added, "Hard to say. First time I've had this injury."

Datsyuk skated on a line with Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader.

"Pav looks good, he skates better and better," Zetterberg said. "Handles the puck well. He's not in battle mode yet. It hasn't been four weeks. I think it's a plus side he was skating on a line today. I don't think we're going to get our hopes up that he'll be in the lineup Thursday."

Said coach Mike Babcock: "It was nice to see him out there. I don't know if he's ready to play or not ready to play. We'll see."

Tatar expects to be cleared

Tomas Tatar returned to practice Monday following a couple of days off due to concussion symptoms. He hit his head on a linesman's knee on Thursday, after getting checked.

He said he needs to pass one more concussion test on Tuesday before being cleared.

"It should be good. There is nothing (no symptoms),” Tatar said. "I had full practice with team and felt pretty good.

"You got to pass the test first but I don't think it should be a problem."

Michigan Live LOADED: 10.07.2014
Detroit Red Wings

NBC broadcaster expects Mike Ilitch will make sure Mike Babcock stays as Red Wings coach

Brendan Savage | bsavage@mlive.com By Brendan Savage | bsavage@mlive.com

DETROIT – The Detroit Red Wings might not be able to spend freely when it comes to signing players but there’s no salary cap on NHL coaches.

And that’s the reason NBC Sports play-by-play announcer Mike Emrick says he thinks Mike Babcock will be back in Detroit for an 11th season with the Red Wings next year.

Babcock’s contract expires after this season and unless he signs an extension this week, he’ll hit the open market next summer. Babcock has said he won’t negotiate during the season and the Red Wings kick off the 2014-15 campaign Thursday against the Boston Bruins at Joe Louis Arena.

But Emrick doesn’t see Red Wings owner Mike Ilitch letting Babcock get away.

"Whenever the Red Wings have had a chance to, in an open marketplace, get what they need to win a championship, they’ve always done it," Emrick said.

"We're not in an open marketplace anymore except for general managers and coaches, and they already extended the general manager, who was regarded as the best or one of the best in the league, and they’re in the process of discussing it with the coach.

"If you go back even to the Sergei Fedorov challenge from Carolina, when push came to shove, if there was excellence there, the Ilitch family always stepped up. I'm not anticipating anything other than that in the case with the coach."

Carolina signed Fedorov to a six-year, $38-million offer sheet in 1998 but the Red Wings retained his services by matching the deal.

Babcock, considered by some to be the best coach in the NHL, led the Red Wings to the 2008 Stanley Cup and is the winningest coach in franchise history with a 415-198-91 record.

He also coached Canada to the last two Olympic gold medals.

Michigan Live LOADED: 10.07.2014
Detroit Red Wings

Babcock sends message to veteran forwards

By Chuck Pleiness, The Macomb Daily

DETERGIT >> If Detroit Red Wings coach Mike Babcock wanted to deliver a message to a couple of his veteran players on Monday he did so with the practice jerseys he had them wear.

Stephen Weiss and Daniel Cleary, along with Andrej Nestrasil, each wore gray, which is an indication of a player being injured or a healthy scratch.

"I've just got to keep it up in practice and work hard and just try to get back in the lineup," said Weiss, who's heading into his second year of a five-year deal worth $24.5 million. "I've got to score goals and get points. I've got to get on the board somehow. I had some chances and made some plays (in the preseason) but nothing is going in. I've just got to keep creating. That'll come with more reps."

Due to a sport hernia, Weiss managed to play just 26 games last season totaling two goals, two assists and a minus-4. He needed a second procedure to repair an issue with scar tissue.

Weiss has had just one assist and was a minus-4 in six preseason games this year, while Cleary has one assist and is a minus-3 in five games.

"What I'm going to do is whoever has earned the right to play on opening day is going to play," Babcock said.

Datsyuk iffy for opener

Pavel Datsyuk took part in practice and skated on a line with Henrik Zetterberg and Justin Abdelkader.

"I'm on my way," Datsyuk said afterwards. "(I) don't (want to) say it's too close, but (it's) a good feeling. I need to skate more and see how I feel. I need more contact and see how it feels from contact."

Zetterberg isn't getting his hopes up for seeing Datsyuk, who injured his shoulder on Sept. 22, in the lineup Thursday.

"He's not in battle mode yet," Zetterberg said. "It hasn't been four weeks. I think it's a plus side he was skating on a line. I don't think we're going to get our hopes up that he'll be in the lineup Thursday."

Datsyuk was slated to be out 4-5 weeks.

Nestrasil will most likely get his roster spot if Datsyuk goes on injured reserve.

This and that

On defense, Babcock had Xavier Ouellet paired with Kyle Quincey. Ouellet is battling for a spot on the roster with Jakub Kindl and Brian Lashoff. Ouellet finished tied for the team lead with two goals this preseason.

Tomas Tatar has one more hurdle to clear, a concussion test, before he's cleared to be in the lineup Thursday.

"You've got to pass the test first but I don't think it should be a problem," Tatar said.

Tatar made it through the entire practice without an issue, skating with Riley Sheahan and Tomas Jurco.

Mitch Callahan, Landon Ferraro and Kevin Porter all cleared waivers and were assigned to Grand Rapids.

The Wings still have 26 players on their roster and need to get down to 23 by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Macomb Daily LOADED: 10.07.2014
EDMONTON — There’s no end to the second guessing from Edmonton Oilers fans about coach Dallas Eakins’s final roster decisions, but when you dig in and apply reliable hockey analytics, it’s evident Eakins made reasonable choices.

That includes his two most controversial choices, picking defenceman Oscar Klefbom over Martin Marincin, and forward Will Acton over Tyler Pitlick or Anton Lander.

The most surprising move was Marincin’s demotion, given that the 22-year-old Slovak had, at times, played a top-pairing role in Edmonton last season.

Marincin also has a vocal group of boosters in the Corsi analytics community, even if the trendy stat is more misleading than illuminating when it comes to rating individual players.

For the uninitiated, Corsi is a shots-at-net plus-minus. If you’re on the ice for 48 shots for and 52 shots against out of 100, you’re said to have a Corsi of 48 per cent. That’s where the Oilers ended up when Marincin was on the ice last year, 48 per cent. It was the best Corsi for a defenceman on the Oilers.

Nonetheless, the Oilers cut him.

At Sunday’s press conference about the cuts, Oilers in-house analyst Bob Stauffer brought up the issue with Eakins.

"Martin Marincin was your best Corsi d-man last year. He was the most settled in the games that he played, had the best numbers by far of your defencemen," Stauffer said, then asked Eakins how much weight he might put on Corsi.

It was a fitting question, given that Corsi analysis was invented by Oilers fans and is now rampant here.

"I don’t want to get into the whole analytical debate here," Eakins said, “but an individual player’s Corsi number, there is no such thing. An individual does not have a Corsi. His Corsi is a whole bunch of players that are with him, right?"

Eakins’ take on Corsi makes perfect sense, even if it flies in the face of the Corsi analytics fad.

When a Corsi stats analyst uses the term "Martin Marincin’s Corsi," it may sound definite and rock solid, like they’re talking about something significant and directly determined by Marincin, but that’s not how the stat actually works. Most crucially, as Eakins suggests, it measures the performance of groups of players, not of individual players.

For example, if an Oiler is on the ice for 1,000 shots-at-net for and 1,500 shots-at-net against over a full season, he’s said to have a Corsi of -500. But numerous Oilers had a varying hand in creating and allowing those shots. Corsi doesn’t tell us which individual players most often made plays to help create the 1,000 shots. It also fails to identify which individuals most often caused the 1,500 shots against.

As a result, Marincin’s Corsi reflects his play somewhat, but it mostly represents the mishmash of performances from the 20-plus players who shared the ice with him. He played 888 even strength minutes in 2013-14, but Jeff Petry was on the ice for 528 of those minutes, David Perron for 235, Sam Gagner 229, Taylor Hall 211, Jordan Eberle 198, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins 191, Ryan Smyth 158, Boyd Gordon 152, etc.

In the end, Eakins was right to put little or no weight in Marincin’s so-called Corsi.
Rogers promises more NHL games to watch in first year of TV-rights deal

By Stephen Whyno, The Canadian PressOctober 6, 2014

Canadian hockey fans won't just be switching to different channels to get their fix this season. Rogers and the NHL have promised more games and more robust coverage than ever as part of a new $5.2-billion, 12-year television-rights deal.

"Hockey Night In Canada" will have a new look, with George Stroumboulopoulos taking over host duties from Ron MacLean, and Sportnet recently unveiled a new state-of-the-art, multimillion-dollar studio to showcase its newfound reach and influence in the sport. Don Cherry and MacLean will still team up for the "Coach's Corner" segment, but some of the other pre-game, intermission and post-game coverage will be different.

While it may take time for viewers to adjust to the changes, there will be no shortage of hockey on the air under the new broadcast agreement.

"There are more games actually being televised than ever before," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said.

"Hockey Night In Canada" games will be shown coast-to-coast instead of by region and Rogers and the NHL have made a point to showcase Sunday and Wednesday nights. Blackout restrictions on GameCentre Live for computers, tablets and smartphones will also contribute to the "more games" philosophy.

Rogers is banking on Sunday night becoming appointment viewing with MacLean hosting "Hometown Hockey" from 25 cities across Canada.

"This was a way for us to take something, particularly in Canada, that we know is as close to religion as you can do, something that's vitally important to the country, something that's fun and exciting, entertaining, brings people together, and take it to places where it's never been," Bettman said.

To do it, the league and the network mapped out a schedule that should make Sunday part of the new hockey-watching routine. NBC in the United States has its Wednesday night rivalry programming, and Rogers made sure it got the games it wanted among the 1,230 in the regular season.

"We sat around the board with the NHL — there were 12 of us, 12 of them — and said, 'How can we create the best schedule?'" Rogers Media president Keith Pelley said. "And you can see it. You can see the schedule now. There has not been a schedule like this for NHL hockey in this country ever. The NHL have been nothing but spectacular in helping us create the best schedule."

There are actually fewer Sunday games than last season (123 in 2014-15 compared to 132 in 2013-14), but the Rogers "Hometown Hockey" broadcasts make 25 of them much more of a national production.

Bettman said it was important to take control of Sunday nights and compared it to "Sunday Night Football" in the United States. The better parallel may be Thursday night NFL action, which has become the norm instead of a rarity in recent years.

But "Hockey Night In Canada" is still the crown jewel.

"Saturday night sitting in front of the game with a family dinner and friends over, I don't think that's going to change," said Mark Messier, who's working as a Rogers ambassador. "Saturday night hockey has always been an institution in our country. I don't think that'll ever change."

At a recent Canadian Club of Toronto luncheon, Bettman said in a chat with Stroumboulopoulos that the new rights deal was a chance to take "Hockey Night In Canada" to the next level on multiple platforms. Viewers are now able to stream it online or through GameCentre.

"This will create a hockey experience if you're a fan unlike what you've ever seen in terms of how complete the coverage is," Bettman said.

Stroumboulopoulos is the new face of that.

The 42-year-old talk-show star recalled sitting in a room at the Fan 590 radio station 20 years ago and betting Jeff Marek which one would get on "Hockey Night In Canada" first. Technically, Stroumboulopoulos got there as part of a pre-game show when he worked for CBC, according to Marek, who will host national coverage on Thursday nights.

Stroumboulopoulos will be front and centre on Saturday nights, running things on the biggest program in the sport.

"This is the show that I've been watching without reservation my entire life, and when I was thinking about changing my job I didn't know what to do," Stroumboulopoulos said. "This I didn't think was even a remote possibility. But this is the only show in Canada you grow up needing to be a part of."

Broadcasts will still feature the familiar play-by-play voices of Bob Cole and Jim Hughson, and Rogers hired Dave Randorf from TSN and Paul Romanuk — who returns after working overseas for nine years — to join the group. Some analysts and panellists were hired from CBC and others, like Leah Hextall and Darren Pang, brought in from the outside.

"One of the things we're really excited about, about the Rogers deal — people say, 'Yeah the money,'" Bettman said. "It's not about the money, it's the people we're going to be dealing with ... and all the talent that they've assembled."

The Drought of the Century: It’s going to be a long winter in Western Canada

By Cam Cole, Postmedia News October 2, 2014

Consider that the state of hockey in 2013-14, at least NHL hockey, was California.

And that the Vancouver Canucks — for years, the best of Canada’s Western entries — have fallen to the bottom third of the league in many pre-season forecasts. If the Calgary Flames, Edmonton Oilers and Winnipeg Jets rank south of that, you might wonder why we don’t all just temporarily secede from the union and play a little intramural schedule here in Western Canada this winter.

The only one that even seems to have a conspicuous ups ide is Edmonton, and we’ve heard that song before.

In a series of terrific interviews with the GMs, TSN’s Bob McKenzie asked each what would constitute a successful season. Edmonton’s Craig MacTavish, burned before by an excess of optimism, said “progress.” Calgary’s Brad Treliving said “a step forward.” Winnipeg’s Kevin Cheveldayoff said “Give us a few years and I like our chances.”

Compared to which, Vancouver GM Jim Benning’s “make the playoffs and then see where we go” sounds positively cocky.

So we start there . . .

VANCOUVER CANUCKS

With the former Boston Bruins assistant GM and new coach Willie Desjardins joining president Trevor Linden to make it a troika of westerners in charge, the Canucks are hoping for the post-Tortorella, post-Kesler, post-Luongo-fiasco bounce.

They’ll probably have at least six new players in the lineup: 34-year-old goalie Ryan Miller, former Anaheim Ducks forward Nick Bonino and defenceman Luca Sbisa (obtained in the long-awaited Ryan Kesler deal), grinder Derek Dorsett, Los Angeles Kings scorer-in-waiting Linden Vey, and forward Radim Vrbata.

With Vrbata on their wing and Desjardins promising to utilize their strengths better than John Tortorella did a year ago, the revitalization of Henrik and Daniel Sedin is the key to whatever hopes the Canucks may have of returning to the playoffs.

Bonino could be a spark plug on the second line, Vey could break out on the third and Miller . . . well, he was nothing special in St. Louis last spring, but the culture shock going from the Buffalo Sabres to Ken Hitchcock’s stingy squad must have been considerable.

The likelihood of any of the Canucks’ prospects making a big dent is slender. All in all, a season of maybes lies ahead in Vancouver.

CALGARY FLAMES

The idea is that the Flames, with Brian Burke hiring like-minded Treliving from Phoenix to be Calgary’s GM, are now committed to moving forward as a heavier, harder team.

After proving to be a stout, diligent crew under Bob Hartley a year ago, though it didn’t translate into a sniff of the playoffs, the Flames are the other half of the Alberta Slump.

They don’t appear to have added much in the way of improved talent — Mike Cammalleri and T.J. Galiardi out, Mason Raymond and Devin Setoguchi in, with defenceman Deryk Engelland and forward Brandon Bollig bringing some beef. Jonas Hiller should be an upgrade in goal.

So it will be up to some of their young prospects — Sven Baertschi, Markus Granlund, Max Reinhart, perhaps Hobey Baker winner Johnny Gaudreau — to try and bolster a lineup that had a big breakout year from Sean Monahan last season, and needs him to be even better now on what could be a goal-starved squad.

EDMONTON OILERS

That word “potential” has killed a lot of coaches, and Dallas Eakins did well to survive the failure of the Oilers’ corps of much-hyped kids to live up to theirs in 2013-14. Taylor Hall has become a big-time player, but it’s been a struggle for consistency from Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Jordan Eberle and Justin Schultz, and a debacle for Nail Yakupov.

Second-year GM MacTavish seems to have stabilized the goaltending with last season’s additions of Ben Scrivens and Viktor Fasth, but the cast of skaters surrounding the big-name offensive talent remains iffy.

Teddy Purcell is a serviceable right-winger picked up from Tampa in the Sam Gagner trade, while free-agent forward Benoit Pouliot (from the Rangers) and defenceman Mark Fayne (New Jersey) are big favourites of the analytics crowd, from which the club surprisingly plucked lawyer, blogger and Corsi proponent Tyler Dellow to help them evaluate performance through advanced stats.

If that makes them smarter, their hopes still ride on the personnel, and much will depend on whether they decide to develop or play big centre Leon Draisaitl, their top draft pick, and whether they see enough improvement from young blueliners Darnell Nurse, Oscar Klefbom and Martin Marincin to give them bigger roles alongside Schultz, Andrew Ference and Jeff Petry.

MacTavish says they don’t want to rush players into the NHL, but the bright future — after eight years out of the playoffs — had better not be very far away.

WINNIPEG JETS

Everybody’s favourite pinata, Winnipeg has been batted back and forth from West to East and back again — and right now, the Jets must be wishing they’d stayed in the Southeast.

GM Cheveldayoff’s team has been the very definition of ordinary since Winnipeg’s return to the NHL in 2011: Barely over .500, never in the playoffs, though they did enjoy a flush of success after Paul Maurice replaced Claude Noel as coach in January.

So when the GM says the Jets “need to take a step in a lot of different areas,” he means up front, on defence and in goal. The third-youngest team in the NHL a year ago, Winnipeg has three kids with significant talent in forwards Evander Kane and Mikel Peca (awaited Ryan Kesler deal), and a debacle for Nail Yakupov.

If that makes them smarter, their hopes still ride on the personnel, and much will better not be very far away.

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Their veteran core, including captain Andrew Ladd, Bryan Little, Blake Wheeler and the versatile Dustin Byfuglien, is solid. Signing centre Mathieu Perreault from Anaheim should help down the middle, but Ondrej Pavelec needs to be much better than his .901 save percentage of 2013-14.

But in a division with Chicago, St. Louis, Colorado, Dallas and Minnesota, it appears there is just no place to go.

Barry Fraser, architect of ‘84 Oiler Stanley Cup team can’t make reunion

Jim Matheson

Chief scout Barry Fraser, who had a huge hand in putting together the 1984 Edmonton Oiler Stanley Cup champions, regretfully won’t be here for the reunion this week because his place in Mexico at Cabo san Lucas, was damaged three weeks ago by Hurricane Odile.

Fraser, who joined the Oilers late in the WHA days, was responsible for drafting Kevin Lowe, Mark Messier and Glenn Anderson in rounds 1, 3 and 4 in 1979, Paul Coffey, Jari Kurri and Andy Moog (first, 4th and 7th rounds) in 1980, Grant Fuhr (eighth overall) in 1981 and Finn Raimo Summanen (sixth-round) in 1982. Those eight were all part of the 1984 squad in varying degrees and Fraser pushed to sign defenceman Charlie Huddy, as well, in 1979 when he went undrafted in a six-round draft that summer because of the WHA-NHL merger.

Coffey and Huddy, now Winnipeg Jets assistant coach, became one of the franchise’s best defence tandems, starting in 1982.

Centre Kevin McClelland, who scored arguably the biggest goal in team history (the 1-0 snipe on Billy Smith in the third period of a goalie duel between Grant Fuhr and Billy Smith) may not be coming, as well. The four-time Cup champ currently coaches the CHL’s Wichita Thunder.

Summanen, who played in five post-season games in ‘84 with a goal and four assists before they went to Jaroslav Pouzar instead for a bigger body on the wing, isn’t expected here, either. He coaches Avangard Omsk in the KHL.

Oiler owner Peter Pocklington, who has had some well-documented legal issues the past few years, has confirmed that he’s coming to the reunion from his home in California. So is current New York Rangers’ GM Glen Sather, his Oilers’ right-hand man John Muckler, now retired, and Oiler assistant coach in ’84, Teddy Green.

Predictably, all four Oilers sent to OKC and needing waivers cleared Monday which means Keith Aulie, Anton Lander, Tyler Pitlick and Steve Pinizzotto are reporting to the Barons. Ex Oiler defenceman Taylor Fedun, who signed with the San Jose Sharks over the summer, was assigned to their AHL farm team in Worcester Monday.

Willie Mitchell honored to be named Florida Panthers captain

BY GEORGE RICHARDS

When Ed Jovanovski was announced as the seventh captain in Florida Panthers history, then-coach Kevin Dineen did it following a practice.

On Monday, Willie Mitchell got the news atop a mountain in New York.

Mitchell was presented with a red game jersey with the “C” on the front Monday on Mount Tourne at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point where the team is spending a few days of training before its season opener.

Mitchell is one of eight new players on the roster of a team that has a new head coach in Gerard Gallant as well as two new assistant coaches.

Florida veterans Brian Campbell and Scottie Upshall were named assistant captains as were newcomers Derek MacKenzie and Dave Bolland.

“It’s flattering in one sense but it’s also a big responsibility,” Mitchell said. “I haven’t chatted with a lot of people about it so it kind of caught me off guard. I heard grumblings, but I was a bit surprised at the top of the hill. . . . It’s not something I’m going to take lightly. When you wear that, it’s an honor. A lot of great people in the league represent their team that way.”

The 37-year-old defenseman, who has won two of the past three Stanley Cup championships with Los Angeles, has already been hailed as a leader inside the Panthers locker room. Mitchell also served as a rotating captain with Minnesota in 2006.

“It was really important for us to go after guys like Willie who are not only great hockey players, but great guys in the room as well,” said goalie Roberto Luongo, who played with Mitchell in Vancouver.

“Willie has been there, knows what it takes, knows what a winning locker room looks and feels like. There are some things people may not see off the ice. Helping these young kids see what they need to do is important.”

• The Panthers made a trade to bolster their depth Monday, trading forward Joey Crabb to the Rangers in exchange for defenseman Stephen Kampfer and Broward-born winger Andrew Yogan.

Crabb was on a one-way deal with the Panthers but had already been reassigned to their AHL team in San Antonio. Kampfer and Yogan are expected to report to the Rampage in the coming days.

Florida also signed free agent defenseman Shane O’Brien to a one-year, two-way deal meaning he will start the season in San Antonio. Colby Robak makes the Panthers as the roster is now set at 23.

Kampfer, 26, has played in 61 NHL games but has spent the past two seasons in the AHL.

Yogan, who played youth hockey in Lighthouse Point and was a member of the Junior Panthers in Coral Springs, has spent the past two seasons bouncing between the Rangers’ AHL and ECHL affiliates.

Florida had a chance to draft Yogan, who left South Florida at age 15 to play Canadian junior hockey, in 2010 but did not. Yogan was picked by the Rangers with the 100th overall selection that year – one spot after Florida took Joonas Donskoi (who is no longer in the organization).

Read more here:
http://www.miamiherald.com/sports/nhl/florida-panthers/article2535577.html #storylink=cpy

Miami Herald LOADED: 10.07.2014
LOCAL TRADE: Panthers send Joey Crabb to Rangers, grab Coral Springs’ Andrew Yogan in return; Shane O’Brien to San Antonio

TWITTER: @GeorgeRichards

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Miami Herald LOADED: 10.07.2014
NEW CAPTAIN: Willie Mitchell named new captain of the Florida Panthers

TWITTER: @GeorgeRichards

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Miami Herald LOADED: 10.07.2014
Panthers select veteran Mitchell as team captain

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel contact the reporter

Panthers sign two-way deal with D Shane O’Brien

Looks like Colby Robak won the final spot on the roster
Scottie Upshall, Dave Bolland, Derek MacKenzie and Brian Campbell named alternate captains

In a surprise, emotional ceremony held at the top of Mt. Thorne Monday afternoon, Panthers coach Gerard Gallant named veteran defenseman Willie Mitchell the eighth captain in franchise history.

It was after a grueling team hike on a sun-splashed day at West Point Military Academy, where the team is completing training camp.

It was fitting that Mitchell, 37, led a squadron named “Honor” up the treacherous, rocky path to the top while they alternately carried an 89-pound rock and long log (pseudo Panthers flagpole). And the Honor team of Panthers players got to the top quicker than the other two divisions, named “Courage” and “Integrity.”

“It’s flattering in one sense but it’s also a lot of responsibility,” said Mitchell, who was an alternate captain in Vancouver and rotating captain in Minnesota before he won two Stanley Cups in the past three years with the Kings.

“You just want to settle in with your teammates and find your game and build toward your season so you’re so focused in doing all those things here at West Point team building and having a great time, so it kind of caught me off guard. It’s not taken lightly.

“When you wear that it’s an honor. There’s so many great players in the NHL who wore the ‘C’ on their jersey representing their organization, team and the league. I always try to live up to myself everyday but also to those people around you who push the bar and you want to be at that bar. If people look at me in that light, it’s cool.”

Gallant also introduced his four alternate captains: forward Scottie Upshall and former Blackhawks center Dave Bolland on the road while defenseman Brian Campbell and center Derek MacKenzie, another first-year Panther, will sport the “A” on their jerseys at home. Upshall, 30, and Campbell, 35, were alternates in many games last season while injured defenseman/captain Ed Jovanovski was sidelined.

“I’m looking forward to following and learning from [Mitchell] and guys who won Stanley Cups,” said MacKenzie, 33, who came over from the Blue Jackets. “I’m happy to be part of a young team moving in the right direction.”

The Panthers chose four veterans, three with Stanley Cup credentials (Mitchell, Campbell and Bolland), instead of potential young stars like Erik Gudbranson, Nick Bjugstad, Jonathan Huberdeau and Aleksander Barkov, because Gallant said, “they might not be ready yet.”

“We went out this summer and got veteran leadership,” Gallant said. “Some guys were left out. It’s a great leadership group and [Mitchell] is a natural leader.”

Inspired by Col. Hank Kersey, the video game advisor for the Call of Duty, the Panthers had to haul heavy rocks up the mountain as symbol of teamwork, sacrifice and honor to the fallen soldiers and active heroes whose names were inscribed in a rock garden tribute at the pinnacle.

Team owners Doug Cifu and Vinnie Viola, a 1977 graduate of West Point, made the difficult trek, as did President Rory Babich and Tallon.

“Proud to be a Panther,” Viola said as Mitchell and teammates planted the Panthers makeshift flagpole at the top.

Eric Joyce, assistant to Tallon, and leadership consultant J.B. Spisso, both decorated West Point military officers, helped organize many of the team-bonding exercises, including paint ball, fording muddy waters, constructing rope ladders at Camp Buckner before meeting the Army hockey team.

Before the morning practice at Tate Arena, the players were given inspirational messages from Army hockey coach Brian Riley and three-star Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen.

The entire team attended the annual U.S. Military Academy Thayer Award ceremony on Monday that featured marching bands from the Revolutionary War days while featuring former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for her lifelong service to her country.

Jimmy Hayes and Bjugstad, the only Americans on the Panthers, were in awe of the team-bonding trip.

“It’s a good learning experience to see what these guys go through every day, their mental toughness,” said Bjugstad, who has stepbrothers in the military.

Previous Panthers captains were Jovanovski, Brian Skrudland, Scott Mellanby, Paul Laus, Pavel Bure, Olli Jokinen and Bryan McCabe.

O’Brien earns contract

Tallon pulled defenseman Shane O’Brien off the team bus en route to the mountain hike to tell him that he had reached an agreement with the veteran’s agent on a one-year, two-way deal worth $650,000 in the NHL and $125,000 in the AHL.

O’Brien, 31, came to training camp on a professional tryout after the Flames bought out the rest of his contract, so he will also be paid by Calgary $733,000 in each of the next two seasons.

O’Brien will start the season in San Antonio, meaning that young defenseman Colby Robak will round out the seven-man defensive corps and complete the 23-man, opening-night roster.

“We had to get to 23 and this was the only way we could get it done,” said Tallon, who didn’t want to risk losing Robak on waivers. “Shane will play a lot of games for us. It takes an army. He gives us depth, toughness and offense, and he’ll go down and [mentor] Mackenzie Weegar and Alex Petrovic.”

O’Brien has to clear waivers by noon Tuesday to remain in the Panthers’ organization. …

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 10.07.2014
Panthers acquire South Florida native Yogan

By Craig Davis, Sun Sentinel contact the reporter

Andrew Yogan, first Florida-raised player drafted by NHL team, acquired by Panthers

Yogan closer to realizing dream of playing for Florida Panthers; must work his way up from minors

The first player born and raised in Florida to be drafted by an NHL team is now property of the Florida Panthers.

Andrew Yogan, a forward who honed his skills playing youth hockey in Pompano Beach and Coral Springs, was acquired Monday in a trade of minor league players with the New York Rangers along with defenseman Steven Kampfer in exchange for forward Joey Crabb.

Yogan was born in Broward County and a resident of Boca Raton when he was drafted by the Rangers in 2010. Before the draft he expressed a desire to be selected by the Panthers.

"I want to be not just the first player to play in the NHL from Florida, but the first player from here to bring the [Stanley] Cup to my hometown," said Yogan, who was then 18 and had a Pavel Bure poster in his bedroom in Boca Raton. "I just see myself one day playing for the Panthers. I don't know when it's going to be in my career, but I do."

Yogan started playing hockey at Glacier Ice in Pompano Beach in the 7- and 8-year-old division and eventually played for the Florida Junior Panthers at then-Incredible Ice, the Coral Springs rink now known as Panthers IceDen that is the Panthers’ training base.

He went to Canada in 2007 to pursue his NHL dream in Ontario Hockey League, one of the elite junior leagues for developing pro prospects.

Going into the 2010 draft, Yogan was rated the 61st-best North American skater by NHL Central Scouting. He was chosen by the Rangers in the fourth round with the 100th overall pick, one selection after the Panthers took Finnish center Joonas Donskoi.

Yogan, 6 feet 3, 205 pounds, played last season in the Rangers organization for the Hartford Wolf Pack (AHL) and Greenville Road Warriors (ECHL). He had 16 points (seven goals) in 17 postseason games for the Road Warriors.

Kampfer, who has played in 61 NHL games for Boston and Minnesota, was vying for a roster spot on the Rangers, but was pushed out by the sterling exhibition season of 19-year-old Anthony Duclair.

Crabb, 13, was cut early in Panthers training camp and assigned to San Antonio of the AHL. He had one assist in nine games for the Panthers last season.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 10.07.2014
What would it take for the Kings to become a dynasty?

Helene Elliott

Like NHL dynasties past, the Kings built their championship foundation through the draft

Can Kings become the first NHL team to repeat as champions since 1997, 1998 Red Wings?

Kings GM Dean Lombardi has done a lot of research on making the Kings a dynasty

Two days after the Kings had won the Stanley Cup for the second time in three seasons — probably before some players had gotten any sleep — General Manager Dean Lombardi was back at work, focusing on his next project.

A student of sports history, Lombardi researched which major league teams in the past 25 years had won three championships in a span of four or five years. He wanted to learn how they sustained their success, knowledge he hoped to apply to his team.

Dean Lombardi

Kings General Manager Dean Lombardi speaks during the team's Stanley Cup championship celebration at Staples Center on June 16. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)


"What's a dynasty? It's the Packers. It's the Cowboys. It's the guys down the hall," he said, nodding toward the Lakers offices in the teams' El Segundo practice facility. "It's four in five, boys, that's it, so let's go for it."

No NHL team has done that since the Edmonton Oilers won in 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988 and again in 1990, after they had traded Wayne Gretzky to the Kings. No NHL team has won consecutive Cup titles since the Red Wings of 1997 and 1998.

Would a repeat by the Kings make them a dynasty?

That's up for debate. But in winning the Cup twice and reaching the West final once in the past three seasons, the Kings have won the endorsement of an authority on dynasties — Bill Torrey, architect and general manager of the New York Islanders when they won the Cup in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983 and lost the Final in 1984.

"No one has given me an apt, complete description of what the word means, but they're about as much a dynasty this year as you could be," said Torrey, 80, now an alternate governor of the Florida Panthers.

"When you look at the way they went down in every series last spring and had to fight their way back, no team ever did it before, and they are due lots of recognition."

Sustaining success is difficult in any sport. It's especially tricky under the hard salary cap the NHL implements. Players want raises after they win, but the team's payroll can stretch only so far. Role players want a chance at stardom elsewhere. That creates the kind of upheaval that broke up the 2010 Chicago Blackhawks — though they retooled and won in 2013 — and often leads to years of rebuilding.

So it's impossible.

"I'm not sure I buy that," Lombardi said. "It seems that's the first thing out of everybody's mouths: 'You can't do it.' I think a lot of it comes from the NFL because there's such a high turnover, but part of that is it looks high because there's so many guys on the roster.

"I never wanted to accept that. You've heard me say, 'We're doing it slow so we can keep it together.' ... I think it can be done."

Dynasties were common in the six-team NHL. The Montreal Canadiens won the Cup five consecutive times starting in 1956 and won four straight championships starting in 1976 with teams considered among the best ever.

"Each era has its own distinct obstacles to continue winning, and you have to deal with them," Torrey said. "You can't compare the '60s to the '70s. They're all different. And certainly the budget I had in running the Islanders wouldn't win me very many championships today."

One notable difference is that the Canadiens of the 1950s had to win only two playoff series to win the Cup; their 1970s counterparts had to win three series. As the NHL expanded and changed its playoff format, the road to the Cup lengthened and the 1980 Islanders were the first team to win four series. Consider this: They won an astonishing 19 straight playoff series.

"When I go to my grave, I think that's one record I will be safe to know will be there for a while," Torrey said.

The Islanders, Oilers and Kings relied heavily on the draft to build their teams. The Oilers, who had acquired Gretzky when they were in the World Hockey Assn., got a head start when they were allowed to keep him instead of possibly losing "The Great One" in the expansion draft that took place when four WHA teams joined the NHL in 1979.

The Islanders, after finishing last in 1972, drafted Denis Potvin No. 1 overall in 1973, then added Clark Gillies and Bryan Trottier in 1974 and Mike Bossy in 1977. All became Hall of Famers. Torrey resisted calls to blow up his team after playoff losses in 1978 and 1979 and made a deadline-beating trade in 1980 that remains the gold standard — Despite the objection of Coach Al Arbour, Torrey traded Billy Harris and Dave Lewis to the Kings for Butch Goring, who became the glue of their dynasty.

The Oilers, guided by scout Barry Fraser, drafted Kevin Lowe, Mark Messier (48th) and Glenn Anderson in 1979, Paul Coffey, Jari Kurri (69th) and Andy Moog (132nd) in 1980 and Grant Fuhr in 1981. All became multi-Cup winners. The Oilers' draft efforts have never come close to matching that.

The Kings, also drafting early after years of failure, chose Dustin Brown 13th in 2003, Anze Kopitar 11th and Jonathan Quick 72nd in 2005, and Drew Doughty second in 2008. Lombardi made his version of the Goring trade on Feb. 23, 2012, filling a need for scoring by acquiring forward Jeff Carter from Columbus. Two years later, he got free-agent-to-be Marian Gaborik from Columbus for Matt Frattin and two draft picks.

"I have a great deal of respect for him," Torrey said of Lombardi. "He's extremely thorough, and he's not afraid to take chances. He's very forward-thinking. It's paid off."

The Islanders and Oilers grew up together and became family, an atmosphere Lombardi promotes. Players have bought in, helping keep the group largely intact; Gaborik and defenseman Matt Greene re-signed for less than they could have gotten on the free-agent market.

Because they respect and push each other, they avoid complacency, a key to sustained success. "I think their bonds are stronger," Lombardi said. "I see none of this stuff that you've usually got to watch out for — who gets the credit, that type of thing."

"You can definitely tell they like each other, and I've always talked about what makes this group so special. It's that, and it seems like it's continuing to grow, which is pretty neat."

Just as the case for calling them a dynasty will grow if they win again.
Kings make roster moves; Darryl Sutter evaluates preseason effort

By Lisa Dillman contact the reporter

Kings Coach Darryl Sutter is pleased with how things went for the team during the preseason.

The Kings have placed Jeff Schultz and Adam Cracknell on waivers.

Kings goalie Jonathan Quick performed well in preseason after undergoing wrist surgery.

Preseason hockey, thankfully, has ended for the Kings in 2014.

Their regular season starts Wednesday against the Sharks, kicked off by the Stanley Cup-banner raising ceremony at Staples Center. The understanding is that the proceedings will be short and efficient, a fact welcomed by the players.

Meanwhile, Kings Coach Darryl Sutter was pleased with the way things have unfolded.

"I think we had a really good preseason in terms of what we wanted to do as a group," he said Monday after practice. "Especially with the injured guys. Our plan was to try and get guys into three or four games and then some of the younger guys playing more."

The biggest question was the readiness of No. 1 goalie Jonathan Quick. Quick had wrist surgery in June and played in big parts of three games last week.

You could say 145 minutes of action gave Quick and the coaches plenty of information, all positive signs of progress. Sutter thought Quick was good from the first game last week at San Jose.

"I knew I'd feel comfortable with the shots. ... I got seven periods in over the course of the week. Had a lot of time to work on it. I felt pretty consistent throughout. Every game I did something a little bit better than something else. ... Obviously you want to go into Game 1 feeling as great as you can. You've got to keep getting better every day."

Of course, the Kings had to do some roster housekeeping and put on the finishing touches to get down to a 23-man roster by Tuesday. Veteran defenseman Jeff Schultz and forward Adam Cracknell were put on waivers Monday morning, and, if they clear, they are designated for the Kings' American Hockey League affiliate in Manchester, N.H.

And so, there will be two newcomers on the King's roster, defenseman Brayden McNabb and forward Andy Andreoff.

"I think they both got better as the camp went on," Sutter said. "Based on that, they're deserving of a roster spot. Brayden, especially because of the position. It's not easy. He's willing to really work on his game and he's really coach able."

For McNabb, it was educational playing alongside Drew Doughty near the end of the preseason campaign.

"When you're playing with him every shift, you really see how good he is and what he does with the puck," McNabb said. "The little things. Watching the game, you don't really see and appreciate it."

"He's pretty loose on the ice. It kind of helps everyone else to be less uptight."

LA Times: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Kings players, and some staff members, were scheduled to receive their Stanley Cup rings in a private ceremony Monday night. Other staff members will get their rings Wednesday.

When the Kings won the Cup in 2012, players got their rings during a lengthy on-ice ceremony immediately before the season opener. This time, the ceremony will be shorter (scheduled to be less than a half hour).

The Kings also announced that, because of scheduling conflicts, names will not be engraved on the Stanley Cup before the start of the season. The engraving apparently will happen before the end of this month.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 10.07.2014
What impact will Andreoff, McNabb make?

posted by RICH HAMMOND

Andy Andreoff and Brayden McNabb have made the Kings’ roster, but how much will they play and what will their roles be at the start of the season.

Andreoff, 23, is expected to be a healthy scratch for Wednesday’s season opener and has the potential to fill in as a fourth-line (and maybe third-line) center or left winger.

McNabb, 23, is also expected to be scratched, but is a left-shot defenseman who could occasionally step in for Matt Greene (or Drew Doughty or Alec Martinez, in the case of injury.

Andreoff has never appeared in an NHL game. McNabb played 25 games with Buffalo in 2011-12 and 12 games last season before his trade to the Kings. McNabb spent the rest of the season with the Kings’ AHL affiliate, then practiced with the NHL club throughout the playoffs.

``It was a pretty smooth transition, after being here last year for playoffs,” McNabb said. "The coaches do a great job of preparing the players. It maybe took me a couple games to get everything figured out, but the last two or three games, I thought I felt pretty good within the systems, but I still have a lot to work on.”

The Kings acquired McNabb from Buffalo last March with the thought that he could eventually replace Willie Mitchell, the lanky, left-shot defenseman who signed with Florida four months later.

"He’s willing to really work at his game and he’s really coachable,” Sutter said of McNabb. "He’s a left-handed defenseman so he only plays on the left side, but he can play with any of our right-handed defensemen, which is something that I really like. A lot of times, guys can only play with a certain partner. With the way our right-handers are set up, Drew is Drew, but obviously Slava and Greener are a lot different players. So to know that we can comfortably put Brayden with any one of those guys, it’s good for him and it’s good for us.”

As for Andreoff, a Kings third-round pick in 2011, Sutter said, "I thought he got better as camp went on. I think he still has lots to learn but, like Brayden, he’s coachable and he wants to play in the NHL. Because of the numbers, there’s four centers ahead of him and there’s four or five left wingers ahead of him, so he’s spotted in the right place.”

Orange County Register: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Darryl Sutter is pleased with the way the Kings conducted their training camp.

Darryl Sutter is pleased?
The Kings’ coach, notorious for his frowning and his we-can-do-better mentality, seemed almost serene Monday as the Kings neared final preparations for Wednesday’s season opener against San Jose.

And why not? The Kings had a 5-0-2 preseason record. They avoided major injuries and all of the players who had offseason injury issues are now seemingly ready to go. Complacency doesn’t seem to be a problem for the Kings, even though they’ve won the Stanley Cup two of the last three years.

“Even Darryl has been commenting on their attitude,” General Manager Dean Lombardi said Monday. “You know how Darryl can be. He’s not going to say things that he doesn’t believe. Time will tell, but we certainly believe that we’re in a good spot.”

As expected, the Kings placed forward Adam Cracknell and defenseman Jeff Schultz on waivers Monday. If they clear Tuesday morning, they will be assigned to Manchester of the American Hockey League.

That means forward Andy Andreoff and defenseman Brayden McNabb, two 23-year-old prospects, claimed the Kings’ final two roster spots, although both are expected to be healthy scratches on Wednesday.

“Their body of work has been pretty strong,” Lombardi said. “In Brayden’s case, I think he struggled a little bit early, but he was pretty good here down the stretch. They’re not easy decisions to make, but there are only so many players you can keep.”

The Kings were also fortunate not to have to put any regulars on injured reserve. Marian Gaborik missed the final four preseason games with an undisclosed injury, but Gaborik was a full participant in Monday’s practice and apparently remains on track to play Wednesday.

The same goes for goalie Jonathan Quick, who had wrist surgery in June and missed the first three preseason games.

Sutter said he was pleased with how Quick played in the final three preseason games and wouldn’t manage his schedule any differently, at the start of the season, because of Quick’s later-than-usual start to the preseason.

“It’s not Jonathan’s schedule,” Sutter said. “It’s making sure that (backup Martin Jones) gets enough.”
As noted earlier, the Kings have made their final rosters decisions for the start of the season. Andy Andreoff and Brayden McNabb, both age 23, will stay over Adam Cracknell and Jeff Schultz, both of whom were placed on waivers. It's likely that both players will clear waivers and be assigned to the AHL.

Tomorrow morning, the Kings will be at their NHL-mandated limit of 23 players. I talked to Dean Lombardi this morning about his final roster cuts and his thoughts at the end of training camp.

QUESTION: In making the final cuts, how much of it was about the future, in keeping two guys who might be more a part of the long-term plans?

LOMBARDI: "I think they also played pretty well. Their body of work has been pretty strong. In Brayden’s case, I think he struggled a little bit early, but he was pretty good here down the stretch. They’re not easy decisions to make, but there are only so many players you can keep. So it’s not only a long-term decision. It’s also what’s best for the team in the short term. But those are two really good players, productive players to have in your system, Schultz and Cracknell, so I’m hoping that they still remain on our roster. Because you’re going to need them at some point."

Question: Everyone is saying how this was a drama-free camp, nothing big happening. I guess that’s probably how you want it at this point...

LOMBARDI: "The players are the ones who ultimately set the tone, and I think they set the tone when so many of them came back early. They all showed up in good shape. Even Darryl has been commenting on their attitude. You know how Darryl can be. He’s not going to say things that he doesn’t believe. Time will tell, but we certainly believe that we’re in a good spot."

Also, here’s what Darryl Sutter said about the final cuts...

SUTTER: "It’s not that hard to figure out. I thought Adam had a really good camp. I think that Jeff got better as camp went on, but at the end of the day, there are only so many spots. You know what? Those kids, they’re still a part of the team. That’s just the way it works. It’s not unlike every other team that’s doing the same thing sometime in the last three or four days. That’s the way it works."

Orange County Register: LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Kings essentially set their opening-night roster on Monday morning when they put forward Adam Cracknell and defenseman Jeff Schultz on waivers.

If neither player is claimed by another team before tomorrow morning, both will be assigned to Manchester of the AHL, and the Kings' 23-man roster will be set for their season opener against San Jose on Wednesday.

The winners are forward Andy Andreoff and defenseman Brayden McNabb, who, as expected, beat out Cracknell and Schultz for the final two roster spots.

Here's how the Kings' roster will look...

FORWARDS: Marian Gaborik, Anze Kopitar, Dustin Brown, Tanner Pearson, Jeff Carter, Tyler Toffoli, Dwight King, Mike Richards, Justin Williams, Kyle Clifford, Jarret Stoll, Trevor Lewis, Jordan Nolan, Andy Andreoff.

DEFENSEMEN: Jake Muzzin, Drew Doughty, Robyn Regehr, Slava Voynov, Alec Martinez, Matt Greene, Brayden McNabb.

GOALIES: Jonathan Quick, Martin Jones.

Orange County Register: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Meet the captain of the 2014-15 Florida Panthers, Willie Mitchell:

He was named the eighth captain in Panthers history on Monday during a
team ceremony in West Point, New York, where the team is practicing and
participating in team-building activities.

"I'm happy to see that for him," said Drew Doughty, one of Mitchell's former
defensive partners. "He's obviously got a lot of experience in the NHL. He's
won two Cups now, he's been through a lot, and he can help those young
guys there. I know they got that first overall pick,...Ekblad, and I know that
Mitchie's really good at kind of taking him under his wing. I'm sure they'll be
partners trying to kind of help the kid out. I miss Mitchie here on this team.
He's a great guy, a good friend of mine, and I'm really happy for him
because he's put a lot of years in."

You've probably heard me mention this once or twice, but two of my former
players (and Canucks prospects) when I was an Everett Silvertips
broadcaster spoke about how accessible Mitchell was during Vancouver's
training camps. The veteran – who has acknowledged Scott Stevens' influence on his own development as a younger player – works very well
with younger players, as Darryl Sutter noted.

"It makes sense," Sutter said. "They're a team that's had a lot of trouble and
made the playoffs, what, once in the last [13 seasons], and they brought in
some quality veterans. I don't know who's on their roster, obviously, of that
veteran group, who [could serve as captain]. But Willie's won the Stanley
Cup two of the last three years, and they're basically a young team that
hasn't had much success. I would say it's a logical choice."

There's also Mitchell's geniality and proclivity to speak at length, which
makes him a preferred target with those armed with recording devices.

"Yeah, he likes to talk. I think we all know that," Doughty said, "I'm sure he'll
have a lot to say to his team before games, too."

Elsewhere, 2012 Stanley Cup winner Simon Gagne could crack the Boston
Bruins' roster after sitting out an entire season.

Via Joe Haggerty of CSN New England:

"My impressions are that he's getting better. I think he's skating better and
he's starting to get his hands back. He's been away from the game – he's
skated for most of the year, but he's been away from the game for the whole
year," said Chiarelli. "I spoke with him [Saturday] morning, and I made a
proposal to him in the sense of, 'Look Simon [Gagne], I see you getting
better, I want you to stick around and practice with the team.'"

"He didn't say yes or no, but I think he suggested he would want to stick
around. He feels that he's getting better. So that's kind of a play-it-by-ear,
day-by-day see how his legs feel, see how his hands feel, and just kind of
see how it goes."

Update, 4:25 PM:

Los Angeles Kings v New Jersey Devils - Game Five

Posted by JonRosen on October 6, 2014

McNabb, Andreoff’s progress explained by Sutter

Even if they’re in their first full year with the Kings, there is some familiarity that joins Brayden McNabb and Andy Andreoff. Their new numbers – 3 for McNabb and 15 for Andreoff – are those formerly worn in junior hockey.

“I just kind of got used to it throughout the five years I was in Oshawa, so I was lucky that 15 was still available here,” Andreoff said.

Both players secured their place on the team by virtue of training camps that improved as the preseason progressed, leading to the decisions to waive Adam Cracknell and Jeff Schultz – who also strung together quality camps – in an attempt to assign both players to AHL-Manchester.

“I think they both got better as camp went on. Based on that, they’re deserving of a roster spot,” Darryl Sutter said. “I thought that Brayden especially, because of the position, it’s not easy. But I think one thing that we’ve seen from him is that he’s willing to really work on his game. He’s really coachable. Obviously he’s a left-handed defenseman – he plays only the left side – but he can play with any of our right-handed defensemen, which is something that I really like. A lot of times guys can only play with a certain partner. The way our righties are set up – hey, Drew’s Drew – and Slava and Greener are obviously different players. So to be able to say that we can comfortably put Brayden with any one of those guys, it’s good for him, it’s good for us.”

Though they play different positions, Sutter’s evaluation of Andreoff was similar.

“I thought he got better as camp went on,” Sutter said. “I think he’s got lots to learn, but he’s like Brayden in that sense, where he’s coachable. He wants to play in the NHL. Obviously…there are four guys at center ahead of him if they’re healthy, for sure, and there’s four or five left wingers for sure, so he’s slotted in the right place.”

Barring injuries or trades, the likelihood is that come Wednesday night, McNabb, Andreoff and Jordan Nolan will open the season as scratches, though the players’ own play and continued development will have an impact on their ability to absorb a larger role as the season progresses.

Brayden McNabb, on securing a roster spot:

It’s really exciting to be a part of the Kings. It’s an honor. It’s a great organization. I’m thrilled to be here and am just looking forward to getting better each day and hopefully crack the lineup.

McNabb, on wearing number three in junior hockey:

Yeah, I’ve always liked three and I was lucky enough to have an option to get it, so I’m happy with it.

McNabb, on becoming more acclimated to the team:

It was good. It was a pretty smooth transition being here last year for playoffs. The coaches do a great job of preparing the players and getting the systems down. It maybe took me a couple games to get everything figured out, but the last two or three games, I thought I felt pretty good with the systems, and there’s obviously still a lot to work on, and I’ll continue to do that.

McNabb, on getting more shots off in the preseason finale:

Yeah, good to get a little bit more involved in the offensive area. That comes with time, like I said earlier. I think I’m just going to get better as the season goes on.

McNabb, on skating with Drew Doughty in the preseason finale:

It’s awesome. He’s one of the best, if not the best, D in the league. That being said, it was great.

McNabb, on whether skating with Doughty provides a better appreciation of his game:

I mean, when you’re playing with him every shift, you really see how good he is and what he does with the puck and the little things [that] watching the game, you don’t really see and appreciate. He’s obviously a great talent.

McNabb, on Doughty’s on-ice communication:
On the preseason:

I think we had a really good preseason in terms of what we wanted to do as a group, especially with the injured guys. Basically, our plan was to try and get guys into three in four games, and then some of the younger guys playing more, guys that maybe didn’t play as much last year or didn’t play as many minutes. So it worked out.

On not having enough roster spots to keep Adam Cracknell and Jeff Schultz:

Well, you do the math. It’s not that hard to figure out. I thought Adam had a really good camp. I think that Jeff got better as camp went on, but at the end of the day, there are only so many spots. You know what? Those kids, they’re still part of the team. That’s just the way it works. It’s not unlike every other team that’s doing the same thing sometime in the last three or four days. That’s the way it works.

On Jonathan Quick’s progress:

I don’t think it was “progress.” I think he was good from the start, and our plan was exactly what happened. He wanted to play... the whole second game in Colorado Springs, and I just thought with the altitude and all that, that I was just more concerned with the third period. So then he was fine with that, and he was good from the start. Our goalies – if you go right through our goalies – I mean, the three guys that we carried ‘til the end were all good in camp.

On whether he approaches Quick’s workload early in the season differently:

No, I wish Jonesy would’ve played one more game last year so he could’ve got his name on the [Jennings] Trophy, so that’s always on the back of my mind. It’s not Jonathan’s schedule, it’s making sure that Marty gets enough. [Reporter: Can you petition and ask to have that changed?] No, I think it’s not games played, I think it’s minutes, I think. You should check – it’s one or the other, and he was either one game or not enough minutes. I can’t remember the way it was. It’s too long ago. It seems like a long time ago.
McNabb, Andreoff switch numbers

The franchise’s full list of players who have worn the numbers 3 (last worn by Jack Johnson) and 15 (last worn by Brad Richardson):

3

BRAYDEN MCNABB (October, 2014 – Current)
Jack Johnson (September, 2007 – February, 2012)
Aaron Miller (February, 2001 – April, 2007)
Garry Galley (October, 1997 – April, 2000)
Jan Vopat (March, 1995)
Denis Tygurov (February, 1995 – November, 1995)
Brent Thompson (December, 1992 – February, 1994)
Tom Laidlaw (March, 1987 – 1990)
Ken Hammond (March, 1987)
Garry Galley (October, 1984 – February, 1987)
Marc Chorney (October, 1983 – March, 1984)
Peter Helander (October, 1982)
Ian Turnbull (November, 1981 – February, 1982)
Al Sims (October, 1981)
Doug Halward (December, 1978 – March, 1981)
Larry Brown (October, 1972 – April, 1978)
Doug Barrie (December, 1971 – March, 1972)
Larry Hillman (October, 1971 – December, 1971)
Larry Cahan (October, 1969 – March, 1971)
Dave Amadio (1968-69)
Poul Popiel (1967-68)
Dave Amadio (1967-68)

15

ANDY ANDREOFF (October, 2014 – Current)
Brad Richardson (October, 2008 – June, 2013)
Brady Murray (September, 2007 – October, 2007)
Jamie Lundmark (January, 2007 – April, 2007)
Jeff Cowan (October, 2005 – December, 2006)
Jozef Stumpel (October, 2003 – April, 2004)
Ted Donato (March, 2002)
Jozef Stumpel (October, 1997 – October, 2001)
Jaroslav Modry (March, 1996 – April, 1997)
Pat Conacher (October, 1992 – February, 1996)
Randy Gilhen (October, 1991 – December, 1991)
Chris Kontos (March, 1989 – April, 1990)
Tim Tookey (October, 1988)
Bryan Erickson (December, 1985 – December, 1988)
Dave Gans (October, 1985)
Kevin Lavallee (November, 1984)
Daryl Evans (March, 1982 – November, 1984)
Schultz, Cracknell placed on waivers

As first reported by Lisa Dillman, the Kings have placed Jeff Schultz and Adam Cracknell on waivers.

Should they not be claimed in the 24-hour waiver window, they will be able to be assigned to the Manchester Monarchs.

While this is the most significant transaction news of the preseason for the Kings, it isn’t a surprise. Though Darryl Sutter had previously discussed roster options that included using 13 forwards and eight defensemen – and even 13 forwards and 7 defensemen – it was most likely that Schultz and Cracknell would be the odd men out in the event that the Kings finished the preseason healthy and without roster players on injured reserve, and that’s simply what happened.

That Brayden McNabb showed steady progression through training camp and the preseason, and considering Andy Andreoff’s strong performances in San Jose and Colorado Springs, the two were able to solidify the inside track they had on their roster spots.

There is the chance that Cracknell and Schultz are claimed, though teams could potentially be wary of Schultz’s two year deal, as has been noted on LAKI. It is certainly worth watching, as the depth to the Kings’ blue line would be challenged were Schultz to be claimed, given Andrew Bodnarchuk’s knee injury in training camp.

Barring any injuries or trades, the Kings appear set to open the season with the following roster:

Forwards (14): Andy Andreoff, Dustin Brown, Jeff Carter, Kyle Clifford, Marian Gaborik, Dwight King, Anze Kopitar, Trevor Lewis, Jordan Nolan, Tanner Pearson, Mike Richards, Jarret Stoll, Tyler Toffoli, Justin Williams

Defencemen (7): Drew Doughty, Matt Greene, Alec Martinez, Brayden McNabb, Jake Muzzin, Robyn Regehr, Slava Voynov

Goalies (2): Martin Jones, Jonathan Quick

NHL teams must submit their final rosters by 2:00 p.m. PT on Tuesday.
Save the kvetching and declare Kuemper No. 1 goalie

Ten of the Wild’s best players formed a semicircle around goalie Darcy Kuemper in a post-practice game they call “rebound.”

The player at the point fired a shot at Kuemper, and the other nine guys tried to tap in rebounds. Basically, it’s hockey’s version of target practice.

Kuemper relished every save and let his teammates hear about it, describing his friendly trash talk as “chirping.”

“I see a very confident player,” Wild coach Mike Yeo said of his young goalie. “I hate to use the word, but swagger, that’s the way he’s playing the game right now and he’s backing it up.”

So does that mean that Kuemper will start the season Thursday night as the Wild’s No. 1 goalie? Yeo didn’t exactly paint a clear picture when asked Monday if he’s established a definitive pecking order with his goalies, Kuemper and veteran Niklas Backstrom.

“Not right now,” he said.

Does he need a pecking order?

“Not right now,” he repeated. “After Game 1, yeah. I’m not going to say one is ahead of the other. The writing may be on the wall with that, if you want to look at it that way for Game 1.”

OK, so which one gets the net for the season opener?

“You have to wait until Game 1,” Yeo said.

Not this again. Harrumph.

Well, at least we know that Yeo’s confusing clue doesn’t involve Josh Harding, who literally kicked a wall and broke his foot during an off-ice altercation with a teammate.

That eliminates one option, but this never-ending goalie uncertainty is enough to cause migraines. That story line engulfed the Wild last season and now the starter’s identity remains a mystery only a few days before the start of this promising season.

No more carousel, please. The Wild desperately needs more stability and less drama at that position.

This is undeniably the most talented team in Wild history. Deep at forward, improved along the blue line, the days of Jed Ortmeyer and Warren Peters are a distant memory.

Success in the NHL playoffs remains a crapshoot. The best teams on paper, or in the standings, don’t always advance. But the Wild shouldn’t fear anyone, and Yeo didn’t discourage optimism by dousing it with cold water.

“We know that we can be a contender,” he said. “We know if we do what we’re supposed to do then we can have a shot to win the Stanley Cup. In the same breath, we also know that we could miss the playoffs, looking at our division and our conference.”

Their path likely hinges on goaltending. The Wild handled all the wackiness with its goaltending last season in a professional manner, but all the daily questions became exhausting. No doubt that Yeo wants to prevent a repeat of that.

The Wild needs one of the goalies to distinguish himself as the No. 1, someone capable of playing 50 to 55 games.

Ideally, that guy is Kuemper, who is young (24), talented and fits a leaguewide trend of tall, agile goalies. At 6-5, he consumes a lot of his workspace, even when he drops into his butterfly position.

“Obviously the bigger you are,” he said, “the more net you take up.”

Kuemper showed promise as a rookie last season and gained valuable experience in the postseason. This looks like an ideal opportunity to give him the job and see how he responds, knowing Backstrom is available if Kuemper falters.

“That’s definitely the role I want to play,” Kuemper said. “I’ve always been the No. 1 guy at every other level growing up. You want to be out there every night. … I know I’m ready for it.”

Kuemper doesn’t lack confidence, which is evident in his body language, his aggressiveness in the crease, even the way he flips the puck out of his glove after big saves. He plays the position with professional arrogance.

“I think the team feeds off that a little bit,” he said. “I try not to get too crazy.”

The Wild won’t care, as long as he’s effective. Assuming he gets the start, of course. Or maybe Backstrom will get the nod.

Whatever happens, let’s just hope neither one kicks a wall in anger.
Wild narrows roster, then adds Ryan Carter

Article by: Michael Russo

No news was good news for a handful of Wild players Monday.

Christian Folin arrived at Xcel Energy Center bright and early. The defenseman went for a workout, his heart pounding. Afterward, Folin discovered he wasn’t bound for demotion to Iowa of the AHL by walking in the locker room and finding his practice jersey in his stall.

Same for Matt Dumba. And Jason Zucker. And, for now, Stu Bickel.

Unfortunately for Ilya Bryzgalov, Cody Almond and Stephane Veilleux, they got called in to see General Manager Chuck Fletcher. Bryzgalov was released from his tryout, although Fletcher didn’t close the door on eventually signing Bryzgalov to a two-way or minor league contract. Almond and Veilleux were placed on waivers and will be sent to Iowa if they clear Tuesday.

Almond has the option of returning to his Swiss team.

“[Zucker, Folin, Dumba and Bickel] needed to make this team. None of them had a spot here. They had very strong camps.”

A few hours after practice ended, however, the Wild signed forward Ryan Carter to a one-year, $725,000 deal. The White Bear Lake native, who won a Stanley Cup with Anaheim in 2007 and went to the Finals with New Jersey in 2012, is expected to practice Tuesday and debut in the season opener against Colorado on Thursday.

“I’m beyond excited,” said Carter, 31, who spent the past month in the Devils’ training camp and has 68 points in 360 NHL games. “Everything away from the rink aside, I get a chance to play with Zach [Parise] again. And when you look at the team and the roster and to have a chance to win, that’s extremely important.”

Fletcher said the coaches felt strongly that Carter would be an “upgrade” and provide more options in terms of building rosters on a nightly basis. He’s a hard-working, good-skating checker who can play center or wing and kill penalties.

Justin Fontaine is on injured reserve because of a gluteus injury. He practiced Monday and hopes to play Thursday, although the Wild will be cautious because he missed much of camp. Once he’s activated, the Wild will have to assign somebody to Iowa. The likeliest candidate is Bickel, although $3 million fourth-line forward Kyle Brodziak has been on the trading block since June.

Fletcher said the Wild might be shuttling players back and forth to Iowa early in the season based on what lineup the coaches want on a nightly basis.

The big news Monday was Folin, 23, and Dumba, 20, making the team and being paired together at practice inside the top six. Veteran defensemen Keith Ballard and Nate Prosser were the extras.

“I put everything out there that I had,” Folin said. “After the Saturday night game [against St. Louis], I just thought to myself, ‘There’s nothing else I can do.’ I was just hoping for the best.”

The Wild debated about Dumba, who could benefit from playing big minutes in the AHL. But he had a goal and four power-play assists in five exhibition games, and Dumba adds a dynamic dimension to a team that wants to get more offense from its blue-liners.

Dumba was outstanding in the preseason finale against the Blues.

“I would say before that game, we maybe had some decisions to make, whereas after the game there was no decision to be made,” Yeo said.

Zucker, who has eight goals and four assists in 47 games, made the team out of camp for the first time.
Good camps. I mean, that’s quite often how they work their way in full time.

On Folin, Dumba and Zucker outplaying vets, Yeo said, “Those guys all had playoff success. He brings good depth to a team and different dimensions to the bottom six and provides the coaching staff with more options in terms of building rosters from game to game.”

The Devils wanted to re-sign Carter, but they didn’t have room. He spent all of training camp in New Jersey, but Carter just didn’t feel like he could wait any longer for GM Lou Lamoriello to open up a roster spot once the Wild came in with a viable offer.

Fletcher talked with Lamoriello today, and the GM “raved about him, not just the contributions that Ryan made to New Jersey, but the work ethic and character he brings. I don’t think you can ever have too much of that.”

When Justin Fontaine comes off injured reserve, the Wild will have to make a roster move. Stu Bickel seems the likeliest candidate, although we know how much Yeo values what he can bring.

The Wild also tried to trade Kyle Brodziak over the summer to no avail. I had no conversations about the opening night roster and how people speak about it too much. We’ll do what we have to do to put the team on the ice the coaches want for Game 1 and we may continually make adjustments after that. I think it’ll be a game to game scenario for the early part of the season.

“Based on what we do from game to game, we’ll react accordingly.”

In other words, there could be an Iowa shuttle for awhile based on the type of lineup Yeo wants from game-to-game. For instance, next week when the Wild travels to Anaheim and Los Angeles, maybe those are games Yeo will want Bickel to play. Maybe other times he’ll want Carter in the lineup against faster teams.

2. Christian Folin and Matt Dumba were paired together in practice today. Yeo said that is a likely pair Thursday against Colorado and after seeing them paired together for a few shifts in St. Louis and third period at home against St. Louis, he’s confident they can be trusted.

Dumba, a right-shot defenseman, told me he played the left side his entire draft year. Dumba admitted that when he wasn’t supposed to play against St. Louis in the finale, he figured he wasn’t making the team. He found out at 5:20 he was playing, and made the most of it with a third-period goal and his fourth power-play assist of the preseason.

“He had a good camp before that, but he had a real strong game again there,” Yeo said, “I would say before that game, we maybe had some decisions to make, whereas after the game there was no decision to be made.”

On the guys who made the team. Yeo said, “There’s usually nothing final about final cuts. But we feel that the guys that are here deserve to be here, whether it’s younger players or older players. We had a good camp. Guys did a good job and I think we’ve seen people get rewarded for that.”

On Folin, Dumba and Zucker outplaying vets, Yeo said, “Those guys all had good camps. I mean, they needed to make this team. None of them had a spot here, none of them were going to come here and play OK and have a chance to be still here today. So those guys have come in and had very strong camps. I think we gave those guys a good workload. We gave them the opportunity to succeed and we also gave them the opportunity to fail, and they went obviously in the direction toward succeeding. They had good camps, so they should be proud of that. Same message that I’ll give them, every day is a new day and they should feel real good about being here, but you have to make sure that you stay here.”

On Dumba’s defense, Yeo said, “We want to continue to develop that. We have to work on the areas of his game that he needs to improve and he needs to bring consistently to be an effective player in this league. That said, we have to make sure we’re not limiting him, too, because he does bring a dimension that we need as far as his ability to get up ice, his ability to create offense off the rush, his ability to create offense inside the offensive zone and on the power play. We want to increase the offense that we’re bringing from the back end and we believe he’s a guy who’s capable of doing that.”

Folin said, “I put everything out there that I had. After the Saturday night game, I just thought to myself, there’s nothing else I can do. I was just hoping for the best.”

Said Dumba, “It feels good, but nothing’s set in stone, I know that. You try to reach one goal and move on to the next.”

3. On Zucker making the team one year exactly after being cut, Yeo said, “Last year is last year. It wasn’t his best camp. He came in very determined this year and he knew that he had to make the team this year – there was no sense of entitlement. He scored, which is nice. But if he scored and didn’t do other things than he wouldn’t have made the team. Where he’s going to factor in, where’s he’s going to find a place in our lineup on Day 1, he did the things necessary for that. He was playing a competitive game, he was going to the hard areas, he was taking care of the puck, he was sound defensively, he was a strong penalty killer, and that’s going to get him the opportunity to work his way into other opportunities. If you want to look at Nino last year, that’s very similar to what he did. There were times when he was on the fourth line, there were times that he was on the first line. And maybe this is an opportunity for Zucker to prove that he can be in the lineup consistently and play in different roles and play different positions. Really for young guys that’s quite often how they work their way in full time.”

On making the team, Zucker said, “It’s huge. We all know we’re just getting started as far as work goes. It’s exciting and definitely what I set out to do. I’m excited to be here and grateful for the opportunity. I’ve worked really hard for it. Now I just have to perform. It is big in my mind. I want to prove to myself that I’m not a callup and I can play in this league. I’m definitely not satisfied with it. I want to get better and I want to get better every day. I don’t want to be just another guy. I want to be somebody who helps this team win on a daily basis.”

4. Yeo said he wants to have an everyday No. 1, but as of now, the goaltending is something they’ll evaluate every day. He said “the writing may be on the wall if you want to look at it that way for Game 1.”

Actually, I still don’t have a clue, although my gut says he goes with the vet, Nik Backstrom. I know it won’t be Ilya Bryzgalov. Actually, I still don’t have a clue, although my gut says he goes with the vet, Nik Backstrom. I know it won’t be Ilya Bryzgalov.

He was released from his tryout because Bacigalupi, Darcheu and Kueper are both healthy and Fletcher doesn’t want to carry three goalies on a 23-man roster.

Fletcher said Bryzgalov understood and will go home to Jersey to see his family and “decompress.” Fletcher wants to sign Bryzgalov to some kind of creative two-way contract or AHL deal and those talks will come in a week or two.

“As an organization, we really appreciate what he’s done for us,” Fletcher said. “I have an awful lot of respect for him from a personal level. He’s been a great fit for our organization. We’d like to find a way to keep him sharp and keep him ready in case something happens here or even elsewhere, but I can’t say enough good things about him. I’m a little perplexed why he can’t get a job in this league. There’s just a giant chasm between the perception of Bryz and the reality. He’s a quality goalie and a great guy and fit very well on this team. I just didn’t have any interest in carrying three goalies, and I think he understood that.”

Some people on Twitter joked that Fletcher should have subbed “humongous big” for “giant.”

5. Yeo on Bickel: “He brings an element that we don’t have. I think he’s done a good job up front. Even today at practice he looks good. If we decide that we’re looking for a certain degree of toughness in a particular game, then
he’s a guy who could factor in. He has shown that he can play the game, too. We don’t want somebody who’s just going to go out there and play two shifts. We want somebody who’s going to bring some momentum and try to be physical on the forecheck. He understands that part of the game, plus he’s there to stick up for his teammates when needed.”

6. Justin Fontaine practiced today and felt good. He wants to play Thursday, but while Yeo said, “There’s a chance,” Yeo continued, “I’ll be cautious with that one. He’s missed a lot of time here in camp and I’ve since the pace of play increase since the first week of camp. So we have to make sure that we’re making the right decision and 100 percent confident that he’s ready to go.”

My guess is they hold him out the first two games with this glute injury and play him in Anaheim next week. That’ll give him basically two weeks more to heal.

7. If you remember last year, the Wild got burned a few times in the Colorado series by Patrick Roy pulling his goalie with a ton of time left for an extra attacker. So it was humorous today when Yeo practiced 6-on-5s.

I jokingly asked if he was practicing 6-on-5s or 5-on-6s.

Yeo, chuckling, “Both.”

The Wild did a lot of situational stuff today, like 4-on-4s, and Tuesday will really work special teams.

Here was Colorado’s lines today, courtesy of the Denver Post’s Adrian Dater.

8. One big reason why Erik Haula was back at third-line center today, my guess, is because of how successful he was tracking Nathan MacKinnon in Games 3-7 in the playoffs.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.07.2014
Wild signs Ryan Carter to one-year deal

Blog Post by: Michael Russo

The Wild has agreed to terms with center/winger Ryan Carter on a one-year, two-way contract.

Carter, who hails from White Bear Lake and played at Mankato, will be paid $725,000 in the NHL or $350,000 in the minors. But he was signed to play with the big club. It's clear the Wild look at him as a better fourth-line option than Cody Almond or Stephane Veilleux, who were both placed on waivers today.

The Wild actually offered Carter a one-way contract, I'm told, but Carter chose the two-way for slightly more money because if it doesn't pan out here, he can be placed on waivers and potentially picked up by somebody. One other team wanted to sign Carter, and so did Jersey, but the Devils don't have the room.

Here is a feature I wrote on Carter, a hero in the 2012 Eastern Conference Finals, a few years back.

He'll practice the next two days and likely make his Wild debut Thursday against the Colorado Avalanche. He has gone through an entire training camp with the Devils.

Carter, who had 10 points in 62 games last season with New Jersey, has scored 31 goals and 68 points in 360 games with Anaheim, Carolina, Florida and New Jersey.

He can play both center and wing and is a hard-working, good-skating checking role player. He finishes checks, can kill penalties and plays a responsible game. And as you can see in that feature, he has been good in the playoffs before.

When Justin Fontaine comes off IR, the Wild will have to make another roster move now.

"I'm beyond excited," Carter said by phone from Jersey. "It should be fun. It's kind of been a whirlwind. It kind of happened fast and is starting to sink in.

"There's a lot to be excited about going there. Everything away from the rink aside, I get a chance to play with Zach again. He's a good friend of mine. And when you look at the team and the roster and to have a chance to win, that's something that's extremely important to me. Going there with a chance to play and a chance to win is really exciting."

I'll update this blog later with all the post-practice stuff today from the gents who made the team, but one thing: Yeo changed the lines late in practice. Here are the new ones:

Zach Parise-Mikael Granlund-Jason Pominville
Matt Cooke-Mikko Koivu-Thomas Vanek
Nino Niederreiter-Erik Haula-Charlie Coyle
Jason Zucker-Kyle Brodziak-Stu Bickel/Justin Fontaine

My guess is Carter will play in Bickel's spot on Thursday and Fontaine will stay on injured reserve until the Anaheim game (Game 3) because he has missed so much of camp with a glute injury.

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.07.2014
Bryzgalov released from tryout; Almond, Veilleux on waivers

Blog Post by: Michael Russo

The Wild's 23-man roster is set. It's actually at 22.

This morning, the Wild released goalie Ilya Bryzgalov from his pro tryout, placed Cody Almond and Stephane Veilleux on waivers and placed Justin Fontaine on injured reserve.

Fontaine is practicing though and close to a return.

What this means: Jason Zucker, Stu Bickel, Matt Dumba, Christian Folin and Nate Prosser have made the opening-night roster.

Don't close the door on Bryzgalov yet. GM Chuck Fletcher is expected to talk to his agent, Ritch Winter, later this morning about a two-way contract or AHL deal. It'll be up to Bryzgalov if he wants to accept.

Today was the waiver deadline to create space for tomorrow's 4 p.m. roster deadline. By placing two guys on waivers, the Wild can technically sign Bryzgalov to a two-way deal and fit him on the roster before he would have to go on waivers. It also means no roster move once Fontaine is ready to play, which is soon.

My guess is Fontaine goes to the Vanek-Koivu line once he's ready.

Also, Almond has an out in his contract where if he clears waivers, he can return to his Swiss team in Geneva rather than reporting to Iowa. Almond tells me he has no idea what he'll do yet, that he wants to put himself in the best situation to establish himself as an NHL player and he'll see what the next 24 hours brings.

Lines in today's practice:
Parise-Granlund-Pominville
Cooke-Koivu-Vanek
Zucker-Coyle-Niederreiter
Brodziak-Haula-Bickel

D pairs:
Suter-Brodin
Scandella-Spurgeon
Dumba-Folin
Ballard-Prosser (extras)

Goalies
Backstrom
Kuemper

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.07.2014
Wild throw endorsement behind youngsters, for now

By Chad Graff

It would have been easy for the Wild to send their talented young players to the minors for more seasoning.

While the big league club started its 2014-15 season, Jason Zucker, Christian Folin and Matt Dumba could have gotten more time in the system and learned to play major roles for AHL Iowa until injury or demotion demanded their participation.

It would have been a no-brainer, except that Zucker, 22, Folin, 23, and Dumba, 20, all earned big-league jobs.

"Those guys have come in and had very strong camps," coach Mike Yeo said. "We gave them the opportunity to succeed, and we also gave them the opportunity to fail, and they went obviously in the (right) direction."

In an upset, the three youngsters beat out veterans for roster spots Monday when the Wild got down to the NHL maximum of 23 in advance of Thursday's season opener against Colorado.

"I'm definitely excited," Zucker said. "It was a big goal of mine to be here. But the work is just getting started."

Forwards Cody Almond and Stephane Veilleux were played on waivers, Justin Fontaine was placed on injured reserve with a lower body injury, and goalie Ilya Bryzgalov was released from his tryout. Earning the final spot was Ryan Carter, a free-agent forward from White Bear Lake who signed a one-year, two-way contract Monday.

Yeo's message to Zucker, Folin and Dumba, though, was the same one he had for those who didn't make the opening-night roster:

"There's usually nothing final about final cuts," Yeo said.

The Wild's decision to keep Folin and Dumba means veterans Keith Ballard and Nate Prosser will start the season as the odd men out on the blue line. It makes no sense, Yeo and general manager Chuck Fletcher have said, to keep a young player on a two-way deal in the NHL just so he can sit in the press box as a healthy scratch.

Yeo, in fact, said there is "a very good possibility" that Folin and Dumba will be paired against the Avalanche.

Folin, 6-foot-3 and 214 pounds, was solid on the back end, good in the offensive zone, and showed he can move the puck up the ice during the preseason. Dumba, while not as big (6-0, 189) or consistent, showed a game-changing ability offensively, with one goal among his five preseason points.

"It's a little bit of a relief, but ... there's still a long ways to go," Folin said.

But because of their youth, the three youngsters have a slim margin for error. If anyone slips out of the top six for an extended period he'll likely be sent to Iowa, where he will be guaranteed big minutes.

"They had good camps, so they should be proud of that," Yeo said. "But this is the same message that I'll give them: Every day is a new day, and you should feel real good about being here, but you have to make sure that you stay here."

Zucker and Chanhassen's Stu Bickel, 28, were the last forwards to make the team out of camp.

Zucker was one of the final players cut a year ago but made his mark during a call-up in January and February, when the Wild rallied back into the playoff hunt. His season was cut short, however, by knee surgery.

He is penciled in to open the season on the fourth line after a strong camp that included one preseason goal.

Yeo compared Zucker to Nino Niederreiter, who emerged as a potential star in the postseason a year ago.
More roster moves likely coming soon

By Chad Graff

Ryan Carter, a free-agent forward from White Bear Lake, signed a two-way contract with the Wild on Monday that will pay him a $725,000 NHL salary.

He played in 62 games with the New Jersey Devils last season, recording seven goals and three assists.

He is the 13th forward on the team, taking the spot cleared when Justin Fontaine was put on the injured list Monday with a lower body injury.

Carter is expected to practice with the Wild on Tuesday, but Fontaine is close to returning. Close enough that coach Mike Yeo said he could play in Thursday's season opener against Colorado at Xcel Energy Center.

When Fontaine returns, the Wild must clear a roster spot for him. They have options.

One would be waiving defenseman Nate Prosser, the longtime prospect from Elk River whom the Wild claimed off waivers from St. Louis last week. Another would be waiving Carter or forward Stu Bickel and hoping they can clear and be reassigned to AHL Iowa.

As Yeo made clear in the days leading to Monday's final cuts, the roster will change plenty this season.

The addition of Carter indicates there is more work ahead for Cody Almond, the Wild draft pick who signed a free-agent deal after playing in the Swiss league.

Even on a one-way contract that will pay him $550,000 while in the minors, he was placed on waivers Monday because he still has to improve his defense before becoming a reliable third- or fourth-line forward.

White Bear Lake's Ryan Carter takes team's last roster spot

By Chad Graff

On the day they made final cuts, the Minnesota Wild added Ryan Carter to the fold.

Carter, a White Bear Lake native and former Minnesota State Mankato player, will take the Wild's 23rd roster spot. He agreed to terms on a two-way contract worth $725,000.

He's a defensively responsible forward who can play left wing or center.

Last season, Carter played in 62 games with the New Jersey Devils, recording seven goals and three assists with a minus-6 rating.

He had been skating in training camp with the Devils despite not having a contract with them and played in three preseason games.

Minnesota Wild waive Cody Almond, Stephane Veilleux, release Ilya Bryzgalov

By Chad Graff

The Minnesota Wild placed forwards Cody Almond and Stephane Veilleux on waivers and released goalie Ilya Bryzgalov from his tryout to set the roster for Thursday's season opener against Colorado.

Justin Fontaine was placed on injured reserve with a lower body injury.

That leaves the roster at 22 active players, one shy of the maximum 23 the team had to get to by Wednesday.

That means that the Wild won't have to demote a player once Fontaine is healthy, which could be as soon as next week. He practiced with the team Monday.

The final roster is noteworthy for the young player who beat out veterans for the final spots.

After battling against each other most of camp, both defensemen Christian Folin, 23, and Matt Dumba, 20, made the squad, something coach Mike Yeo said wouldn't happen unless both played in the top-6 on a nightly basis.

Jason Zucker, 22, beat out veterans Veilleux and Almond for the final forward spot. Stu Bickel, a bruising 28-year-old, made the team as a right wing.

Nate Prosser, who the Wild claimed off waivers last Thursday, made the team as an extra defenseman.

Wild plan viewing party to show off new video board

Pioneer Press

The Wild's new scoreboard displays fans during a break in the action against St. Louis in the first period of their exhibition game at Xcel Energy.

The Minnesota Wild will host a viewing party for their first road game of the season on Oct. 11 against the Colorado Avalanche. Gates at Xcel Energy Center will open at 7:30 p.m., and the event is free and open to the public. Game time is 8 p.m.

Fans will be able to watch the Fox Sports North broadcast on the arena's new high-definition video board, which is six times the size of the old scoreboard. And the first 500 fans through the doors will receive a "Home of the Home Ice Advantage" towel.

Montreal Canadiens

Habs enjoy an uneventful fall before beginning new season

Sean Gordon

The whole point of a major renovation is to one day run out of major things to fix.

When the last of the heavy jobs is finally crossed off the list, there’s time to tinker and set to work on the marginalia.

That’s the best way to describe the Montreal Canadiens, a team whose main training-camp storylines involved the third-line right winger, seventh defenceman and backup goalie.

It’s not to say these players have no importance; it’s just that they occupy bit parts in this particular play.

Uneventful early falls, by the way, are a comparatively new thing for the Habs.

For the past half-decade it seems like they’ve entered every season with boldface question marks hovering over one crucial thing or another: starting goaltending, or the top line, or the diminshing form of veteran pillars, or the contract status of a star player.

There is no such fretting this year.

“I’d say it feels pretty good,” said a smiling David Desharnais, who will shoulder the bulk of the top-line centre minutes alongside leading scorer Max Pacioretty, who is looking to improve on his 39 goals of a season ago.

“At this point we’ve had guys showing what they can do for three, four, five years, we made it to the conference final last year and we know what we have here. I think it’s encouraging.”

It’s not as if there haven’t been changes. Hockey’s a business, but while occupying a stall in an NHL dressing room requires players to become inured to teammates coming and going – “I’m not running a boys’ camp here,” general manager Marc Bergevin said pointedly on Monday – that doesn’t mean it’s easy.

Goaltender Carey Price admitted he’s a little bummed at seeing his backup running mate Peter Budaj leave town; the Habs will turn to 25-year-old Dustin Tokarski to fill the post.

“Everybody says it’s part of the business, but it is a tough part of it,” Price said. “This past six months has been pretty tough, I’ve lost three of my good buddies –well, four now – and it’s not a fun part [of the business]. But at the same time you have management making moves to make the team better.

It’s not up to us to argue that just because you’re friends with a guy.”

Bergevin told a news conference that he did talk to Price to clear the decision to move on from the 32-year-old Budaj – which in hindsight was thoroughly predictable given Tokarski was tabbed when Price was hurt in the conference final. But he did call his star goalie before the news became public.

It’s a minor example of how highly the club regards its most important player.

Budaj’s apparent desire to leave – La Presse reported he asked for a trade after the playoffs – didn’t cause so much as a ripple during camp, although given the dearth of controversies or roster battles, it could have.

Not even the training-camp niggles suffered by centre Lars Eller and newly arrived veteran winger P.A. Parenteau have moved the needle into the red – both are expected to be ready to go for Wednesday’s season-opening game.

To expect the Habs to replicate or improve on last year’s run to the ante-room of the Stanley Cup final may be unreasonable, but they are the oddsmakers’ favourites among Canadian NHL teams, and they clearly get the sense their championship window is opening a little wider.

It’s one reason why younger players such as Alex Galchenyuk, Nathan Beaulieu, Jarred Tinordi, and Tokarski are being given promotions; now is time to see how much they can give, and in Galchenyuk’s case, the answer should prove pivotal for this season’s hopes.

While commiserating over the departure of likeable veterans Budaj (dealt to Winnipeg on Sunday, waived on Monday) and Francis Bouillon (released from a professional try-out on Monday), Eller observed that “this is a tough roster to crack.”

From all appearances, KHL free agent Jiri Sekac has managed to stick – his arrival, likely on Eller’s line, has bumped incumbent wingers Michael Bournival and Travis Moen down the pecking order, although both should be on the 23-man roster when it is sent to the league Tuesday afternoon.

So, too, should defencemen Beaulieu, whose playoff performance last spring always hinted that he would be the next prospect in line, and Tinordi, who despite an indifferent camp has apparently showed enough to start the year in the NHL. Beaulieu can expect to feature more prominently – and possibly deliver more impact – than any rookie since Galchenyuk in 2013; he’ll get second-unit power-play time and could well feast on being matched up with opposing fourth-liners.

Beaulieu is a major upgrade on the aging but willing Bouillon.

Now all that remains is for the team to play a real game; Wednesday’s date with Toronto should help determine whether the serenity of September and early October is merely fleeting.

“It’s a good vibe around here … the challenge is a little different this year. Now it’s up to us young veterans to fill the vacuum,” Desharnais said. “It should be interesting to watch.”

Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.07.2014
Francis Bouillon is out, Jarred Tinordi is in.

The fight for a job as the Canadiens' seventh defenceman ended early Monday morning when Bouillon was summoned to a meeting with general manager Marc Bergevin and head coach Michel Therrien. They thanked the 38-year-old for his 16 years in the Canadiens organization, but told the veteran the team was looking to start the season with its younger defencemen at the helm.

"It was an emotional meeting," Bouillon said. "I was prepared for it on some level and I'm at peace with the decision … I feel, not relieved, but it's good to find out what's happened. I'm OK with it. I understand the move from the Canadiens (perspective)."

Asked last week if he'd started to consider life after hockey, Bouillon said his mind wasn't quite there yet. He's played the game for as long as he can remember, he said, and while he'd love to still be competing, he doesn't want his life to be defined by the drive to compete doesn't just die when the team tells you they've moved on.

"Mentally, I'm not ready for that," Bouillon said on whether he thought about coaching or management. "I had a few offers before training camp, before I came here, from two, three teams in Switzerland. I've always wanted to see what's over there. When I finished playing junior, because of my size and the type of player that I was, I didn't expect to play that long in the NHL, so Europe was always on my mind."

Though he was offered a tryout with the Canadiens, it was almost a foregone conclusion that this was Bouillon’s last NHL training camp. In Tinordi, Nathan Beaulieu and Greg Pateryn, the team has three young defencemen competing for a spot on the roster. Bouillon, it was believed, was brought along to push them into playing better.

But on some level, it was hard not to at least consider the possibility that Bouillon would once again defy skeptics and keep playing in the NHL.

After going undrafted in 1996, Bouillon's unlikely pro career began with a team called the Wheeling Nailers in West Virginia — a place known more for banjo picking, moonshine and lawlessness than professional hockey.

He spent one season earning a few hundred dollars a week, busing across the circuit of empty arenas in the East Coast Hockey League. Then it was on to the Quebec Rafales, the Fredericton Canadiens and finally, in 1999, he joined the Canadiens.

It wasn’t supposed to last that long and, at the time, many considered the presence of an undersized defenceman on the squad to be a sign of the team’s decade-long descent into mediocrity. But even as the team evolved into a divisional contender, the then-5-foot-8, 198-pound Bouillon didn’t go away.

He dove in front of pucks, he bounced his body off larger players, travelling across the ice like a smiling pinball. He fought, he played on the power play, on the penalty kill, sat in the press box, and made no bones about any of that.

There’s an anecdote among hockey journalists about Bouillon’s earlier days with the Canadiens, in which a young Bouillon was asked to sign a fan’s trading card. Bouillon was taken aback. He didn’t know they made Francis Bouillon NHL trading cards. He was so impressed at the novelty of it that he bought the card off the fan and gave him some autographed piece of equipment in return.

"I don’t remember that, but it wouldn’t surprise me," Bouillon told The Gazette. "I really never expected to be in the NHL for this long. I always thought I’d have to fight to stay in the league."

A few dozen metres away, his former teammates were in full equipment, preparing for Wednesday’s season opener in Toronto (7 p.m., SN, TVA Sports, TSN Radio 690).

Francis Bouillon speaks to reporters in Brossard Monday, Oct. 6, 2014, following his release from the Montreal Canadiens.

"Hockey is a beautiful sport, but it’s a tough sport," Bouillon said. "You’re always fighting your teammates for a job. I pushed out veterans earlier in my career, now I’m being pushed out. It’s just the way it is."

Beaulieu started his NHL career on a pairing with Bouillon and spoke to the veteran after hearing he’d been cut from the squad.

"It’s tough to see him leave, he’s a special person," Beaulieu said. "I wish him the best, I hope he continues playing. It’s one part of the game that never gets easy, you see it from junior on: guys coming and going, management coming and going. It’s not easy, especially when you have a relationship with someone. I thanked him for helping me during my first game and told him I learned a lot (from him)."

Bergevin, himself a former NHL defenceman, said saying goodbye to Bouillon was especially difficult.

"Frankie is the kind of person … I’ve always said I wanted character players in Montreal," Bergevin said, before pausing. "If you made a list of those kinds of players, Frankie’s name is at the top of it. He’s an extraordinary person."

"It’s not a boys camp, it’s a hockey team," the GM added. "Losing teammates isn’t fun, but it’s part of the business."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.07.2014

By Christopher Curtis, Montreal Gazette, Montreal Gazette

October 6, 2014

Francis Bouillon is out, Jarred Tinordi is in.

The fight for a job as the Canadiens’ seventh defenceman ended early Monday morning when Bouillon was summoned to a meeting with general manager Marc Bergevin and head coach Michel Therrien. They thanked the 38-year-old for his 16 years in the Canadiens organization, but told the veteran the team was looking to start the season with its younger defencemen at the helm.

"It was an emotional meeting," Bouillon said. "I was prepared for it on some level and I’m at peace with the decision … I feel, not relieved, but it’s good to find out what’s happened. I’m OK with it. I understand the move from the Canadiens (perspective)."

Asked last week if he’d started to consider life after hockey, Bouillon said his mind wasn’t quite there yet. He’s played the game for as long as he can remember, he said, and while he’d love to still be competing, he doesn’t want his life to be defined by the drive to compete doesn’t just die when the team tells you they’ve moved on.

"Mentally, I’m not ready for that," Bouillon said on whether he thought about coaching or management. "I had a few offers before training camp, before I came here, from two, three teams in Switzerland. I’ve always wanted to see what’s over there. When I finished playing junior, because of my size and the type of player that I was, I didn’t expect to play that long in the NHL, so Europe was always on my mind."

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But on some level, it was hard not to at least consider the possibility that Bouillon would once again defy skeptics and keep playing in the NHL.

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It wasn’t supposed to last that long and, at the time, many considered the presence of an undersized defenceman on the squad to be a sign of the team’s decade-long descent into mediocrity. But even as the team evolved into a divisional contender, the then-5-foot-8, 198-pound Bouillon didn’t go away.

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"I don’t remember that, but it wouldn’t surprise me," Bouillon told The Gazette. "I really never expected to be in the NHL for this long. I always thought I’d have to fight to stay in the league."

After finding out he wouldn’t be a Montreal Canadien anymore, Bouillon met with his teammates and then stood in front of the Habs press corps — dressed in jeans and sneakers — smiling and politely answering questions in what felt more like a eulogy than a news conference.
Bouillon hopes to keep playing after being released by Canadiens

Posted by Stu Cowan

Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin announced before Monday morning’s practice in Brossard that the club has released veteran defenceman Francis Bouillon.

Bergevin met with Bouillon Monday morning and told him the club wouldn’t be offering him a contract. The 38-year-old attended training camp on a tryout basis.

In 52 games with the Canadiens last season, Bouillon had two goals and four assists. In 776 career NHL games, Bouillon posted 32-117-149 totals.

Bergevin told reporters in Brossard that it was a tough decision to release Bouillon, but added: “We have two young defencemen (Jarred Tinordi and Nathan Beaulieu). It’s time to turn the page with these guys.”

The GM added: “Frankie is the kind of person … I’ve always said I wanted character players in Montreal. If you made a list of those kinds of players, Frankie’s name is at the top of it. He’s an extraordinary person.

“It’s not a boys camp, it’s a hockey team. Losing teammates isn’t fun, but it’s part of the business.”

Bouillon also spoke with the media in Brossard.

“It was a pretty emotional morning,” the defenceman said. “I met all my teammates after I found out the team released me. I’d say it was really emotional for a part of this morning, but now I feel better. I feel not relieved, but it’s good to find out what’s happened. I’m OK with it. I understand the move from the Canadiens (perspective).

“I want to keep playing,” he added. “I’m going to go home, talk with my wife, talk with my agent, see what kind of opportunities are offered to me. Obviously, I want to keep playing.”

When asked if he was ready to move into a hockey management role, Bouillon said: “Mentally, I’m not ready for that. I just want to keep playing. We’ll see about that in the future …

“I had a few offers before training camp, before I came here from two, three teams in Switzerland,” he added. “I’ve always wanted to see what’s over there. When I finished playing junior, because of my size and the type of player that I was, I didn’t expect to play that long in the NHL, so Europe was always on my mind.

“My kids just started high school this year, so it’s going to be a little harder. We’ll have a family decision to make. If I can still play with another team in the NHL, that will be my priority.”

Bouillon also said that he understood the situation in Montreal with Tinordi and Beaulieu.

“They told me they gotta give those young guys some experience,” Bouillon said. “I was ready for both eventualities, to stay or to leave. I’m OK with it, I’ve gotta move forward now.

“For me, it was a dream, and then the dream came true. When I wake up tomorrow, I’ll be proud of what I accomplished. I got to play with one of the best goaltenders in the league with Carey Price, one of the best defencemen in P.K. (Subban). We didn’t really have those guys (in Montreal) when I started my career.

“I just wanted to earn my teammates respect and I earned that …”

With Bouillon’s release, the Canadiens were left with 24 players in camp. They have to get down to the NHL maximum of 23 players on the roster by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Meanwhile, a day after acquiring Peter Budaj from the Canadiens, the Winnipeg Jets placed the goalie on waivers Monday.

Here’s how the lines and defence pairings looked at practice Monday as the Canadiens prepare for their season opener Wednesday night in Toronto (7 p.m., SN, TVA Sports, TSN Radio 690).
Predators' defensemen hope to boost offense

Offense is one of the reasons Peter Laviolette was hired to coach the Predators.

Laviolette sees the defense's ability to move the puck as a complementary skill at both ends of the ice.

"I think that's pretty good for defense and offense, to be able to go back into your own end and retrieve pucks, make plays and find who's open — get yourself out of a jam," Laviolette said. "I think we have guys that can do that."

One of those guys is captain Shea Weber, a finalist for the Norris Trophy in three of the past four seasons who anchors a defensive group that saw little personnel change in the offseason. Laviolette called him the Predators' leader on and off the ice.

Familiar faces back on the blue line also include Roman Josi, Seth Jones, Ryan Ellis, Mattias Ekholm and Victor Bartley. The new man is Anton Volchenkov, who signed a one-year, $1 million contract in free agency.

The defensemen talk about the system as a team-based approach in which they have freedom to join an offensive rush if an opportunity presents itself.

"The system is different," Weber said. "It's more aggressive on the forecheck, and the neutral zone is different. That is where we need to be a five-man unit. The 'D' needs to be up on the play and helping the forwards, and the forwards need to be back helping the 'D' when the puck turns over."

Jones, the Predators' first-round pick in 2013, enters his second season after playing in 77 games last season and says he is feeling more confident with the experience he gained.

"I played a lot of good games last year, but I had some bad games as well," Jones said. "I'm trying to learn from that this year and be a lot more consistent with my decision making."

Volchenkov, 32, landed with the Predators after New Jersey bought out of the final two years of his contract. He is known for his physical game and his ability to block shots — 91 total shots in the 56 games he played last season.

"He's coming to a new place and finding his spot, but I think he's done a good job in practice," Laviolette said. "He knows what we're trying to do out there, and he's fit in just fine."

Volchenkov is part of the last line of defense in front of starting goalie Pekka Rinne, who heads into the season healthy after missing most of last season while recovering from surgery to cure an infection in his surgically repaired hip. Carter Hutton played 40 games last year with Rinne out and will serve as the backup.

"He's (Rinne) probably the No. 1 guy in our defensive end, and he's one of the best in our league," Ellis said. "I think the general consensus is everyone needs to contribute, and the back end is going to be heavily involved in that as well."

Weber said he wants the team to allow fewer goals this season, which begins Thursday night against Ottawa at Bridgestone Arena (7 p.m., Fox TN). The Predators allowed 233 goals last season (2.84 goals per game) and ranked ranked 23rd out of 30 teams.

"It's six men if you include the goaltender, so we're going to need all six guys out there to be successful," Weber said.
Predators’ tempers flare at practice

Maren Angus, mangus@tennessean.com 12:05 a.m. CDT October 7, 2014

The Predators turned the intensity up a notch during practice Monday at Centennial Sportsplex.

Gloves were dropped at the end of the first session. Craig Smith and Roman Josi got into a tussle after digging the puck out of the corner. Rich Clune played the role of peacemaker and separated the two.

“We got in a battle in the corner. It’s good to have high intensity in practice and sometimes stuff like that happens,” Josi said.

Work in progress: There are a lot of new faces with the team this season, and coach Peter Laviolette said they are still working on implementing the new system.

“It’s going to be a work in progress, and there were some good things that we did on the ice last game, but certainly things that we can do better still as well,” Laviolette said. “We’re moving towards a direction where we are trying to make sure we have a good understanding of what it is we are trying to do and the identity of which we are trying to play.”

Power play needs work: Laviolette said special teams will be a priority during practice this week after the team’s power play finished the preseason 1-for-25.

“I think when you have new pieces on a power play, you’re trying to get the pieces comfortable on the ice where they’ll be,” Laviolette said. “You certainly don’t want to take away their creativity, but it still needs some structure, and probably more than anything it needs time spent working together. I don’t think the goal scoring is a true reflection of the way the puck has been moved on the power play.”

Winning in Nashville: With the Titans and Vanderbilt off to rough starts, there’s a little extra pressure on the Predators to win immediately.

“I think everybody in sports wants to be successful,” Laviolette said. “We have got to make our own way as a group. We’ve got to practice hard, and we’ve got to become familiar with what we are doing. We’ve become familiar with our new teammates, and if we can continue to improve, then we’ll go slow, one game at a time and look to win hockey games.”

Injury update: Forward Viktor Stalberg participated in the first half of full-contact practice.

Center Matt Cullen did not skate with the team but skated outside of practice.

The status of both players remains unchanged.

Tennessean LOADED: 10.07.2014
NEWARK — Ryan Carter's decision to sign with the Minnesota Wild Monday seemingly opens the door for the Devils to keep training camp tryout Jordin Tootoo.

The situation remains unclear for center Scott Gomez, who is also on a tryout but has been dealing with a sore wrist.

The Devils placed forwards Steve Bernier and Cam Janssen, along with defenseman Peter Harrold, on waivers Monday. If they are unclaimed by noon Tuesday, they can be assigned to Albany (AHL).

Without those three players, the Devils' roster would be at 24, including the unsigned Tootoo and Gomez. It is possible that Gomez will be asked to stick around without a contract for the time being or, possibly, be signed and start the season on injured reserve.

The current roster:

Goalies (2)
Cory Schneider, Scott Clemmensen

Defensemen (8)
Andy Greene, Adam Larsson, Eric Gelinas, Bryce Salvador, Marek Zidlicky, Jon Merrill, Damon Severson, Peter Harrold*

Forwards (17)
Mike Cammalleri, Travis Zajac, Jaromir Jagr, Dainius Zubrus, Patrik Elias, Martin Havlat, Ryane Clowe, Adam Henrique, Michael Ryder, Tuomo Ruutu, Stephen Gionta, Jordin Tootoo**, Jacob Josefson, Damien Brunner, Scott Gomez**, Steve Bernier*, Cam Janssen*

* On waivers
** Unsigned

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.07.2014
Ryan Carter leaves Devils training camp and signs with Minnesota Wild

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

NEWARK — The Devils have lost another player who wants to go home. Veteran forward Ryan Carter, who spent the entire preseason with the Devils without a contract, Monday signed a 1-year, $725,000 deal with the Minnesota Wild. It is a two-way contract.

The decision means Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello will have to make one fewer move to get the team's roster down to the 23-man limit by 5 p.m. Tuesday. The roster is at 27 now.

Carter, who is from Minnesota, has decided to return to his home state despite the fact that the Devils offered him a contract this past summer. "There were other factors that left the Devils kind of handcuffed. The Devils had a contract offer out there, but I decided to go in this direction," Carter said. "I wanted to stay here, but there were things I wanted to figure out."

"I like the Devils. I respect the Devils. I like to here, but this is an opportunity to play in Minnesota I couldn't pass up. As an added bonus, I get a chance to be with my family and that's really important to me."

Carter said he isn't certain that he could've been on the Devils' opening night roster if he had wanted. "I don't know that answer. There are moving parts. Anything could've happened at any time, I believe," he said.

The Wild weren't the only team interested. "There has been interest from other teams for some time. We spoke to Minnesota earlier this summer, too," Carter said. "They circled back recently and that's how this materialized. We've had some communication over the past handful of days in terms of interest."

Carter said he spoke to Lamoriello but would not reveal what was said. He said the GM "handled things the right way and I'm thankful for that and I believe I did the same."

The fact that Carter's family is in Minnesota was only part of the reason for his decision. "That all goes into it, but I tried to remove those thoughts from the equation," he said. "I just wanted to do what was best for my career and for a chance to win the Stanley Cup. That's what it comes down to."

Does that mean he feels the Wild have a better shoot at winning than the Devils? "No. That's not what I meant at all. There were other teams we spoke to throughout this whole process and at the top of my list what was most important was winning a Stanley Cup," he said. "I want to be known as a winner and I want a chance to win."

"There were teams that came knocking and I don't believe those teams have a chance to win, so those were easy to turn down. I believe the Devils have a really good chance and that's why I was willing to stick around for a long time to see if I could make it work."
NEWARK — The Devils put forwards Cam Janssen and Steve Bernier, along with defenseman Peter Harrold, on waivers Monday as they try to get their roster down to 23 players by Tuesday’s 5 p.m. deadline.

General manager Lou Lamoriello said the decision to put the three players on waivers does not mean any final roster decisions have been made. If they clear waivers by noon Tuesday, the three players can be assigned to Albany (AHL).

That would leave the Devils with 25 players on their preseason roster, including three unsigned.

Lamoriello said it is still possible that a trade will be made and he said unsigned free agent Ryan Carter and unsigned tryouts Scott Gomez and Jordin Tootoo have not yet been signed.

"We're still in the process of trying too make decisions," Lamoriello told NJ Advance Media. "There is always the chance of transactions. We have not made any final roster decisions yet."

Bernier was signed to a one-year, $600,000 contract this past summer, but the Devils still have 18 forwards on the team. Harrold earns $800,000.

Although both players have one-way contracts, their salaries will not count against the salary cap if they are sent to the AHL because they earn less than $925,000. Janssen is on a 2-way contract.

Harrold is regarded as an ideal seventh man on defense, but the emergence of 20-year-old Damon Severson during the preseason has made the Devils think twice.

"With Severson, we've got to have the option (of keeping him)," Lamoriello explained. "He's come in and played extremely well. He's done everything we expected he might do, as he did last year."

"As far as Bernier, we've got a little overload on that fourth line right now and we have to make some decisions. So we have to have some flexibility."

The Devils brought in Gomez, Tootoo, Ruslan Fedotenko, Tomas Kaberle, Mike Komisarek and Renat Mamashev into camp as unsigned tryouts. Fedotenko, Kaberle and Komisarek were released while Mamashev was assigned to Albany.

"I thought it was a very positive situation. I thought the competitiveness in camp gave us some depth and allowed us to use different people in exhibition games," Lamoriello said. "We didn't have to use all the players to get ready for the year."

"And the key thing was, they were all quality in character and in their work ethic. And they were a great example to young players in how hard they work and what it takes to get here and stay. If they weren't good people, they wouldn't have been here."
NEWARK — The Devils finished the preseason with a 4-1-1 record. They will open the regular season Thursday night in Philadelphia.

Here is a look at the team by the numbers:

1.62 Goalie Cory Schneider's preseason goals-against average

4 Michael Ryder's team-leading points total for the preseason (he also led with 3 goals)

5 Cuts needed to reach the NHL's 23-man roster limit by Tuesday's 5 pm. deadline

9 American-born players still on the team (Cory Schneider, Scott Clemmensen, Andy Greene, Peter Harrold, Jon Merrill, Ryan Carter, Stephen Gionta, Scott Gomez, Cam Janssen)

16 Points Jaromir Jagr needs to tie Marcel Dionne for 5th all-time at 1,771. He also needs 3 goals to tie Mike Gartner for 6th and 13 assists to tie Steve Yzerman for 7th

17 Points Patrik Elias needs to reach 1,000 for his NHL/Devils career

27 Years Lou Lamoriello has been general manager/president of the Devils

33 The average age of the players who have comprised the Devils' top three lines in preseason (oldest is Jaromir Jagr at 42, youngest is Adam Henrique at 24)

92 million Dollars spent this summer on contracts for three key players (Mike Cammalleri, Schneider and Andy Greene)

617 Victories Schneider needs to tie Martin Brodeur, the all-time leader at 688

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.07.2014
NEWARK — The jumbo pretzel and foot-long frank are getting a run for their money.

The Prudential Center in Newark unveiled an overhaul of its concession stands and in-arena dining at a season preview event for NJ Devils season ticket holders Sunday. The new concept, launched in conjunction with Legends Hospitality, the company that operates the arena’s concession stands, features a “farm-to-fan” concept that Devils management says is unique among NHL rinks.

The new food, which will officially roll out to all fans at the Devils’ home opener against the San Jose Sharks on Oct. 18, focuses on locally-sourced ingredients and higher-quality recipes from New Jersey-based chefs.

“We want this building to be a place that showcases all of the awesome things that happen in this state,” Hugh Weber, the President of Business Operations, said at Sunday’s event.

“Quality of the food is what comes first. But, adding in fresh ingredients, and local ingredients…we know that that’s important to our consumers, too.”

More than 2,000 fans gathered at the preseason event Sunday to meet players, participate in events like a free skate on the ice, and to taste test the new food options.

“If you come here for a game or for another event, you want the whole experience to be good,” Robert Shaftic, who attended the event with his wife Karin and their daughter Charlotte, said.

“You’re going to be shelling out some money for this food, so you want it to be part of a good experience. From what I’ve tasted so far, it hasn’t disappointed.”

Shaftic also said he was happy to hear of the arena’s initiative to support local farms, bakeries, and other N.J. food providers.

“For a place this big that sells this much food to support locals, that’s an important thing,” he said.

Some fans said the food they taste-tested Sunday was an improvement over the former menu at the Prudential Center, which management said consisted mainly of traditional stadium foods.

“This food is much better,” Meaghan Vollkommer, of Cranford, said.

“You’re number one concern when you’re here is to have a good team on the ice,” her fiancé, Michael Andersen, added. “But having good food definitely doesn’t hurt.”

In addition to Legends, food on the concourse will now also include Tony Baloney’s, of the Mustache Mobile food truck, Jersey Diner concessions, and menu items that pay homage to the Jersey Shore and Newark’s Ironbound District, famous for its Portuguese and Brazilian food.

Premium ticket holders with access to the center’s Fire and Ice Lounge will also find new dining options this season – a pizza shop and sandwich club from Top Chef All-Stars runner-up Mike Isabella, and two new concepts from the David Burke group: Angry Taco, which serves Mexican cuisine, and Burke’s Bacon Bar, which is dedicated to an array of different recipes for bacon lovers.

Both Burke and Isabella are N.J. natives.

“People don’t want to eat from a freezer, they want healthier food,” Isabella said.

“Jersey has got so many good, local ingredients to offer. I think it’s great that stadiums and arenas are adapting to these trends in food.”

“It’s really about marrying high quality food and fine dining with being able to serve it quickly and still give fans the fast, stadium experience,” Stephen Goglia, the President and CEO of the David Burke Group, said.

“People are demanding fresh, tasty food more than ever before,” executive chef Chris Shea, added. “We want to bring depth of flavor, quality, and freshness, to this new venue.”

Though the Prudential Center management team didn’t unveil the exact prices of all of the new menu items to fans Sunday, Weber said they won’t cost customers much more than the old menu items did.

“The prices are really right in line with what you could get outside the arena,” he said. “There should be something at every price point, including items for the folks who are looking for a higher-end eating experience here.”

Still, arena officials said there is an economic benefit to the switch. Management expects the new menu items to increase food sales in the arena, and anticipates a $2.5 million increase in concession stand sales over last year.

And, though management says the new food is part of what they hope will be an overall improved fan experience at the Prudential Center this season, they are still rooting for a good hockey season.

“There is an old adage in this business,” Weber said.

“When the team is winning, the hot dogs and beer taste better. I think that’s true no matter what you’re serving.”

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.07.2014
5 former Devils players who deserve Hockey Hall of Fame consideration

Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com By Rich Chere | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

Former Devils coach Pat Burns will be posthumously inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame on Nov. 17.

He will join a lengthy list of players and coaches with Devils ties (no matter how briefly they played in New Jersey) that are in the Hall.

Here are 5 former Devils players who should be in the Hockey Hall of Fame:

1. Claude Lemieux. His stats aren’t incredible (786 points, including 379 goals, in 1,215 career games). But he’s won four Stanley Cups (two with the Devils) and his 80 career playoff goals rank ninth all-time. He has 19 game-winning playoff goals and is one of 10 players to win Cup on three different teams. Mr. Clutch.

2. Pat Verbeek. He ranks 34th all-time with 522 career goals and is the only player in NHL history with over 500 goals and 2,500 penalty minutes. A Stanley Cup winner in 1999 with the Dallas Stars, Verbeek is in the top 50 with 67 career game-winning goals. He is 64th all-time with 1,063 points. Underrated, except by those who had to play against him.

3. Dave Andreychuk. With 640 career goals, he ranks 14th all-time. That alone should get him in, but he also stands 28th with 1,339 career points and 30th all-time with 77 game-winning goals. His one Stanley Cup came with the Tampa Bay Lightning, where he helped establish that franchise after a memorable career in Buffalo.

4. Phil Housley. More career points and games-played than fellow American-born defenseman Brian Leetch. His 1,232 points rank 37th all-time and second among U.S.-born players behind only Mike Modano. He played in 1,495 NHL games but never won a Stanley Cup, his biggest drawback. The quarterback.

5. Martin Brodeur. Without question, he’ll be a first ballot Hall of Famer. We know that, so this is no bold statement. His 688 wins, 124 shutouts and 1,259 games are the most all-time. A three-time Stanley Cup winner with the Devils, he is considered by many to be the greatest goaltender in history. The franchise for two decades in New Jersey.

Note: Jaromir Jagr will also be a first ballot Hall of Famer with Devils ties. He is not on the list because he is still playing and not a former Devil.

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.07.2014
An opening night roster spot is not a lock yet, but, with less than 24 hours to go until NHL teams have to be down to the 23-player limit, 20-year-old rookie defenseman Damon Severson is still with the Devils.

That’s not a surprise to the confident Severson, who has said all along that he was here to win a job and stated after Saturday’s preseason finale against the Rangers that, “I expect myself to be on this team.”

Devs general manager Lou Lamoriello also is not surprised that Severson, the team’s 2012 second-round draft pick, made such a strong push to make the team now.

“I think it’s what we expected,” Lamoriello said today. “He had a great camp last year and went back and played well. I don’t think it’s a surprise. I think it’s a good feeling that nothing’s changed and he’s going to just get better and better like all the young players.”

Lamoriello wasn’t ready yet today to say Severson (one assist, plus two in five preseason games) will definitely start the season in the NHL. The decision to place veteran defenseman Peter Harrold – along with forwards Steve Bernier and Cam Janssen – on waivers today does appear to be a step on that direction, though.

If Harrold, Bernier and Janssen are not claimed by another team at Tuesday’s noon deadline, they will be eligible to be assigned to the AHL. Still, Lamoriello said “nothing is definite” as far as sending any of them to Albany.

And, because Severson does not need to clear waivers to be sent down, it’s still possible he will be assigned to Albany before the Devils have to get to the 23-man roster limit at 5 p.m. Tuesday (or even after that, but before Thursday’s regular season opener in Philadelphia).

If Harrold is claimed by another team, however, that would leave the Devils with seven defenders on their roster – Andy Greene, Bryce Salvador, Marek Zidlicky, Jon Merrill, Adam Larsson, Eric Gelinas and Severson.

When I asked Lamoriello if he would be comfortable starting the season with those seven defenders, he replied, “If that were the case (Harrold is claimed), yes.”

The possibility of the Devils starting the season with only six defensemen – leaving them room to carry 15 forwards – exists, but seems improbable.

Predictably, Lamoriello wasn’t even ready today to declare that Merrill, 22, Larsson, 21, and Gelinas, 23, will definitely be on the opening night roster.

“I don’t want to say anything because I don’t like to do anything until we get to the 23-man roster,” Lamoriello said.

Still, Larsson and Gelinas both have to clear waivers to be sent down, so, barring a trade or previously undisclosed injury, they are guaranteed to be on the 23-man roster at 5 p.m. Tuesday. And, though Merrill doesn’t require waivers to be sent down, Devils coach Pete DeBoer has been planning to play him in his top six all along, so he’s not going anywhere.

Severson (6-2, 210) played in two NHL games with Albany in 2013-14 (and had two assists) after his junior season with Kelowna was over, but he is a first-year pro. So, the logical thinking was that Severson would at least start the season in Albany so he could get some pro experience.

When I asked DeBoer about that theory, he said, “Anybody that’s here deserves to be here. He’s had an excellent camp. He’s made it really tough to make that decision.”

It seems to make more sense to have Severson playing in the AHL than sitting as the seventh defenseman in the NHL, but it seems the Devils might have bigger plans for him that now. Severson was paired with Andy Greene, the team’s No. 1 defenseman, for two exhibition games, including Saturday’s preseason finale against the Rangers and did not look out of place.

The Devils had originally intended to try Merrill as Greene’s partner, (filling the spot opened when Mark Fayne signed with Edmonton on July 1). But, Merrill, a left-handed shot who would’ve been playing on his offside, was injured in an accidental collision with Ruslan Fedotenko on the first day of training camp practices and didn’t make it back until the last final two preseason games.

When he did play in those games, Merrill was on the left side.

When he was asked about the practicality of keeping Severson as the extra defenseman on Saturday, DeBoer seemed to hint at the possibility of some kind of rotation.

“Is he playing every other night? Is he playing two out of three?” DeBoer asked of Severson. “There’s a lot of things that factor into that and there’s a lot of things that happen this time of year. Because it doesn’t look like there’s room for people, there’s ways of creating room for people, too.”

With potentially four defensemen 23 or younger on the roster – Gelinas, Merrill, Larsson and Severson – there are bound to be some growing pains along the way.

“All of these young defensemen, it’s going to take a little time,” Lamoriello said. “We’re going to have to live with a few things here and there, but they’re all going to be players.”

Even after the Devils settle on their 23-man roster, figuring out how to fit everyone into their lineup will still be a challenge. Coming off a preseason in which he had three assists in three games, right wing Damien Brunner expressed his frustration with not getting a chance to be on the top three lines throughout camp.

DeBoer said finding a way to fit Brunner into his top nine forwards is one of the challenges for him.

“He’s a top nine forward. He’s proven that,” DeBoer said. “He’s had an excellent camp. It’s tough. We’ve got tough decisions everywhere trying to find who fits where. That’s not the only one we’re dealing with.”

Part of the problem so far has been the excess of forwards the team carried in camp. The picture might be a little clearer after the 23-man roster is set Tuesday.

“A lot of things can change, so we’ll see,” DeBoer said. “I think it has been an excellent camp. The guys, to their credit, have made these decisions tough with how many of them have come in here and pushed for spots. It’s a good problem to have, but it’s not an easy problem to deal with.”

Rookie goaltender Keith Kinkaid said he understood the Devils’ reasoning in deciding to start the season with Scott Clemmensen as their backup goaltender, though he’d have preferred to get the job himself. With the Devils playing only 10 games in October and planning to rely heavily on No. 1 goaltender Cory Schneider, they preferred that Kinkaid play regularly in the AHL than sit in the NHL.

Clemmensen, 37, also has experience being a seldom-used backup from his days playing behind Martin Brodeur.

“I got that feeling,” Kinkaid told reporters in Albany today. “Clemmensen’s been there. He’s been through the works with the backup and starting a little bit. I wanted to be up there no matter what, but it would be tough to sit. Also, it’s going to be good to play games here and keep my game sharp and work on things.”

Kinkaid, 25, thought he did his part with the way he played in his two preseason appearances. He went 1-0-1 with a 2.50 goals-against average and .902 save percentage. That included playing the second half of a 5-4 win over the Rangers on Sept. 22 and playing the full game in a 3-2 shootout loss to the Islanders on Sept. 26 at Barclays Center.

“I thought I played well,” Kinkaid said. “It was a fun experience. I loved that. I had a lot fun playing at the Barclays Center against the Islanders, who grew up (on Long Island) liking (and) watching. Obviously, the second goal wasn’t the best. You make mistakes, but I think I responded well and I feel I gave my all.”

And, hopefully, made a good impression with management and the coaching staff for future reference.

“I came to camp in great shape, the best shape I’ve been in,” Kinkaid said. “I wanted to show them that I belong and fit in and I think I made mark. Time will tell. I’ve just got to play my game here.”
The Devils did not practice today. They will back on the ice Tuesday morning at Prudential Center.

Posted by Tom Guliti on 10/6 at 09:48 PM

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.07.2014
With no room on Devils' roster, Ryan Carter signs one-year deal with Minnesota Wild

With no roster spot on the Devils available, left wing Ryan Carter decided today to sign a one-year, two-way contract with the Minnesota Wild.

The contract carries an NHL salary of $725,000.

Carter, a 31-year-old native of White Bear Lake, Minn., attended training camp with the Devils as an unsigned unrestricted free agent, but they had too many forwards under contract to give him a contract, so he decided to accept the Wild's offer.

"New Jersey was the place I wanted to be," Carter said. "That's why I'm here right now. But, the season is starting in a few days and Minnesota came along and made this offer and I felt at this time I had to take it."

Devils GM Lou Lamoriello said there wasn't any room to sign Carter at this time.

"Right now, there just wasn't a roster spot available."

Lamoriello didn't want to get into whether he was hoping that Carter would wait a while longer for him to open a roster spot, but said he understood why Carter made the decision to sign with the Wild.

"Ryan and I spent a considerable amount of time together and I certainly understand and he understands," Lamoriello said. "We just had a lot of discussions and I'd like to keep it at there. I have a tremendous amount of respect for Ryan and wish him the best."

The Devils' plan now appears to be to sign right wing Jordin Tootoo, who attended training camp as an unsigned tryout. It's also possible that team will keep Scott Gomez, who also attended training camp as a tryout, but that will require another roster spot being opened up.

With forwards Cam Janssen and Steve Bernier being placed on waivers today, they will be eligible to be sent down if they are unclaimed by another team at noon Tuesday. If both were sent down, the Devils would have 13 forwards under contract on the roster and room to sign one more.

Carter came to camp without a contract hoping the Devils would find room for him after not accepting an offer from them earlier in the summer. A source said after Carter did not accept the Devils' earlier offer, they made other moves and then did not have room on the roster to sign him after he didn't sign elsewhere.

Lamoriello declined to discuss what happened in the negotiations with Carter earlier in the summer.

"I won't get into that," he said. "I don't like to get into any contract discussions."

One NHL team source (not the Devils or the Wild) said Carter was seeking more than double what he got from the Wild today on the unrestricted free agent market. When I asked Carter if something got "messed up" earlier that prevented him from signing with the Devils, he replied, "I don't believe anything got messed up. Nothing got messed up."

"Is there different ways that I would still be here?" he asked. "Yeah, maybe. But, that stuff is all behind us."

Even after things didn't work out in July, Carter was still interested in signing with the Devils and they were interested enough if re-signing him that they invited him to come too camp without a contract. Carter paid for his own insurance and hoped that a roster spot would open for him as camp and the preseason progressed.

Carter admitted last Thursday, however, that not having a contract was "becoming a distraction" as he began to worry what would happen if the regular season began without him being signed. He said the contract offer from the Wild came together "over the past handful of days."

"There's been interest from other teams for some time, Carter said. "We spoke to Minnesota earlier in the summer, too. They circled back recently and that's kind of how the contract has materialized, from the most recent contract."

Carter said it wasn't a matter of the Devils waiting too long. "It has nothing to do with the amount of time they were waiting," he said. "There were other factors there that had the Devils handcuffed. This was ultimately in the end my choice. The Devils had a contract offer out there and I decided to go this direction."

Carter initially said he did not know if the Devils' contract offer from earlier in the summer was still available.

"That's a conversation that never came around," he said.

Was it still possible that Carter could have ended up in the Devils' lineup for Thursday night's season opener in Philadelphia if he had just waited a little longer?

"In terms of right now today, I don't know that answer," he said. "There's moving parts. Anything could have happened at any time, I believe."

But, there was no guarantee right now that the Devils would open up a roster spot to sign him, so he made decision to go to the Wild.

"I wanted to stay here. I did," he said. "It's not that it wasn't a good enough contract either. There were just things that I wanted to figure out. It's a tough situation. I like the Devils. I respect the Devils. I like it here, but this was an opportunity to play in Minnesota I couldn't pass up."

Carter said he spoke with Lamoriello today, but would not discuss whether he gave the Devils a chance to match the Wild's offer.

"I spoke to Lou. What we spoke about was between he and I," he said. "That's kind of the best way I can leave that answer. I have nothing but respect for him and I think he handled things the right way and I'm thankful for that and I hope he believes I did the same."

Carter called getting the opportunity to play in his home state of Minnesota, "an added bonus." His wife, Erin, and two young daughters remained back in Minnesota while he was at training camp in New Jersey, waiting to see if he would be signed by the Devils.

"I get a chance to be with my family and that's really important to me," he said.

Carter said playing near home was only, "part of the equation," though.

"My family is there and stuff and that all goes into it, but I tried to remove the whole thought from the equation," he said. "I just wanted to do what was best for my career and a chance to win the Stanley Cup. That's what it comes down to."

Carter made it clear he was not saying that he believes the Wild have a better chance to win than the Devils.

"That's not what I meant by that at all," he said. "There were other teams we've spoken to throughout this whole process and at the top of my list of importance in my decision matrix and the one that carried the most weight was winning a Stanley Cup. As I look at my career, I want to be known as a winner and I want a chance to win. So, there were teams that came knocking and I don't believe those team s have a chance to win and those were easy to turn down."

"I believe the Devils have a really good chance. That's why I was willing to stick around for a long time to see if I could make it work."

Does Carter have any regrets on how things went with the Devils?

"It would be easy to answer that question with a yes or no answer, but I've learned what I needed to learn through this process, where my values are and what value I have and things like that," he said. "And, is that important to me? Yes it is. So, I guess the short answer is no, I don't have any regrets."

Carter played three seasons for the Devils, putting up 17 goals and 16 assists in 171 regular season games, including seven goals and three assists in 62 games in 2013-14. Playing on the fourth line with Stephen Gionta and Steve Bernier, Carter was a key cog in the Devils' run to the 2012 Stanley Cup Final, registering five goals and two assists in 23 playoff games.

Carter had three goals in the six-game win over the Rangers in the Eastern Conference finals, including the game-winner in Game 5 at Madison Square Garden.

With Carter signing with the Wild and Bernier being placed on waivers today and potentially being sent to the minors Tuesday, Gionta might be the last one left from a fourth line that was a staple for the Devils since the 2012 playoffs.
The Devils have placed defenseman Peter Harrold and forwards Steve Bernier and Cam Janssen on waivers.

If they are not claimed by noon Tuesday, they will be eligible to be assigned to Albany of the AHL.

Teams have until 5 p.m. Tuesday to reach the 23-man roster limit. The Devils currently have 28 players on their roster, but that includes unsigned forwards Ryan Carter, Scott Gomez and Jordin Tootoo, who would not count against the roster number if still unsigned.

Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello said it’s not definite that the three players placed on waivers today will be sent down if they aren’t claimed and that the moves were made to give him flexibility in making the decisions to get down to 23-man limit. He also did not rule out making a trade to make room on the roster.

“We’re trying to get close to our roster,” Lamoriello said. “There’s been no final decisions until we put it in. Where we have sort of overlapping situations, we want to have the flexibility of making whatever decisions that we feel necessary for the roster.”

If Harrold, 31, were to be claimed by another team, however, that would leave the Devils with seven defensemen, including 20-year-old rookie Damon Severson, on their opening day roster. Lamoriello said he would be comfortable with that.

“If that were the case (Harrold is claimed), yes,” he said.

But, Lamoriello stressed it’s not definite that Harrold would be sent down if he isn’t claimed.

“Nothing is definite,” Lamoriello said. “Nothing is definite on any of the players placed on waivers today.”

Harrold ($800,000) and Bernier ($600,000) both have one-way contracts, but because they both make below this year’s $925,000 threshold, none of that money will count against the team’s NHL cap if they are assigned to Albany, as expected.

Janssen, 30, is on a two-way deal.

Bernier, 29, just re-signed with the Devils as an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

The decision to place Bernier on waivers would seem to open up a spot for one of the unsigned forwards to get a contract. Lamoriello said there has been no change, however, in the situations with Carter, Gomez or Tootoo.

“Nothing has changed,” Lamoriello said. “Everything is status quo.”

Tootoo's agent, Kevin Epp, said today that Tootoo had yet to be offered a contract, but he expects to speak with Devils GM Lou Lamoriello today and hopes to know one way or another by the end of the day if Tootoo will be signed.

Carter's agent, Neil Sheehy, said today that there has been no change so far in his client's status.

Gomez's agent, Ian Pulver, is also expected to talk with Lamoriello today.

It is possible that at least one of those three will end up staying with the team as an unsigned player beyond when the roster is set Tuesday.

There are still some difficult decisions to be made, but if Harrold, Bernier and Janssen are sent down, the Devils would be able to sign one of the three unsigned forwards and still be at the 23-man roster limit by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Lamoriello said "It's good" that the players have made it so difficult to make these roster decisions.

"I have tremendous respect for the players through this whole process because every one of them have been team players," Lamoriello said. "Every one of them have known the situation, there's no promises, and everybody has an open mind so whatever the decisions are everybody has to feel comfortable. Unfortunately, if it's good or bad, everything was good intentions."
Devils place trio on waivers to clear space

By TOM GULITTI

The Devils’ crowded roster picture became a little clearer Monday, but there is still some work for general manager Lou Lamoriello to do to get to the 23-man roster limit by today’s 5 p.m. league deadline.

First, the Devils placed defenseman Peter Harrold and forwards Steve Bernier and Cam Janssen on waivers. If they are not claimed by noon today, they will be eligible to be sent to Albany in the AHL.

A couple hours later, left wing Ryan Carter, who attended training camp with the Devils as an unsigned unrestricted free agent, signed a one-year contract with the Minnesota Wild instead.

Carter, a 31-year-old native of White Bear Lake, Minn., played for the Devils the past three seasons and had been hoping they would find room on the roster to re-sign him but, with the team’s regular-season opener Thursday night in Philadelphia rapidly approaching, opted to take the Wild’s offer.

"New Jersey was the place I wanted to be. That’s why I’m here right now," Carter said before flying to Minnesota. "But, the season is starting in a few days and Minnesota came along and made this offer and I felt at this time I had to take it."

Carter said the Devils made him a contract offer earlier in the summer that he did not take. A source said that after Carter didn’t take their offer, the Devils made other moves and no longer had roster room for him after he didn’t sign elsewhere.

Lamoriello wouldn’t get into the specifics of the contract negotiations, but said, “Right now, there just wasn’t a roster spot available.”

With Carter gone, indications are that the Devils intend to sign right wing Jordin Tootoo, who attended training camp as an unsigned tryout. They also have interest in signing center Scott Gomez, who also attended camp as a tryout, but it might take a little longer for Lamoriello to find a roster spot for him.

That might mean Gomez sticking around for a while and practicing with the team as an unsigned player — if he were willing to do that.

Right now, the Devils still have 25 players under contract on their roster. If Harrold, Bernier and Janssen clear waivers and are assigned to Albany – Lamoriello said it was not “definite” all three would be sent there – that would get them down to 22 signed players, leaving a roster spot for the 31-year-old Tootoo, who would replace Bernier as the fourth-line right wing.

If Harrold is claimed by another team or sent down, that would leave the Devils with seven defensemen, including 20-year-old rookie Damon Severson, who had a strong camp and might have forced his way onto the roster. Lamoriello wouldn’t commit to any of that, though.

“We’re trying to get close to our roster,” Lamoriello said. "There’s been no final decisions until we put it in. Where we have sort of overlapping situations, we want to have the flexibility of making whatever decisions that we feel necessary for the roster.”

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.07.2014
Boychuk: Islanders will be a great team

By John DeMarzo

Islanders shore up defense — trade for Boychuk, Leddy
Roster spot no guarantee for Islanders’ Josh Bailey
Islanders didn’t give Jaroslav Halak $18M just to work hard
Snow knows the one thing that will change Islanders’ culture

With a strong group of forwards and an upgraded goalie situation, the Islanders appeared to have most of the necessary ingredients to make a playoff run in their final season at Nassau Coliseum.

Their one big concern was on the blue line, but on Saturday general manager Garth Snow addressed that weakness, swinging trades for defensemen Johnny Boychuk from the Bruins and Nick Leddy from the Blackhawks.

The two met the media on Monday, and both are ready to embrace the challenge of leading the Islanders back into the playoffs.

“It was hard to leave [Boston], but you have to come with an open mind and be positive,” Boychuk said after Islanders practice. “This is going to be a great team and people shouldn’t take us lightly anymore. They’ve done some good things and I think it’s going to be a good challenge for any team to come in and play us.”

As the Islanders prepare to move to Barclays Center in Brooklyn, they’re looking to give Long Island fans one more playoff team for their memory banks.

The team figures to remain potent offensively, as six of its seven leading scorers return, led by Kyle Okposo (69 points) and John Tavares (66).

“[The Islanders] forwards are very fast, skilled and they work hard,” Boychuk said. “They’re a young team too. They work hard and they can make unbelievable plays, so I’m just excited to get out there and be part of those plays, not [play] against them.”

In acquiring Boychuk, 30, and Leddy, 23, the Islanders have added two quality defensemen to their young core of Thomas Hickey, Matt Donovan, Travis Hamonic, and Calvin de Haan, all of whom are younger than 26.

“[Having depth] is huge,” Leddy said. “There are points where guys get tired, but you have to battle through that. We have a lot of good, young guys on this team and I’m really looking forward to it.”

The Islanders are one of the last teams to open its season — Friday at the Hurricanes — but the ebullient Boychuk sounded ready to lace up the skates on Monday.

“There’s good things that are happening and now we’ve bolstered the defense and it’s gonna be a good team,” Boychuk said. “Good things are gonna happen.”

New Islanders defenseman Johnny Boychuk says no one should take them lightly this season

BY Stephen Lorenzo

There were two new faces at Nassau Coliseum on Monday morning, both of which added even more excitement and intrigue to a locker room that was downright dreary just a few months ago.

New Islanders defensemen Johnny Boychuk and Nick Leddy skated at practice two days after being acquired in respective trades from Boston and Chicago. The two former Stanley Cup champions are just the latest acquisitions in a spirited offseason campaign by Isles general manager Garth Snow, who has upgraded the team at goaltender, forward and now at the blue line.

"People shouldn’t take us lightly anymore," Boychuk said on his first day in Uniondale. "I think it’s going to be a good challenge for any team to come in and play us."

Not only are Boychuk and Leddy upgrades on defense, but they arrive at the perfect time due to injuries to defensemen Calvin de Haan (upper body), Lubomir Visnovsky (back) and Ryan Pulock (lower body). Both players saw reps on the power play, with Boychuk on the first unit and Leddy on the second.

"It certainly has been (the deepest team) since I’ve been here," said defenseman Travis Hamonic, who will now have some more help on the blue line. "There’s a lot of excitement. There’s a lot of buzz it seems. Garth made some good moves and as a group in here we’re pretty excited about the players he’s added to our team.

"It’s up to us now. (Snow) has done everything he can do at this point. He’s upgraded all of the positions, so it’s up to the group in here to make things go and make things work. And we’re really excited about it."

Given the team Snow has assembled, expectations are undoubtedly higher in Uniondale than they have been in years. But coach Jack Capuano says he doesn’t feel any added pressure for the team to perform.

"I don’t feel any pressure at all. We’ve got a good hockey team here," Capuano said. "Our goaltending was good (last year) but I think we’ve improved that. Our defense, we’ve improved it. We’ve got some depth up front. Our team defense has gotten better, we proved that in the preseason. The one area is that we haven’t scored that many goals five-on-five. Since I’ve been here we’ve always been a team to play hard in the offensive zone and grind teams down and get opportunities... that’s a little bit of a concern, but as far as pressure, I don’t believe in pressure."

Islanders prepare for fan-friendly final season on LI

October 7, 2014 1:05 AM By NEIL BEST neil.best@newsday.com

It's not as if the Islanders are moving to Kansas City or Quebec City, after all, even if some current fans consider a schlep to downtown Brooklyn only somewhat more convenient.

So the team faces a delicate challenge in how to mark -- and market -- its final season in Nassau County.

On one hand, the goal is a seamless transition that retains fans as well as the franchise's historical narrative.

On the other, attention must be paid to the past four decades, the sort of championship history the Islanders' soon-to-be Brooklyn basketball brethren did not have to worry about when they said goodbye to New Jersey.

"It's certainly going to look back and celebrate the past and also connect it to the current team," senior marketing manager Eileen Mathews said of the marketing, promotional, merchandise and advertising initiatives to come.

The Brooklyn end of the operation is charged with getting everyone ready for the inaugural season there in 2015-16, but in the meantime, there is much to do on the eastern front.

"Lots of good stuff coming up," Mathews said of a plan with the theme "We Play for You."

"It's all about acknowledging our fans who have been here for 43 years," she said.

The Islanders will stage ceremonies honoring six stars from the Stanley Cup era, giving away mini locker stalls tied to each. The fall slate has Bill Smith on Nov. 22, Denis Potvin on Nov. 29, Bobby Nystrom on Dec. 6 and Clark Gillies on Dec. 13. Bryan Trottier and Mike Bossy will be honored early in 2015.

The Islanders also plan to celebrate current players John Tavares, Kyle Okposo and Matt Martin to help remind everyone that life will go on next autumn.

Also ahead this winter: a night in which, during warm-ups, players will wear a modernized version of the notorious "fisherman" logo that debuted in 1995, after which the jerseys will be auctioned off for charity.

Those jerseys already are available for purchase by fans.

Um, shouldn't the Islanders be trying to forget that logo?

"It's part of our history," Mathews said. "I saw probably five to 10 people in Brooklyn wearing that jersey. I think it's gotten a cult following."

She said younger fans particularly seem to like it. That presumably is because they don't remember the first time around.

The team's "Tradition on Ice" emblem, featuring an image of the four Stanley Cups and the years 1972-2015, is to appear on jerseys, hats, T-shirts and other items.

For the final home game, players will wear replicas of the jersey style from the inaugural season of 1972-73, an item fans will be able to purchase later this season.

Fans also will be invited to participate in promotions asking them to select the 15 greatest players in team history and the five best moments at the Coliseum.

Whether fans embrace all the looks back, to the exclusion of the current season, obviously depends largely on how well the 2014-15 Islanders perform on their way out the door.

The marketing department is hoping for the best of both worlds. "We want to be sensitive to the fact there is still a really good team," Mathews said. "It's not the end of the Islanders' story at all."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Johnny Boychuk, Nick Leddy excited about playing major roles with Islanders

By ARTHUR STAPLE arthur.staple@newsday.com

Islanders newest defensemen Nick Leddy and Johnny Boychuk

Islanders newest defensemen Nick Leddy and Johnny Boychuk stand on the ice during practice at the Nassau Coliseum on Monday, Oct. 6, 2014. (Credit: Howard Schnapp)

Johnny Boychuk and Nick Leddy arrived on Long Island on Sunday, put on their gear and practice jerseys Monday morning and went right to work: Boychuk with the Islanders' first power-play unit and Leddy with the second for pre-practice special-teams duty.

It was an early indication that the Isles' two new defensemen aren't here merely to shore things up. They will be leading the way on a defense that will look vastly different when the puck drops Friday in Raleigh, North Carolina.

"We knew coming in that we need a threat up top for our power play, and he's got a big shot, a hard shot, and that can open up room for some other guys down low," coach Jack Capuano said of Boychuk. "Nick's an elite skater, very deceptive moving the puck, and we'll give him an opportunity as well. They're going to play some minutes."

Quite likely as a pair at even strength, too.

Boychuk and Leddy got to know one another when they arrived at the Long Island Marriott, then on the short walk to Nassau Coliseum.

Boychuk, 30, was quoted as being quite upset by the Saturday trade from the Bruins, for whom he played five seasons and won a Stanley Cup in 2011. But he was all smiles on the ice and in the locker room after his first practice.

"It's sad to say goodbye, but now it's a new beginning and there's some good things that'll be happening here," Boychuk said. "I know I'll be having a bigger role than I had in Boston. I'm up for the challenge and I can't wait to get in front of these fans. There's good things happening for us."

Leddy, 23, had been hearing rumors all summer that the salary cap-strapped Hawks were shopping him around. After playing a more limited role on a defense with Duncan Keith, Brent Seabrook and Johnny Oduya, Leddy will get a chance to play bigger minutes as an Islander.

"It was a wild process. There were rumors for most of the summer," he said. "It kept growing and growing more toward the season. It's a relief that it's over and I'm happy to be here."

Capuano is thrilled, too, especially because of injuries to key regular defensemen. Calvin de Haan (upper body) was placed on injured reserve Monday and Ryan Pulock (lower body) and Lubomir Visnovsky (back) still are sidelined. Pulock and Visnovsky could join de Haan on IR by Tuesday.

But now the coach has two more top-four defensemen to go with Travis Hamonic and likely Thomas Hickey to start. Rookie Griffin Reinhart likely will make his NHL debut Friday if Pulock and Visnovsky are out.

"Obviously, we are banged up," Capuano said. "[Leddy and Boychuk] will alleviate some minutes from Hamonic and Hickey. We've got the depth up front now and we've got the depth on the blue line where we don't have to play a guy 27, 28 minutes."

Notes & quotes: Michael Grabner (lower body) also was placed on IR and defenseman Kevin Czuczman was sent to Bridgeport, leaving the Isles with only one forward to choose before rosters must be set Tuesday. Anders Lee appears to be the odd man out up front.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Rangers will start the N.H.L. season Thursday in St. Louis with at least one unexpected newcomer in their lineup: the 19-year-old left wing Anthony Duclair.

He made the roster with a strong training camp, netting three goals.

“He’s got an N.H.L. skill set, the hands, the speed, the thinking with the puck,” Rangers Coach Alain Vigneault said. “It’s there. Now can that continue when the season starts against full N.H.L. lineups and full N.H.L. pace and intensity? He’s going to get a chance to prove that. So far, he’s earned the right to start with us.”

Rosters will not be official until 5 p.m. Tuesday, but when the Rangers traded the minor leaguers Steven Kampfer and Andrew Yogan to the Florida Panthers on Monday for forward Joey Crabb, it opened a roster spot for Duclair, a third-round pick by the Rangers in 2013. A native of Montreal, Duclair scored 50 goals for the junior Quebec Remparts last season.

If Duclair plays fewer than 10 games with the Rangers, he can be returned to his junior team without the Rangers using a year of his entry-level contract. He will probably skate on a line centered by the 21-year-old J. T. Miller, with the veteran Lee Stempniak on right wing.

The Rangers placed center Derek Stepan, who broke his left fibula during training camp, on injured reserve, meaning he will miss at least the first 10 games of the season. That enables the Rangers to carry 14 forwards, seven defensemen and two goaltenders on the opening-night roster.

Vigneault also praised the rookie forward Jesper Fast, who also scored three goals during the preseason. Fast, 22, played 11 games without a point for the Rangers last season.

“He’s been one of most consistent players in training camp,” Vigneault said. “He just comes to work and does what he has to do.”

Matt Hunwick, a veteran of almost 300 N.H.L. games, made the team as the seventh defenseman.

The Rangers assigned defenseman Dylan McIlrath and forwards Oscar Lindberg, Marek Hrivik and Ryan Haggerty to Hartford of the American Hockey League. Defenseman Michael Kostka, forward Matthew Lombardi and goaltender Cedrick Desjardins cleared waivers and were also sent to Hartford.

Center Chris Mueller was placed on waivers. The rookie forward Kevin Hayes, who is nursing a sore shoulder, could be placed on injured reserve to reduce the roster to the required 23 if Mueller is not claimed by another team by noon on Tuesday.

Related Coverage

Derek Stepan in the Eastern Conference finals. He broke his fibula Wednesday.

Derek Stepan and Rangers Upbeat Despite Injury

Late Monday, the Rangers announced that defenseman Ryan McDonagh was named the team’s captain, with defensemen Dan Girardi and Marc Staal and forward Martin St. Louis and Stepan as alternates. McDonagh, 25, will be the fourth-youngest captain in franchise history for the Rangers, who didn’t immediately name a captain to replace Ryan Callahan after he was traded to Tampa Bay for St. Louis in early March.
NY Rangers name defenseman Ryan McDonagh team captain

BY Pat Leonard

NYC PAPERS OUT. Social media use restricted to low res file max 184 x 128 pixels and 72 dpi Andrew Theodorakis/New York Daily News Ryan McDonagh is named the Rangers 27th captain.

Now Ryan McDonagh has the letter “C” on the front of his jersey, too.

Late Monday night, three days before the Rangers’ opener in St. Louis, the team announced that McDonagh, 25, its top defenseman and reigning team MVP, has been named the 27th captain in franchise history.

Forwards Martin St. Louis and Derek Stepan were named alternate captains to join defenseman Dan Girardi and Marc Staal in a group of four Rangers who will wear an “A.”

McDonagh is the fourth-youngest captain in Rangers history, and the first Blueshirts defenseman to wear the “C” since Brian Leetch. The Rangers also are now the second franchise in NHL history, along with the Dallas Stars, to have had three consecutive American-born captains (previously Ryan Callahan and Chris Drury).

“Ryan McDonagh exemplifies what we want a New York Ranger to be,” GM Glen Sather said in a statement.

The Duke will start the NHL season in the King’s court.

Left wing Anthony Duclair, 19, originally was supposed to return to his Quebec Remparts junior hockey club after training camp, but on Monday in Greenburgh, coach Alain Vigneault told his preseason star that he would receive the opportunity to prove he belongs with the Rangers.

“Unbelievable,” said the French Canadian winger, the Rangers’ third-round pick in 2013. “My goal was to stay as long as possible and maybe get a few preseason games in. To make it... It’s an amazing feeling.”

The Rangers even made a trade later in the day to accommodate Duclair’s contract. They dealt AHL defenseman Steven Kampfer and forward Andrew Yogon to the Florida Panthers for depth forward Joey Crabb, who will join the Blueshirts’ minor-league franchise, the Hartford Wolf Pack.

Doing so kept the organization at 50 total player contracts, the maximum allowed, but it was a no-brainer to ensure Duclair would suit up in the Blueshirts’ regular season opener on Thursday night in St. Louis against the Blues.

“He’s got an NHL skill set,” Vigneault said of Duclair, who had 50 goals and 99 points in 59 games with Quebec in juniors last season. “I explained to him that he is going to start the season with us, and I basically put it this way: ‘As long as you can prove you can play in our top nine (forwards), then you’re going to stick with us.’”

Duclair’s opportunity apparently will begin on an interesting, experimental third line centered by J.T. Miller, 21, who has made the team out of camp for the second straight season, with veteran offseason signing Lee Stempniak, 31, on right wing.

Vigneault admitted Miller “is a little bit like the Duke” in that he has to prove he can play consistently on one of the team’s top three lines to keep a spot, a message the youngster who trains in Pittsburgh during the offseason hears loud and clear.

“It starts now for me,” Miller said Monday. “I’ve been here before, but now it’s about the sticking part.”

Left wing Jesper Fast, 22, technically still a rookie, also made the team for a second straight season and received a major compliment from his coach, despite having just 11 career NHL regular-season games under his belt.

“He has been one of our most consistent players throughout training camp,” Vigneault said. “When he’s on the ice, coaches and management have a lot of trust that he’s going to do the right thing.”

Derick Brassard, Martin St. Louis, Miller and Dominic Moore will start as the team’s four centers, but injured rookie Kevin Hayes, 22 (shoulder, day-to-day), and journeyman Chris Mueller, 28, each could become options, while top center Derek Stepan recovers from a broken left fibula sustained in camp.

The team placed Stepan on the NHL’s long-term injury list on Monday, making him ineligible until the team’s 11th game, Nov. 3 at the Garden against St. Louis, in order to free cap space to retain 14 healthy forwards. Hayes either is headed to short-term I.R. or Mueller is headed to the minors to keep the team at the 23-man roster limit.

Matt Hunwick made the team as its seventh defenseman but had to go to the hospital for stitches after appearing to cut his forward on Chris Kreider’s skate while tumbling to the ice in Monday’s practice.


“Unbelievable,” the French Canadian winger said on Monday in Greenburgh, realizing he is not heading back to his junior team, at least for now. “My goal was to stay as long as possible and maybe play a couple more preseason games. But to make it …”

Coach Alain Vigneault said he told Duclair that if he can prove he’s capable playing on one of the Rangers’ top three lines night in and night out, he will stay with the team even past the nine-game threshold at which his entry-level contract will kick in.

“He’s got an NHL skill set,” Vigneault said. “It doesn’t mean he’s going to play every game, but when he plays he has to play in our top-nine forwards, and he’s going to get an opportunity starting Thursday to prove that.

Two other young players, forwards J.T. Miller, 21, and Jesper Fast, 22, made the team out of camp for the second straight year, but neither of them staked as regulars last season, so they – like Duclair – have plenty of work ahead of them.

“It starts now for me,” Miller said, a year more mature. “I’ve been here before, but now it’s about the sticking part.”

“J.T. in my estimation has had a very good camp,” Vigneault said. “We tried him at different positions. Other than one game where I thought he was just average, I liked all his other games. He’s a little bit like the Duke. He’s got to prove that he can play in our top nine. He’s got that potential. Can he do it right now? We’ve got to give them the opportunity to show they can do it, and that’s what we’ll get to start Thursday.”

This roster, of course, could change game-to-game, week-to-week, but Vigneault nevertheless paid a major compliment to Fast on Monday after practice in Greenburgh.

“(Fast) has been one of our most consistent players throughout training camp,” Vigneault said. “When he’s on the ice, I would say to you that coaches and management have a lot of trust that he’s going to do the right thing.”

The Rangers have kept 25 total players, but they will get to the 23-man roster limit by end of day Tuesday.

They have placed center Derek Stepan (broken leg) on the league’s long-term injury list, keeping him out until at least a Nov. 3 game against St. Louis Blues at the Garden. Then there is a decision still to be made regarding injured center Kevin Hayes (shoulder, day-to-day) and healthy center Chris Mueller.

The Blueshirts put Mueller on waivers on Monday. If he is claimed by another team, the Rangers are down to 23. If he is not claimed, the team can put Hayes on short-term injured reserve (out seven days) and get to 23 that way instead.

To make room for Duclair’s contract, the Rangers also made a two-for-one trade on Monday with the Florida Panthers, offloading defenseman Steven Kampfer and forward Andrew Yogan in return for depth/AHL forward Joey Crabb. The Rangers had 50 contracts, which is the NHL’s limit for one team, and adding Duclair would have made 51. So they traded away two players, got back Crabb, and added Duclair.

Clearing a spot for Duclair was still necessary on Monday because C Matthew Lombardi, D Mike Kostka, Kampfer and G Cedrick Desjardins all had cleared waivers on Monday at noon. The Rangers assigned all four on Monday to their AHL affiliate, the Hartford Wolf Pack, along with cuts F Ryan Hagerty, F Marek Hrivik, C Oscar Lindberg and D Dylan McIlrath. Then they traded Kampfer.

If Mueller clears waivers, he could return to the Wolf Pack, or he could remain with the Rangers when Hayes goes on IR. Vigneault’s four centers for Thursday are going to be Derick Brassard, Martin St. Louis, Miller, and Dominic Moore, but that could change game-by-game based on performance.

That’s why Vigneault and the Rangers put Stepan on long-term IR: To have more money to keep extra forwards so they can address these – hopefully – short-term issues.

Matt Hunwick won the battle for the seventh defenseman’s spot, though in his first practice he cut his face and had to get stitches at the hospital after tumbling in a collision with Chris Kreider and getting Kreider’s skate to the forehead, it appeared.

J.T. Miller’s offseason work has earned him a spot as one of the Rangers’ starting four centers to open their regular season Thursday night in St. Louis. Joel Auerbach/Getty Images J.T. Miller’s offseason work has earned him a spot as one of the Rangers’ starting four centers to open their regular season Thursday night in St. Louis.

Vigneault said Hunwick should be O.K., and though he didn’t see much separating Hunwick from Mike Kostka, Vigneault said the coaches felt Hunwick’s slightly better ability to beat opponents’ forechecks on dump-ins was the deciding factor.

Here are the lines and pairs Vigneault showed on Monday in Greenburgh, which appear to reflect the lineup he intends to use in Thursday night’s regular season opener in St. Louis. Then below that is a financial breakdown of where the Rangers stand at the moment with regards to the salary cap:


Defensemen (seven): Ryan McDonagh-Dan Girardi, Marc Staal-Dan Boyle, John Moore-Kevin Klein

Goalties: Henrik Lundqvist, Cam Talbot

Extras: LW Ryan Malone, C Chris Mueller (waivers), D Matt Hunwick

Injured, not skating (two): C Derek Stepan (broken left fibula, long-term IR, Nov. 3), C/W Kevin Hayes (shoulder, day-to-day)

BREAKING DOWN THE MONEY

As I mentioned, there are 25 players who still conceivably could be on the Rangers’ official roster, including Stepan, when they open the regular season on Thursday night. Here’s their financial breakdown, followed by a quick explanation of why this works:

Goalies: Henrik Lundqvist ($8.5 million), Cam Talbot ($5.625 million), Henrik Lundqvist, Cam Talbot

Forwards: (16 total): Rick Nash ($7.8 million), Martin St. Louis ($5.625 million), Derick Brassard ($5 million), Mats Zuccarello ($3.5 million), Derek Stepan ($3.075 million, long-term injury), Chris Kreider ($2.475), Carl Hagelin ($2.25 million), Dominic Moore ($1.5 million), Tanner Glass ($1.45 million), Kevin Hayes ($800,000), Lee Stempniak ($800,000), J.T. Miller ($894,167), Jesper Fast ($705,000), Anthony Duclair ($772,500), Ryan Malone ($700,000), Chris Mueller ($600,000).

Defensemen: (seven): Dan Girardi ($5.5 million), Ryan McDonagh ($4.7 million), Dan Boyle ($4.5 million), Marc Staal ($3.975 million), Kevin Klein ($2.9 million), John Moore ($850,500), Matt Hunwick ($600,000).

Goalties: Henrik Lundqvist ($8.5 million), Cam Talbot ($562,500).

NHL salary cap ceiling: $69 million

Rangers salary cap total as of Oct. 6: $70,334,667

Stepan’s going on long-term injury allows the Rangers to spend over the NHL salary cap ceiling to assemble their 23-man roster, so even though they technically have exceeded $69 million, they are abiding by NHL rules. Once Stepan comes off long-term injury in early November, they will have to adjust to accommodate the financial restriction of the $69 million ceiling.

The $70.33 million number obviously would change if Mueller is claimed and his $600,000 charge comes off, but the same principle would hold: Stepan going on long-term injury allows the Rangers to exceed the limit temporarily.

Ryan McDonagh named Blueshirts captain

By Brett Cyrgalis

The Rangers made official what seemed like a given on Monday night, naming defenseman Ryan McDonagh the 27th captain in franchise history. Joining him as alternate captains were defensemen Marc Staal and Dan Girardi, along with forwards Martin St. Louis and Derek Stepan.

“Ryan McDonagh exemplifies what we want a New York Ranger to be,” general manager Glen Sather said in a statement released (for some reason or another) at 8:30 p.m. “He has earned the respect of his teammates through his commitment to excellence, both on and off the ice, and the passion with which he plays on a consistent basis. He is the ideal choice to lead our team as its captain.”

The 25-year-old McDonagh is the fourth youngest captain in team history, and the third consecutive American-born captain, taking over for Ryan Callahan, who was traded to the Lightning last March. McDonagh set career highs last season in goals (14), assists (29), and points (43), while also leading the team in averaging 24:49 of ice time per game.

By Brett Cyrgalis

Rangers’ roster still a muddle after preseason loss to Devils

As expected, the Rangers placed top-line center Derek Stepan (broken left leg) on long-term injured reserve Monday, meaning he will have to sit out at least the first 10 games of the regular season. He is eligible to return for a home game against the Blues on Nov. 3.

The four-to-six week timeline that was given for Stepan’s recovery could have had him return for the seventh game of the season, but this move enables the team to temporarily exceed the salary-cap ceiling while he remains out. That financial flexibility allowed coach Alain Vigneault to keep 14 forwards for the season opener Thursday in St. Louis.

In Stepan’s absence, it seems Vigneault is going to try Martin St. Louis at center, which he did with middling results for Friday’s preseason match against the Blackhawks.

“There are little differences, but when I have the puck, I play the way I know how to play,” St. Louis said after a practice in which he centered Chris Kreider and Rick Nash. “I have to make sure I’m a little more patient because I’ve always kind of been a go-go kind of player. As a centerman, you kind of have to be in position and make reads when you can go and when you can’t go.”

When asked if there were other options at center besides St. Louis, Vigneault joked, “That’s a good question, and deserves a good answer.” He then explained the options only as Chris Mueller, who was placed on waivers Monday, or Kevin Hayes, a rookie who is hurt.

Vigneault said if Mueller clears, there is a chance he could still remain with the Rangers. Hayes is dealing with a shoulder ailment and is likely to be placed on short-term injured reserve in order for the team to get down to the 23-man limit that is needed by Tuesday at 5 p.m.

Matt Hunwick won the spot as the seventh defenseman, a close competition between him and Mike Kostka, who cleared waivers Monday and was assigned to AHL Hartford.

“There wasn’t a lot separating those players,” Vigneault said. “It was maybe [Hunwick’s] ability to beat the forecheck on dump-ins — quick to turn and a little shuffle there to beat the first guy. We could see that we were out of our end a little bit quicker.”

Hunwick fell hard into the boards in practice and was cut on the bridge of his nose, seemingly from the skate of Kreider. He went to the hospital for stitches, but is expected to be OK.
Rangers pull strings to keep phenom Anthony Duclair on roster

By Brett Cyrgalis

First The King, now The Duke.
The Rangers did what they had to do to add more royal monikers to their roster on Monday, as 19-year-old Anthony Duclair – whom coach Alain Vigneault calls “The Duke” – made the team for opening night this Thursday in St. Louis.

“He has a NHL skill-set – the hands, the speed, the thinking with the puck,” Vigneault said after Monday’s practice. “It’s there. Now, can that continue when the season starts against full NHL lineups, and full NHL pace and intensity? He’s going to get a chance to prove that. So far, he’s earned the right to start with us by his play, and we’ll see what happens.”

The Rangers liked The Duke so much they even executed a trade to make room for him in the organization. Being at the 50-contract limit, general manager Glen Sather had to shed a contract to keep Duclair. He did just that with a minor-league 2-for-1 swap, sending defenseman Steven Kampfer and forward Andrew Yogan to the Panthers in exchange for 31-year-old forward Joey Crabb, a seventh-round pick of the Rangers back in 2002.

For Duclair, it’s all been like a daydream.

“Words can’t really describe how I feel right now,” he said. “But I’ve worked hard all the way to this point and I’m pretty proud of myself.”

The directive from Vigneault in his Monday morning meeting with Duclair was he has to continue to prove he can play in the team’s top three lines in order to stay with the team. Because of his age, Duclair cannot play in the AHL this season, and because of when he signed his contract, the first year of his entry-level deal is already in effect, whether he plays here or back in Quebec.

“I basically put it this way – if you can prove that you can play in our top nine, then you’re going to stick with us,” Vigneault said. “It doesn’t mean that he’s going to play every game, but when he plays, he has to play in our top nine forwards. He’s going to get an opportunity, starting Thursday, to try and prove that.”

Duclair said he has absolutely exceeded his own expectations, but is still trying not to get ahead of himself.

“My goal was to stay as long as possible, and maybe get a few preseason games,” he said. “Just making the team is pretty surprising for myself.”

In the practice, Duclair skated on a line centered by another youngster, J.T. Miller, and flanked on the right by veteran Lee Stempniak. That is the likely landing spot for Duclair come Thursday.

“The dream is to play in the NHL and win a Stanley Cup,” Duclair said. “For me to experience it at such a young age is unbelievable.”

As expected, the Rangers placed top-line center Derek Stepan (broken left leg) on long-term injured reserve, meaning he will have to sit out at least the first 10 games of the regular season. Vigneault put Martin St. Louis back at center from his natural wing position in hopes of temporarily filling that void.

Matt Hunwick officially won the spot as the seventh defenseman, a close competition between him and Mike Kostka. Vigneault said Hunwick won mostly because of his ability to outskate the forecheck.

Hunwick fell hard into the boards in practice and was cut on the bridge of his nose, seemingly from the skate of Chris Kreider. He went to the hospital for stitches, but is expected to be fine.

The Rangers placed center Chris Mueller on waivers, though if he clears, Vigneault said Mueller could very well stick with the team.

Clearing waivers on Monday at noon were Kampfer (who was then traded), along with center Matt Lombardi, Kostka, and goalie Cedrick Desjardins, all assigned to AHL Hartford. Not needing waivers but also being assigned to Hartford were forwards Ryan Haggerty, Marek Hrivik and Oscar Lindberg, along with defenseman Dylan McIlrath.
Lombardi waived as Rangers pick Mueller

By Brett Cyrgalis

Rangers’ roster still a muddle after preseason loss to Devils

So it was a competition for the Rangers down the middle, and now it seems like Chris Mueller has won the job.

The Rangers placed center Matt Lombardi on waivers on Sunday, making it clear Mueller has won the spot as the final pivot on the roster.

“I think I got a great opportunity,” Mueller said after the game on Saturday night against the Devils at the Prudential Center, the last game of the preseason. “I thought I had another strong game.”

The other players on waivers were defensemen Michael Kostka and Steven Kampfer, meaning the spot for the seventh defenseman was set for Matt Hunwick. Goalie Cedrick Desjardins was also placed on waivers, likely setting himself up to be the No. 1 goalie in AHL Hartford this season.

The spot at center has been a point of contention since top-line pivot Derek Stepan went down for four-to-six weeks with a broken left leg. That has left a void for the Rangers up front, so much so that coach Alain Vigneault has tried moving Hall of Fame winger Martin St. Louis back to the middle.

But that experiment didn’t work all that well on Friday night in the Garden against the Blackhawks, and now Vigneault is left with a roster that doesn’t have very many centers ready to take the reins.

“We’ve got issues in the middle right now,” he said after Saturday’s game.

Mueller was between Chris Kreider and J.T. Miller for that game, a contest after which Vigneault said he had “issues down the middle.” With Stepan out for at least the first month of the season with a broken left leg, that means there is going to be a lot asked of the rest of the roster.

“I think everybody is trying their best,” Vigneault said, his team having Sunday off before final cuts come are announced on Monday. “You can only give what you have.”
McDonagh named Rangers’ captain

The Rangers announced tonight that, as expected, Ryan McDonagh is the next captain.

The team will also rotate four alternate captains - Marc Staal, Dan Girardi, Marty St. Louis and Derek Stepan.

Why this announcement needed to wait until 8:30 p.m. on a Monday rather than just revealing it when Alain Vigneault was asked today, I’m not sure. But that’s a small matter.

McDonagh is the right choice, both for personality and stature on and off the ice and for the fact that, besides Girardi, he’s the only player who will wear a letter who’s locked up long term.

Vigneault said at the start of training camp he wanted to take the camp before naming players, because he did have several candidates. But McDonagh always seemed like the clear-cut choice.

The Rangers’ release is below the fold…

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Rangers President and General Manager Glen Sather announced today that defense man Ryan McDonagh has been named the 27th captain in franchise history. The team also announced that Dan Girardi, Martin St. Louis, Marc Staal, and Derek Stepan will serve as the Rangers’ four alternate captains.

“Ryan McDonagh exemplifies what we want a New York Ranger to be,” Sather said. “He has earned the respect of his teammates through his commitment to excellence, both on and off the ice, and the passion with which he plays on a consistent basis. He is the ideal choice to lead our team as its captain.”

McDonagh, 25, becomes the fourth-youngest captain in Rangers history, and the 11th defenseman in team history to be named captain. The Rangers are now the second franchise in NHL history to have three consecutive American-born captains (along with the Dallas Stars).

Last season, the 6-1, 216-pounder was named Team MVP and received the Players’ Player Award, which recognizes the Ranger who best exemplifies what it means to be a team player. McDonagh became the 10th defenseman in team history to be selected as Team MVP since the award’s inception following the 1941-42 season, and was the first Ranger to be named Team MVP and receive the Players’ Player Award in the same season since Brian Leetch in 2002-03.

McDonagh established career-highs in goals (14), assists (29), points (43), power play points (13), shorthanded goals (three), game-winning goals (four), and average ice time (24:49) in 2013-14. He tied the Rangers’ franchise record for shorthanded goals by a defenseman in one season, which Leetch established in 1988-89. McDonagh led the Rangers in average ice time, ranked second in blocked shots (131), tied for third in game-winning goals, ranked fourth in assists, tied for fourth in power play assists (11), and ranked fifth in points and power play points.

In the 2014 Playoffs, McDonagh tied for first among NHL defensemen in assists (13), and ranked second among NHL defensemen in points (17). He established a franchise record for assists by a defenseman in one playoff series with eight during the Rangers’ six-game series victory over Montreal in the Eastern Conference Finals. McDonagh’s 13 assists were tied for the fourth-highest total a Ranger has had in one playoff year, and his 17 points were the third-highest total for a Rangers defenseman in one playoff year.

The St. Paul, Minnesota native represented the United States at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, where he tallied two points (one goal, one assist) in six games. McDonagh ranked second on Team USA in average ice time (20:43) during the Olympics.

Entering his fifth NHL season, McDonagh has registered 26 goals and 77 assists for 103 points, along with 116 penalty minutes and a plus-65 rating in 246 career NHL games. He has finished second on the Rangers in blocked shots in each of the last three seasons, and has ranked first, second, or third on the team in average ice time in each of the last three seasons.

McDonagh has also posted a plus-11 rating or better in each of his four NHL seasons. He registered a single-game career-high, three points, including his 100th career NHL point, and tallied the game-winning goal in overtime on March 24, 2014 vs. Phoenix.

McDonagh was acquired by the Rangers from Montreal, along with Chris Higgins, Pavel Valen for in exchange for Scott Gomez, Tom Pyatt, and Mike Bust on June 30, 2009. He was originally selected by the Canadiens in the first round, 12th overall, of the 2007 NHL Entry Draft.

Girardi has skated in 569 career NHL games over parts of eight NHL seasons, all with the Rangers, registering 36 goals and 142 assists for 178 points, along with 217 penalty minutes and a plus-16 rating. The Welland, Ontario native served as one of the team’s three alternate captains at the end of last season, and ranks second on the Rangers’ all-time playoff games played list (89).

St. Louis has registered 370 goals and 611 assists for 981 points, along with 290 penalty minutes and a plus-25 rating in 1,060 career NHL games with the Rangers, Calgary Flames, and Tampa Bay Lightning. He served as an alternate captain with the Lightning for six seasons (2007-08 – 2012-13), and was Tampa Bay’s captain for part of the 2013-14 season.

Staal has skated in 460 career NHL games over seven NHL seasons, all with the Rangers, registering 72 goals and 84 assists for 116 points, along with 303 penalty minutes and a plus-14 rating. The Thunder Bay, Ontario native has served as an alternate captain with the Blueshirts since the start of the 2010-11 season.

Stepan has skated in 294 career NHL games, all with the Rangers, registering 73 goals and 124 assists for 197 points, along with 72 penalty minutes and a plus-59 rating. Stepan, who is entering his fifth NHL season, established career-highs in assists (40), points (57), power play goals (five), power play assists (13), and power play points (18), and tied a career-high in shorthanded assists (three) in 2013-14.

Posted by Andrew Gross on 10/06 at 08:47 PM

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.07.2014
Anthony Duclair, J.T. Miller and Jesper Fast were obviously three happy players in the Rangers’ room after this morning’s practice as they found out they would be on the opening night roster when the season begins Thursday night in St. Louis.

Miller, 21, will start the season as a center, most likely on a third line with Duclair and Lee Stempniak. Fast, 22, per coach Alain Vigneault, will fill a third- or fourth-line role while penalty killing. Duclair, 19, the youngest Ranger since Michael Del Zotto made the team at the same age for the 2009-10 season, has been told by Vigneault that in order to stick with the Rangers, he must prove he can play among the top nine forwards.

“He’s got an NHL skill set, the hands, the speed, the thinking with the puck, it’s there,” Vigneault said of his preseason. “I had some lucky swings but he’s good. In my mind, he’s going to play every game but when he plays he has to play in our top nine then you’re going to stick with us,” Vigneault added. “It doesn’t mean he’s going to play every day but when he plays he has to play in our top nine forwards.

“Whatever happened, highs or lows, you’ve got to stay grounded,” Duclair said. “The real work starts now. For me, it’s to keep improving every day and adapting to certain situations. I talked to AV about it too. It’s not playing against some junior or AHL guys, it’s the big boys now and it’s going to be tough. But at the same time I’m looking forward to the challenge.”

The Rangers will place Derek Stepan (fractured left fibula) on long-term injured reserve so they will be able to fit 14 healthy forwards on their roster. With today’s re-assignment of goalie Cedrick Desjardins, defensemen Dylan McIlrath and Michael Kostka and forwards Marek Hrivik, Matthew Lombardi, Ryan Hagarty and Oscar Lindberg to Hartford (AHL), plus the inclusion of defensemen Steven Kampfer (after his re-assignment to Hartford) along with forward Andrew Yogan in a deal to the Panthers for minor league forward Joey Crabb, the Rangers’ NHL roster stands at 25 players including Stepan.

Stepan to LTIR gets the Rangers to 24 then either Chris Mueller or Kevin Hayes will be taken off the roster to get to 23. Mueller was placed on waivers today and teams have until Tuesday at noon to claim him. If not, Hayes (shoulder) could be placed on injured reserve. Mueller said today he had not been told whether he had made the team.

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Duclair said being told in a meeting this morning with Vigneault he had made the team was “an amazing feeling.

“Words can’t really describe how I feel right now but I worked hard to this point and I’m pretty proud of myself,” Duclair said. “I dream of playing in the NHL and to win a Stanley Cup in the future. For me to be here at such a young age is unbelievable.”

“Basically we put it this way, “As long as you prove that you can play in our top nine then you’re going to stick with us,”” Vigneault added. “It doesn’t mean he’s going to play every game but when he plays he has to play in our top nine forwards and he’s going to get an opportunity.”

Fast also started last season with the Rangers due to shoulder injuries to then-captain Ryan Callahan and, on a longer-term basis, to Carl Hagelin. Once Hagelin returned from LTIR, Fast was re-assigned to Hartford.

This season, Fast agreed that it was more up to his performance as to whether he stays with the Rangers.

“I think I played good,” Fast said of his preseason. “I had some lucky bounces out there, that’s always good for confidence. Last year, I showed I could play good in my zone, that’s probably why I made the team last year. I probably took that game with me this year and hopefully play with a little more strength and confidence out there.”

Fast said he added weight, around eight pounds, and strength in his legs this season through running and biking.

“I knew what I had to work on to improve my game in this league,” added Fast, scoreless in 11 games for the Rangers last season. “Everyone has to be strong on the puck.”

Vigneault paid Fast a huge compliment by saying when he was on the ice, he had the trust of the coaches and management to always do the right thing.

Of Miller, Vigneault said there was the flexibility to move him to wing if he struggles at center.

“It’s just like a little reward I guess,” Miller said of making the team. “I put a lot more time into it this year. Obviously it’s what you shoot for, it’s my goal, and I think the real challenge starts now. Obviously I’m glad I’m here to start but I want to stay. That I’m here and here for good type of thing, just make sure I’m playing good every day.

“Yeah (staying in the NHL) it’s hard, there are so many players that can take your job and obviously a ton of younger players that are looking to get a chance at well, it’s definitely really tough,” added Miller, who had three goals and three assists in 30 games for the Rangers last season. “I just have to play consistently in my position.

(At center), we talked about defensive responsibilities in your own end. It’s much more important to play two ways.”

“He’s a little bit like the Duke,” Vigneault said of Miller, comparing him to Duclair. “He’s got to prove he can play in our top nine. He’s got that potential. Can he do it right now? We’ve got to give them the opportunity to show they can do it.”

Also today...

- Vigneault said having Marty St. Louis in the middle is the team’s best option to start with Hayes hurt.
- Vigneault promised his decision on naming a captain was coming “soon.” It’s not expected to be today but definitely by Wednesday.
- Vigneault on why Matt Hunwick was chosen over Kampfer and Kostka as the seventh defenseman: “That was a real tough decision for us, there wasn’t a lot separating those players. He outplayed those guys by a little bit. Maybe it was his ability to beat the forecheck on dump-ins, quick to turn, little shuffle back there and beat the first guy. It seemed we were out of our end a little bit quicker.”
- Hunwick needed stitches after going hard into the corner and taking a skate blade to the bridge of his nose.

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“He’s a little bit like the Duke,” Vigneault said of Miller, comparing him to Duclair. “He’s got to prove he can play in our top nine. He’s got that potential. Can he do it right now? We’ve got to give them the opportunity to show they can do it.”
Minor trade opens roster spot for Duclair

When asked on Saturday about fitting Anthony Duclair’s contract among the organizational maximum of 50, coach Alain Vigneault said he didn’t anticipate an issue despite the Rangers needing to jettison a contract to do so.

And, as it turned out, it wasn’t a problem.

Both Vigneault and Duclair confirmed today that the 19-year-old training camp sensation would start the season with the Rangers and, this afternoon, the Rangers have traded forward Andrew Yogan and defensemen Steven Kampfer - both who had been re-assigned to Hartford (AHL) - to the Panthers for forward Joey Crabb, who will wind up with the Wolf Pack. Crabb was initially picked by the Rangers in the seventh round of the 2002 draft.

Yogan, 22, is going home as the Coral Springs, Fla. native became the first person born and raised in Florida to be drafted when the Rangers picked him in the fourth round of the 2010 draft.

Crabb, 31, split last season between the Panthers and the San Antonio Rampage of the American Hockey League (AHL). He skated in nine NHL games with Florida, recording one assist and seven penalty minutes. In 62 games with San Antonio, Crabb had 15 goals and 14 assists along with 51 penalty minutes. He led San Antonio with seven power-play goals.

The 6-1, 190-pounder has played in 179 career NHL games over parts of five seasons with the Thrashers, Maple Leafs, Capitals and Panthers, compiling 20 goals, 33 assists and 100 penalty minutes. Crabb established career-highs in games played (67), goals (11), assists (15), points (26), and hits (101) with Toronto in 2011-12 season.

Kampfer, 26, was signed by the Rangers as a free agent on July 1.

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Posted by Andrew Gross on 10/06 at 02:09 PM

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Duclair on the ice today for Rangers

The roster picture is a lot clearer today, though not finalized. It now appears the official, official roster won’t be revealed until Tuesday. Tuesday at 5 p.m. is the NHL deadline for teams to be at a maximum of 23 players.

This much is known:
- Defenseman Dylan McIlrath and forwards Oscar Lindberg, Marek Hrivik and Ryan Haggerty have been reassigned to Hartford (AHL).
- Defensemen Steven Kampfer and Michael Kostka, forward Matthew Lombardi and goalie Cedrick Desjardins will be reassigned to Hartford as soon as they clear waivers at noon.
- Rookie Kevin Hayes is not skating today as he remains day to day with a tweaked shoulder.
- Anthony Duclair remains with the Rangers and has not been returned to his junior team. However, the Rangers still must clear a spot in the organization by moving a contract to get under the maximum of 50. That’s what is likely holding up the official roster announcement until Tuesday.

Meanwhile, at practice today, here are the lines:

Chris Kreider-Marty St. Louis-Rick Nash
Carl Hagelin-Derick Brassard-Mats Zuccarello
Anthony Duclair-J.T. Miller-Lee Stempniak
Tanner Glass-Dominic Moore-Jesper Fast

Ryan Malone and Chris Mueller are skating as extra forwards.

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Posted by Andrew Gross on 10/06 at 11:25 AM

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Rangers clear spot for rookie Anthony Duclair, 19

By ANDREW GROSS

GREENBURGH, N.Y. – The Duke has made the varsity.

Staying on it poses the next challenge for Rangers’ training camp sensation Anthony Duclair, at 19 the youngest team member since Michael Del Zotto in 2009-10.

"The real work starts now," the speedy left wing said. "For me, it’s to keep improving every day and adapting to certain situations."

The Rangers will finalize their roster today for Thursday’s season-opener at St. Louis. But after Monday’s personnel moves, including putting top center Derek Stepan (fractured left fibula) on long-term injured reserve, meaning he must miss at least the first 10 games, the only question is whether journeyman Chris Mueller or rookie Kevin Hayes will be on the team to start.

Mueller was placed on waivers on Monday, but coach Alain Vigneault said he won’t necessarily be reassigned to Hartford (AHL) if he clears at noon today. Hayes missed Monday’s practice with a tweaked shoulder and could start the season on injured reserve.

The Rangers cut down to 25 players — including Stepan — by reassigning goalie Cedrick Desjardins, defensemen Michael Kostka and Dylan McIlrath and forwards Matthew Lombardi, Oscar Lindberg, Ryan Haggerty and Marek Hrivik to Hartford. They also traded defensemen Steven Kampfer and forward Andrew Yogan to the Panthers for minor-league forward Joey Crabb.

That created the roster spot necessary to fit Duclair under the organizational maximum of 50 contracts.

"He’s got an NHL skill-set, the hands, the speed, the thinking with the puck," Vigneault said. "It's there. Now, can that continue when the season starts against full NHL lineups at a full NHL pace and intensity? He's going to get a chance to prove that."

Vigneault gave Duclair the good news prior to the team’s morning practice. But it came with a stipulation.

"Basically I put it this way: ‘As long as you prove that you can play in our top nine, then you’re going to stick with us,’" Vigneault said. "It doesn’t mean he’s going to play every game but, when he plays, he has to play in our top nine forwards."

The plan that Duclair ultimately altered with not only his speed and scoring but defensive awareness and poise was to return him for a final season with the Quebec Remparts of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

Duclair, a third-round pick in 2013, had 50 goals and 49 assists in 59 QMJHL games last season before being sidelined by a concussion. Initially, the Rangers’ brass thought it would be best for Duclair to go through a healthy season and participate in the Memorial Cup. As hosts, the Remparts have an automatic berth in junior hockey’s championship tournament.

But Duclair scored three goals and two assists in his first three preseason games before being held scoreless against the more representative NHL lineups in the Rangers’ final two preseason games.

"I talked to AV about it, too," Duclair said. "I’m not playing against some junior or AHL guys. It’s the big boys now and it’s going to be tough. But, at the same time, I’m looking forward to the challenge."

It’s likely Duclair will start the season on a third line centered by J.T. Miller, the team’s first-round pick in 2011, and veteran Lee Stempniak.

"He’s a little bit like the Duke," Vigneault said of Miller. "He’s got to prove he can play in our top nine. He’s got that potential."

BRIEFS: Vigneault indicated future Hall of Fame right wing Marty St. Louis will start the season centering one of the top two lines. … Defenseman Matt Hunwick needed stitches after being struck by a skate blade on his nose.

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.07.2014
New York Rangers

Rangers name Ryan McDonagh captain

By ANDREW GROSS

Alain Vigneault exited his early Monday afternoon news conference through the security-coded door to the team offices, calling out, "It's coming. Soon. Soon. Soon," when asked whether he had decided on his first appointment as Rangers' captain.

The coach's cryptic response – specifically about whether the announcement would be made Monday – was decoded via an email from the team at 8:34 p.m. naming Ryan McDonagh the 27th captain in franchise history and the third straight U.S.-born player to wear the "C." The news was first revealed to teammates at a private dinner earlier Monday night.

It was absolutely the right choice, as was the additional news that Dan Girardi, Marc Staal, Marty St. Louis and Derek Stepan would serve as alternate captains.

But it certainly was odd timing for the public announcement and the wrong way to reveal the big news about McDonagh, which had been anticipated since the last day of last season.

The Rangers, concurrent with their 8:34 news release, also released a picture via their Twitter account of McDonagh wearing his new "C" while posing with former captains Dave Maloney, Ron Greschner and Vic Hadfield.

The Rangers should have let Vigneault announce it in the afternoon. Or, better yet, bring McDonagh out to answer a couple of questions. When he does today, it's already old news.

But enough of the negative.

The positive for the Rangers is McDonagh brings the right poise, professionalism and stature both on the ice and off to his new role. He speaks up when necessary and his elite play allows him to lead by example.

"Ryan McDonagh exemplifies what we want a New York Ranger to be," general manager Glen Sather, who has not spoken on the record yet during training camp, said in the 8:34 press release. "He has earned the respect of his teammates through his commitment to excellence, both on and off the ice, and the passion with which he plays on a consistent basis. He is the ideal choice to lead our team as its captain."

Better yet, the 25-year-old McDonagh is in the second season of a six-year, $28.2 million deal that includes a modified no-trade clause from 2016-19. In other words, he's not going anywhere.

For a franchise that was forced to trade away its last captain, Ryan Callahan, in the middle of last season due to stalled negotiations over a contract extension, that's a big plus. So, too, is the fact McDonagh is in his prime, unlike Callahan's predecessor, Chris Drury, who was relegated to a fourth-line role and eventually bought out after the 2010-11 season.

The Rangers made the perfect call.

So why the wait?

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.07.2014
Ryan McDonagh named Rangers' captain

By STEVE ZIPAY steve.zipay@newsday.com

Ryan McDonagh, the 25-year-old defenseman from Minnesota who was voted the Rangers' MVP last season, last night was named the 27th captain of the team. He will become the fourth-youngest player to wear a "C" for the Rangers.

McDonagh posted career-high numbers in goals (14) and assists (29) last season and finished eighth in the voting for the Norris Trophy, awarded to the NHL's top defenseman.

The University of Wisconsin grad, who played for the U.S. Olympic team in Sochi, succeeds Ryan Callahan, who was named captain in September 2011 and traded to Tampa last March for Martin St. Louis.

McDonagh signed a six-year, $28.2-million contract extension in July 2013. He had been the clubhouse favorite to be given the "C" since then.

St. Louis and Derek Stepan were named as alternates, joining current alternates Marc Staal and Dan Girardi.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Rangers can exceed salary cap with Derek Stepan out

By STEVE ZIPAY  steve.zipay@newsday.com

Derek Stepan of the Rangers looks on during

With center Derek Stepan now officially on long-term injured reserve, the Rangers can temporarily exceed the $69-million salary cap until he returns in November after 10 games.

Then, they must make moves to be cap-compliant.

At this point, it appears they could carry the maximum 23 players when rosters are finalized Tuesday: 16 forwards (only 14 active with Stepan and possibly Kevin Hayes on IR), seven defensemen and two goalies. Or, 15 forwards, for flexibility, if Chris Mueller is claimed on waivers, which doesn't appear likely to happen.

The math:

**GOALIES**
Henrik Lundqvist ($8.5 million)
Cam Talbot ($562,500)

**DEFENSEMEN**
Dan Girardi ($5.5 million)
Ryan McDonagh ($4.7 million)
Dan Boyle ($4.5 million)
Marc Staal ($3.975 million)
Kevin Klein ($2.9 million)
John Moore ($850,500)
Matt Hunwick ($600,000)

**FORWARDS**
Rick Nash ($7.8 million)
Martin St. Louis ($5.625 million)
Derick Brassard ($5 million)
Mats Zuccarello ($3.5 million)
Derek Stepan ($3.075 million, LTIR)
Chris Kreider ($2.475 million)
Carl Hagelin ($2.25 million)
Dom Moore ($1.5 million)
Tanner Glass ($1.45 million)
Kevin Hayes ($900,000, IR)
Lee Stempniak ($900,000)
J.T. Miller ($894,167)
Jesper Fast ($805,000)
Anthony Duclair ($772,500)
Ryan Malone ($700,000)
Chris Mueller ($600,000)

That equals $70,334,667. If nothing changes by early November, decisions would have to be made on two (or three) players to make room for Stepan.
GREENBURGH, N.Y. - After the Stanley Cup Final, Rangers coach Alain Vigneault insisted that teams need an annual infusion of youth in the fall to compete in the spring. "Just look at the Kings," Vigneault said, referring to the Cup champs.

As it stands, with center Derek Stepan (fractured fibula) placed on long-term injured reserve yesterday, the Rangers will have three or four young forwards on their opening-night roster: Anthony Duclair, 19; J.T Miller, 21; Jesper Fast, 22, and possibly Kevin Hayes, 22, a free agent out of Boston College who dinged his shoulder against Chicago on Friday and could go on injured reserve.

"It's an amazing feeling," said Duclair, who had 50 goals and 99 points with the junior Quebec Remparts last season. "My goal was to stay here as long as possible, maybe get a few preseason games. The first few games, I have to make a good impression to stay. The real work starts now."

Duclair, nicknamed "The Duke," is the first Rangers player to make the jump from junior hockey since defenseman Michael Del Zotto in 2009.

"As long as you can prove you can play in our top nine, you'll stay," Vigneault said he told Duclair. "He's earned the right to start with us. He's got an NHL skill set: the hands, the speed, the thinking with the puck. Can that continue when the season starts?"

Miller and Fast made the cut last October but traveled back and forth to Hartford. This time they will understand what it takes to stay in New York.

"J.T. has had a very good camp," Vigneault said, "other than one game, where I thought he was average. He's a little like 'The Duke'; he's got to prove he can play in our top nine [either at center or wing]."

Fast, Vigneault said, "has been one of our most consistent players . . . When he's on the ice, coaches and management have a lot of trust that he's going to do the right thing."

Notes & quotes: The centers, if Monday's practice is any indication, are Martin St. Louis, Derick Brassard, Miller and Dominic Moore.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.07.2014
McDonagh named captain; Staal, Girardi, St. Louis and Stepan are alternates

NEW YORK, October 6, 2014 – New York Rangers President and General Manager Glen Sather announced today that defenseman Ryan McDonagh has been named the 27th captain in franchise history. The team also announced that Dan Girardi, Martin St. Louis, Marc Staal, and Derek Stepan will serve as the Rangers’ four alternate captains.

“Ryan McDonagh exemplifies what we want a New York Ranger to be,” Sather said. “He has earned the respect of his teammates through his commitment to excellence, both on and off the ice, and the passion with which he plays on a consistent basis. He is the ideal choice to lead our team as its captain.”

McDonagh, 25, becomes the fourth-youngest captain in Rangers history, and the 11th defenseman in team history to be named captain. The Rangers are now the second franchise in NHL history to have three consecutive American-born captains (along with the Dallas Stars).* NYR captains

Last season, the 6-1, 216-pounder was named Team MVP and received the Players’ Player Award, which recognizes the Ranger who best exemplifies what it means to be a team player. McDonagh became the 10th defenseman in team history to be selected as Team MVP since the award’s inception following the 1941-42 season, and was the first Ranger to be named Team MVP and receive the Players’ Player Award in the same season since Brian Leetch in 2002-03.

McDonagh established career-highs in goals (14), assists (29), points (43), power play points (13), shorthanded goals (three), game-winning goals (four), and average ice time (24:49) in 2013-14. He tied the Rangers’ franchise record for shorthanded goals by a defenseman in one season, which Leetch established in 1988-89. McDonagh led the Rangers in average ice time, ranked second in blocked shots (131), tied for third in game-winning goals, ranked fourth in assists, tied for fourth in power play assists (11), and ranked fifth in points and power play points.

In the 2014 Playoffs, McDonagh tied for first among NHL defensemen in assists (13), and ranked second among NHL defensemen in points (17). He established a franchise record for assists by a defenseman in one playoff series with eight during the Rangers’ six-game series victory over Montreal in the Eastern Conference Finals. McDonagh’s 13 assists were tied for the fourth-highest total a Ranger has had in one playoff year, and his 17 points were the third-highest total for a Rangers defenseman in one playoff year.

The St. Paul, Minnesota native represented the United States at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, where he tallied two points (one goal, one assist) in six games. McDonagh ranked second on Team USA in average ice time (20:43) during the Olympics.

old RR logo

Entering his fifth NHL season, McDonagh has registered 26 goals and 77 assists for 103 points, along with 116 penalty minutes and a plus-65 rating in 246 career NHL games. He has finished second on the Rangers in blocked shots in each of the last three seasons, and has ranked first, second, or third on the team in average ice time in each of the last three seasons. McDonagh has also posted a plus-11 rating or better in each of his four NHL seasons. He registered a single-game career-high, three points, including his 100th career NHL point, and tallied the game-winning goal in overtime on March 24, 2014 vs. Phoenix.

McDonagh was acquired by the Rangers from Montreal, along with Chris Higgins, Pavel Valentenko, and Doug Janik, in exchange for Scott Gomez, Tom Pyatt, and Mike Busto on June 30, 2009. He was originally selected by the Canadiens in the first round, 12th overall, of the 2007 NHL Entry Draft.

Girardi has skated in 569 career NHL games over parts of eight NHL seasons, all with the Rangers, registering 36 goals and 142 assists for 178 points, along with 217 penalty minutes and a plus-16 rating. The Welland, Ontario native served as one of the team’s three alternate captains at the end of last season, and ranks second on the Rangers’ all-time playoff games played list (89).

St. Louis has registered 370 goals and 611 assists for 981 points, along with 290 penalty minutes and a plus-25 rating in 1,060 career NHL games with the Rangers, Calgary Flames, and Tampa Bay Lightning. He served as an alternate captain with the Lightning for six seasons (2007-08 – 2012-13), and was Tampa Bay’s captain for part of the 2013-14 season.

Staal has skated in 460 career NHL games over seven NHL seasons, all with the Rangers, registering 27 goals and 84 assists for 111 points, along with 254 penalty minutes and a plus-10 rating. The Thunder Bay, Ontario native has served as an alternate captain with the Blueshirts since the start of the 2010-11 season.

Stepan has skated in 294 career NHL games, all with the Rangers, registering 73 goals and 124 assists for 197 points, along with 72 penalty minutes and a plus-59 rating. Stepan, who is entering his fifth NHL season, established career-highs in assists (40), points (57), power play goals (five), power play assists (13), and power play points (18), and tied a career-high in shorthanded assists (three) in 2013-14.

The Minnesota Wild had three consecutive American-born captains as part of their rotational captain system during the 2006-07 and 2007-08 seasons.

Rangers trade Kampfer and Yogan for Crabb; able to get Duclair on the 50-man roster

06 October 2014, 2:17 pm by Carp in Hockey New York Rangers NHL
Rangers Report - 222 Comments

RANGERS ACQUIRE FORWARD JOEY CRABB
Blueshirts Trade Steven Kampfer and Andrew Yogan to Florida

NEW YORK, October 6, 2014 – New York Rangers President and General Manager Glen Sather announced today that the team has acquired forward Joey Crabb (photo above) from the Florida Panthers in exchange for defenseman Steven Kampfer and forward Andrew Yogan.

Crabb, 31, split last season between the Panthers and the San Antonio Rampage of the American Hockey League (AHL). He skated in nine NHL games with Florida, recording one assist and seven penalty minutes. In 62 games with San Antonio, Crabb registered 15 goals and 14 assists for 29 points, along with 51 penalty minutes. He led San Antonio in power play goals (seven) and ranked third on the team in goals last season.

The 6-1, 190-pounder has skated in 179 career NHL games over parts of five seasons with Atlanta, Toronto, Washington, and Florida, registering 20 goals and 33 assists for 53 points, along with 100 penalty minutes. Crabb established career-highs in games played (67), goals (11), assists (15), points (26), and hits (101) with Toronto during the 2011-12 season. Crabb has ranked among the top 10 players on his team in hits twice in his career, and has been credited with 301 career hits in 179 games.

The Anchorage, Alaska native was originally selected by the Rangers in the seventh round, 226th overall, of the 2002 NHL Entry Draft.

Kampfer, 26, has registered seven goals and eight assists for 15 points in 61 career NHL games with Boston and Minnesota. He was signed by the Rangers as a free agent on July 1, 2014.

Yogan, 22, split last season between the Hartford Wolf Pack (AHL) and the Greenville Road Warriors (ECHL). He was originally selected by the Rangers in the fourth round, 100th overall, of the 2010 NHL Entry Draft.

Rangers cut roster to 25, still some work to be done

NEW YORK, October 6, 2014 – New York Rangers President and General Manager Glen Sather announced today that the team has reassigned eight players from its training camp roster to the Hartford Wolf Pack.

The players who were reassigned are: Cedrick Desjardins, Ryan Haggerty, Marek Hrivik, Steven Kampfer, Michael Kostka, Oscar Lindberg, Matthew Lombardi, and Dylan McIlrath.

The Rangers have 25 players remaining on their roster. The roster breakdown is listed below:

**New York Rangers v New Jersey Devils**

**Forwards (16):** Derick Brassard, Anthony Duclair, Jesper Fast, Tanner Glass, Carl Hagelin, Kevin Hayes, Chris Kreider, Ryan Malone, J.T. Miller, Dominic Moore, Chris Mueller, Rick Nash, Martin St. Louis, Lee Stempniak, Derek Stepan, Mats Zuccarello

**Defensemen (7):** Dan Boyle, Dan Girardi, Matt Hunwick, Kevin Klein, Ryan McDonagh, John Moore, Marc Staal

**Goaltenders (2):** Henrik Lundqvist, Cam Talbot

Quick summary: Anthony Duclair, Jesper Fast, Kevin Hayes, Chris Mueller, Ryan Malone, J.T. Miller and Matt Hunwick all survived the cutdown. (hear audio from Alain Vigneault, Duclair and Maloney in the previous post).

Desjardins, Kostka and Lombardi all cleared waivers at noon. Mueller was then placed on waivers today, though he could stay theoretically.

The Rangers are still two over the roster limit and need to get down to 23 players and be cap-compliant by 5 p.m. Tuesday. Derek Stepan is going on LTIR, which means he will miss the first 10 games at minimum. Hayes could go on short-term IR retroactive to the Chicago preseason game with his shoulder. Mueller could be sent to Hartford tomorrow. So could Hayes. Especially since Martin St. Louis was back at center (with Rick Nash and Chris Kreider) at practice today.

The Rangers still need to find a taker for one of their 50 contracts in order to get Duclair on their roster. I believe they have a deal in place, a relatively minor one, where another team takes a contract off the minor-league team by today or tomorrow. They’re not leaving it to chance that they could be forced to send Duclair back to juniors. Not even a remote possibility.

Also, Hunwick, the extra defenseman, was taken to a hospital after taking a skate blade to the nose or forehead. Very deep cut, but he should be OK. Not likely to play opening night anyway.

Rogers GamePlus has NHL angles covered, but app will come at a price

David Shoalts

The NHL is separating Rogers Communications from $5.2-billion in cash over the next dozen hockey seasons.

So Rogers really needs to separate as many Canadians as possible from their cash.

Hence Monday’s unveiling of the GamePlus feature within Rogers NHL GameCentre LIVE, the company’s live-streaming service that will carry most of the games Rogers televise now that it holds the league’s Canadian national broadcast rights. GamePlus is an app that will run on mobile and tablet devices that Rogers hopes will have enough bells and whistles to satisfy the hardest of diehards and geekiest of geeks – new camera angles, exclusive video, analysis, replays and your social media feed.

The president of Rogers Sportsnet says geography will play less of a factor in determining which hockey games fans can watch, thanks to the 12-year Rogers-NHL deal. A whopping 500 regular season games will air in Canada next season.

“Exclusive to Rogers customers, it is the ultimate second-screen experience,” Rogers Media president Keith Pelley said. “It allows our customer to select replays, pick camera angles, be the producer, director and get inside information.”

But here’s the rub for Canadian hockey fans. If you want to call up the view from the ref cam, or see eight replay angles compared with the regular viewer’s two or three, you need to become a Rogers customer. Anyone who has access to a computer, tablet, smartphone, even a competitor’s cable, satellite or Internet service, can buy GameCentre for $179.99 for the season if you sign up before next Monday ($199.99 if you drag your feet).

But only those who have a connection to Rogers – through the Internet, cable television, wireless or a home telephone, and subscribe to GameCentre – can get GamePlus. And by the way, GameCentre is free until Dec. 31 to anyone who has a Rogers wireless or Internet account.

So if you want to see a play develop as the referee sees it – or see the ref blow a call in real time – you had better open your wallet for Rogers.

Rogers executives admitted some of the GamePlus features are still being ironed out. But the package is tempting to those who cannot get enough hockey. Or enough reality television. The POV (point-of-view) cam, for example, which is nestled just under the boards and looks up at the players’ benches, didn’t miss much when it came to players horking up a good one.

There is also the goal-line cam, which offers the same view the NHL’s war room sees when a video review of a goal is made; another POV cam runs along the top of the glass between the blue lines; a sky cam runs on a cable around the upper reaches of the Air Canada Centre; and there will be one camera isolated on one player for the entire game. For Wednesday’s NHL opener between the Montreal Canadiens and Toronto Maple Leafs, the star cam, as the isolation one is known, will be on Leafs winger James van Riemsdyk. The sky cam is only available at the ACC right now, although Pelley said the plan is to put one in each of the seven Canadian NHL arenas.

Theoretically, if you have GamePlus, you can watch the main telecast of the game on your high-definition television and use your tablet to watch the camera angles of your choosing plus the other video and analysis.

However, it is not clear if GamePlus will continue to be included with GameCentre for Rogers customers after Dec. 31, or if there will be a subscription charge. We’re betting on a subscription charge.

There may also be some trouble ahead with the NHL types who are directly involved with the cameras. Players, for example, have been known to drop towels on bench cameras they find intrusive. And not every referee will be thrilled about having his view of the game on display for second-guessing, although Pelley said the officials are supportive.

“*The referees are not against it because there’s that argument that happens all the time in the NHL: Why did the close referee not make the call and the guy 80 feet out made the call?*” Pelley said. “What you can see on the ref cam is he was blocked, he couldn’t see the infraction.”

Okay, what if the ref cam shows he was blocked and made the call anyway or simply blew the call? “Hey, they’re still human, they make 95 per cent of their calls correctly,” Pelley said.

That remains to be seen.

Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.07.2014
Mark Donnelly named by ESPN's Keith Olbermann as ‘World’s Worst Person in Sports’

Posted by: Patrick Johnston

Following in the footsteps of Tom “Hobo on Skates” Sestito, Vancouver-based anthem singer Mark Donnelly has caught the eye of bombastic ESPN host Keith Olbermann.

Donnelly was noted over the weekend for an on-skates rendition of O Canada in Penticton that was interrupted by a red-carpet fall.

Olbermann, for his part, wasn’t impressed, putting Donnelly at the summit of his daily “Worst Person in Sports” rundown.

No, the fact that Donnelly didn’t miss a beat singing the lines despite the mid-ice fall doesn’t impress Olbermann – rather the fact that Donnelly wore a tux and then strapped on skates before falling down was worthy of comment.

Now, in fairness to Mr. Olbermann, this was a tongue-in-cheek “worst.”

Really, “World’s Silliest Person” would be more apt, wouldn’t you say?

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Methot contract on hold, injury slowly healing

Wayne Cuddington / Ottawa Citizen

While Marc Methot continues to nurse a troublesome injury to his backside, talks about a contract extension have hit another snag.

"I thought we made a nice offer, a good offer," general manager Bryan Murray said of the latest deal put before the defenceman and his agent, Larry Kelly.

Murray acknowledged that in contract negotiations, a team and an agent often use a different set of comparable players to establish the relative value of a player. Still both sides have moved from their original starting points and it's believed the sides aren't that far apart on a long-term extension which could see Methot receive between $4.5-$5 million a season. Methot makes $3.75 million in the final year of his existing deal.

"We're going to leave it where it is at the moment," said Murray. Kelly was unavailable for comment Monday.

Without Methot, there are question marks about the strength of the blueline and Murray freely says several defencemen need to be far better than they were last season. "They have to show they're ready to make the step and defend a little better than in the past," he said.

"We shut (Methot) down to get him healthy," the GM said. "Marc was starting to get better and overdid it (in training). He's probably a little ways away (from returning)."

Murray says he feels former NHL defenceman Jason Smith will help improve team defence. Smith is an assistant coach, working primarily with the blueliners.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sure, Curtis Lazar was feeling some pressure to impress Ottawa Senators general manager Bryan Murray and Paul MacLean during training camp. Yet Lazar joked Monday that it was nothing like the pressure he felt from his family to make it on the season opening road trip to Nashville and Florida this week.

“I’m going to talk to my parents,” Lazar said with his ever-present ear-to-ear grin after officially hearing he had made the 23-player roster. “They’ve got some travel plans they have to accommodate now. My parents have been the backbone to everything I do. They’ve supported me every step of the way.”

While Lazar, 19, spent the past three weeks turning heads with his forechecking and backchecking, his family—parents Karen and Dave, younger sister Jenna and younger brothers Ryan and Corey—were busy double-checking to make sure their family trip was still on.

The plan calls for the Vernon, B.C.-based Lazars to fly to Nashville for the season opener Thursday and then drive to Florida for weekend games against the Tampa Bay Lightning Saturday and Florida Panthers next Monday. Seeing Curtis make his NHL debut is one thing, but the chance to see the new Harry Potter exhibit at Universal Studios in Orlando is also a big draw.

“It’s a pretty special day for myself and my dream of playing in the National Hockey League,” he said. “I’m just looking forward to seeing them.”

Lazar lined up at centre with Mike Hoffman and Chris Neil on his wings at practice Monday, but he’s not taking anything for granted about being in the starting lineup Thursday. The Senators broke camp with 14 forwards and only 12 can play every night. MacLean was giving nothing away Monday.

Yet for Murray, deciding to keep Lazar rather than sending him back to Edmonton of the Western Hockey League wasn’t a tough call.

“It was easy,” said Murray. “He made it easy by the way he played. Each and every game (in training camp) was outstanding. For a young player, he certainly showed he can play a two-way game. Very responsible. Paul (MacLean) had him killing penalties. I can only see a player like him expanding his role as we go forward.

Murray says Lazar is “enthusiastic, ambitious, confident. For a young player, he’s really a professional at this point.”

MacLean says the rookie will no doubt have some nerves. “We’ll give him sunglasses I guess, so he doesn’t get too bug eyed with being in the NHL,” he joked. But the coach believes his experience with the world junior hockey championship and Memorial Cup pressure will serve him well.

There were no grand surprises for the Senators on cut down day. Forwards Jean-Gabriel Pageau, Matt Puempel and Buddy Robinson and defenceman Fredrik Claesson were all assigned to Binghamton of the AHL and goaltender Scott Greenham was shipped to Evansville of the ECHL. Left winger David Dziurzynski and defencemen Aaron Johnson and Alex Grant will also begin the year in Binghamton after clearing waivers.

While the Senators began camp with the potential problem of carrying eight NHL-calibre defencemen, the injury to Marc Methot has bought some time. The Senators will now start the year with seven defencemen and the 14 forwards.

In addition to the Hoffman-Lazar-Neil line, the other forward combinations included The Nine Line of Milan Michalek-Mika Zibanejad-Alex Chiasson, Clarke MacArthur-Kyle Turris-Bobby Ryan and Zack Smith-David Legwand-Mark Stone. Colin Greening and Erik Condra were inserted into the rotations.

The defence pairings included Jared Cowen-Erik Karlsson, Chris Phillips-Cody Ceci and Mark Borowiecki-Eric Gryba, with Patrick Wiercioch the seventh defenceman.
Flyers newcomer Del Zotto getting acquainted with new teammates

FRANK SERAVALLI, Daily News Staff Writer seravaf@phillynews.com

ORLEANS, Mass. - For most of the Flyers, their weekend of paintball, fishing, golf and barbecue on Cape Cod was a trip with familiar friends. Twenty of the Flyers' 23 players are returnees, guys who have already gone to war with one another.

For newcomer Michael Del Zotto, the team's annual bonding excursion was a chance to finally familiarize himself with teammates who had been hated enemies for the last five seasons.

"I think everyone's been great," Del Zotto said with a laugh. "It was just great to get to know some of the guys, get some chemistry on and off the ice. I think that's what this weekend was all about. It's a very tight-knit group."

Del Zotto, 24, was already surprisingly familiar with the Flyers before he even arrived last month - at least on the ice.

That's because he spent the summer glued to his laptop, watching video, when he wasn't training. He viewed hours of last season's games, focusing individually on each player, trying to pick up tendencies.

"That's something I've always done, but this year more so than ever, just because it's a new team," Del Zotto said. "I look for where they like to be on the ice, where they are, their strengths and weaknesses. Just stuff like that. Stuff happens so quick on the ice, it's nice to Watch video and slow it down and see what's available out there - for good plays and bad plays.

"The quicker you can make that transition [to a new team], the easier the game will come."

For most of his first four seasons, the NHL came pretty easily for Del Zotto. He racked up 37 points in 80 games as a 19-year-old and was named first-team all-rookie. Even two seasons ago, in 2011-12, he was mentioned as one of the NHL's top, young defensemen. His lockout-shortened season was fine.

Then, the wheels fell off for him last season. He was a healthy scratch early in the season for the Rangers under new coach Alain Vigneault and never recovered.

Del Zotto never latched on with Nashville after a midseason trade. The budget-minded Predators, unwilling to spring for a $2.9 million qualifying offer, let him walk as a free agent. If that wasn't a total shock, the real surprise came when no team jumped to sign him as free agency opened on July 1.

He went un-signed until Flyers veteran Kimmo Timonen was diagnosed with blood clots on Aug. 4, and general manager Ron Hextall reached out with a 1-year, $1.3 million deal.

The setup for Del Zotto couldn't be better. He's back playing in a high-profile hockey market, where he'll be given every opportunity (including special teams) to revert to the suave, puck-moving defenseman everyone saw 2 years ago. The carrot at the end of the stick is a boatload of cash from an organization that always pays its players - especially in positions of need.

Under coach Craig Berube, he'll be given the green light to join the rush, something he probably was cautioned against last season with the Rangers.

Berube's message is "not thinking so much and just playing."

"He's got great tools," Berube said. "Most of it is mental. This game is all mental - ups and downs of the season, the grind, the wins and losses, you guys [media] always ripping players, fans booing. It's a mental game.

"I'm sure at times, Michael Del Zotto tried to be too risky with the puck - like every offensive player. Our message to Michael is that it's not all about that. It's playing the right way. He'll get his offensive chances. It's playing defense. He's a defense-man."

Given what he's been through this summer, he acknowledged he will be emotional tomorrow night at TD Garden. He spent most of the offseason hanging around Tyler Seguin, who spent last season resurrecting his career in Dallas after being run out of Boston. It's almost as if it was all meant to work out this way.

"It was definitely a motivating, humbling summer for me," Del Zotto said.

Simmons ready?

Injured forward Wayne Simmonds (bruised left foot) returned to the ice yesterday for practice in Cape Cod. His first on-ice session in nearly a week raised speculation that he'll be available for tomorrow night's opener against the Bruins.

"I felt as good as I could be out there," Simmonds said. "I got through the whole practice, so that was a good sign. It's too early to tell. I'll skate [today] and then [tomorrow] before the game and we should be able to tell by then."

As a precaution, forward Blair Jones alternated in Simmonds' spot during line rushes. Jones, 28, would make his Flyers debut if Simmonds cannot play.

Kicking off a long season with three games in 4 nights, Simmonds hinted he wouldn't rush returning if it meant possibly doing more damage. He has missed only three games since joining the Flyers in 2011.

"It's probably a better time to be cautious," Simmonds said. "Obviously, the beginning of the year is really important, but, at the same time, it's not like we're in the stretch run right now."

BOSTON - Even before Simon Gagne first pulled on a Bruins jersey in training camp last month, the date of Oct. 8 was circled on his calendar.

For Gagne, it would be the date he would have proved the doubters wrong and defied the odds. It would be his first NHL game in 529 days.

That the Bruins open their season against the Flyers on that date - the franchise he is so inextricably tied to - was a bonus.

Classy as ever, even Gagne had to feel a twinge of revenge. In his mind, the Flyers were the reason he was forced to sit out all of last season and contemplate retirement at age 33. They strung him along for the entire summer of 2013, leading him to believe he would be in a Flyers jersey when training camp opened last September.

The invitation never arrived, a situation botched by then-general manager Paul Holmgren almost signing Dan Cleary. Gagne was burned by his blind faith in the organization that raised him.

Tomorrow night's nationally televised season opener was his chance to send a message to his former club: "Look at me; I've still got it."

"I'm not going to lie, I looked at that when the schedule first came out and I was excited," Gagne said.

Alas, when the Bruins take the ice to roar of TD Garden tomorrow night, Gagne will not be with them. He still has not earned a contract for the upcoming season.

But the Bruins have not sent him home yet. Intrigued by his skill, experience and possible value, the Bruins will have Gagne remain with them for at least the next week - still skating on a tryout - as they continue to evaluate their roster.

After banking on last season to bring home a Stanley Cup, the Bruins are in salary-cap jail. GM Peter Chiarelli hedged this season's cap space on last season's team, since Jarome Iginla played on a special 35-and-over contract that applied his potential $4.2 million in bonuses to this season, even though he now plays for Colorado.

The Bruins already traded away heart-and-soul defenseman Johnny Boychuk to make room. The next week will be beneficial for both Chiarelli and Gagne. Chiarelli will have time to sort out his roster and determine whether a few young prospects are worthy of spots. Gagne, now 34, will have one more week of full-speed practice to smooth out his game after a year on his couch.

"I'm getting better and better every day," Gagne told the Daily News yesterday. "I had a pretty good summer with my training, but I think the first 4 to 5 days of camp were rough. We had some really intense practices. Now, I'm starting to feel like normal, which is what I was hoping for after being away so long.

"I'm not 100 percent yet, but it's coming slowly. They know that. My speed is down. I'm not 100 percent yet, but it's coming slowly. They know that. My speed is down."

Gagne joked that he had a lot more time to get shots off when he was skating this summer in Quebec with a few "old-timers." As one might expect, his biggest adjustment so far is the difference in speed, that fraction of a second to make decisions and release the puck. He finished with one goal and one assist in five exhibition games.

"I've only had 3 weeks to play, so I think this is a good sign," Gagne said. "I like the way things are going. I would like to get a little more time, and they would like to get more time to look at me, too."

In some ways, Gagne's situation is not all that different from last summer - when he was banking on returning with the Flyers. He has been assured of nothing with the Bruins, except more time. The only thing he's receiving on his tryout contract is a hotel room and meal money.

Yet, Gagne has placed his trust in Chiarelli and the Bruins. Maybe that's because he knows veteran forward Jay Pandolfo earned a spot on the
Simmonds practices, could play in Flyers opener

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

ORLEANS, Mass. - The Flyers got some encouraging news Monday morning: High-scoring right winger Wayne Simmonds practiced in Cape Cod and showed no ill effects from a foot injury - a sign that he may play in Wednesday's opener in Boston.

It was the first time Simmonds skated since last Tuesday, when he injured his left foot blocking a shot in a 4-2 preseason win against the visiting New York Rangers. He was wearing a boot Sunday.

"I felt as good as I could today," Simmonds said after Monday's 70-minute practice. "I had a few issues with my wind and did a little bag skate at the end. I think it will help out to get a skate in [Tuesday]."

Coach Craig Berube wasn't ready to announce that Simmonds will play Wednesday, but all signs point that way.

"We'll see tomorrow, but he looked fine to me," Berube said.

If the foot swelled overnight, Simmonds probably would miss the game. But he was encouraged by how it felt immediately after practice.

Simmonds, who led the Flyers with 29 goals last season, continued to play after he blocked the shot against the Rangers.

"You get hit, and adrenaline is rushing through your body [during the game]. ... The next morning you wake up and feel different," he said.

He was happy to be back on the ice Monday at the Charles Moore Arena in Cape Cod.

"I think I had an adrenaline rush going because I was excited to be out there skating with the boys," he said. "So all and all, it was a good practice for me.

It was the Flyers' final practice in Orleans, where they did some bonding activities before heading to Boston on Monday afternoon.

Simmonds skated on his regular line with Sean Couturier and Matt Read, he worked on the first power-play unit, which included Claude Giroux, Jake Voracek, Vinny Lecavalier, and Mark Streit. Simmonds was camped in his customary power-play spot in front of the net.

"If there was any chance it can get worse, I don't think I would have laced up the skates today," Simmonds said.

The Flyers, coming off a 42-30-10 season, open against a Boston team that is favored to win the Eastern Conference title.

"We've got a good squad," Simmonds said. "We're a real tight team, and we play for one another. It's a joy to be in that dressing room every day."

Breakaways

The Bruins won all three games against the Flyers last season and had a 14-6 domination in goals scored. Goalie Steve Mason was 0-1-1 with a 4.33 goals-against average and a .857 save percentage against Boston last season. Boston's Tuukka Rask was 3-0 with a 1.95 GAA and a .942 save percentage against the Flyers. ... Rob Zepp will start the season as Lehigh Valley's No. 1 goalie, with Anthony Stolarz as the backup.
Flyers’ defense under the microscope

Sam Carchidi, Inquirer Staff Writer

ORLEANS, Mass. - The Flyers were 20th in goals allowed last season, and this summer they lost their top defenseman, Kimmo Timonen, because of blood clots in his legs and lungs.

And so, yes, defense would seem to be the team’s weakest link as it prepares for the start of its season Wednesday in Boston.

Coach Craig Berube hears all the talk about the defense being a perceived weakness, and he gets, well, defensive.

"I've said it before, you want to improve your goals-against, it's a team thing," Berube said. "So everybody on the ice has to play better defense, not just the defense. Our forwards have to do a better job than they did last year, and our D has to do a better job - everybody."

In camp, Berube has put special emphasis on getting the forwards to do a better job back-checking and on breakouts.

"When you talk about our defense, our forwards have to help out more," Berube said. "That's what makes a good defense. We did it at times last year, but not consistently enough."

The Flyers also have to show more discipline, Berube said.

"We were the most penalized team in the league last year, and that plays into it," he said of the team's 2.77 goals-against average in 2013-14, despite a quality season from goalie Steve Mason. "All that stuff plays in on that. We gave up too many shorthanded goals. I could go down the line on things that need to improve."

Because Timonen will miss at least three months and there is only a slight chance he ever plays again, the Flyers signed Michael Del Zotto and changed two of their three pairings.

Andrew MacDonald (242 blocked shots, tops in the NHL), who worked well with Luke Schenn after he was acquired from the Islanders late last season, is now paired with veteran Braydon Coburn. They will form the Flyers' shutdown pairing.

"The more you play together, the more you kind of figure out each others' tendencies," Coburn said of being paired with MacDonald, after being matched with Timonen for most of last season. "The good thing is, Mac isn't a totally new guy coming in here. I got to see him a lot last year, playing with other guys. And I got a small chance to play with him last year as well. There are things that I know he likes - and certain places he wants the puck, and certain places he likes to be. So I can read off that, and he can do vice-Versa."

Schenn is together with Del Zotto, who has a reputation as a strong offensive player with flaws in his defensive game. Ageless Mark Streit, who will quarterback the power play, remains paired with shot-blocking Nick Grossmann - the prototypical stay-at-home defender.

"I think we have three nice puck-movers and three big defensemen who can defend," Berube said.

After a disappointing 2013-14 season, the puck-moving Del Zotto said he feels comfortable playing alongside Schenn, who finished third among NHL defenseman with 260 hits last year.

"I think we complement each other very well," Del Zotto said. "We're just trying to simplify our game and concentrate on consistency."

Schenn said the Flyers can compensate for the loss of the 39-year-old Timonen "by committee."

Berube, whose franchise has a handful of promising defensive prospects who will be knocking on the NHL door in a year or so, agreed.

"You don't replace Timonen. He's a very good defenseman - intelligent," Berube said. "But as a group, they can replace him - or try to, to a certain extent. They all have to step up. I think our D corps is very capable of getting the job done."
Simmonds returns for Flyers

Sam Carchidi

Good sign for the Flyers: Right winger Wayne Simmonds returned to practice Monday, skating with the team in Orleans, Mass.

Afterward, Simmonds said he felt no ill effects and that he was hopeful of playing Wednesday in Boston.

"He looked good. Finished the whole practice and did some extra skating," coach Craig Berube said. "We'll see tomorrow, but he looked fine."

Simmonds injured his left foot while blocking a shot in a 4-2 win over the Rangers Tuesday. He did not play in Thursday's preseason finale in Washington.

He has been wearing a boot on the foot, but felt well enough to go through drills Monday in Cape Cod.

Simmonds, who led the Flyers with 29 goals last season, has been on a line with Sean Couturier and Matt Read.

More updates coming after practice.

NHL picks: East race looks wide open

Wayne Fish Staff writer

While the NHL’s Western Conference will have to deal with powerhouses Los Angeles and Chicago once again in 2014-15, the same can’t be said for the East.

Boston and Pittsburgh were last year’s paper favorites, but it was the upstart New York Rangers who made it all the way to the Stanley Cup finals.

Nothing happened in the offseason to suggest there’s been a shift in the balance of power, if there is such a thing on this side of the standings.

Someone in the West is going to have to make some serious strides to get to the championship round. The East might be more wide open.

Here’s how we see the regular season playing out:

**EAST**

IN:

1. **Boston:** Bruins still have strong goaltending (Tuukka Rask) and top D-man (Zdeno Chara).

2. **Pittsburgh:** Penguins have a new coach (Mike Johnston) and maybe a new attitude.

3. **Tampa:** With Jon Cooper at the helm, Ben Bishop in goal and Steven Stamkos healthy, this is a dangerous group.

4. **New York Rangers:** Goaltender Henrik Lundqvist makes Blueshirts a legitimate threat.

5. **Columbus:** Jackets came on strong last year behind ex-Flyer goalie Sergei Bobrovsky.

6. **FLYERS:** This is where they finished a season ago and it will take some work to repeat.

7. **Montreal:** The Habs knocked Boston out of the playoffs last year but won’t catch anyone by surprise this time around.

8. **Washington:** Barry Trotz never had a lot to work with in Nashville, now he will have his hands full with Mr. Ovechkin.

OUT:


**WEST**

IN:

1. **Chicago:** Blackhawks have depth and Stanley Cup championship experience.

2. **Los Angeles:** As long as Justin Williams and Jonathan Quick can lace on their skates, Kings are a threat.

3. **Anaheim:** Ducks might be taking a small step back but could be saving their best for the playoffs.

4. **Colorado:** Everyone thinks last year was a fluke but adding Danny Briere and Jarome Iginla might prove Avs otherwise.

5. **St. Louis:** Ken Hitchcock got his hands on Paul Stastny and now the Blues have a legitimate front-end offensive piece of the puzzle.

6. **San Jose:** Regular season is not the Sharks’ problem – postseason is.

7. **Minnesota:** Only big question mark here is goalie. Anything’s better than Bryz.

8. **Arizona:** That’s right, no more Phoenix. The Coyotes are thinking bigger and might play like it.

OUT:
Simmonds back on ice, hopeful for opener

By Wayne Fish Staff writer

ORLEANS, Mass. — One day he was spotted wearing a protective boot on his injured left foot, the Flyers’ Wayne Simmonds was back on the ice Monday looking like nothing had ever happened.

That doesn’t mean he’s a lock to play in Wednesday’s season opener at Boston, but it sure doesn’t hurt his chances, either.

Simmonds, who was injured in last week’s 4-2 win over the New York Rangers, said he doesn’t know if he can play against the Bruins.

“Too early to tell,” he said after the 70-minute practice at Charles Moore Arena. “I felt as good as I could today. I’ll skate Wednesday before the game and tell by then.

“I feel good. Obviously, I have not skated in the last week. I had a few issues with my wind and did a little bag skate at the end. I think it will help out and get a skate in tomorrow.”

The crucial time will be Tuesday morning. If Simmonds, who was injured blocking a shot against the Rangers, wakes up stiff and sore from this first workout, then he might have to be shut down again.

“…There is going to be a reaction afterwards,” he said. “Whether it is good or bad we will know in a few hours. I think first and foremost, I felt fine and got through the whole practice which is a good sign.”

Simmonds actually finished the game against the Rangers and afterward even spoke to the media.

“You get hit [by a shot] and adrenalin is rushing through your body and the whole night I got hit with a few pucks that game,” he said. “I can’t really tell. I didn’t feel anything until half hour or 45 minutes after the game. Things started to come out afterwards and the next morning you wake up and feel different.”

Simmonds skated on his usual line with Sean Couturier and Matt Read on Monday

“I think I had an adrenalin rush going because I was excited to be out there skating with the boys,” he said. “So all and all, it was a good practice for me.”

The medical staff basically has told him there’s no danger of making it worse.

“If there is any chance it can get worse, I don’t think I would lace up skates today,” he said. “Or if it is going to get worse I don’t think there’s a chance I will play Wednesday. For now, it’s up in the air.”

Does the temptation to play in the season opener play into the decision? Or is caution the operative word?

“It’s actually probably a better time to be cautious right about now,” Simmonds said. “It’s the beginning of the year and it’s really important. At the same time, it’s not the stretch run or anything like that now.”

Simmonds doesn’t foresee any timing issues with Couturier and Reed.

“Yeah, we played four games together,” Simmonds said. “That’s on top of playing together and practices over the last three years. Obviously, I haven’t played with them consistently. I got some spot duty on that line and feel comfortable with those two.”

As for his playing status, it all comes down to how he feels.

“Just in case I am able to go Wednesday, you want to get today in,” he said. “Get that hard skate out of the way, then go Tuesday which obviously won’t be as hard for me.

“Especially, at the end, I doubt I’ll get bagged, especially, if I am in the lineup Wednesday. I probably won’t be playing too well after that. But I thought it was important to get on the ice today.”

Burlington County Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Simmonds gives it a go in Monday practice

Wayne Fish Staff writer

ORLEANS, Mass. -- It looks like Wayne Simmonds isn't going to let a left-foot injury from playing in the Flyers' season opener at Boston on Wednesday.

Simmonds, spotted wearing a plastic protective boot on Sunday at Charles Moore Arena, was back on the ice at Monday's practice.

Coach Craig Berube had said on Sunday that if Simmonds could get into practice on Monday and Tuesday, he would be likely cleared to play.

Simmonds was injured in last Tuesday night's 4-2 preseason win over the New York Rangers at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia. He did not play in the preseason finale at Washington on Thursday.

The right wing led the Flyers in goals last year with 29 and his 15 power-play goals were third in the NHL.

Burlington County Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Flyers Injury Update: Wayne Simmonds returns to practice

ORLEANS, Mass. – Wayne Simmonds still doesn’t know whether he’ll play in Wednesday’s season-opener against the Bruins, yet Monday’s skate on the ice was critical in itself.

“Just in case I am able to go Wednesday, you want to get today in,” said Simmonds, who went through about 75 minutes of practice at Charles Moore Arena.

“Get that hard skate out of the way, then go Tuesday which obviously won’t be as hard for me. Especially, at the end, I doubt I’ll get bagged, especially, if I am in the lineup … I thought it was important to get on the ice today.”

Simmonds had not practiced since being hit by a shot in last Tuesday’s game against the Rangers. He’s been wearing a boot on his left foot.

Flyers coach Craig Berube bag-skated him afterwards to push the limits on the foot. How Simmonds feels Tuesday and whether the foot swells is the next step.

“I feel good,” he said. “Obviously, I have not skated in the last week. I had a few issues with my wind and did a little bag skate at the end. I think it will help out and get a skate in tomorrow.”

And playing?

“Too early to tell,” Simmonds replied. “Obviously, there is going to be a reaction afterwards. Whether it is good or bad we will know in a few hours. I think first and foremost, I felt fine and got through the whole practice which is a good sign.”

Simmonds worked with new linemates Sean Couturier and Matt Read and also worked on the top-unit power play, another positive for the Flyers.

As for the cause of his injury, he is credited with having blocked one shot late in last Tuesday’s game. He played the entire game.

“I got hit with a few pucks that game,” he said. “I can’t really tell [which shot did it]. I didn’t feel anything until half hour or 45 minutes after the game. Things started to come out afterwards.”

Berube seemed encouraged he is getting better.

“Yes, he looked good,” he said. “He finished the whole practice, did some extra skating. We’ll see tomorrow, but he looked fine for me.”

Simmonds wants to be cautious and not turn this into something long-term if he doesn’t feel good on Tuesday.

“It’s actually probably a better time to be cautious right about now,” he said. “It’s the beginning of the year and it’s really important. At the same time, it’s not the stretch run or anything like that now.”

His line was together for four preseason games. Both he and Berube feel that was sufficient to nail down some chemistry, even allowing for the injury.

“I feel comfortable with those two,” Simmonds said, adding he’s itching for a real game. “Real excited. We got a good squad. We’re a real tight team and we play for one another. It’s a joy to be in that dressing room every day.”

Tags:
Wayne Simmonds, Craig Berube, Matt Read, Sean Couturier, Philadelphia Flyers, Tim Panaccio

E-mail Tim Panaccio

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Flyers face urgency as season opener approaches

ORLEANS, Mass. -- The season has not even begun for the Flyers and yet there is a sense of urgency among the forward group to produce quickly.

It's been a training camp where change has been the buzzword throughout the lineup:

- Brayden Schenn moved to Claude Giroux's, then back to center to compensate for the captain's injury, and now back to left wing.
- A remake of the fourth line with speedy Frenchman Pierre-Eduard Bellemare.
- Moving Wayne Simmonds onto Sean Couturier's line with Matt Read to generate more offense. That experiment is now on hold with Simmonds' suffering an unknown left foot injury that has him in a walking boot.
- Finally, a new line for Vinny Lecavalier with Michael Raffl and imported ex-Flyer, R.J. Umberger.

With the season opener Wednesday night in Boston, perhaps the 32-year-old Umberger will be the key to unleashing the chemistry Lecavalier never found with linemates last season.

"For me, it could have gone better," Umberger said. "Some aspects I like the way the preseason went. I thought my legs got stronger each game. I felt fast and I was skating good. Physically, I was good. Penalty kill, I picked up the systems.

"The thing ... that was frustrating was I didn't create much offense. Didn't get much going offensively. That is always a concern. Something obviously, I want to correct."

Lecavalier himself is in better shape and seemed sharp on the power play. His line, however, remains a work in progress.

"It's been a little bit of a challenge at the start," Umberger admitted. "I think we are learning about each other. The thing about Vinny, so far, we seem to have respect for each other. The experience both of us have. Obviously, he has a lot.

"You see us on the ice in practice, we're talking. Trying to figure where each of us is going to go and what we like to do. In games, we talk faceoffs. I think it is something that is working. I have a lot of hope for it. The only area I feel that has been difficult is that we haven't created a lot of offense yet."

The way games went, his line simply didn't have the puck often enough to get a cycle going or establishing zone time.

"We didn't have control of it," Umberger said. "We are chasing a lot. You'd like to see our line control the puck more, especially, with how big a line we are with Raffl and Vinny."

Flyers coach Craig Berube didn't entirely disagree.

"They've had some opportunities to score and haven't," Berube said. "You don't base your game on one area. That's what I tell everybody. You've got to play 200 feet.

"I think they've done a pretty good job at that. It's a big line. They work hard down low and cycle the puck. They'll get some opportunities to put the puck in net."

It becomes a bigger issue, given the player Umberger was traded for -- Scott Hartnell, who averaged 27 goals for the Flyers over the last three full seasons (lockout not included).

Hartnell offers a bigger net presence and a reliable power play guy. Umberger is faster and can kill penalties.

"I understand in some ways that he is a hard guy to replace," Umberger admitted. "He was a big fan favorite, a guy who has been in the organization a long time. For me, personally, I can't look at it that way. I have to put that all aside and bring what I can to the team every night ... and it will be a little different."

Umberger should be on his skates more.
No division had as much upheaval as the Pacific. And it was massive in British Columbia where Willie Desjardins replaced John Tortorella behind the bench after just one season, where Jim Benning replaced Mike Gillis as GM, and where Trevor Linden was named club president. After a decade of wondering whether Roberto Luongo would ever carry the Canucks to a Stanley Cup, the club gave up and now turns its lonely eyes toward Ryan Miller (three years, $18mm), whose brief tenure in St. Louis last season was so disappointing once the playoffs came around. Miller needs six victories to become the fifth American goalie to reach 300 career wins. Benning also signed Vrbata (two years, $10mm), a major force in the Coyotes’ turnaround in recent times. Whether he can reach the 35-goal plateau again could be huge in prompting Vancouver’s success. The even bigger move, however, was trading Ryan Kesler to Anaheim. Will the Sedin twins ever get to carry that chalice around the ice? Don’t think so.

Calgary Flames

Much like their Alberta counterpart in Edmonton, the Flames always seem to be in a state of constant state of chaos with a revolving door from the bench all the way to the front office. This will be Brad Treliving’s first full season as general manager after Brian Burke filled in for him on an interim basis once he hired Jay Feaster last December, who ended up back in Tampa working with youth hockey. As many players left Calgary as arrived, highlighted by defensemen Deryk Engelland (three years, $8.7mm), which wasn’t much of an upgrade at all. Goalie Jonas Hiller (two years, $3mm) is an upgrade, as was the trade acquisition of Brandon Bollig from Chicago. Forward Sean Monahan had an impressive rookie season with 34 points and was second in goals with 22. They’ll need more from him now that Mike Cammalleri (26 goals) is gone, along with respected defenseman Chris Butler. The Flames remain light years away in a division they have no chance of ever winning. Ever!

Edmonton Oilers

Every time you think the Oilers have turned a corner and are ready to stun some people and glide into the playoffs, they go south. How many No. 1 overall picks, or even top picks, does an organization have to stockpile before it can become a legit threat in the league? This is one team that defines the expression “annual disappointment.” Eight straight years and counting without a playoff appearance. The club recycles ex-players and front office personnel, which is why Craig MacTavish is now the GM. His biggest moves: trading for defenseman Nikita Nikitin at the draft and then re-signing him to a two-year, $9 million contract; signing Benoit Pouliot to an outrageous five-year, $20 million contract — his career-high is just 36 points — then acquiring Teddy Purcell from Tampa for Sam Gagner. How does a club with talent such as Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Taylor Hall, Nail Yakupov, etc., not make the playoffs? Six goalies later, the Oilers still don’t know whether Ben Scrivens or Viktor Fasth will start and who will finish.

Tags:
Los Angeles Kings, Anaheim Ducks, San Jose Sharks, Arizona Coyotes, Vancouver Canucks, Tim Panaccio, Edmonton Oilers, NHL, Hockey

E-mail Tim Panaccio
Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
New Flyers enjoying getaway in Cape Cod

ORLEANS, Mass. — The biggest benefit that comes from a team retreat right before the season starts is that it affords new players a chance to bond with guys who have been here a while.

The Flyers have five new players this season — Michael Del Zotto, Nick Schultz, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Blair Jones and R.J. Umberger.

Cape Cod is one of a number of out-of-the-way places the Flyers have been to since the 2000s began — Banff, Alberta; Whistler, British Columbia; Naval Academy, West Point, Lake Placid.

You get the idea.

"It's pretty cool," Del Zotto, who is trying to mesh with a new partner Luke Schenn, said. "It feels like minor hockey again with the rink. It brings you back to your roots having fun again and playing.

"It's been a good couple of days here on the team retreat, especially for me being a new guy on the team and getting the chemistry and getting to know the guys a couple days here so far."

On Saturday, the team had a paintball exercise. Sunday, they practiced at the Charles Moore Arena. It's stuck among an old boat yard, but it's among the trees and nowhere near the water. The Flyers are split among four different dressing rooms — the arena is that tiny.

"This place isn't bad from what it looked like on the outside," Umberger said. "This place is good. These old barns like this are fun. It brings you back to your childhood growing up.

"I grew up on rinks way worse than this in Pittsburgh. It's a lot of fun to see these young kids here. They were here early in the morning and it was something special for them."

Players seemed to enjoy being here. They stuck around to sign autographs. The lines were enormous among the kids here.

"I think it's good," coach Craig Berube said. "Listen, it doesn't determine wins or losses. What it determines is it gets your team together. The guys have a good time together. They had fun doing paintball.

"We have new guys on the team. I think it's important that they get to know each other. All good teams that win are pretty close. I like our team. I like the way they look. I like the way that they interact with each other. I like the character on the team. So it's good."

Loose pucks

At this arena, there were members representing 10 local youth hockey teams as well as local residents, all of whom were invited by the Flyers to watch the closed practice. The Flyers practice here on Monday, as well. Berube had the team practicing shootouts. Team captain Claude Giroux was on the ice long afterward, working with Vinny Lecavalier on the power play. Lecavalier moves to the top power-play unit this season, essentially replacing Scott Hartnell.

Tags:
Philadelphia Flyers, NHL, Hockey, Michael Del Zotto, R.J. Umberger, Blair Jones, Craig Berube, Nick Schultz, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, Tim Panaccio

E-mail Tim Panaccio

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Flyers coach Craig Berube says team speed is 'a mental game' 

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 7:50 p.m. EDT October 6, 2014

ORLEANS, Mass. – Coach Craig Berube blew his whistle and shook his head down in the corner of Charles Moore Arena.

The Flyers had been practicing breaking out of their zone for about 10 minutes and the bench boss was not pleased.

"Not fast enough!" Berube bellowed. "Do it again!"

The instructions seemed like a scene out of Disney's flick "Miracle" with U.S. coach Herb Brooks chanting, "Again! Again! Again!" during a bag skate, a part of practice where all the pucks stay in the coach's bag.

The Flyers may not have the same result as the 1980 Gold medal Team USA, but if Berube has anything to say about it they'll be a quick team.

"That's not necessarily through skating, but speed is puck movement and not hanging on to the puck," defenseman Luke Schenn said. "Just as soon as you get it looking for the open guy. Speed through the puck and quick plays, overall if you're slow out there and standing still, you're ineffective."

The speed at which the Flyers play is what Berube hopes will be among the biggest differences this season. He preached fitness and skating legs all summer to help. Players were told to change their diets, work out harder, whatever it took to come into camp in better shape than they did last year.

When Berube took over for Peter Laviolette three games into the season, he skated them hard in practice until he thought they were in acceptable shape.

So did the players do their homework?

"They look like it, to me," Berube said. "Practices are good, they're fast. Like I said the other day, it just comes down to a mental game."

The tough-love approach doesn't always work, but when it comes from a guy who played 1,054 career NHL games, the players have a high opinion of it.

"Chief's a player's coach," said Jason Akeson, who started last year with the Phantoms, but earned himself a spot with the big club this year. "Everyone loves the guy. When he talks, everyone listens and everyone respects him. Everything he tells me, I'm just trying to take it all in and work on everything he says."

The vision Berube has of his team playing a faster game is a hybrid. It's not like he's Herb Brooks trying to emulate the Red Army team.

"I don't look at a team," Berube said. "I obviously watch teams and I learn from teams and what coaches do and what their teams do. I take little bits and pieces."

The most important thing is getting a better start than the Flyers did last year, when they began 1-7.

"If you're comparing starts to the year, I think this year's been a lot more intense in training camp," Schenn said. "Guys are really skating out there. Every practice it seems like guys have been pretty sharp. Preseason games, the final couple games were a little bit better when we had our team together here. You play with a lot of team speed out there. The first through four lines and first pairing through third pairing of D, it's by committee."

• Simmonds improving: Wayne Simmonds, who hadn't been on the ice since last Tuesday with an injured left foot, returned to practice. He was a full participant in the practice, which lasted a little more than an hour, and was bag skated at the end.

"If there is any chance it can get worse, I don't think I would have laced up skates today," Simmonds said. "If anything's gonna happen where it's gonna get worse, I don't think there's a chance I will play Wednesday. For now, it's up in the air."

Since Simmonds took line rushes with his normal trio with Matt Read and Sean Couturier and he was in on power-play drills, it looks like the team is optimistic he'll play. 
Wayne Simmonds returns to practice with Flyers

Dave Isaac, Courier-Post 1:17 p.m. EDT October 6, 2014

ORLEANS, Mass. – Wayne Simmonds returned to practice Monday, giving hope that he may be in the team's opening night roster Wednesday against the Boston Bruins.

Simmonds, 26, had career highs in goals (29) and assists (31) last season on a line usually with Brayden Schenn and Vinny Lecavalier. This season he's set to be on a line with Matt Read and Sean Couturier.

That is, whenever he's healthy. He hadn't skated since last Tuesday's preseason game against the New York Rangers and wasn't in Sunday's practice, watching from the other side of the boards with a walking boot on his left foot.

Monday, he was a full participant in a practice that ran a little longer than an hour.

"Yeah, he looked good," coach Craig Berube said after Monday's practice. "He finished the whole practice, did some extra skating. We'll see tomorrow, but he looked fine for me."

Monday's practice is an encouraging sign that the Flyer could return against the Bruins. He took line rushes with Read and Couturier while Blair Jones, who replaced Simmonds in practices and the preseason finale, rotated in as an extra forward.

"I feel good," Simmonds said. "Obviously, I haven't skated in the last week. I had a few issues with my wind and did a little bag skate at the end. I think it will help out and get a skate in tomorrow."

In Monday's practice, Simmonds was wearing plastic shot-blocking shells over both skates. Later in the skate, when the Flyers practiced special teams, Simmonds took reps on the top power-play unit along with Lecavalier, Mark Streit, Claude Giroux and Jake Voracek.

"Obviously, there is going to be a reaction afterwards," Simmonds said. "Whether it is good or bad we will probably know in a few hours. I think first and foremost, I felt fine out there and got through the whole practice, which is a good sign."

Simmonds finished last Tuesday's contest in which he got hurt. It's unclear exactly when the injury occurred, but Simmonds blocked one shot in the game: a wristshot from defenseman Conor Allen with 5:43 remaining in the game.

"I don't know," said Simmonds, wearing no other protection on his foot after practice, just shower sandals. "I got hit with a few pucks that game. I can't really tell. I didn't feel anything until half hour or 45 minutes after the game. Things started to come up afterwards."
Phil Bourque is known around town as a lot of things: a color commentator for the Pittsburgh Penguins, a former Pens player of some renown and an ambassador for hockey in general.

It's a lot of roles for one guy to play, a lot of layers to his personality.

Perhaps that's why, when presented with the opportunity to name a dish after him, the Penguins chose to layer smoked barbecue pork, macaroni and cheese, baked beans and coleslaw and put it all in a waffle bowl. Yes, the Ole 29er ($10) is a bit of a mouthful.

As with the rest of Pittsburgh's arenas and ball fields, the Consol Energy Center is loading up its newly revamped menu with more of everything, really. Nothing is complete unless it's topped with four or five other things, even if it's just french fries.

Some of them work quite well. The Pittsburgh Pierogi Nachos ($10.25) are surprisingly good, with fried mini-pierogies, shaved kielbasa, a light white-cheese sauce and pepperocinis. It's not what your Polish grandma made, but it's pretty good.

The Polish Hill Pretzel Sandwich ($9.75) also works, putting the shaved kielbasa and a bigger pierogie on a salty pretzel bun with a little mustard and white American cheese.

"Hey, it's a pretzel bun without that annoying Wendy's girl," said season ticket-holder Linda Vallerino, 56, of Cecil, Washington County, at a tasting event Oct. 6.

Carving stations are a new thing that all the stadia seem to be doing. There's a prime-rib carvery and a Whole Pig station (pricing varies), which, indeed, features a whole pig, cut to order.

"It's a whole smoked pig, brined in apple cider," said chef Lou Cramer of Aramark, who developed the bulk of the new menu.

There's a good amount of vegetarian and gluten-free items, too, served at a gluten-free stand in the arena. The Kale Salad ($7.50) chooses a bright, citrus-laden outfit for the fashionable green, with fennel, orange slices, golden raisins, pine nuts, feta and an orange-vinaigrette dressing. Grilled Vegetable Tacos ($7.50) feature zucchini, squash, portobello mushrooms, roasted peppers, pico de gallo and queso fresco.

"We have a new Loaded Fry Concept ($10.25)," Cramer said. "My favorite is the Pittsburgh Fry, tossed in a housemade spice mix, with cheese sauce, ranch and pork belly."

There are seven Loaded Fry Concept items listed, including the dessert-like Funnel Cake, which are sweet french fry-shaped bits of funnel cake, covered in strawberries, chocolate and caramel sauces and whipped cream.

Local burger chain Burgatory is using their Consol Energy Center spot to debut Jalapeno, Bacon & Cheddar Fries ($7.25), and a new Strawberry Pretzel Shake ($9.50).

The Captain Morgan Club and First Niagara Club offer a bunch of new sandwiches, the most unusual of which is the Captain Burger ($12.50). Atop an Angus patty, there’s maple bourbon mayonnaise, white American cheese, Canadian bacon, sweet potato fries and a fried egg.
Penguins forwards undergo a makeover heading into season

By Jason Mackey

Nowhere has the Penguins' offseason of change been more apparent than with their forwards. Twelve players who logged a total of 439 games in 2013-14 are no longer with the organization. Two more — Andrew Ebbett and Zach Sill — recently had to clear waivers, an indication that management isn't exactly counting on them to play top-six roles.

There potentially could be six new faces in the opening night group of 12, including rookies Kasperi Kapanen and Oskar Sundqvist and veterans Blake Comeau, Steve Downie, Patric Hornqvist and Nick Spaling.

Are they Better? Pascal Dupuis, who missed most of the year with a torn ACL/MCL, thinks so.

"The third and fourth lines are way deeper," Dupuis said. "The guys are established NHL players that have good numbers that are here to fill certain roles that they're used to."

THE MINUTE MEN

Having Dupuis back with Sidney Crosby and Chris Kunitz should help, NHL analyst and former general manager Craig Button said.

"Pascal Dupuis played so well with Sidney Crosby," Button said. "You can put another player there, but you can't replace Pascal Dupuis."

The Penguins will have to replace James Neal, who scored 88 goals the past three years. Same for Jussi Jokinen, who had 21 goals in 2013-14.

Center Brandon Sutter is coming off a career-best postseason — five goals in 13 games — and would be fine centering the second line should Evgeni Malkin not be ready for opening night.

Crosby appears to be fully recovered from the wrist injury that hampered him in the postseason. What the Penguins do with the newly-acquired Hornqvist will be interesting; he plays a lot like Kunitz, but coach Mike Johnston has toyed with putting him on Crosby's right wing while Malkin recovers.

WALKING WOUNDED

Center Evgeni Malkin started skating on his own late last week, but he has yet to complete a full practice with teammates.

Winger Beau Bennett was having perhaps the finest camp of any Penguins player before he suffered a lower-body injury in practice Sept. 26. Coach Johnston said Bennett will miss about six weeks, putting his possible return around Nov. 8.

Crosby and Kunitz appear to be fully recovered from minor, undisclosed injuries that hampered them early in camp.

MUSCLE MAN

How about adding a former first-round pick who has reached the 20-goal plateau and can provide toughness?

The Penguins did that with Steve Downie.

In 336 career NHL games with the Flyers, Lightning and Avalanche, Downie has 59 goals and 766 penalty minutes.

He thrived playing in Tampa Bay under current assistant coach Rick Tocchet — 44 goals in three years — and the Penguins will look to Downie for similar production.

New acquisition Patric Hornqvist has shown the willingness to battle in front of the net and is coming off a 22-goal season with Nashville, his fourth with 21 or more.

"He's always around that cage," center Brandon Sutter said. "That's what makes him good. "Any time you get the puck below the goal line in the offensive zone, you kind of know where he's going to be."

X-FACTORS

What kept Malkin out of all six exhibition games and every practice prior to this past week likely will remain a mystery. His value to the Penguins is much more clear. Two Art Ross Trophies tend to do that.

As Sutter said, "We need (Malkin) to be a good team."

If Malkin's not able to play, Sutter will center the second line, and Spaling will move from wing to center.

Still ...

"Malkin to anybody, Sid to anybody, there's a dropoff," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said.

On the second line with Sutter and Hornqvist could be Kapanen, a first-round pick who has looked markedly better when playing with top-six talent.

THE KIDS

Johnston seems to have no problem with Kapanen playing Thursday at home against the Ducks., even if it's for a nine-game preview.

"He could be a guy who could jump in for opening night," Johnston said.

A pairing with Malkin is an intriguing possibility. Kapanen has a powerful shot and, like Neal, could benefit from Malkin's playmaking ability.

Oskar Sundqvist has pressed for a key role, scoring two goals and adding an assist in the preseason. He finished with two goals and three points in five preseason games, including points in three straight.

"He's a guy who took a big step," Johnston said of Sundqvist. "He's got size. He's responsible. He's going to be a very good player for this organization."
More mature Letang eyes normalcy for Penguins

By Dave Molinari / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Kris Letang is a guy who tends to stand out. Put him in street clothes, and chances are he will be better looking than most of the men around him. Stick him on the ice, and he likely will have more talent than almost anyone else out there.

Still, what Letang really wants as he prepares for the 2014-15 season is to be looked at like any other player. Might not sound like a particularly lofty goal, but it is for someone who spent much of last winter recovering from a stroke.

"Going into a practice or a game, I don't want people to be scared to touch me because they think I'm going to die the next shift," Letang said. "I want to be treated the same way [as other players], but, sometimes, you see it. People are cautious."

That's understandable. After all, not many players have a daily regimen that involves taking prescription medicine for the migraine headaches that Letang suffers occasionally, as well as blood thinners necessitated by his stroke.

"Nothing major," he said, with a big smile. "I'm not going to bleed to death."

While Letang never truly can escape his medical history -- "It's in your face every day," he said -- nothing about his play in training camp suggests it will be an issue this season.

He has been a presence all over the ice, looking quite capable of again forcing his way into conversations about the Norris Trophy, which goes to the NHL's top defenseman.

"He's a special player," winger Pascal Dupuis said. "He's probably the best skating defenseman in the league. One of them, anyway."

Whether Letang can play well enough to contend for the Norris -- something he did in 2013, when he finished behind P.K. Subban and Ryan Suter in the voting -- won't be known for a while, but he seems intent on elevating his game to, if not above, any level it has reached in the past.

"I want to have a great year," he said. "A great bounce-back year."

He is 27 now, and the maturity he has gained is evident.

On the ice, he has become a better two-way player. Off it, he's more insightful.

Experience -- and knowing that your career, or even your life, could have been taken away -- will do that.

"Two months [after the stroke], I went back on the ice," Letang said. "The first time, it lasted seven minutes, and I was so dizzy I couldn't ... during those days, you think, 'How am I going to get back to normal? Is this going to be it?'

"So I'm pretty happy with where I am right now."

Watching Letang in practices and games gives onlookers a renewed appreciation of his skills. Simply being out there gives him an appreciation for how far he has come since his wife, Catherine, found him helpless on the bedroom floor that January morning.

"It increases how much I love hockey," Letang said.

He is entering the first year of an eight-year, $58 million contract.

The team made that commitment to Letang before his stroke, and he seems driven to validate the investment. And to enjoy himself in the process.

"I want to make sure we have success and fun every day we come to the rink," he said. "And, as the season goes along, I think we're going to build as a team, get better and better."
Without Bortuzzo, defense might have to toughen up

By Seth Rorabaugh / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

At 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds, Robert Bortuzzo is the largest player on the roster and arguably the Penguins' most physical defenseman. In 2013-14, he had the second-most penalty minutes on the team (74).

Bortuzzo also is expected to be out of action for approximately two to four weeks with an undisclosed injury that happened in a 3-2 overtime preseason win at home Sept. 25 against the Minnesota Wild.

With Bortuzzo out, the Penguins appear to have a lack of muscle on defense, especially around their own net.

In a 4-1 road loss Sept. 29, Minnesota's first two goals were scored in part to having forwards near the cage.

Although the majority of the remaining defensemen are more renowned for their skills and skating rather than their size or strength, management doesn't appear to be concerned over any void being created by Bortuzzo's injury.

"Our skill guys, [Christian] Ehrhoff, [Kris] Letang, they bring a certain grit level to their game as well," said assistant general manager Bill Guerin.

"You're not going to intimidate anybody anymore. That very seldom happens. We just feel our skill guys bring the right amount of grit at the right time.

"When [Bortuzzo] comes back and he brings his element, that's a great thing to have as well.

Ehrhoff doesn't see a need for the other defensemen to alter their games to compensate for Bortuzzo's absence.

"For the other guys, you can't ask them to change their game," Ehrhoff said. "Everybody has to stick to what they do well and play their game. For some guys, it's playing a bit more physical. For other guys, it's just not the way they play. When you miss a guy in the lineup, you shouldn't change your game."

One defenseman who appears more than capable of picking up the slack in Bortuzzo's absence is his defensive partner, Simon Despres.

In the preseason, Despres (6-foot-4, 214 pounds) engaged in several scrums and got into one fight.

"Last year, in the [American Hockey League's Eastern Conference final], Simon had multiple big hits and two fights against some of their better players," Guerin said. "He had a fight in the preseason here. He's played physical in every game he's in. He's a big body that can skate and defend well. The more that he brings that edge to his game, it's a great combination. Skill and edge, everybody's looking for that."

Tip-ins

NHL teams must have their regular-season rosters finalized by 5 p.m. today.

... The Penguins had a scheduled day off Monday, but will practice today.

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.07.2014
Penguins, Aramark introduce new Consol treats at 'Taste of the Arena' event

By Bob Batz Jr. / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Pittsburgh Penguins and food provider Aramark held the first "Taste of the Arena" event at Consol Energy Center today to introduce some season-ticket holders and others to more than two dozen new foods that will be available when the NHL regular season opens there on Thursday.

Several of the items sport local names and flavors: The Polish Hill Pretzel sandwich is a pretzel bun stuffed with shaved kielbasa and caramelized pierogies, white American cheese and house mustard.

Pittsburgh Pierogi Nachos top mini 'rogies with that shaved kielbasa, white cheese and pepperoncinis.

Burgatory riffs on the local delicacy that is strawberry-pretzel salad with a Strawberry Pretzel Shake.

But perhaps the most popular item at the event was an edible waffle bowl filled with barbecued pork, mac 'n' cheese, baked beans and coleslaw. The creation shares the well-known nickname of former player-turned-radio analyst Phil Bourque, the Ole 29er. He took a chomp out of one for the TV cameras.

The team also showed off some new gear, including their alternate jerseys.

Mr. Bourque joked that the team knew they could attract the press with the words "free food," but in a fresh twist on that, invited diners at the event to post their photos and comments to social media under the hashtag, #NewAtCONSOL.

For more details on the new foods, including prices, see Thursday's Food & Flavor section of the Post-Gazette.

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.07.2014
Penguins notebook: Malkin creeps closer to return from an injury

By Seth Rorabaugh / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Penguins center Evgeni Malkin, who has been kept out throughout training camp and the preseason due to an undisclosed injury, took part in some on-ice drills Sunday at Consol Energy Center.

After working out with strength and conditioning coach Mike Kadar, Malkin participated in what was described as a "skills session" with several of the team's defensemen.

Coach Mike Johnston was unsure if Malkin would skate today -- a scheduled day off for the team -- but was optimistic with his progress.

"The next progression for me would be for him to do a pre-practice skate and then get into at least the first four drills of practice, shooting and moving and playing with players and moving the puck with other players at full speed," Johnston said.

Defenseman Olli Maatta, who has been recovering from offseason shoulder surgery, took part in another practice with full contact and worked in a pairing with Paul Martin.

Johnston is hopeful he will be cleared to play for the season opener Thursday at home against the Anaheim Ducks.

"I'm anticipating he may be able to play on Thursday so we're trying to work him in with a regular pair with defense," Johnston said. "Before, we've had him sort of as a seventh [defenseman], an eighth [defenseman]. Now he's starting as the sixth as far rotation in drills."

Centers Andrew Ebbett, Zach Sill, defenseman Taylor Chorney and goaltender Jeff Zatkoff cleared waivers. Ebbett, Sill and Chorney will remain on the NHL roster for the time being while Zatkoff was assigned to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League.

Zatkoff will serve as the organization's third goaltender behind starter Marc-Andre Fleury and backup Thomas Greiss. The value of having a veteran with NHL experience in that role isn't lost on management.

"I wouldn't put a number on a guy like that," assistant general manager Bill Guerin said. "I think it's just a huge bonus for us with organizational depth in goal. We've got a guy we trust, we believe in, that we love. We're lucky to have him. It's definitely a tough situation but we're a better team with Jeff Zatkoff in the organization."

With Fleury and Greiss each scheduled to become unrestricted free agents next offseason, does Zatkoff, who is entering the first year of a two-year contract, still have a future with the Penguins at the NHL level?

"Yeah. He earned that contract," Guerin said. "He earned the term, the money, everything. He's been great for us. We've got nothing to say about this guy. He's been fantastic."

"Wherever he is, if he's in Pittsburgh or if he's in Wilkes-Barre, we feel comfortable. We're lucky to have a guy like that. He's got great character."

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.07.2014
Taylor Chorney has spent the past few weeks trying to prove he belongs in the NHL.

He's done a pretty fair job of it, too.

That, however, was the easy part.

What's really tough is waiting to find out whether all he's earned is a spot on the Penguins' opening-night roster, and Chorney acknowledged he will be a bit on edge until that question is answered.

"We'll see what happens," he said after practice Sunday at Consol Energy Center. "But I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little bit nervous."

NHL teams have to submit an active roster of no more than 23 players to the league office by 5 p.m. Tuesday. The Penguins, who have 28 on their roster now, could make their final cuts anytime before then.

Chorney, 27, is one of nine defensemen on the major league depth chart, although Robert Bortuzzo is expected to open the season on injured-reserve. Players on IR do not count against the 23-man limit.

Chorney remains with the Penguins despite being put on waivers Saturday and clearing them Sunday.

Although he's had a strong enough camp that it was conceivable another team would claim him, Chorney said he didn't dwell on the possibility.

"You think about it, but it's not the first time I've been on them," he said. "The chances of getting picked up are pretty slim, especially when you get sent through during training camp."

Chorney, signed as a free agent this summer, is the son of former Penguins defenseman Marc Chorney, who played 139 games in the early 1980s.

"It's a pretty cool experience for him to know that he played here and that now, his son is going to maybe have a chance to play some games here, too," Chorney said. "That's something he'll definitely be proud of, and it's cool for me, too.

"Just walking outside the locker room, they have all the old pictures up there. To be able to see his picture up there from '81-'82, '82-'83 ... I snapped a couple of pictures on my cellphone and sent them to him."

Chorney is mobile and moves the puck well. His offensive talents -- and, perhaps, those bloodlines -- persuaded Edmonton to grab him with the 36th choice in the 2005 draft.

He spent three winters at the University of North Dakota, then appeared in two games with the Oilers in 2008-09 and 42 more the following season.

That time in the NHL could have been construed as evidence that he had made it. In reality, Chorney said, it prevented him from developing into a regular at this level.

"I got the opportunity to play a decent number of games in the NHL when I was younger," he said. "Quite honestly, I don't think I was quite ready to play.

"I was not on a very good team in Edmonton, where a lot of guys were getting their first crack in the league and we were losing a ton of games. Maybe that experience shook my confidence a little bit."

That belief in his ability was rebuilt in the American Hockey League the past few seasons, Chorney said, and now he's convinced that he's ready to contribute consistently in the NHL.

"It was nice to come in here with a fresh start and show what I think I'm capable of," he said. "I came here with the idea that I wanted to compete, push some of the guys who have been here for a long time. Just show what I can do."

Chorney has accomplished that. All that's left is to learn whether it's been enough to keep him here.
2014-15 NHL Preview: A look at the Eastern Conference

By Curtis Pashelka

Here's a team-by-team look at the NHL's Atlantic and Metropolitan divisions, in predicted order of finish.

ATLANTIC DIVISION

1. Boston Bruins -- Due to salary cap constraints, the Bruins made no major additions this offseason. That's not necessarily a bad thing, as the pieces are in place for a run at a second straight Atlantic Division title. Goalie Tuukka Rask had a remarkable 2013-14 regular season and appears to be at the top of his game again. There is depth up front, although Boston would certainly love to see Loui Eriksson back in top form. Dennis Seidenberg, injured midway through last season, returns to bolster one of the best defensive corps in the Eastern Conference.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning -- After a busy offseason, the Lightning should make a push for the division title. Tampa Bay has depth up front with Steven Stamkos, Valtteri Filppula and Andrej Palat, and is excited about the long-term potential for Jonathan Drouin. The defense, led by Victor Hedman, has been bolstered with the additions of Jason Garrison and Anton Stralman. Goaltending is not a big question mark this year, as Ben Bishop looks to back up a solid 2013-14 campaign.

3. Montreal Canadiens -- Expectations are again high for the Canadiens, who were two wins away from reaching the Stanley Cup final. The core of the team is solid, with defensemen PK Subban and Andrei Markov and forwards Max Pacioretty, Tomas Plekanec, Brendan Gallagher leading the way. Additions such as winger P-A Parenteau and center Manny Malhotra should make a positive impact. But unless goalie Carey Price plays at the top of his game, the Canadiens may have to temper those expectations and settle for second or third in the division standings.

4. Detroit Red Wings -- The Wings are mixing in some younger forwards to go with established veterans such as Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg, Johan Franzen and Justin Abdelkader. The good news for Detroit is that a few of those forwards, such as Gustav Nyquist and Tomas Tatar, already saw extensive time in what was an injury-plagued 2013-14 campaign. Jimmy Howard is reliable in net, and if the second and third defensive pairs continue to improve, Detroit will likely extend its playoff streak to 24 years.

5. Toronto Maple Leafs -- The Leafs' biggest change this offseason came in the front office, as Brendan Shanahan was named president of hockey operations. But is the on-ice product any better? Defenseman Carl Gunnarsson and goalie Mason Raymond, two of Toronto's more productive players last year, are gone, replaced by David Booth up front and defensemen Roman Polak and Stephane Robidas. Still, any hopes for a turnaround will be pinned on forwards Phil Kessel and Tyler Bozak, defensemen Dion Phaneuf and goalie Jonathan Bernier.

6. Florida Panthers -- The Panthers made a host of moves in the offseason. Forwards Dave Bolland and Jussi Jokinen should add scoring punch, Shawn Thornton brings some physicality and Willie Mitchell will help stabilize the defense. Aleksander Barkov is slated to be the top line center after an impressive rookie campaign, but winger Jonathan Huberdeau will need to recapture the form he showed as a rookie for Florida to have significant improvement. Florida has a solid top goaltending tandem in Roberto Luongo and Al Montoya, but it may be another year before the Panthers threaten for a postseason spot.

7. Ottawa Senators -- The Senators have their third captain in three years in defensemen Erik Karlsson, and just signed forward Bobby Ryan to a long-term contract extension. But stability at defense appears to be the biggest issue for Ottawa, especially since Marc Methot is out with a back injury and is in the midst of very public negotiations for a new contract. If he's out for a while, or traded, it will likely move other defensemen into unfamiliar roles, further unsettling the situation. Ottawa does have reliable goaltenders, though, in Craig Anderson and Robin Lehner.

8. Buffalo Sabres -- Few could blame Sabres fans for already thinking about next season, when Buffalo will likely have one of the top two picks in the entry draft and franchise-type players Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel are available for selection. Until then, it'll be another cold winter in Western New York for the Sabres, who should marginally improve on the 150 goals they had last season with the return of Matt Moulson, the addition of Brian Gionta, and prospect Mikhail Grigorenko making an impact. Center Sam Reinhart might also stick around all season, giving Buffalo fans a glimpse of what should be better days to come.

METROPOLITAN DIVISION

1. Pittsburgh Penguins -- The Penguins were an easy choice to win the Metropolitan Division last season, but things aren't so cut-and-dry this year. The stars -- Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Kris Letang and Chris Kunitz -- are there, but depth is Pittsburgh's biggest question. Patric Hornqvist and Nick Spaling came over from Nashville in the James Neal trade and will need to play well right away. The Penguins' defense has been retooled, as former Shark Christian Ehrhoff will play heavy minutes, likely alongside Letang. To return to Cup contender status, goalies Marc-Andre Fleury, entering the final year of his seven-year contract, has to be more consistent.

2. Philadelphia Flyers -- The Flyers recovered from a poor start to finish third in the division last season. With many of the same pieces in place, Philadelphia should again contend for a playoff spot in what may be the weakest division in the NHL top-to-bottom. The Flyers have some depth down the middle with Claude Giroux, Sean Couturier and Vincent Lecavalier, and Andrew MacDonald and Braydon Coburn will log heavy minutes on the blue line. If goalies Steve Mason can stay healthy and consistent, the Flyers should stay in the division title hunt throughout.

3. New York Rangers -- After acquiring Martin St. Louis at the trade deadline, the Rangers, with some outstanding goaltending from Henrik Lundqvist, made a surprising run to the Stanley Cup final. But the Blueshirts lost more talent than they acquired in the offseason and will probably be hard-pressed to win the division. Defenseman Dan Boyle was the most notable free agent pickup, and he'll be counted on to bolster a middle-of-the-road power play. Ryan McDonagh and Dan Girardi remain key components to the defense.

4. Columbus Blue Jackets -- The Blue Jackets took care of the most important item on their to-do list by signing center Ryan Johansen to a three-year deal on Monday. While Johansen's back in the fold, Boomer Jenner is expected to be out for another 4-6 weeks with a broken hand and Nathan Horton is out indefinitely, so it's fair to say Columbus' depth at forward is in question. Sergei Bobrovsky had a solid preseason and will have to shoulder more of the load in net, and Ryan Murray should be back shortly to bolster the defense. But it might be a struggle for the Blue Jackets to return to the playoffs.

5. Washington Capitals -- Give the Capitals credit for at least identifying the biggest reason why they didn't make the playoffs last season: defense. So, out went Adam Oates as coach and in came the more defensive-minded Barry Trotz, who should help Washington improve on its 2.79 goals against average from last season. The Capitals also brought in Matt Niskanen and Brooks Orpik to stabilize the blue line, and if the defense improves even marginally, they should challenge for a playoff spot. Early indications are that Trotz is getting along just fine with Alex Ovechkin, who, of course, remains one of the league's most impactful players.

6. New Jersey Devils -- Few teams are as tough to figure out as the Devils. Cory Schneider is the new No. 1 goalie, that much we know. But New Jersey has several question marks at forward and defense as a host of new faces are being worked into the lineup. On the blue line, New Jersey will be relying on several young players to get up to NHL speed, and up front, Mike Cammalleri was added to provide some scoring punch. The Devils also look to squeeze another good year out of Jaromir Jagr, and see if Marty Hlavat has anything left after a lackluster stint with the Sharks.

7. New York Islanders -- The Islanders certainly bolstered their offense with the signing of Mikhail Grabovski and Nikolai Kulemin, and along with John Tavares, Michael Grabner and Kyle Okposo, should score enough to stay competitive most nights. But without a more consistent effort on defense or in goal, New York will be hard-pressed to make the playoffs. Jaroslav Halak was signed to a four-year deal to stabilize things between the pipes, but that may not be enough for the Islanders to crack the top four in the division.

8. Carolina Hurricanes -- The Hurricanes have a different look, at least from a managerial perspective, after a brutal 2013-14 campaign. Coach Kirk Muller was fired and replaced by Bill Peters, and Jim Rutherford stepped aside as general manager, replaced by Ron Francis. No major moves were made in the offseason in terms of personnel, as the club hopes forwards like Eric Staal, Jeff Skinner and Alexander Semin can provide some much-needed scoring. It probably all boils down to goaltending though, as
Cam Ward and Anton Khudobin must get past disappointing 2013-14 campaigns.
By David Pollak

Here's a team-by-team look at the NHL's Pacific and Central divisions, in predicted order of finish.

PACIFIC DIVISION

1. Los Angeles Kings -- Sure, they've built more for the playoffs than the regular season. But the Kings return intact and this is the year they show they can win year-round with an array of talent up and down the lineup led by Anze Kopitar, Drew Doughty and Jonathan Quick. Plus there's the "nice guys finish last" adage -- and these aren't nice guys on the ice.

2. Anaheim Ducks -- The Ducks gained more than they lost in the off-season with the arrival of Ryan Kesler, who was in need of new surroundings (though picking up Dany Heatley is a bit of a head-scratcher). Talent, toughness and a youthful look in goal. And, strangely, maybe less locker room tension with Teemu Selanne retired. Who knew?

3. San Jose Sharks -- Talent is still there, but off-season turmoil and a brutal early schedule will take enough of a toll to drop the Sharks to third in the Pacific. Ultimately, if the culture change that GM Doug Wilson is looking for does occur, they might be a stronger team than in playoffs past, however. And isn't that the point?

4. Vancouver Canucks -- A year in free fall led to changes in the front office and the axe for coach John Tortorella. Still far behind the California teams even if the gamble on a bounce-back year for newly acquired goalie Ryan Miller pays off. Veteran Radim Vrbata should be productive playing on a line with the Sedins, but more new blood would help.

5. Arizona Coyotes -- Never underestimate a team coached by Dave Tippett, but the Coyotes seem to be spinning wheels. Solid defense led by Oliver-Ekman Larsson, and Mike Smith strong in goals, but offense a problem with the departure of Vrbata. Buying out forward Mike Ribeiro likely improves chemistry.

6. Edmonton Oilers -- Here we go again. All that promise that never seems to gel. And no reason to think this year will be any different. The Oilers tried to bulk up to compete in the Pacific, but still lack a blue line to complement flashy forwards such as Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle. In goal, Ben Scrivens has slight edge over Viktor Fasth.

7. Calgary Flames -- Calgary's rebuild is making strides. Mark Giordano anchors an otherwise suspect defense, rookie Johnny Gaudreau should help the offense and Jonas Hiller's arrival from Anaheim gives the Flames a second veteran to pair with Karri Ramo. Maybe they pass their Alberta rivals, maybe not.

CENTRAL DIVISION

1. Chicago Blackhawks -- What's not to like? Already a Western Conference finalist, Chicago added Brad Richards to center reliable Marian Hossa and Brandon Saad. There may be more teams with high-end talent in the Central than Pacific this season, but Chicago still has the most impressive lineup, top to bottom.

2. St. Louis Blues -- Again, the chief threat to the Blackhawks and stronger than a year ago with the signing of free agent Paul Stastny, a major upgrade over Vladimir Sobotka, who bolted to the KHL. Defense starting with Alex Pietrangelo and Jay Bouwmeester is effective at both ends of the ice while Brian Elliott and Jake Allen share the net.

3. Dallas Stars -- The smarts in the front office (GM Jim Nill) and the experience behind the bench (Lindsey Ruff) helped get Stars in the playoffs for the first time in six years last season. The rise continues with Jason Spezza centering second line and no shortage of toughness with Antoine Roussel and Ryan Garbutt on third. Defense lacks depth, though.

4. Colorado Avalanche -- Sure, Colorado could build on jump in standings a year ago under coach Patrick Roy. And losing Stastny to St. Louis won't hurt too much with likes of Matt Duchene, Gabriel Landeskog and Nathan MacKinnon still around. But the defense remains sketchy and a drop in the standings looks likely. Playoff-bound, though.

5. Minnesota Wild -- The Wild have assembled some potent forwards, adding Thomas Vanek to a group that already included Zach Parise and Jason Pominville. The defense does drop off after Ryan Suter and goaltending is a concern after Josh Harding was suspended for breaking his foot when he kicked a wall last month.

6. Nashville Predators -- Strangest sight in the NHL early this season will be someone other than Barry Trotz behind the bench, but replacement Peter Laviolette will quickly put is stamp on things. Predators strong in their own zone with goalie Pekka Rinne and defenseman Shea Weber back. James Neal should help the always struggling offense.

7. Winnipeg Jets -- Still not ready to move up in the standings. Goaltending biggest of several questions as Ondrej Pavelec registered his poorest numbers since the team left Atlanta. Some talent here in veterans Evander Kane, Dustin Byfuglien, Blake Wheeler in as well as defenseman Jacob Trouba. Just not enough.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Nothing too drastic, but a lot of tinkering in the rule changes approved by the NHL's board of governors and players' association. Here's how the game will be different this season:

1. More room for goalies to roam -- The trapezoid behind the nets where netminders can pursue the puck are larger as the lines have been redrawn two feet further from each post. That may help strong puck-handlers, but goalies who lack that skill could find themselves fumbling away pucks in a larger area.

2. More outside review of disputed goals -- In the past, a referee could say he intended to blow the whistle and waive off a goal even if he didn't follow trough on that intent. The NHL war room had no jurisdiction to overrule, but can intervene now and talk with the official to make sure his intended whistle did indeed precede the puck crossing the line.

Also, more latitude is being given to officials to allow goals that go into the net off skates when there is a distinct kicking motion. Intent also will be a factor going forward.

3. Good-bye, spin-o-rama moves on shootouts and penalty shots -- Not allowed anymore, presumably because they could come close to violating the forward-movement rule or maybe because they were too much fun.

4. Change in tripping rules on breakaways -- Until this season, a defending player could dive onto the ice and slide in a player's path, knowing if his stick touched the puck first it didn't matter if the player heading toward the net went tumbling to the ice. Now it matters as touching the puck no longer negates a tripping penalty. Touching the puck first, however, won't result in a penalty shot that might otherwise have been awarded.

5. That other kind of diving just got more expensive -- There's now an automatic fine for multiple embellishment penalties. Players are warned the first time, then get fined $2,000 the second, $3,000 the third, $4,000 the fourth and $5,000 for each additional violation. Coaches face a $2,000 fine on a player's fourth offense, and that increases $1,000 for each embellishment that follows $5,000.

6. Redefining "physical fouls" that lead to automatic suspensions -- Boarding and checking from behind had been the only "physical fouls" that could lead to a game misconduct of the sort that resulted in an automatic suspension after two violations. Now clipping, charging, elbowing, interference, kneeling, head-butting and butt-ending have been added to the list.

7. Faceoffs after icing -- The league got fed up with stalling tactics by the defensive team and now there will be a price to pay. Before, a defending center could get tossed from the circle for a faceoff violation, buying time as his replacement skated in. Now, a defending center will have to stay in the circle after a violation, and a second violation will result in a two-minute penalty for delay of game.

The NHL experimented in the preseason with hashmarks that would separate players on all faceoffs by an additional 2-feet, 7-inches in an attempt to increase clean wins that would let plays develop.

8. More overtime decisions, fewer shootouts -- General manager weren't ready to abandon the shootout, but they did push for changes that increase the likelihood tie games won't reach that point.

For one thing, teams will change ends again, creating longer distances into the defensive zone for players changing on the fly. For another, the Zamboni will do a dry scrape of the ice between the end of regulation and the start of overtime, improving the ice surface and giving teams an extra few minutes to catch their collective breath.

9. When the puck leaves the ice -- Look for more offensive zone faceoffs when the puck flies into the netting. Going forward, that will happen on go pucks deflected off the boards or glass or goal itself, tipped or deflected by a teammate, or stuck somewhere on the outside of the goal. Also on pucks that break the glass.
2014-15 NHL Preview: Familiar faces in new places

By David Pollak

Here's a look at some of the NHL's most-notable players and where they are playing this season:

Jarome Iginla -- Yes, he's 37 now. But he scored 30 goals for the Boston Bruins last season before signing with Colorado, his fourth team in the last three seasons.

Ryan Kesler -- In a rare intra-division trade, the Anaheim Ducks acquired the always annoying center from a Vancouver team in need of a makeover.

Brad Richards -- Bought out by the New York Rangers, Richards found a soft landing spot in Chicago as the Blackhawks' biggest off-season acquisition.

Jason Spezza -- A point per game player (687 points, 686 games) in 11 seasons with the Ottawa Senators, Spezza was acquired by a Dallas team in need of a second-line center.

Paul Stastny -- The St. Louis Blues landed what may have been the top prize in the free agent market when they signed the Colorado center to a four-year, $28 million contract.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
2014-15 NHL Preview: Several ex-Sharks switched teams in offseason

By David Pollak

Here's a list of former Sharks and the teams they are playing for this season:

D Dan Boyle -- Went from Sharks to New York Islanders via trade, then signed with New York Rangers as a free agent

D Christian Ehrhoff -- Had his contract bought out by the Buffalo Sabres, and signed with the Pittsburgh Penguins as a free agent

LW TJ Galiardi -- Went from Calgary Flames to signing as a free agent with the Winnipeg Jets

D Josh Gorges -- Was traded by the Montreal Canadiens to the Buffalo Sabres

G Thomas Greiss -- Went from Arizona Coyotes to signing as a free agent with the Pittsburgh Penguins

RW Marty Havlat -- Had his contract bought out by the Sharks, and signed with the New Jersey Devils as a free agent

LW Dany Heatley -- Went from Minnesota Wild to signing as a free agent with the Anaheim Ducks

C Manny Malhotra -- Went from Carolina Hurricanes to signing as a free agent with the Montreal Canadiens

G Evgeni Nabokov -- Went from New York Islanders to signing as a free agent with the Tampa Bay Lightning

LW Devin Setoguchi -- Went from Winnipeg Jets to signing as a free agent with the Calgary Flames

D Brad Stuart -- Went from Sharks to Colorado Avalanche via trade

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
2014-15 NHL Preview: Six teams hope new coaches can turn fortunes around

Bay Area News Group

Here are the teams that have new NHL coaches this season:

CAROLINA HURRICANES -- Fired Kirk Muller after three seasons and replaced him with Bill Peters, who was an assistant with Detroit for the last three seasons.

FLORIDA PANTHERS -- Fired Peter Horachek after one season and replaced him with Gerard Gallant, who was as an assistant with Montreal the last two years. Gallant also coached Columbus from 2003-2006.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS -- Fired Barry Trotz, the only coach in franchise history, after 15 seasons and replaced him with Peter Laviolette, who is coaching his fourth NHL team. Laviolette has previously coaches Carolina, the New York Islanders and Philadelphia, and most recently coaches Team USA at the world championships.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS -- Fired Dan Bylsma after six seasons and one Stanley Cup championship, and replaced him with Mike Johnston, who had been the coach and general manager of the Western Hockey League's Portland Winterhawks for the last six seasons.

VANCOUVER CANUCKS -- Fired John Tortorella after one tumultuous season and replaced him with Willie Desjardins, who won the Calder Cup with the Texas Stars of the AHL last season. Desjardins was also an assistant coach with the Dallas Stars for two seasons.

WASHINGTON CAPITALS -- Fired Adam Oates after two seasons and replaced him with Barry Trotz, who was let go by Nashville after 15 seasons.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks notebook: Rookie infusion on San Jose roster

By Curtis Pashelka

SAN JOSE -- The Sharks will have at least one rookie on the roster, and possibly three, when they open the season Wednesday against the Los Angeles Kings.

DefensiveMan Mirco Mueller has made the team out of training camp, and by all indications, so have third-line forwards Chris Tierney and Barclay Goodrow. NHL teams have until Tuesday at 2 p.m. (PDT) to finalize their 23-man rosters.

"Tierney, Goodrow and Mueller have all played exceptional, and they've earned the right to be here right now," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said Monday. "As our roster gets sorted out today, to this point, they've been very good and they've earned the right to be here."

The Sharks also announced that forward Nikolay Goldobin will start the season playing for HIFK of the Finnish Elite League. Goldobin, the Sharks' first-round draft choice in June, had four points in four exhibition games.

Mueller, the Sharks' first-round draft choice in 2013, steadily improved throughout the exhibition season. Paired with Brent Burns in recent games, he displayed an exceptional skating ability and ample confidence in handling the puck.

Mueller, 19, was in a competition from the start of camp to be among the Sharks' seven defensemen. But San Jose sent Taylor Fedun down to Worcester of the AHL and placed Taylor Doherty on waivers to get to seven defensemen.

"I'm happy, obviously, to be here still, and I'm looking forward to Wednesday," Mueller said. "I'm really excited to get the season going, finally; it's been a long camp and a long preseason."

With a host of injuries to several veterans, the Sharks needed young forwards to step up. James Sheppard and Tyler Kennedy skated Monday but have been ruled out for Wednesday's opener, and Raffi Torres is out long term with a knee injury.

Tierney, 20, the Sharks' second-round pick in 2012, and the 21-year-old Goodrow, a free agent signing in March, have impressed with their two-way play in the exhibition season, particularly when they played on a third line with Tommy Wingels toward the end of training camp. Tierney had one assist in six preseason games and Goodrow four points in five preseason games.

To be in the lineup on opening night, "would be unbelievable. That's your dream since day one, the goal since day one is to make an NHL roster," Tierney said. "That would be awesome."

Goodrow didn't skate Monday, with McLellan saying it was a maintenance day for a small injury. Including Goodrow, the Sharks have 15 healthy forwards and still need to get to 14.

By having Goldobin play with professionals, the Sharks are hoping his development can mirror that of Tomas Hertl, who was drafted in 2012, returned to play for Slavia Prague for the 2012-13 season, and made the Sharks roster for the 2013-14 campaign. Goldobin was a member of the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League last year.

"He is going to be an important player for this organization moving forward," Sharks general manager Doug Wilson said in a statement, "but at this time, in conjunction with direction from his agent Igor Larionov, we feel his development is best suited playing in a league against men, similar to the path Tomas Hertl took."

Goldobin, who signed an entry-level contract last week, got the chance to skate on a line with Joe Thornton and Hertl in San Jose's preseason game against Los Angeles last Tuesday. But against a veteran-dominated Kings lineup, Goldobin struggled at times to control the puck and finished with four giveaways. He did not play in either of the Sharks' final two preseason games.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks' captaincy in the air entering season opener

By David Pollak

SAN JOSE -- Maybe the Sharks will have a new captain when the puck drops Wednesday night as their 2014-15 season starts on the road against the Los Angeles Kings.

Maybe not.

Coach Todd McLellan still would not disclose Monday if he intends to hand out a C before San Jose faces the team that knocked it out of the playoffs and into an offseason of angst. He could have several players wearing the A that designates an assistant captain. Or maybe a rotating captaincy, something the Sharks tried in 2003. Or maybe no letters are handed out at all.

That, after all, could be the ultimate symbolic gesture if the goal is to have team-wide leadership -- or "23 captains," as the Shark who lost the captaincy this summer, Joe Thornton, put it after a team bonding session at Lake Tahoe.

San Jose Sharks' Joe Pavelski (8) controls the puck against Los Angeles Kings in the opening period of Game 1 of an NHL first-round playoff series against the Kings on Monday, April 21, 2014. (Josie Lepe/Bay Area News Group) (Josie Lepe/Bay Area News Group)

San Jose Sharks' Joe Pavelski (8) controls the puck against Los Angeles Kings' Anze Kopitar (11) in the first period in Game 7 of an NHL first-round playoff series at the SAP Center on Wednesday, April 30, 2014. (Nhat V. Meyer/Bay Area News Group) (Nhat V. Meyer)

"We're working on it," said McLellan, who waited until just hours before opening night of the 2010 season before giving the C to Thornton. "The one thing I know in the rule book is we don't have to name a captain. We don't have to have it done by a date or anything like that. We're working on it."

McLellan has done his best to avoid the topic throughout training camp. Others might speculate that Joe Pavelski or Logan Couture or Marc-Edouard Vlasic is likely to be tapped for a formal leadership position, but McLellan -- who left open the possibility last summer that Thornton himself might get a letter back -- won't narrow the field.

Seven NHL teams began training camp last month without a captain -- more than you'd expect considering the emphasis that hockey puts on that role compared to other sports.

But what made the Sharks' situation different from the other six was that their most recent captain was still around. Nobody was traded, nobody retired. That isn't unprecedented -- the Sharks themselves went through the same thing with Patrick Marleau in 2009 -- but it is rare.

Thornton has insisted that while others may dwell on the issue, he doesn't. Nor, he adds, is he altering his demeanor in the locker room or on the ice.

San Jose Sharks' Marc-Edouard Vlasic (44) fires the puck to score power play goal 5-0 against Los Angeles Kings' in the second period of Game 1 of an NHL first-round playoff series against the Kings on Monday, April 21, 2014. (Josie Lepe/Bay Area News Group) (Josie Lepe)

As outlined by general manager Doug Wilson, the goal was to change the Sharks' culture by changing the leadership hierarchy after a historic playoff nose-dive. But at least one TV commentator doesn't see much changing in the room because of the respect for the highly skilled Thornton.

"I think it could be with other guys," said Ray Ferraro, lead TV analyst with the Canadian sports network TSN. "I think there would be maybe a little embarrassment at having the captaincy taken away. I think there would be some uneasiness as to whose place it is. But I don't think that's going to be an issue with Joe. I just don't see that he's going to make this a problem.

"Someone else may have a C on the jersey," Ferraro added, "but it's not as if Joe is going to fade into the woodwork."
SHARKS WHO WORE THE 'C'
Eleven Sharks have served as captain for at least a brief period over the past 23 years.
Doug Wilson, 1991-93
Bob Errey, 1993-95
Jeff Odgers, 1995-96
Todd Gill, 1996-98
Owen Nolan, 1998-2003
Vincent Damphousse, 2003*
Mike Ricci, 2003*
Alyn McCauley, 2003*
Patrick Marleau, 2004*-2009
Rob Blake, 2009-10
Joe Thornton, 2010-14
*part of a rotating system after Nolan traded to Toronto on March 5, 2003
San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks assign Nikolay Goldobin to Finnish league

By Curtis Pashelka

SAN JOSE -- Forward Nikolay Goldobin's days as a junior hockey player are over, as the Sharks assigned their 2014 first-round draft choice to HIFK of the Finnish Elite League.

Goldobin, 18, stayed with the Sharks for almost the duration of training camp and finished with four points in four exhibition games. Goldobin showed at times an elite offensive skill set, but listed at 180 pounds, still needs to physically develop to become a regular at the NHL level.

By playing with professionals, the Sharks are hoping Goldobin's development can mirror that of Tomas Hertl, who was drafted in 2012, returned to play for Slavia Prague for the 2012-13 season, and made the Sharks roster for the 2013-2014 campaign. Goldobin was a member of the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League last year.

"Nikolay had a great training camp and showed us that he is a highly-skilled player," Sharks general manager Doug Wilson said in a statement. "He is going to be an important player for this organization moving forward but at this time, in conjunction with direction from his agent Igor Larionov, we feel his development is best suited playing in a league against men, similar to the path Tomas Hertl took."

Goldobin, who signed an entry level contract last week, had a goal and assist in San Jose's 5-2 win over Vancouver in his pro debut on Sept. 23, then added another goal and assist in the Sharks' 3-1 win over Anaheim on Sept. 27.

Goldobin got the chance to skate on a line with Joe Thornton and Hertl in San Jose's preseason game against Los Angeles last Tuesday. But against a veteran-dominated Kings lineup, Goldobin struggled at times to control the puck and finished with four giveaways. He did not play in either of the Sharks' final two preseason games.

Goldobin, still learning English, said he had a "great time" in San Jose. "The coaches, guys, everything. It's been a good time for me."

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks keep rookie Mirco Mueller as one of seven defensemen

By Curtis Pashelka

SAN JOSE -- The Sharks will have at least one rookie on the roster, and possibly three, when they open the season Wednesday against the Los Angeles Kings.

Defensemen Mirco Mueller has made the team out of training camp and by all indications, so have third line forwards Chris Tierney and Barclay Goodrow. NHL teams have until Tuesday at 2 p.m. (PDT) to finalize their 23-man rosters for their opening game.

"Tierney, Goodrow and Mueller have all played exceptional, and they've earned the right to be here right now," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said. "As our roster gets sorted out today, to this point, they've been very good and they've earned the right to be here."

Forward Nikolay Goldobin said Monday he will start the season playing in Europe, possibly in Germany or Finland, instead of returning to Sarnia of the Ontario Hockey League. Goldobin, the Sharks' first round draft choice in June, had four points in four exhibition games.

Mueller, the Sharks' first-round draft choice in 2013, was the most likely rookie to make the team out of training camp. Still, he steadily improved throughout the exhibition season as he displayed an exceptional skating ability and ample confidence in handling the puck.

Mueller, 19, was in a competition from the start of camp to be among the Sharks' seven defensemen. But San Jose ended the competition on Monday, sending Taylor Fedun down to Worcester of the AHL and placing Taylor Doherty on waivers.

Mueller drew comparisons to Marc-Edouard Vlasic when he was drafted, and that impression hasn't changed.

"If we can find another Marc-Edouard, we'll take it," McLellan said.

With a host of injuries to several veterans, the Sharks needed young forwards to step up. James Sheppard and Tyler Kennedy skated Monday but have been ruled out of Wednesday's opener, and Raffi Torres is out long term with a knee injury.

Tierney, the Sharks' second-round pick in 2012 and Goodrow, a free agent signing in March, have impressed with their two-way play in the exhibition season, particularly when they played on a third line with Tommy Wingels toward the end of training camp. Tierney had one assist in six preseason games and Goodrow four points in five preseason games.

To be in the lineup on opening night, "would be unbelievable. That's your dream since day one, the goal since day one is to make an NHL roster. That would be awesome," Tierney said.

Fedun, 26, was signed as a free agent in July after he had played the last two years with the Edmonton Oilers organization. He has one assist in three preseason games with the Sharks.

Doherty, 23, had played the last three-plus seasons with Worcester. He had no points and nine penalty minutes in three preseason games with the Sharks. Renaud Lavoie of TVA Sports in Montreal first reported the news on Doherty.

San Jose Mercury News: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks notes: Mueller makes cut, goalie decision looms, etc.

SAN JOSE — Since the day he was drafted, defenseman Mirco Mueller has been compared with the Sharks’ Marc-Edouard Vlasic for playing an effective but not necessarily flashy style.

Todd McLellan wasn’t yet with the Sharks when Vlasic broke in as a teenager in 2006, but remembered seeing him skate for San Jose while still an assistant with the Red Wings.

He’s hopeful, of course, that Mueller can become just as much of a rock on the blue line as Vlasic is today.

“I remember playing against San Jose and us talking about this young kid on the blue line, the amount of poise that he has, the skill level that he had,” McLellan said of Vlasic. “The organization at that time was always very confident in playing that type of player. If Mirco can, or will become that guy, then all the more power to him and to us.”

McLellan has praised Mueller this preseason for his ability to use his feet to get out of trouble, and that he’s gotten progressively better as camp has moved along.

Still, it will be a work in progress for Mueller as he gets set to make his NHL debut on Wednesday or shortly after. It’s not a certainty that Mueller will stay here for the duration of the season.

“There’s development that has to happen. … The maturity element, but also the understanding of what it feels like in certain situations on the ice,” McLellan said. “He has been able to adapt quickly to this point. We still have to monitor, and we have a huge responsibility as a coaching staff to continue to develop and grow this young man if he’s going to be here full time with us.”

[KURZ: Sharks mailbag: What’s the key to the D?]

Mueller has played with Brent Burns in each of the last three preseason games, so that pair could very well be together against the Kings in two days.

“I’m happy obviously to be here still,” Mueller said. “I’m looking forward to Wednesday. I’m really excited to kind of get the season going finally. It’s been a long camp and a long preseason.”

* * *

Less than 48 hours before the Sharks hold their first game day morning skate, there are still no hints as to whom — if anyone — will be the team’s captain and alternates.

“The one thing I know in the rulebook is we don’t have to name a captain,” McLellan said. “We don’t have to have it done by a date, or anything like that. We’re working on it.”

* * *

Another question that may not get answered until Wednesday morning is which goalie will get the start against the Kings.

[KURZ: Important year for Sharks’ Niemi in net]

Alex Stalock was 2-1-0 with a 1.68 goals-against average and .915 save percentage in three preseason games, while Antti Niemi was 0-1-2 with a 2.23 GAA and .909 SP.

“Two of them are playing well. To me, that’s real good progress,” McLellan said.

Tags:

NHL, Top Stories, SAN JOSE Sharks, Kevin Kurz, Mirco Mueller, alex stalock, Antti Niemi

Kevin Kurz

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks prospect Goldobin departs, will play in Finland

SAN JOSE – Nikolay Goldobin trusts the people around him to do what’s best for his career.

A 2014 first round pick of the Sharks, Goldobin said he’s not disappointed he won’t be starting the season with the NHL club after showing some flashes of offensive brilliance in four preseason games, posting one goal and three assists. The Sharks announced on Monday that the youngster would go to HIFK of the Finnish Elite League for the upcoming season, rather than return to his junior team in Sarnia.

"Coaches know better, and my agent. I listen to them," said Goldobin, who turns 19 on Tuesday.

The thought process is that Goldobin will develop more quickly while playing against men, as Tomas Hertl did in the Czech Republic before he made the jump to the NHL. Goldobin will need to get bigger and stronger, and although he played well early in the preseason, looked overmatched and jittery against the Kings last Tuesday in his final game.

[KURZ: Five thoughts as Sharks preseason concludes]

"Nikolay had a great training camp and showed us that he is a highly-skilled player," general manager Doug Wilson said in a statement. "He is going to be an important player for this organization moving forward but at this time, in conjunction with direction from his agent Igor Larionov, we feel his development is best suited playing in a league against men, similar to the path Tomas Hertl took."

Goldobin said: "I have to play against men so I can make the [Sharks] next year. That will help me."

Chosen 27th overall by the Sharks at June’s NHL draft in Philadelphia, Goldobin enjoyed his first NHL training camp.

“Great coaches, guys, organization. Been a good time for me,” he said.

Goldobin’s departure leaves 24 healthy players on the Sharks’ roster. They will have to trim one more player – likely a forward – before Tuesday’s 2 p.m. deadline for the final 23-man roster.

Tyler Kennedy (upper body), James Sheppard (left knee) and Raffi Torres (right knee) will start the season as injured players. Kennedy and Sheppard returned to practice on Monday, while Torres is out long term.

Tags:
NHL, Top Stories, SAN JOSE Sharks, Kevin Kurz, nikolay goldobin

Kevin Kurz

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Roenick: Sharks ‘didn’t do anything to improve’ in offseason

— Jeremy Roenick

The Sharks will kick off the 2014-15 season with a nationally televised game on NBC Sports Network on Wednesday night against Los Angeles.

A pair of NBC analysts, Jeremy Roenick and Keith Jones, weighed in on the Sharks’ season outlook.

Roenick: “They didn’t do anything in the offseason to improve their team. When you don’t win, it’s always going to come down to your leaders. You’ve got to score goals in big situations. Until that happens, guys are going to be questioned.

“Joe Thornton is going to be questioned. Patrick Marleau is going to be questioned. Joe and Patty are running into that time in their careers when their legacy is going to be that they were great players in the regular season, but when the playoffs came around, they couldn’t figure it out.”

[KURZ: Five thoughts as Sharks preseason concludes]

Jones: “They’re going to be really good. If they don’t lose Marc-Edouard Vlasic in that first-round series last season, they don’t lose four straight to the L.A. Kings.

“They have to come to the realization that with Vlasic in the lineup, they were a better team than L.A., and we’re not talking about the disastrous collapse, if Vlasic doesn’t get hurt. I’m not worried about San Jose. If I was in the Western Conference and in their division, I would be worried about playing against them.”

Jones’ bullish outlook on San Jose is no surprise. He told CSNBayArea.com early in the offseason that the Sharks were his pick to win the Stanley Cup.

Tags:
NHL, SAN JOSE Sharks, Top Stories, Kevin Kurz, Jeremy Roenick, Joe Thornton, Patrick Marleau, Marc-Edouard Vlasic, Keith Jones

Kevin Kurz

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Sharks' potential third line could feature two rookies

SAN JOSE – One of the bigger knocks on the Sharks over the past few seasons is that their bottom six forwards just aren’t good enough to compete with other, deeper Western Conference teams.

The third line, specifically, is a point of concern, since it looks like Joe Pavelski will remain as a top line winger.

Nothing has been made official, but looks more and more likely that San Jose will ice a third line of rookies Chris Tierney and Barclay Goodrow, along with Tommy Wingels when the season gets underway on Wednesday in Los Angeles. That trio has been together for the last three preseason games, and would have skated together again for Monday’s practice had Goodrow not been out with a “maintenance day,” according to coach Todd McLellan.

[KURZ: Five thoughts as Sharks preseason concludes]

General manager Doug Wilson said numerous times in the offseason that his team will get younger. If Tierney, 20, and Goodrow, 21, make the roster, along with 19-year-old defenseman Mirco Mueller’s spot now assured, that will be enough to prove Wilson wasn’t kidding.

Of course, whether that potential third line can keep up with NHL regular season competition is yet to be determined, and Tierney and Goodrow haven’t played a single game that counts. Wingels, though, likes what he’s seen so far from his two fresh-faced linemates.

“They’ve learned quickly. These past two games were more actual dress rehearsals against actual lineups. They fared well,” Wingels said.

Tierney, a second round Sharks draft pick in 2012, would have the more difficult task of adjusting to NHL life as a centerman. Voted the “OHL Western Conference’s Smartest Player” last season while captaining London, he’s been adept at picking up the finer points of McLellan’s system throughout camp, according to the coach.

“Chris is a smart player. He picks things up very, very quickly,” McLellan said. “Once he gets a look at the real pace and intensity and we keep evaluating him, we think we’ve found a very good player.”

Tierney said: “It comes down to details – in your own end, off faceoffs, what you’re doing to win battles in the corners. Everything is a little detail, and that’s where games are won and lost, little battles like that.”

Wingels has been helpful. The 26-year-old suddenly finds himself as the old guy on the line, but the blossoming leader is arguably as good as anyone the Sharks have at helping young players get acclimated to the league. After all, it wasn’t long ago that Wingels himself was trying to break through.

“He was really helpful in giving little tips and stuff in practice and games, just talking on the bench,” Tierney said. “It’s really nice to have a guy that you’ve been playing with on a line that you can just ask questions.”

[KURZ: Sharks defense still open competition for spots]

Wingels said: “It’s fun. Those guys are doing a good job, and they bring a lot of youthful energy, kind of like Tomas [Hertl] did last year.”

Like McLellan, Wingels also sung the praises of Tierney’s cognitive ability.

“His hockey sense is great. As a centerman, his positioning kind of reminds me of Logan [Couture]’s out there. He’s always around the puck, both offensively and defensively. ... Being his winger, that’s what you want your centerman to do. He makes my job easier, and he’s trying to learn.”

Despite the strong preseason showing from the line, it would still be trial by fire starting against the Stanley Cup champions. If that’s how they line up, Tierney will relish the chance, while the Sharks hope that some new blood will give their third line some strong two-way hockey.

“That’s your dream since day one and your goal since day one, to make an NHL roster,” Tierney said. “That would be awesome. It’s something I’ve been trying to work to.”

Wingels said: “It’s not just about making the team, it’s about contributing and being a really good and elite third line. That’s a conversation I’ve had with those two guys, and if that’s their spot right now, they’re ready to go.”

Tags:
Mueller likely to make final roster after more cuts

SAN JOSE -- The Sharks made a pair of cuts early on Monday, as they approach the Tuesday 2 p.m. deadline for the final 23-man roster.

Defenceman Taylor Doherty was placed on waivers, and will head to AHL Worcester in the event that he goes unclaimed. Taylor Fedun, another defenceman who was signed as a free agent in July, was also reassigned to Worcester.

The Sharks are down to seven defencemen in training camp, essentially ensuring that 2013 first round pick Mirco Mueller will be on the opening night roster. Mueller, 19, was paired with Brent Burns and averaged more than 21 minutes over the final three preseason games. He finished with one assist, a minus-1 rating and five shots on goal while playing in six of seven games.

San Jose’s roster now stands at 28 players, including injured forwards Raffi Torres, Tyler Kennedy and James Sheppard.

Tags:
NHL, SAN JOSE Sharks, Top Stories, Mirco Mueller, Taylor Fedun, Kevin Kurz

Kevin Kurz

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Blues coach Ken Hitchcock has been saying for months that Brian Elliott would open the season as the team’s No. 1 goalie, so it should be no surprise that he will be in net Thursday against the New York Rangers.

Hitchcock isn’t publicly putting a number on how many starts Elliott and Allen will each receive this season, nor does he probably even have an idea at this point. Elliott will get the nod Thursday and the team will go from there.

“It’s a light October (nine games), so both guys are going to play,” Hitchcock said. “There’s a lot of space between games, so both guys have to get action. We’ll just monitor it as we go. We’ve got two good goalies.

“The reason Jake Allen is a backup is because he’s inexperienced. That’s in name. Well, that experience can change in a month. I know we’re going to need both guys and we’re going to play both guys in October and see where we go. But Brian is going to get the start in Game 1 and get a chance to carry a significant responsibility.”

Said Elliott: “I don’t know how it’s going to play out. You just want to get in there and play well, that’s all.”

FORWARD THINKING

Jaden Schwartz played in only two preseason games, but in that limited time, he was impressed with the Blues’ re-calibrated group of forwards.

“There’s no doubt we had creative lines last year,” Schwartz said. “But this year, it just seems deeper. Losing (Vladimir) Sobotka (stinks), but from what I’ve seen, (Jori) Lehtera looks like a tremendous player. He can create a lot of offense, and same with (Joakim) Lindstrom. We’ve got three solid lines that can hopefully put up a lot of goals, and the fourth line, we know that they can play their role as good as anybody and they’re going to chip in offensively as well.”

As far as Schwartz getting up to speed following contract talks that kept him out of camp for 10 days, Hitchcock said: “He was a little tired but he still found a way to impact (Saturday’s preseason game). I think he found out how much not being here impacts because it’s missing quite a bit. He missed a lot of action, and getting these two games and us playing him a lot on purpose gave him a chance to at least get the bumps and bruises on the body so you’re not feeling it before you start.”

IDEAL IMPROVEMENT

The Blues aren’t putting much stock in their preseason record, but they believe the finish shows that they are trending upward.

The club wrapped up its seven-game preseason schedule last weekend with a mark of 2-3-2. After going winless in its first four games, the team went 2-0-1 in the last three.

“We didn’t win the first few preseason games and we had a meeting and said we had to amp things up,” Blues forward Patrik Berglund said. “I think we did. I think it was better execution in practices, we won two games there. I think it got better. It needs to get better. We need to get going for the home opener.”

ROSTER CUTS

The Blues must trim their roster to 23 from 27 by 4 p.m. today. They are expected to cut two forwards, and after placing defenseman Carl Gunnarsson (hip surgery) on injured reserve, they will need to shed just one defenseman.
Lindstrom, Lehtera emerge as offensive threats

The big splash of the offseason for the Blues was the signing of free agent center Paul Stastny to a four-year, $28 million contract. But two lower-priced acquisitions, who combined have just 15 goals in the NHL, made their marks in camp and could be significant contributors to the Blues this season.

The two are center Jori Lehtera, who tied for the team lead in scoring in the preseason with six points, and left wing Joakim Lindstrom, who had two goals and two assists. Lehtera will make $2.75 million this season, while Lindstrom will make $700,000, which will make him one of the least expensive players on the Blues’ 23-man roster, which has to be set today by 4 p.m. The Blues are at 27 players on the roster, with one of those, defenseman Carl Gunnarsson, starting the season on injured reserve.

Lehtera, the Blues’ third-round pick in 2008, was a known commodity headed into camp because of his international play, though the Blues were unsure of what role he would play in the NHL. Lindstrom, meanwhile, had an earlier, unsuccessful run in the league, but after three seasons playing in Sweden was prepared to give it another try. They turned out to be two of the best Blues in training camp.

“I think they’re perfect examples of guys who have played pro,” coach Ken Hitchcock said. “They played professional hockey, they’ve played at a high level, they know the job to do and it shows in their preparation. It shows in their professionalism, it shows in their readiness.

“Both guys have helped us. Lehtera was expected, it was just where does he fit, and Lindstrom, obviously, he’s done a nice job. He’s kind of a sudden offense guy.” (After a lot of thought, Hitchcock said that Lindstrom’s style was similar to that of Colorado’s Alex Tanguay.)

“It’s really good that we have solid two-way players like that in the lineup,” said forward Patrik Berglund.

Lindstrom will turn 31 in December, 18 days before Lehtera turns 27, so while they may be NHL newcomers, they’re not inexperienced. Other than 14 games with former Blues farm team Peoria in 2008-09, all of Lehtera’s time has been in his native Finland or in Russia. Last season, between the KHL regular season and postseason, the Olympics and the world championships, Lehtera played in 74 games, with 16 goals and 50 assists. Lindstrom last played in the NHL in the 2011-12 season, when he played 16 games for Colorado, before going home to Sweden. The two are very different physically. Lindstrom is 6 feet and listed at 187 pounds, which means he will probably be the lightest player on the team. Lehtera is 6-2, 210 and gives the team another big body down the middle.

To help them get prepared, Hitchcock had Lehtera play in five preseason games — only defenseman Petteri Lindbohm played in more — and Lindstrom played in four. Lindstrom was put in a good situation from the start, being placed on a line with Stastny and old friend and fellow Swede Alexander Steen, but when Hitchcock tried Lindstrom with Lehtera on Saturday, he continued to shine. On Lehtera’s second goal, Lindstrom was taking the puck behind the net when he saw Lehtera coming up from behind. Just before he got behind the net, he gave Lehtera a drop pass while Wild goalie Darcy Kuemper kept following Lindstrom. Lehtera scored into an open goal. Lindstrom and Lehtera had a hand in three of the Blues’ four goals in the game.

“I knew (Lehtera) would have an impact in the game because of his moxie,” Hitchcock said. “I saw that in the Olympics where he started in the back (of the lineup) and got to the front. This is not surprising to me.”

“I’m ready,” said Lehtera, who had two goals and an assist Saturday. “I’m in good shape. I had a very good summer, worked very hard. I think these five games helped me a little bit to get used to the small-rink game. It’s faster. You have to do everything faster. I think I’m ready now.”

Lindstrom appears to have bridged the gap that kept him from sticking in the NHL the previous time he was here. Among other things, he is skating faster, which is allowing him more decision-making time.
Blues are taking a day off before Thursday's opener

The Blues are enjoying a special day away from the ice today. They are on the golf course for the annual 14 Fund Golf Tournament at Norwood Hills Country Club.

The club will be back at the rink Tuesday, preparing for Thursday's regular-season opener against the New York Rangers at Scottrade Center.

Before the Blues can start game planning, however, they'll need to trim the roster to a maximum of 23 players before 4 p.m. on Tuesday.

Currently, the club has 27 players on its roster, including defenseman Carl Gunnarsson, who will start the season on injured reserve. So that means the Blues will need to cut at least three others to get to 23.

The Blues still have 16 forwards on their roster and will likely keep 14, so two will be eliminated from this group:

David Backes
Patrik Berglund
Robby Fabbri
Dmitrij Jaskin
Maxim Lapierre
Jori Lehtera
Joakim Lindstrom
T.J. Oshie
Steve Ott
Magnus Paajarvi
Chris Porter
Ryan Reaves
Jaden Schwartz
Paul Stastny
Alexander Steen
Vladimir Tarasenko

Minus Gunnarsson, who will not count toward the opening-night roster, the Blues have eight defensemen. So one will likely be cut from this group:

Jay Bouwmeester
Chris Butler
Ian Cole
Barret Jackman
Jordan Leopold
Petteri Lindbohm
Alex Pietrangelo
Kevin Shattenkirk

The Blues are set in goal with netminders Brian Elliott and Jake Allen.

Hitchcock isn't publicly putting a number on how many starts Elliott and Allen will each receive this season, nor does he probably even have an idea at this point. Elliott will get the nod Thursday and the team will go from there.

"It's a light October (nine games), so both guys are going to play," Hitchcock said. "There's a lot of space between games, so both guys have to get action. We'll just monitor it as we go. We've got two good goalies. What can you say?"

"The reason Jake Allen is a backup is because he's inexperienced. That's in name. Well, that experience can change in a month, so I don't know. But I know we're going to be need both guys and we're going to play both guys in October and see where we go. But Brian is going to get the start in Game 1 and get a chance to carry a significant responsibility."

Said Elliott: "I don't know how it's going to play out. You just want to get in there and play well, that's all."

LINE CHANGE

Regarding their forwards, the Blues have stuck to their pairs. One of those pairs has been Jori Lehtera and Vladimir Tarasenko, who were able to recreate the chemistry in camp that they possessed for two seasons together in Russia's Kontinental Hockey League.

However, in Saturday's preseason finale, Lehtera played with fellow newcomer Joakim Lindstrom and the results were positive. Lehtera finished with two goals and an assist.

Hitchcock said Sunday that the development could lead to the Blues swapping Lindstrom and Tarasenko at the start of the season. That would mean the top nine would look like this:

Patrik Berglund-David Backes-T.J. Oshie
Alexander Steen-Paul Stastny-Vladimir Tarasenko
Jaden Schwartz-Jori Lehtera-Joakim Lindstrom

My P-D partner Tom Timmermann (@tomtimm on Twitter) will have an article about Lehtera and Lindstrom in Tuesday's newspaper and will likely touch on this topic.

Back at the rink tomorrow with more Blues' updates. Thanks for following!

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.07.2014
TAMPA — The Tampa Bay Lightning roster is all but set for opening night.


That leaves 24 players on the roster, with the team required to be at a maximum of 23 before Tuesday’s 5 p.m. deadline.

Injured rookie Jonathan Drouin is still recovering from a fractured right thumb and will not be ready to play in Thursday’s season-opening game against Florida, head coach Jon Cooper said. Drouin has been cleared for additional activity, which included taking full shots and participating in some drills during practice on Monday.

General manager Steve Yzerman indicated he does not expect to place Drouin on injured reserve because he could play during the four-game homestand to start the season.

“Our medical team wants him practicing and shooting the puck and see how he feels,” Yzerman said. “I don’t want to put any particular game on him, but he is getting closer and with each day that he feels better, up the workload a little bit.”

That means one other roster move would have to be made prior to Tuesday’s deadline.

Brenden Morrow, who missed two days of practice last week with back spasms, could also be placed on injured reserve retroactive to last week. Under that scenario, Morrow could be placed on IR ahead of the roster deadline, but be eligible to be activated prior to Thursday’s opening game.

Morrow has practiced and skated with the team since Thursday, but did not play in Tampa Bay’s final three preseason games.

The 14 remaining forwards are Steven Stamkos, Ondrej Palat, Tyler Johnson, Alex Killorn, Ryan Callahan, Valtteri Filppula, Nikita Kucherov, Brett Connolly, Brenden Morrow, Brian Boyle, J.T. Brown, Richard Panik, Vladislav Namestnikov, Drouin and Morrow.

The eight remaining defensemen are Victor Hedman, Anton Stralman, Jason Garrison, Matt Carle, Eric Brewer, Radko Gudas, Andrej Sustr and Mark Barberio, while the goaltenders are Ben Bishop and Evgeni Nabokov.

Tampa Bay will also place defenseman Mattias Ohlund, who hasn’t played since the end of the 2010-11 season, on long-term injured reserve to be compliant with the salary cap.

If the Lightning need to reassign another player to Syracuse, options could include Namestnikov or Sustr, neither of whom requires waivers to be sent to Syracuse.

But no matter who is on the roster come Thursday, Cooper is understandably confident.

“For our part and our situation, and I can’t predict what is going to happen in these opening games, but I like our mind set, I like our players and I like our compete,” Cooper said. “And I like the way they have progressively played in the preseason. So, I like what we have going.”

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 10.07.2014
TAMPA — Decision day is upon the Lightning.

Tampa Bay must submit its 23-man roster to the league ahead of Tuesday’s 5 p.m. deadline, and there are some difficult decisions to be made.

For Jon Cooper, it’s the most difficult time of the year to be the coach.

“These guys, you know what they’ve done all summer, they came in with a goal to make this hockey team,” Cooper said. “It’s really, really hard, because you’ve got to look these guys in the eye and say, ‘You’ve got to wait your turn,’ and that part is really tough.”

Complicating some decisions are the training-camp performances of forwards Vladislav Namestnikov, Cedric Paquette and Jonathan Marchessault as they made their case for roster spots. Nikita Kucherov, who might have been on the bubble at the start of camp, seemingly played his way onto the roster by leading the league with six preseason goals.

These players are certain to be on the roster for Thursday’s season opener against Florida: forwards Steven Stamkos, Ondrej Palat, Tyler Johnson, Valtteri Filppula, Alex Killorn, Ryan Callahan, Brian Boyle, J.T. Brown, Brenden Morrow and Kucherov; defensemen Victor Hedman, Anton Stralman, Jason Garrison, Eric Brewer, Matt Carle and Radko Gudas; and goaltenders Ben Bishop and Evgeni Nabokov.

Assuming Jonathan Drouin (fractured thumb) starts the season on injured reserve, that leaves five spots up for grabs among forwards Brett Connolly, Richard Panik, Namestnikov, Paquette and Marchessault; and defensemen Mark Barberio, Andrej Sustr and Luke Witkowski.

Connolly, Panik and Barberio would have to be placed on waivers prior to noon today and clear to be reassigned to Syracuse of the American Hockey League.

“We’ll hash it all out,” Cooper said.

Half-empty

Brown, who did not score a goal after Dec. 23 last season, picked up his second preseason goal late in the first period of Saturday’s 4-1 victory against Florida.

His first goal was into a vacated net after a bad pass by Dallas G Anders Lindback. His second came courtesy of a feed from Boyle, who faked a shot that dropped Florida G Al Montoya to his knees, leaving a large portion of the net open for Brown.

“That felt good, but at the same time it was still an empty net at that point,” Brown said.

“Boyle made a great pass over to me that had both the goalie and the D-man fooled, so I just had to hit the net.”

Trending attitude

Tampa Bay was 5-1 this preseason after going 5-2 last season. While wins in the preseason don’t count, having a winning attitude can be a springboard.

“It sure is a lot better than going the other way,” Stralman said. “But, I don’t think you should draw much from preseason games, (though) you can take some points out of it, and I think most games we played pretty well.”

Clunker

Syracuse ended the preseason 1-2 after Sunday’s 6-0 loss to the Binghamton Senators in Lyon, France. G Kristers Gudlevskis played the full game for the Crunch.

The team will sight-see in Paris today before returning home and practicing Wednesday in Syracuse.

Erik Erlendsson

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 10.07.2014
Lightning sends three to Syracuse, roster almost set

Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

But it's not completely set.

By sending forwards Jonathan Marchessault and Cedric Paquette and defenseman Luke Witkowski to Syracuse of the American Hockey League, Tampa Bay got down to 24 players.

Now settling on the 23 for Thursday's season opener against the Panthers at Amalie Arena is a bit tricky.

"I have an idea," general manager Steve Yzerman said.

Veteran left wing Brenden Morrow (back spasms) will be put on injured reserve, retroactive to Thursday, which will get Tampa Bay down to 23 by today's 5 p.m. deadline. If Morrow, who missed the last three preseason games but has been skating the past three practices, is ready to go Thursday, another move will have to be made.

"It gives me a couple more days to decide," Yzerman said.

Touted wing prospect Jonathan Drouin, 19, will be on the roster, as Yzerman said he doesn't expect to put him on IR. Drouin, out since Sept. 18 with a right thumb fracture, was cleared to do more in Monday's practice, participating in drills and shooting, albeit still in a red no-contact jersey. "It's exciting," he said.

It's unclear when Drouin will be ready to play for the Lightning, with Yzerman saying a conditioning assignment with Syracuse is possible.

The big winner Monday was center Vladislav Namestnikov, 21, who made the team — at least for now — after a strong training camp. Namestnikov, who had a four-game call-up last season, racked up seven assists in the preseason, showing he was stronger with the puck and forming obvious chemistry with wing Nikita Kucherov, who had six goals.

"He's an intelligent player and a good skater, a year older and a little stronger, little heavier," Yzerman said. "He's just getting used to playing against NHL players. He did very well in the preseason, and we're very anxious to see how he does in the regular season."

Brett Connolly and Richard Panik made the team, as expected, as both would have to clear waivers to get sent down. Both had their best camps with the Lightning, making the decision easy.

If Morrow is ready Thursday, Namestnikov or defenseman Andrej Sustr can be sent down without clearing waivers. No players were put on waivers Monday, Yzerman said.

Marchessault, Paquette and Witkowski impressed in camp. Said Yzerman:

"They're a phone call away."


"I like our mind-set," Cooper said. "I like our players. I like our compete (level) and like the way they've progressively played in the preseason. I'm happy. I like what we have going. I've got a good feeling about our group and a big part of that is how all the new guys have seamlessly fit in and that really helped the process."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Anton Stralman gets look on Lightning power play

Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

With Stralman scoring three preseason goals — after tallying just one in 81 games for the Rangers last season — he was asked if it's a sign of things to come.

"Don't count on it," he said, smiling.

But if Stralman continues to run the point on the second power-play unit, like he did during Saturday’s game and in Monday’s practice, he can likely expect a scoring surge.

Stralman, who has just 18 goals in seven NHL seasons, likes getting involved on the power play.

"It's something I've been doing for 90 percent of my career, something I enjoy doing," he said. "It's just a matter of getting the chance, it's a lot about confidence to kind of find that rhythm and do the right things up there."

When the Lightning acquired D Jason Garrison from Vancouver in June, it was thought his heavy shot could make him an asset for the power play. He might get some power-play time but, for now, it's Stralman. D Victor Hedman is on the first unit.

"I think (Stralman's) got a good head," coach Jon Cooper said. "He's right-handed, which is something we've kind of lacked for a power-play guy. His shot isn't probably as hard as Jason Garrison, but he gets it through, he distributes pucks. He's a pretty heady player so for someone that can just direct traffic up there, we think he's doing a pretty darn good job for us."

Stralman said he'd like to have a more offensive game, and feels Cooper's system allows more freedom for that.

"It's just fun, I enjoy being part of the offense a little bit more and that's something I've been doing my whole career really and I'm trying to get back to it a little bit, and trying to find it," Stralman said. "So far so good."

Four play: The Lightning did a lot of power-play work at the end of practice (5-on-4, 5-on-3). Tampa Bay has been using a four forward, one defenseman alignment for its first two units (C Steven Stamkos, RW Ryan Callahan, C Valtteri Filppula and LW Ondrej Palat with Hedman on the first unit). Cooper said he's playing to his personnel, a skilled forward group which is responsible defensively. "If this team had three Hall of Fame defensemen, we might have two forwards and three (defensemen)," he said.

Minor matters: First-round pick D Anthony DeAngelo, 19, got a game misconduct for sharing words with a referee after Saturday's game with Sarnia (Ontario junior league). DeAngelo served two suspensions last season for violating the league's harassment, abuse and diversity policy, both times using a slur. Yzerman said DeAngelo's latest misconduct is a "concern," but will refrain from further comment until he gets more details.

Not yet: Cooper said they will alternate assistant captains this season, and won't settle on them for the first few games.
Lightning narrows roster down to 24

Joe Smith, Times Staff Writer

The Lightning's final roster became clearer on Monday.

But it's not completely set yet.

By sending forwards Jonathan Marchessault, Cedric Paquette and defenseman Luke Witkowski to Syracuse of the American Hockey League on Monday, Tampa Bay got down to 24 players.

Now settling on the 23 it will start the season with in Thursday's opener against the Panthers at Amalie Arena is a bit tricky.

"I have an idea," general manager Steve Yzerman said.

Veteran left wing Brenden Morrow (back spasms) will be put on injured reserve, retroactive to Thursday, which will get Tampa Bay down to 23 by today's 5 p.m. deadline. If Morrow, who missed the last three preseason games but has been skating the past three practices, is ready to go Thursday, another move will have to be made.

"It gives me a couple more days to decide," Yzerman said.

But touted wing prospect Jonathan Drouin, 19, will be on the roster, with Yzerman saying he doesn't expect putting him on IR. Drouin, who has been out since Sept. 18 with a right thumb fracture, was cleared to do more in Monday's practice, participating in drills and even shooting. "It's exciting," he said.

It's unclear when Drouin will be ready to play for the Lightning, with Yzerman saying a conditioning assignment with Syracuse will be a consideration.

The big winner Monday was center Vladislav Namestnikov, 21, who has made the team - at least for a few days - after a strong training camp.

Namestnikov, who had a four-game call-up last season, racked up seven assists in the preseason, showing he was stronger with the puck and forming obvious chemistry with wing Nikita Kucherov, who had six goals.

"He's an intelligent player and a good skater, a year older and a little stronger, a little heavier," Yzerman said. "He's just getting used to playing against NHL players. He did very well in the preseason, and we're very anxious to see how he does in the regular season."

Brett Connolly and Richard Panik made the team, as expected, as both would have to clear waivers to get sent down; both had their best camps with the Lightning, making the decision easy.

If Morrow is ready Thursday, Namestnikov or defenseman Andrej Sustr can be sent down without having to go through waivers. No players were put on waivers by Monday's noon deadline, Yzerman said.

Though Marchessault, Paquette and Witkowski got cut, they impressed in camp. "They're not far away," Yzerman said. "They're a phone call away."

As of now, the roster includes forwards Steven Stamkos, Tyler Johnson, Ondrej Palat, Ryan Callahan, Valtteri Filppula, Alex Killorn, Brian Boyle, J.T. Brown, Namestnikov, Kucherov, Connolly, Panik. On defense, it'll be Victor Hedman, Anton Stralman, Jason Garrison, Radko Gudas, Matt Carle, Eric Brewer, Sustr and Mark Barberio. Ben Bishop and Evgeni Nabokov are the goalies. Morrow will be on roster if he's healthy.

"I like our mindset," Cooper said. "I like our players. I like our compete and like the way they've progressively played in the preseason. I'm happy. I like what we have going. I've got a good feeling about our group and a big part of that is how all the new guys have seamlessly fit in and that really helped the process."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 10.07.2014
Believe it or not, the Toronto Maple Leafs won’t have an enforcer to start the season.

The Leafs made the last step toward their final cuts on Monday morning, putting Colton Orr, Frazer McLaren and Korbinian Holzer on waivers for the purpose of re-assignment to the minors.

They also reassigned 2014 first-rounder William Nylander back to Sweden for the season.

Those cuts will leave the Leafs with 24 players on the roster, with the team able to get down under the 23-man roster limit by placing David Booth and his broken foot on injured reserve.

The most significant aspect of the moves, however, was the fact Toronto coach Randy Carlyle ditched both of his fighters in Orr and McLaren, who have been mainstays on the worst fourth line in hockey for the last two years.

Instead, young players like Brandon Kozun and Carter Ashton have stuck with the team.

Those decisions came out of an internal battle brought on by a summer filled with changes, with new president Brendan Shanahan helping spearhead a push for more skill throughout the Leafs lineup.

“We wanted to get to Wednesday and beyond with the team that gave us the best chance of winning,” Leafs GM Dave Nonis said. “It doesn’t mean that Frazer or Colton won’t be with us at some time during the year. We made a statement early on [in camp] that if certain players played well enough to make the team, then we would have to make room for them.”

“Some people have stepped to the front of the line,” Carlyle said. “There were some tough decisions… but we felt that we would be best suited to go in this direction.”

Nonis added that the Leafs want to get down to 22 players by Wednesday, in large part due to cap reasons. That’s likely bad news for rookie Josh Leivo, who had a good camp but was in tough due to all of the competition for roster spots.

The day’s other surprise involved rookie defenceman Stuart Percy making the final cut. With Cody Franson unlikely to be ready for Wednesday’s opener against Montreal because of a knee injury, Percy is expected to start the season in the NHL after beating out Holzer for the final spot on the blueline.

Percy has been lining up alongside Roman Polak on Toronto’s third pair of late.

Given all of the expected machinations, here’s how the Leafs roster will likely look for opening night:

JVR – Bozak – Kessel
Lupul – Kadri – Kozun
Winnik – Holland – Frattin
Komarov – Santorelli – Clarkson
Phaneuf – Robidas
Gardiner – Rielly
Percy – Polak
Bernier
Reimer

Extra: Ashton, Booth (IR), Franson

Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.07.2014
Tiger Williams pulls no punches on Leafs’ enforcer cuts: Feschuk  
By: Dave Feschuk Sports Columnist, Published on Mon Oct 06 2014

Tiger Williams, barking over the phone from northern British Columbia, sounded apoplectic.

“You’ve got to have a Colton Orr around,” Williams was saying. “I love Colton Orr.”

Williams, who enjoyed a star turn as a beloved Maple Leafs enforcer in the 1970s, was speaking after he’d heard Monday’s news out of Toronto that both of the team’s present-day tough guys, Orr and Frazer McLaren, had been cut from the opening-night roster to make room for younger, more skilled players.

It was a seismic revelation for some. Broad Street may have made hockey bullies famous, but Bay Street has always loved its fistic furies. It was a little less than 40 years ago that Williams was called up from the minors and promptly shattered the Maple Leafs franchise record for penalty minutes in a season. The franchise has scarcely gone without an accomplished bruiser since.

But hockey’s changing. In a copy-cat league, it’s been duly noted that the Stanley Cup champion L.A. Kings found success rolling four lines loaded with speed and skill. Now that the Kings and Chicago Blackhawks and others have resisted the age-old urge to stock the bottom of the lineup with a little-used lightweight — now that their strength-in-depth approach has been shown to reduce the wear and tear on top-line talent — players known primarily for pugilistic talent aren’t having an easy time finding work.

Williams, who has spent more time in an NHL penalty box than anyone, is of the belief the trend is a mistake.

“Here’s my question to everyone in the hockey world: Can that guy you keep (instead of an enforcer) change the game? Can that guy tell his teammates, ‘I’ve got your back, no matter what?’ I don’t think so,” Williams, 60, said. “To me, it’s an arsenal you need.”

The Leafs decided they’re more in need of the likes of Carter Ashton and Brandon Kozun, the latter a speedy, quick-handed Californian who is listed at five-foot-eight.

Certainly the decision went against everything Randy Carlyle, the Toronto head coach, has espoused about the necessity of the bloody-listed arts. Carlyle has often credited his most successful moments in Toronto — specifically a playoff run in the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season that saw the Leafs lead the league in fighting majors — to his team’s black-and-blue identity. If the banishment of Orr and McLaren to the waiver wire looked suspiciously like the work of the new voices on the management team led by team president Brendan Shanahan, Carlyle sounded as though he couldn’t wait for the theoretical opportunity to recall one of Orr and McLaren from the AHL Marlies, should they clear waivers and be assigned there on Tuesday.

“I don’t think it’s a philosophical change,” Carlyle said of what looked an awful lot like a philosophical change. “Because (Orr and McLaren) aren’t on our list today doesn’t mean they won’t be on our list Friday or Saturday or the day after.”

Williams, absorbing all this information from across a continent, said it reminded him of a hunting trip he took with former Vancouver Canucks GM Mike Gillis on the eve of the 2010-11 season that would conclude with the Canucks being manhandled by the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup final.

“We were hunting together and I told him, ‘Mike, you’ve got to go get yourself a tough guy. Do it no matter what.’ And he told me he disagreed with me. I said, ‘It’s going to bite you in the ass, man.’ And it did . . . They lost to Boston because they got bullied. That’s the only reason they lost.”

On Monday the Leafs insisted they won’t be pushed around by anyone. Nonis spoke of the importance of having a “pack mentality,” wherein any number of players can drop the gloves if necessary. David Clarkson is a candidate for those duties, as are the likes of Dion Phaneuf and Joffrey Lupul and Ashton. The list goes on.

Williams, over the phone connection from Prince George, B.C., cackled a little when this theory was relayed to him.
Leafs ship William Nylander to Sweden to 'get stronger'

By: Mark Zwolinski Sports reporter, Published on Mon Oct 06 2014

William Nylander was among the four cuts at Leafs camp Monday, a disappointing result for the 18-year-old but one he can almost certainly reverse.

“When I talked to him, I said his focus should be on getting stronger,” Leafs coach Randy Carlyle said about his meeting with Nylander, drafted eighth overall in June.

“Do an inventory of what you accomplished here (in training camp) . . . you showed you can play at an NHL pace in exhibition season, but you need to get stronger. Don’t go back and expect things will be easy. He kept up with the pace here, but he had opportunities — three of four breakaways — and didn’t score. We want him to get stronger and come back and play on this team.”

Nylander said he will return to the Swedish Elite League and play for his former club, Modo. The challenge is clear.

The Leafs see him playing key minutes under highly regarded coach Anders Forsberg. Nylander is also expected to represent his country at the world junior championship, set for Toronto and Montreal after Christmas, and Sweden’s early games will all be in T.O. The Leafs may reassess his status at that time.

“He’s going to play in a man’s league (in Sweden),” Nonis said. “We felt that he’s going to a team that’s got a high-end coach where they need him. He’s going to get a lot of minutes . . . he’s going to be put in key situations, and for his development we felt that would be the best place for him. We’re going to hopefully see him here around Christmas. You can expect him to be a key guy on the world junior team.”

While many NHL teams are going younger and cheaper, it appears the number of 18-year-olds on opening night will be low. With Nylander gone, only three teens are still in line for NHL employment: Florida’s Aaron Ekblad, Edmonton’s Leon Draisaitl and Buffalo’s Sam Reinhart.

Defenceman Viktor Loov is expected to join Nylander at Modo. The Leafs had hoped the Swedish club would waive Loov’s rights, but Nonis said Monday that didn’t happen.

Nylander entered camp with more muscle and tone than anticipated, but he agreed with the notion that strength, grit and scoring polish are areas where he needs work.

“I feel myself — and they feel the same way — I need to get stronger,” said Nylander, who had a goal and an assist in six exhibition games. “My goal is to go back to Sweden and work hard and be back with this team next year.”

Also Monday, there was a changing of the guard with Leaf enforcers Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren placed on 24-hour waivers for the purpose of joining the AHL Marlies. Defenceman Korbinian Holzer was also waived for the same reason. The Leafs were down to 25 players and must have no more than 23 by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Here’s the way the Leafs lined up at practice: Phil Kessel with Tyler Bozak and James van Riemsdyk; Nazem Kadri between Joffrey Lupul and Brandon Kozun; Peter Holland centring Daniel Winnik and Matt Frattin; and Mike Santorelli between Leo Komarov and David Clarkson.

The defense pairings had Stuart Percy with Roman Polak, Dion Phaneuf alongside Stephane Robidas and Jake Gardiner with Morgan Reilly.

Both Cody Franson (knee) and Josh Leivo (foot) left practice Monday and are considered doubtful for Wednesday’s opener. David Booth (broken foot) was placed on long-term injured reserve.
Rookie Percy impresses Maple Leafs, closes in on NHL job

By: Mark Zwolinski Sports reporter, Published on Mon Oct 06 2014

Stuart Percy — like all rookies who are facing final cuts in NHL camps right now — couldn’t help fighting a nervous feeling over the past few days.

At Leafs practice Monday, the talented 21-year-old defenceman was still in NHL camp, paired with Roman Polak, and all but assured a season-opening roster berth, with Cody Franson’s injured knee leaving him unavailable for Wednesday’s opener against Montreal.

Still, Percy, while on the verge of his first NHL job and completing a lifelong dream, could take absolutely nothing for granted.

“I think you just come in and practice your hardest; come in and do that every day and hope for the best,” Percy said.

Percy’s camp was markedly better from a year ago. He’d risen in the junior ranks, captaining Mississauga in the OHL and grabbing status as one of the very best junior-aged defenceman in the world. He stood out with the Marlies last season and took another essential step, performing during this camp at a level Leafs management didn’t expect, according to GM Dave Nonis.

While that buoyed Percy, he still faced the uncertainty of those final roster decisions.

His approach was going back to his roots, literally.

“I went home to Oakville Saturday and for a bit Sunday,” Percy said about visiting his parents back home.

“I had dinner with my mom. We had steak and potatoes, just a little good home cooking,” he said. “You try to remember where you came from and you’re grateful for everything you have and what you’ve done. Sometimes you need to relax and just be thankful for everything.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.07.2014
Maple Leafs’ ACC experience gets overhaul for opening night

By Kevin McGran Sports Reporter, Published on Mon Oct 06 2014

For a building as big as the Air Canada Centre and a Maple Leafs fan base that is so rabid about its team, the in-game experience has sure been quiet since, oh, time immemorial.

But that’s about to change.

The Leafs have made some significant changes to the ACC since Shanahan was hired. The biggest change is a $1.5-million investment in over-the-ice projectors that will use the surface as a screen. Nine NHL teams already have this, including Wednesday night’s visitors, the Montreal Canadiens, and the Halifax Mooseheads of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

The projector can show the rink’s surface in near 3D — lines getting painted, water flowing in, ice forming. At one point, shards of ice flow by, each with its own Leaf vignette. The Maple Leaf logo is meticulously stitched together. And, of course, there are lots of shots of players, goals and hits.

The sky camera is set up for games.

The sky camera is set up for games.

Steve Russell/Toronto Star

“The game experience has sure been quiet, the tunes will be cranked up. Music won’t interrupt — maybe a drumbeat to keep it going. If the crowd is quiet, the tunes will be cranked up,” said Reid James, game operations manager.

“We want to be real strategic with what music we play when,” said Reid Black, senior director of marketing for the Leafs and Marlies. “The best game presentation is where the crowd takes over. If you look at soccer in the English Premier League, game presentation is just the crowd noise. We would love to get to that point.”

Some old elements will return. Wednesday’s anthem will be sung by the fans, for example, typical when the opposition is a Canadian team.

Next season, a new over-the-ice JumboTron will be unveiled with four equal sides, giving fans the same experience no matter where they sit.

The new in-game host, Lauren Howe, will do less corporate shilling, although one corporation in particular will get a lot of positive in-game play. Automaker Ford is giving 200 fans per game the chance to sit in their own section, as some under-used corporate suites have been turned back into a kind of grandstand. These promise to be the loudest fans and will probably be featured a lot.

They have to audition for the free tickets, though. There is a travelling Maple Leaf — a big, oversized logo — making its way around the busiest parts of town with a camera and computer algorithm. Fans can approach the logo and cheer into the camera and microphone. After that the algorithm — dubbed the “spirit meter” — rates the cheer for quality and volume and a box opens, with a prize inside. Sometimes it will be a T-shirt, sometimes Marlies tickets, and for the craziest fans it will be tickets to the Ford Fan Deck. No doubt video of the winning auditions will be shown during the game.

Pre-game and in-game music will go with the flow, reviewed every six or seven games. Game-operations people say they’ll tailor it to the crowd’s mood. If the place is loud and boisterous and chanting “Go Leafs Go!” the music won’t interrupt — maybe a drumbeat to keep it going. If the crowd is quiet, the tunes will be cranked up.

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Toronto Star LOADED: 10.07.2014
The Maple Leafs say they will approach team toughness with a “pack mentality” now that they’ve placed enforcers Colton Orr and Fraser McLaren on waivers.

“My feeling is fighting is part of the game, everyone says Detroit doesn’t fight. Well, they do, they have fights and we have to have a pack mentality regardless of whether (Orr and McLaren) are in the lineup,” Leafs GM Dave Nonis said as the club trimmed four players from its roster Monday morning.

Toronto placed its two enforcers, as well as defenceman Korbinian Holzer, on waivers for the purpose of sending them to the Marlies. All three players have 24 hours to clear, or be claimed by another team.

The Leafs also told 18-year-old first-round pick William Nylander he wasn’t going to make the club.

“When I talked to him, I said his focus should be on getting stronger,” Leafs coach Randy Carlyle said about his meeting with Nylander.

“Do an inventory of what you accomplished here (in training camp) . . . you showed you can play at an NHL pace in exhibition season, but you need to get stronger. Don’t go back and expect things will be easy. He kept up with the pace here but he had opportunities — three or four breakaways, and didn’t score. We want him to get stronger and come back and play on this team.”

Sports videos

Nylander said he will return to the Swedish Elite League and play for his former club in Modo.

“My goal is to come back here next year and play for this team,” said Nylander, who was clearly disappointed at the decision.

With Modo, he’ll play under highly regarded coach Anders Forsberg. The teenager is expected to represent his country in the world junior championships — Sweden’s initial games are all in Toronto — and could return to the Leafs, depending on his performance and the status of Toronto’s roster at that time.

The cuts Monday left the Leafs with 25 players remaining in camp. Nonis must reduce that number to the 23 man limit — and be cap compliant (payroll at or under $69 million) by Tuesday at 5 p.m.

There were smiles all around for camp standout Brandon Kozun, who has made his first NHL roster and will play in his first career NHL game Wednesday.

Defenceman Stuart Percy also appears to have made the Leafs season opening roster, given that regular blueliner Cody Franson is injured (knee) and is not ready to start the season.

Josh Leivo, another camp standout, left practice Monday, still nursing a bruised foot from a blocked shot last week. That leaves the door open for bubble players Carter Ashton and Matt Frattin.

The Leafs lines in practice llows:

Kessel-Bozak-Van Riemsdyk
Lupul-Kadri-Kozun
Winnik-Holland-Frattin
Komarov-Santorelli-Clarkson
Ashton was the lone extra, though he worked onto a line with Winnik and Frattin.

On defence, Percy paired with Roman Polak, Dion Phaneuf with Stephane Robidas, and Jake Gardiner with Morgan Reilly.

The buzz after the cuts centred on the Leafs apparent departure from carrying an enforcer-type player, at least to start the season. It was called a dramatic change in team philosophy — the club made no secret of carrying an enforcer (Orr) ever since Brian Burke took over the GM reins, and this marks the first season opener a true enforcer type is not on the roster.

“We have to have a pack mentality regardless of whether Orr or McLaren are in the lineup,” Nonis said. “We have to stick up for each other and stick together, and figure out a way to support each other.”

Orr and McLaren accounted for 15 of the NHL leading 48 fights the Leafs were in last season. Clarkson, Lupul and Phaneuf all combined for another 15.

“I don’t think its a shift in philosophy,” Nonis said. “Like I said, we have to figure a way out to support each other.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.07.2014
Toronto Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle takes ‘mind-boggling’ step in a new direction

Michael Traikos | October 6, 2014 4:15 PM ET

TORONTO — William Nylander is going back to Sweden. And he is not going alone.

The Toronto Maple Leafs eighth-overall draft pick, who scored one goal and one assist in six exhibition games, was cut from the team on Monday. He said he intends to re-sign with Modo, the team he played for last season. General manager Dave Nonis said defenceman Viktor Loov would likely be returning as well.

Read more...

I thought the Toronto Maple Leafs head coach was too stubborn, too old school and frankly too afraid to change with the times. When Carlyle said last week that, “We don’t want to fear going into any building, because players can’t play with fear,” I believed he meant that there would always be a place on the roster for a player like Colton Orr. Almost everyone did.

But then the Leafs placed Orr and Frazer McLaren on waivers on Monday and everything changed. For the first time in Carlyle’s coaching career, a so-called enforcer will not be taking up space in the middle of the bench. Instead, that spot has now been given to 5-foot-8 Brandon Kozun as positive possession numbers have replaced pugnacity, belligerence and whatever words Brian Burke once used to define a successful hockey team.

To steal a phrase from Carlyle, it is a “mind-boggling” advancement.

It makes you wonder if the 58-year-old can change his stance on the role of the fourth-line enforcer, what else might he be willing to change?

Will Tyler Bozak, a black hole when it comes to possession-based stats, be moved off the top line? Will the young kids, who Carlyle typically did not trust for meaningful minutes, play more? If so, maybe there is hope for this team after all.

Then again, Carlyle did not sound like he had turned into a pacifist overnight. The same coach who employed George Parros for six years in Anaheim and then rescued Orr from minor-league exile, sounded more like someone who had been strong-armed into making a decision that he did not necessarily want to make.

“I talked to [Orr] and the message is you’re here. You’re not here today, but who knows what the next 24 hours brings,” Carlyle said. “I don’t think it’s a philosophical change. Again, we feel that we have to be team tough. Because those players aren’t on our list today doesn’t mean that they won’t be on our list Friday or Saturday or the day after or whatever.”

So Orr has probably not punched his last face in the NHL. But for now, it is a step in a new direction.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/Darryl Dyck

Heading into this season, the main gripe was despite all the changes in the front office, behind the bench and on the ice, nothing had really changed.

Carlyle was still the head coach and Dave Nonis was still the general manager and Dion Phaneuf was still the captain of the same core group that failed miserably last season.

Well, it appears that is not entirely true. From allowing Kozun to win a roster spot ahead of Orr and McLaren — who combined for 16 fights but not a single point last season — to adopting a new defensive system built around winning control of the neutral zone, the Leafs are trying to do things differently than they did last year.

It does not mean they will not drop the gloves. In fact, David Clarkson was tied with a team-leading nine fighting majors last season — three more than Orr — while Joffrey Lupul fought four times and Carter Ashton and Roman Polak each had three fights.

“My feeling on fighting is it is part of the game. It’s going to happen,” Nonis said Monday. “As I said to some people yesterday, the Detroit Red Wings get into fights. Everyone says they don’t, but they do … we have to have a pack mentality that regardless of whether or not Colton or Frazer is in the lineup, as a group we have to stick together.”

What Nonis failed to mention is that the Red Wings fought a league-low seven times last season — or two fewer times than McLaren did by himself. The Leafs, meanwhile, led the NHL with 48 fights. That may or may not change depending on Monday’s developments.

On paper, this is not a great team. The Leafs cannot get by with skill and skill alone. It will have to grind out wins, fight for every square-inch of ice and get lucky to make the playoffs. At the same time, Nonis said the team has more depth than it did a year ago. The fourth line, which looks more like a third line, is proof of that.

It is not necessarily about moving away from fighting. It is about trying to put together a lineup that gives the team the best chance of winning. “We made a statement earlier on that if certain players played well enough to make our team we would have to make room for them,” he said. The end result is Clarkson will probably start the season on the third line regardless of how much money he is earning, while Orr and McLaren were placed on waivers.

To some, it might look as though team president Brendan Shanahan is pulling the strings and getting Carlyle to do things that he normally would not do. Maybe there’s some truth to that. Then again, it could also be a head coach who understands he is very much on the hot seat.

And desperate times call for desperate measures.

National Post LOADED: 10.07.2014
Jarred Tinordi will likely be kept as the seventh defenceman. 

Canadiens’ Jarred Tinordi makes the cut; Francis Bouillon looks for a new team 

Francis Bouillon’s bid for another season with the Montreal Canadiens is over. 

Previewing Canada’s teams in the East 

The best reason for optimism among the Canadian teams in the Eastern Conference is the fact they are in the East. 

While the deep West includes brutes like Los Angeles, Chicago and San Jose, with skill and size to spare, only Boston is a consistent bully on the right half of the map. And the Bruins have proven vulnerable in the playoffs. 

Talented teams like Pittsburgh and Washington are starting with new coaches this year, while Tampa is still trying to figure out how much it will miss Martin St. Louis. 

Read more… 

The veteran defenceman who was a favourite of coach Michel Therrien dating to their junior days in the 1990s was told Monday he would not be offered a contract after attending training camp on a tryout. 

The five-foot-eight 195-pound Bouillon, who will turn 39 on Oct. 17, learned his fate at an emotional meeting with Therrien and general manager Marc Bergevin. 

The New York native who grew up in Quebec City hopes to find another NHL club and will consider going to Europe to continue his playing career. 

"I was ready for both situations,” he said, adding that he may have regretted it in the future if he didn’t take one last crack at staying on in Montreal. 

The Canadiens look ready to start the season with youngsters Nathan Beaulieu and Jarred Tinordi on the blue-line. Beaulieu is expected to play on the third defence pair, while Tinordi will likely be kept as the seventh defenceman. 

Bergevin said it was time for the young rearguards, who both spent most of last season at AHL Hamilton, to become full-time NHL players. 

Leafs say goodbye to their enforcers and ‘see you soon’ to William Nylander 

The Toronto Maple Leafs have placed Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren on waivers, who both played on the blue lines in the past, as a result of the youth movement from Leon Draisaitl to Darnell Nurse. 

The Leafs also announced Monday that they had assigned defenceman Tyler Wotherspoon to the Adirondack Flames of the American Hockey League. 

Wotherspoon, 21, had four assists and four penalty minutes in 14 games with Calgary last year. 

Flames sign defenceman Diaz to one-year contract, assign Wotherspoon to AHL 

The Calgary Flames signed defenceman Raphael Diaz to a one-year contract on Monday. 

Diaz has six goals and 39 assists along with 52 penalty minutes through 145 games in the National Hockey League. He has also played nine NHL playoff games. 

The 28-year-old had two goals and 13 assists in 63 games with three teams — the Montreal Canadiens, Vancouver Canucks and New York Rangers — last season. 

The Flames also announced Monday that they had assigned defenceman Tyler Wotherspoon to the Adirondack Flames of the American Hockey League. 

Wotherspoon, 21, had four assists and four penalty minutes in 14 games with Calgary last year. 

Edmonton Oilers keep Leon Draisaitl, Darnell Nurse on opening-night roster 

The Edmonton Oilers youth movement continues with 18-year-old Leon Draisaitl, this year’s third overall draft pick, and 19-year-old Darnell Nurse making this year’s opening-night lineup. 

Draisaitl will slot into the no. 2 centre role, while the Oilers will continue to evaluate Nurse while he plays the nine allowed NHL games before his entry-level contract kicks in with the 10th. The Oilers, then, will have to make a decision whether to keep him with the club or send him down to Sault Ste Marie Greyhounds. 

The Oilers make other moves, including sending defenceman Martin Marincin and wingers Steve Pinizzotto and Tyler Pitlick to their American Hockey League farm club in Oklahoma City. 

Anton Lander and veteran defenceman Keith Aulie were also sent down.
Toronto Maple Leafs draft pick William Nylander headed back to Sweden: ‘I need to get stronger’

TORONTO — William Nylander is going back to Sweden. And he is not going alone.

Leafs’ Leo Komarov is a pretty good pianist

The Toronto Maple Leafs eighth-overall draft pick, who scored one goal and one assist in six exhibition games, was cut from the team on Monday. He said he intends to re-sign with Modo, the team he played for last season. General manager Dave Nonis said defenceman Viktor Loov would likely be returning as well.

“He’s going to play in a man’s league,” Nonis said of Nylander. “We felt that he’s going to a team that’s got a high-end coach where they need him. He’s going to get a lot of minutes, he’s going to be put in a lot of key situations and for his development we felt that was the best place for him.

“We’re going to hopefully see him here around Christmas. You would expect him to be a key guy on the world junior team.”

That Nylander failed to make the Leafs is not surprising. That he is returning to Sweden rather than play for the Toronto Marlies is interesting.

Had Nylander played in the American Hockey League, the Leafs would have had the option of calling him up during the season. But it appears the team did not want that temptation or did not believe the minors were the right place for him to develop. While head coach Randy Carlyle said the 18-year-old showed “a skill-set to play in the NHL,” he still lacks strength and maturity.

In Sweden, where the schedule is lighter and the game is less physical, Nylander will get an opportunity to continue to work on his skills and bulk up his 6-foot, 185-pound frame.

“We’ve seen guys go back to Sweden for one or two years and come back more NHL ready,” Nonis said. “We just felt that was the best spot for him.”

Aside from the top three selections in the 2014 draft — Florida’s Aaron Ekblad, Buffalo’s Sam Reinhart and Edmonton’s Leon Draisaitl — it appears that no other pick from this year’s draft will be sticking with their NHL team.

“My goal is to be back here next year,” said Nylander, who scored one goal and seven points in 22 games for Modo last season. “Go back to Sweden, work harder every day and hopefully be back here next year.”

Loov’s situation is a bit different. The Leafs wanted the 21-year-old defenceman, who was selected in the seventh round of the 2012 draft, to play for the Marlies and continue to develop his physical game. But because he is still under contract, it was up to Modo to decide whether or not to release him.

As of Monday, Nonis said that was unlikely to happen.

“We think that Viktor Loov has the ability to play in the American Hockey League and that would be a better development course for him than going back and playing in Sweden, because he’s more of a North American style of player.” Carlyle said last weekend. “He’s a rough-and-tumble [defenceman].”

Tyler Anderson/National Post

National Post LOADED: 10.07.2014
The gloves are staying on.

Undersized forward Brandon Kozun could bring ‘element of speed’ to Leafs’ new-look fourth line.

For the first time since Randy Carlyle took over as the head coach two years ago, the Toronto Maple Leafs will not enter the season with a so-called enforcer.

On Monday, the team placed Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren on waivers with the purpose of assigning them to the minors. Instead, the Leafs decided to keep forwards Carter Ashton, Josh Leivo and Brandon Kozun, but also placed Korbinian Holzer on waivers and is still deciding to re-assign William Nylander to either Sweden or the Toronto Marlies.

The team is now down to 25 players — David Booth is injured and Viktor Loov is in the process of joining the Marlies — ahead of Tuesday’s 5 p.m. deadline for submitting a final 23-man roster.

The decision to waive Orr and McLaren comes after Carlyle suggested having an enforcer in the lineup was essential for the safety of the other players.

“We don’t want to fear going into any building, because players can’t play with fear,” said Carlyle. “They won’t reach their potential with fear. But if your team is prepared, usually your reputation arrives before you do when you come to the rink. There’s varying degrees of toughness. We’re going to do an assessment on what we feel is best for our hockey club that is going to give us a chance to compete in every building we go into.”

Orr (six fights) and McLaren (nine fights) combined for 13 fighting majors last season, but neither recorded a point.

With both gone, David Clarkson would appear to be Toronto’s new enforcer, although it is more likely that the Leafs will take a team approach to defending themselves. The highly-paid, third-line winger tied for the team lead with nine fights times last season and had his orbital bone broken in a pre-season game this year.

THE CANADIAN PRESS/Chris Young

As well, Joffrey Lupul fought four times and Carter Ashton and Roman Polak each had three fights.

With two more days before the start of the season, here is the projected lineup:

Forwards
James van Riemsdyk – Tyler Bozak – Phil Kessel
Joffrey Lupul – Nazem Kadri – Brandon Kozun
Leo Komarov – Mike Santorelli – David Clarkson
Daniel Winnik – Peter Holland – Matt Frattin
X – Josh Leivo, Carter Ashton
Defenceman
Dion Phaneuf – Stephane Robidas
Jake Gardiner – Roman Polak
Morgan Rielly – Cody Franson
X- Stuart Percy
Goaltenders
Jonathan Bernier
James Reimer

National Post LOADED: 10.07.2014
The gradual whittling of his Capitals roster close to an end, Coach Barry Trotz fielded a lineup Sunday afternoon roughly representative of what will appear in the season opener later this week.

"You saw the lines today," he said later, after Washington bludgeoned visiting Carolina, 5-2. "That's probably the way we'll start."

Save several minor last-second tweaks and the possible returns of players battling injuries, those who skated at Verizon Center will skate again Thursday, when the Montreal Canadiens come to town, and likely in similar combinations to those seen against the Hurricanes:

On the top line, from left to right: Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, Eric Fehr.

Second line: Marcus Johansson, Andre Burakovsky, Troy Brouwer.

Third line: Jason Chimera, Brooks Laich, Joel Ward.

Fourth line: Liam O'Brien, Evgeny Kuznetsov, Chris Brown.

"It was probably the closest we've had to a full lineup," Brooks Orpik said. "We've got a few guys still banged up. That's usually the case all throughout the season. You could see a little more chemistry tonight, little more comfort as opposed to the previous games."

Given Michael Latta's strong preseason, and the emergence of both Burakovsky and Laich as better center options, Kuznetsov could very well start the season on the fourth line beside Latta and Brown, though who plays center might be up in the air. Both Kuznetsov and Johansson, pushed aside from the second-line center battles, saved their best performances of the preseason for last; Johansson was aggressive at even strength; Kuznetsov scored Washington's first goal.

"I think both play a quick, cerebral style," Trotz said. 'I think they were moving pretty good. I was hoping to get some chemistry. They both had lots of juice in the game."

The top-four defensive pairings are similarly set – Matt Niskanen with Karl Alzner, John Carlson with Orpik – though four players are battling for the final two roster spots, assuming Mike Green (upper body) returns for the opener. Steve Oleksy and John Erskine were both scratched against Carolina, with Nate Schmidt and Jack Hillen playing roughly 18 minutes each.

"Yeah, he's pretty close," Trotz said of Green. "That's one of the tweaks we may have to make. I'll have a real clear picture the next couple days, let you guys know the night before."

Assuming the Capitals have 22 healthy bodies on their Thursday roster, one short of the NHL's minimum, that would leave room for forward Jay Beagle (upper body) to stay off injured reserve while he gets healthy. It seems unlikely training camp standout Liam O'Brien will make the opening day roster, but Trotz didn't rule out the free agent signing a contract with the organization, leaving that decision up to management.

"He's a player that's demanded to be noticed," Trotz said.

Tom Wilson, Dmitry Orlov and Aaron Volpatti, on the other hand, will likely begin the season either on injured reserve (seven days) or long-term injured reserve (10 games and 24 days, per the latest collective bargaining agreement), leaving bigger decisions for Trotz and his staff ahead.

For one afternoon, before a half-filled arena frothing for the regular season, the Capitals put forth their most complete offensive exhibition effort, backed by four even-strength and one shorthanded goals. The penalty kill – two goals allowed — and discipline – 10 penalties – leaves much to be desired, but at least the Capitals finally familiarized themselves with what will be expected later this week.

"We're starting to create a family with our group and they're very accountable to each other," Trotz said. "Just like any family, you're not always going to be on the same page in terms of agreeing with your brothers and sisters. You still love them, but you may not agree with them all the time. Other than that, I think we've made good strides. We have lots of work to do to get where we want to be, but the foundation's starting to be laid there. If you don't have a foundation, it'll crumble."
'Lazy stick penalties' giving Capitals too much shorthanded time

By Alex Prewitt

October 6 at 10:23 AM

The captain came charging toward the boards, hard at Eric Staal, carrying payback Staal had launched himself at John Carlson, checking the Capitals defenseman behind the Washington net, so Alex Ovechkin took umbrage. Try handling 230 pounds of a steamrolling Ovechkin. You might end up like Staal did, pounded into the glass then down onto the ice.

"Absolutely that was the right thing for Ovi to do," Coach Barry Trotz said. "That showed leadership. That was all about team. The Carolina player cross-checked our guy. Wasn’t necessary and Ovi jumped in. I’m all for that. That shows great leadership and great unity."

For that aggression in a 5-2 victory Sunday afternoon, Ovechkin was escorted into the penalty box, two minutes for charging and two minutes for roughing. And so the Capitals headed to another penalty kill, the ninth power play offered to Carolina on Sunday night.

"We'll kill those off all day long," Trotz said.

The other Capitals penalties? Not so much. The Capitals were whistled twice for hooking, once for holding, once for tripping, once for slashing, once for interference, once for too many men on the ice and, because Nicklas Backstrom happened to fall down, two minutes for "closing hand on puck."

"Lazy stick penalties," is how defenseman Brooks Orpik described them, the kind the Capitals have committed in spades this preseason, the kind that has given their penalty kill unit the drilling it desperately deserved.

"Way too many penalties and unnecessary," Trotz said. "We talked about that. We need to be way more disciplined. Guys had good intentions all night. They were playing the right way, other than the penalties. But it was good from a penalty kill standpoint, to get some more reps. So there was some benefit to the penalties. But I'd rather not. It puts people at risk."

Risk, Trotz elaborated, by blocking pucks in traffic, a key element of Washington's new penalty kill system. Versus Carolina and their 14-plus minutes of power play, the clear penalty kill lines formed. Orpik logged nearly seven minutes; Carlson, 6:31. Brooks Laich and Matt Niskanen hovered above five minutes apiece, while Joel Ward and Karl Alzner tallied in the 4s.

Both Hurricanes goals came on the power play: First, an unmarked Jiří Tlusty poked home a rebound and, in third period garbage time, John-Michael Liles fired a high wrist shot through a jungle of bodies which snuck past Braden Holtby's glove. But for Laich, everything traced back to the penalties committed, and not how the Capitals set about killing them.

"I don’t think we can take as many penalties as we do," he said. "I think that’s something we have to have pride in. I think our faceoffs on the PK need to be better … There’s still a few breakdowns that we’ve had, come with certain transfers, when a player’s supposed to continue with his speed and the weakside forward fall underneath him, clean those areas up. For the most part I think our guys have done a good job. It's a new system from last year, so there are going to be a few wrinkles in there, but I thought our guys have done a pretty good job grasping it."

But how do the Capitals stop taking penalties? Is it as simple as, "Just don’t do it?"

"Yeah they call it a little bit tighter at the beginning the year and... probably shouldn’t say this...it seems to fade as the season goes on," Orpik said. "Just discipline amongst ourselves. I think we've all been guilty of it at some point during the preseason. Just something we have to clean up."

The Capitals placed defenseman Steven Oleksy onto waivers Monday afternoon, gambling the 28-year-old will clear in exchange for further clarity on their blue line.

Following their preseason finale Sunday against Carolina, Washington had four defensemen vying for two open roster spots, according to the parameters Coach Barry Trotz put forth: Oleksy, Nate Schmidt, John Erskine and Jack Hillen. Both Erskine and Oleksy were healthy scratches for the game. Of the group, Schmidt is the only waiver-exempt player, and all indications point to him heading to Hershey to begin the season, free to shuttle between the AHL and Capitals without consequence.

Oleksy, on the other hand, must clear the 24-hour waiver period — his price is $67,500, highest among the 19 players put onto waivers Monday — to report to the Bears. He did as much this January, when the Capitals demoted him in exchange for goaltender Philipp Grubauer.

With the regular season approaching, would any team have use for a scrappy defenseman with 61 career games of NHL experience over the past two seasons? Oleksy will enter unrestricted free agency this season and carries a cap hit of just $541,667, a bargain for a blue-liner whose 1.38 points-per-60 led all Capitals defensemen with at least 400 minutes last season. Oleksy also fought twice this preseason, hoping to further distinguish himself and earning praise from his coaches.

“Steve Oleksy, you look at him, you know he’s got your back,” Coach Barry Trotz said. “There’s no question. That’s undeniable, just watching him in a practice. Those are the guys that can make it on pure character and they’re still good players, but you’ve got to separate a guy who has so much character from someone with maybe less. You want that guy for sure. That’s the guy in the room, everyone recognizes the character and the type of team person that he is.”

With Oleksy out, the Capitals have but two cuts to make. Assuming Schmidt heads to Hershey, that leaves the final forward spot. Long-term injuries to Aaron Volpatti and Tom Wilson, not to mention the nagging upper-body issue of Jay Beagle, would open room for Michael Latta and Chris Brown, but it seems unlikely the Capitals would currently have space to keep Liam O’Brien too. That said, a source with knowledge indicated that Washington has entered contract discussions with O’Brien’s camp, though the source was unsure whether it would result in an AHL-only deal or a two-way deal, thereby allowing O’Brien the option of debuting in the NHL.

As for Oleksy, his fate will be known by noon on Tuesday.
Alex Ovechkin’s date arrived sporting her Alex Ovechkin jersey, size small-medium, and carrying her Alex Ovechkin puck, which she used to prove how the color of Alex Ovechkin’s hair had changed from black to gray. "I’m the mascot, Slapshot," is how she introduced herself, though on other days she might say something different, just for fun.

Her father, Lou, also wearing his Alex Ovechkin jersey, stood off to the side and explained that her real name is Ann Schaab, age 10, and how she has both Down syndrome and a massive crush on the Capitals captain. "I think I’m going to marry him," Ann had said, but she now wondered if the proposal would have to wait. She had come here Sunday morning, on the ninth anniversary of Ovechkin’s NHL debut, by invitation, having skated with Ovechkin at an event several weeks back. She came with the Washington Ice Dogs, a team for developmentally disabled individuals, and once, when an Ovechkin pass found her stick, Ann skated over and invited him to her house, proposing to eat sushi and play kickball.

Many years ago, when Ovechkin was still new to the National Hockey League, Ann’s brother, who has spinal bifida, was cheering at a Capitals game near the luxury suites and got invited inside one by Capitals owner Ted Leonsis. Later that night, Ovechkin gave young Louie, now 19, a stick, which made the family fans for life. So now here they were, another memory about to be made, Ann invited several hours before the Capitals faced the Carolina Hurricanes, believing the team had a morning skate, taking a tour of the practice facility, unaware of the surprise to come.

She bounced down the halls in sneakers that blinked blue lights. They passed the rink, where a team official pretended the players couldn’t be found. The Capitals had a game today, and she knew that, but where could they be?

She entered the stick room and found the bundle for No. 8. She passed a picture of Ovechkin hugging Mike Green. She hopped in place. "Oh my gosh," she said. "Awesome. Awesome."

They went into the gym, which seemed so big, and into the film room, where she wondered if the players watched "Modern Family" and sat in the front-row seat she believed Ovechkin would use. Out in the hallway they found another picture of Ovechkin, holding the old blue jersey, and Ann loved that, because she had the same one at home.

Next came the locker room, which didn’t smell so bad, and over to Ovechkin’s stall, where Ann put on his helmet, which did smell bad, so she made a stinky face. She wondered what could be cooler than this and thought, maybe, asking Ovechkin to marry her would compare. So she stuck out her hand, aimed at her mother, Melissa, and beckoned.

"Mom," she said. "Ring. Please."

Then, the back door swung open. Out came Ovechkin, dressed in a suit, carrying a bouquet of roses.

"Hello," he said. "What’s up? You want to come to the game?"

"Yeah," she replied. He handed her three tickets, part of the eight he donates every game.

"And you’re going to drive with me," Ovechkin said, giving her a No. 8 jersey that said her name instead of his.

"I might check with my parents," Ann said, but Ovechkin promised to drive slow, not fast, and she warned him not to get pulled over for speeding. Then she pulled her father beside Ovechkin and compared their gray hairs. Then Ovechkin took her hand, buckled her into his car and drove to Verizon Center, where she would sit on the bench for warm-ups and the other players.

When the game ended and Ovechkin had scored a goal in a 5-2 win, Ann left her seat in Section 115 – the section for Ovi’s Crazy 8s. She and her parents went to the locker room, where her jersey got signed by the

Washington Capitals, and she made defenseman Nate Schmidt smell Ovechkin’s socks. They ran into Coach Barry Trotz, to whom Ovechkin introduced his new girlfriend, to whom Ann asked permission for Ovechkin to visit on her birthday.

Further down the hall, they entered the owner’s lounge and settled into a booth in the back. Ovechkin poured the soy sauce. A waitress brought a platter of salmon rolls, sashimi tuna and eel and avocado. Her parents sat down too, chaperones for the sushi dinner, which was the best date ever.
Capitals sign Liam O’Brien to three-year, entry-level deal

By Alex Prewitt
October 6 at 3:54 PM

Here are Liam O’Brien’s salary numbers for his entry-level deal:

- **2014-15:** $550,000 NHL, $70,000 AHL, $55,000 signing bonus.
- **2015-16:** $575,000 NHL, $70,000 AHL, $55,000 signing bonus.
- **2016-17:** $575,000 NHL, $70,000 AHL, $55,000 signing bonus.

Again, the Capitals plan to put O’Brien either in the NHL or the AHL this season; according to his agent, Allan Walsh, the ECHL is off the table.

ORIGINAL POST Forward Liam O’Brien, the biggest surprise of Washington Capitals training camp, has parlayed his strong performance into a three-year, entry-level contract, the team announced Monday.

Invited this preseason as an undrafted free agent, with over-age eligibility remaining in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, O’Brien instead managed to outlast several rounds of cuts, making it increasingly likely that the Capitals keep him into the regular season.

“He’s a player that’s demanded to be noticed,” Coach Barry Trotz said, and that included several fights, four points, a team-high 20 hits and consistent fourth-line play as Washington kept throwing O’Brien into exhibition games to see if he could swim.

“There’s still lots of stuff he needs to learn in the game,” Trotz said recently. “But at the same time he’s come in with injuries to a number of people in that role. He’s got an opportunity and he’s learning. I give him a lot of credit. He’s making a big step and doing a good job for us. I’ve learned that obviously he’s fought some pretty tough guys in the preseason and he doesn’t show any fear. He needs some work, but he’s got some good pieces we can work with him.”

With forward spots at a premium and Tuesday’s cut deadline nearing, the Capitals locked O’Brien into the organization and can now send him to their AHL affiliate in Hershey.

O’Brien arrived at camp thinking he would return to the QMJHL, where he had 35 points and 147 penalty minutes over 68 games with the Rouyn-Noranda Huskies. Instead, he endeared himself to teammates, skated in the preseason finale along with Capitals veterans and impressed enough to accelerate his ascent.

“He’s unbelievable,” forward Michael Latta said. “He’s hard on the puck. He’s fearless…He’s making a name for himself. I love him.”

Barry Trotz knows there are miles to go before he sleeps. But in a span of 18 days and eight preseason games, he has seen remarkable improvement in the way his team approaches the game and the relationships that are building within the walls of his locker room.

“I think we understand each other better,” Trotz said Sunday night following the Caps’ preseason finale, a 5-2 win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

“I think there was a little uneasiness coming in, but I think we’ve talked through everything. I don’t think there’s anything we haven’t really discussed in terms of what we need to do and why.

“We’re just starting the journey. We’re going to have some hard times; we’re going to have some good times. That’s the NHL season. It’s no different than a family. We’re starting to create a little bit of a family with our group and they’re all accountable to each other.

“Just like any family you’re not always going to be on the same page with your brothers and sisters. You still love them, but you may not agree with them all the time. We’ll have a couple of those days, but other than that we’ve made great strides.

“We have lots of work to do this year to get to where we want to be, but the foundation is there and that’s the most important thing. If you don’t have a foundation it will crumble, so we’ve been working hard on the foundation.”

The Caps have spent most of the preseason working on gap control -- closing in on opponents to create panic -- and Braden Holtby says he has seen significant improvement in that area, calling it “phenomenal” after Sunday night’s win.

Another measurable change under Trotz has been a reduction in the shots surrendered by the Caps. Last season the Caps finished 27th in the NHL, allowing 33.5 shots per game. Only the Buffalo Sabres, Ottawa Senators and Toronto Maple Leafs allowed more. In eight preseason games, the Caps allowed an average of 25.6 shots per game.

“I think our 5-on-5 play has been pretty good,” Trotz said.

There are, of course, areas that need improving. In eight preseason games the Caps found themselves shorthanded 40 times, an average of five a game. That’s way up from last season, when they were shorthanded an average of 3.5 times a game.

“We need to be a lot more disciplined,” Trotz said.

Trotz said that by the 20th game of the regular season he wants everyone in the NHL to know how the Washington Capitals play. Laich said he thinks the Caps are ahead of schedule in that department.

“You want your feet under you going into the season and I think we’re there now,” Laich said

“Honestly, I think we’re ahead of where I thought we would be. We were warned about certain things in the summer. There was going to be this change and that change and the first couple days of camp there was a lot of new system stuff.

“Even for a guy that grasps it fairly quickly there was a lot to learn and understand. New terminology. A rail forward, a flood. I think the guys have really done their homework and paid attention.

“In my opinion I think we’re ahead of schedule. I thought it would take us maybe 10 or 15 games into the season to really grasp stuff, but it seems like we’ve got it now and we should start the season on Thursday comfortable and confident.”
Capitals place Oleksy on NHL waivers

Chuck Gormley

10 critical dates for the Capitals in 2014-2015

The Capitals took another step toward reducing their roster to the NHL limit of 23 players on Monday when they placed 28-year-old defenseman Steve Oleksy on waivers with the intent of assigning him to the AHL Hershey Bears.

Oleksy played in four preseason games for the Caps, recording one assist, a minus-1 rating and 14 penalty minutes, second to rookie forward Liam O’Brien. He also grabbed the attention of Capitals coach Barry Trotz.

“You look at him, you know he’s got your back, there’s no question,” Trotz said. “That’s undeniable just watching him in a practice. Those are the guys than can make it on pure character. They’re still good players, but you’ve got to separate a guy who has so much character from someone with maybe less. You want that guy for sure. That guy’s in the room and everyone recognizes the character and the type of team person he is.”

A hard-nosed, straight-talking defenseman from Chesterfield, Mich., Oleksy has played in 61 games for the Capitals over the past two seasons, recording three goals, 16 assists and 86 penalty minutes. He tied Joel Ward last season with a team-best plus-7. He is entering the final year of a three-year contract that pays him an NHL salary of $550,000 and an AHL salary of $115,000.

By trimming Oleksy from their roster, the Caps now stand at 10 healthy defensemen, with Nate Schmidt, who is waiver-exempt, the most likely to be sent to the Bears when season-opening rosters are due to NHL registry. Barring any trades or unforeseen transactions, the Caps likely will begin the season with a blue line of Brooks Orpik, John Carlson, Matt Niskanen, Karl Alzner, Mike Green, Jack Hillen and John Erskine, with Dmitry Orlov (wrist surgery) on long-term injury reserve (10 games or 24 days).

In addition, the Caps need to make a decision on O’Brien, who could be signed to a two-way or one-way AHL contract within the next 24 hours. If O’Brien agrees to a contract he likely would be assigned to Hershey as well, giving the Caps 13 healthy forwards, with Jay Beagle and Tom Wilson likely to start the season on IR.

The Caps open the season on Thursday night against the Montreal Canadiens. The Bears open their AHL season Saturday night at Norfolk.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Eric Fehr co-authors children’s book to fight bullying

Chuck Gormley
October 6, 2014, 3:00 pm

By night, Eric Fehr is a top-line right wing for the Washington Capitals. By day, he is a budding author of children’s books. OK, well at least one children’s book.

Fehr has teamed with author Pamela Duncan Edwards to write The Bulliest Dozer, a story that illustrates the harmful effects of bullying and the values of friendship.

The Bulliest Dozer will be available for purchase beginning Thursday in the United States with 100 percent of proceeds going to bullying prevention and the encouragement of positive behavior.

The book tells the story of Bo Dozer and his peers at Ms. Crane’s Academy for Little Machines. Embarrassed by being unable to skate in preparation for a holiday concert on ice, Bo decides to become “A Mean Machine.” Bo bullies other students until a concert day crisis helps him understand the importance of friendship.

“In The Bulliest Dozer, Bo learns the valuable lesson that acceptance and teamwork can lead to success,” Fehr said in a statement. “My hope is that this book will provide an opening for parents to discuss how important it is for children to accept one another and to treat their peers with respect. All forms of bullying including verbal abuse, cyberbullying and physical abuse are unacceptable, and whether the aggressor or the victim, I hope children read Bo’s story and realize there are steps they can take to reduce bullying.”

The Bulliest Dozer will be sold for $10 online at WashingtonCaps.com, at the Washington Capitals Team Store at Kettler Capitals Iceplex and at the Team Store at VerizonCenter during Capitals home games beginning with the teams season opener Thursday at VerizonCenter. In addition there will be a limited number of autographed books available for purchase for $20 at WashingtonCaps.com, at the Team Store at Kettler Capitals Iceplex and at the Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation table located behind section 104 on the main concourse at VerizonCenter during Caps home games.

The book, illustrated by Kate Komarnicki, also will be available in Canada beginning Thursday throughout Giant Tiger stores in Winnipeg, at Jonny’s Java in Fehr’s hometown of Winkler, Manitoba, and during the Western Hockey League’s Brandon Wheat Kings home games.

Funds from U.S. sales will benefit PlayworksDC. Playworks is a national nonprofit that transforms recess to improve school climate. In 18 elementary schools throughout Washington, D.C., principals have partnered with Playworks to improve recess, work with teachers in the classroom, mentor young leaders and develop sports teams. By showing students new games that level the playing field for every kid, and teaching them social skills such as empathy, fair play and inclusiveness, Playworks helps to create a welcoming environment where every child gets to play, regardless of ability, and bullying behavior is much less likely to be considered. Studies have shown that this multi-disciplinary Playworks model reduces bullying and exclusionary behavior during recess by 43%.

Proceeds from Canada sales will benefit the Canadian Red Cross’ Violence, Bullying and Abuse Prevention program. The Canadian Red Cross is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with a mission to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity in Canada and around the world.

The launch of the book coincides with National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month, a time when communities nationwide are encouraged to unite and take a stand for bullying prevention efforts through events, activities, outreach and education. Fehr designed a custom T-shirt as part of Customink’s “Be Good to Each Other” bullying prevention campaign, with proceeds benefiting Customink’s nonprofit partner – PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. Fehr’s “Don’t be a Mean Machine!” T-shirt was inspired by a line from The Bulliest Dozer and will be available for purchase at www.booster.com/ericfehr.
O'Brien comes out of nowhere to sign with Caps

Chuck Gormley
October 6, 2014, 4:00 pm

Liam O'Brien came into his first Capitals training camp unsigned, undrafted and with zero pro hockey experience.

"I guess that's three strikes right there," he said.

Today, the hard-edged 20-year-old center from Halifax, Nova Scotia proved that hard work pays off, signing a three-year entry-level contract with the Capitals. While he is eligible to go back and play as an overage player for Sherbrooke of the Quebec League, the plan is for O'Brien to start the season with the Capitals or the Hershey Bears. He could be assigned to Hershey on Tuesday.

"I think I surprised some people," said O'Brien, who was invited to the Pittsburgh Penguins training camp the past two Septembers. "But this is the way that I play and I'm just glad they like me.

O'Brien impressed the Capitals coaching staff by recording one goal, three assists and a team-high 17 penalty minutes in five preseason games.

"They've been pushing me and talking to me and motivating me," he said. "It's a different level of hockey, honestly. Consistency and preparing yourself every night is something you have to have. The coaches want me to be physical, play big in the corners, play my game and keep going."

O'Brien registered 35 points [20 goals, 15 assists] and 148 penalty minutes in 68 games with the Rouyn-Noranda Huskies of the Quebec League last season.

The 6-foot-1, 210-pounder ranked first among Huskies skaters in penalty minutes, third in goals and sixth in points. In 261 career QMJHL games with Rouyn-Noranda and Rimouski, O'Brien registered 95 points [42 goals, 53 assists] and 493 penalty minutes.

O'Brien said having Barry Trotz in his corner from the start of training camp certainly helped.

"That helps my cause a lot," he said. "Obviously, he wants guys that compete and work hard and that's two things I've always done. I'm glad he likes that."

The Caps must submit their 23-man NHL roster to the league by 5 p.m. on Tuesday.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Ovechkin takes 10-year-old fan on special date

Chuck Gormley

Ann Schaab may be a 10-year-old fourth grader at Fulton Elementary School in Howard County, but she knows an opportunity when she sees it.

A few weeks ago, while participating with about 60 other players from the American Special Hockey Association in a skating session with Alex Ovechkin, Schaab asked the Capitals’ 29-year-old captain if he'd like to come to her house for some sushi and maybe a game of kickball.

The Capitals learned of the date request and on Sunday executed a romantic surprise for one of their biggest fans.

First, Ovechkin picked up Schaab at Kettler Capitals Iceplex in Arlington and drove her to VerizonCenter, surprising her with flowers and a sushi dinner for two down the hallway from the Caps' locker room.

But Ann had grander plans. After watching the Caps close out their preseason with a 5-2 win over the Carolina Hurricanes Ann decided the mood was right to pop the question.

So, with Ovechkin sitting beside her inside the Capitals’ dressing room, Schaab did what any smitten girl would do.

"Mom, I need the ring," Ann said to her mother, Melissa.

“This is my wedding ring,” Melissa replied.

“Hey, I'm still making payments on that ring,” interjected Lou Schaab, Ann’s father.

Sensing the magnitude of the moment, Ovechkin smiled at Ann and said, “You will have lots of boyfriends who will want to marry you.”

Ann Schaab shrugged her tiny shoulders and quickly diverted her attention to Capitals defenseman Mike Green, telling him how much she loved him, too.

“I’ll say this about Ann,” her father said, “she knows how to ask for something.”

Lou Schaab says it was a day his little girl, who has Down syndrome, will never forget. And he says it all began with her interest in playing for the Washington Ice Dogs, an ice hockey team for children with developmental disabilities. Ann Schaab took an interest in hockey because her two older brothers, Louis, 19, and Matthew, 15, also play.

Louis Schaab, who has Spina bifida, began playing sled hockey at the age of 7 and is now in his second year at Coastal Carolina. Matthew Schaab is a sophomore member of the Appleton High School hockey team.

Lou Schaab said Ovechkin probably doesn’t know this, but Sunday’s date day was his family’s second personal encounter with Ovechkin. During Ovechkin’s second season with the Caps in 2007, Schaab said he took Louis to a game and the two were cheering so enthusiastically that Capitals owner Ted Leonsis invited them into the Caps' locker room after the game.

“It was so loud in there that Louie started to cry,” his father recalled. “Ovi came over and gave him a big hug and he totally put Louie at ease. Alex is a special guy.”

Ovechkin also gave Louis the hockey stick he used in that game and when Louis and his father left the arena they were surrounded by fans who wanted to touch the stick.

“I never thought there would be a day to top that,” Lou Schaab said. “But this tops that. The Capitals really know how to make people feel special. Ann had a hop in her step all day. And by the time we hit the BW Parkway she was fast asleep.”

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 10.07.2014
Jets' plans for Budaj on hold for a day

By: Paul Wiecek
Posted: 10/6/2014 11:16 AM
Last Modified: 10/6/2014 10:46 PM

The Winnipeg Jets remain hopeful that newly acquired goaltender Peter Budaj can still provide them some valuable depth in net heading into the 2014-15 regular season.

Budaj, who was acquired from the Montreal Canadiens on Sunday in a trade involving forward Eric Tangradi, was placed on waivers by the Jets on Monday as a first step towards sending him down to the minors to start the season with Winnipeg’s AHL affiliate in St. John’s.

That can only happen, however, if no one claims the nine-year NHL veteran off waivers today, all of which puts the Jets plans for Budaj on hold for a day.

"It's a real positive for us and we'll see how today works out," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said Monday after his team’s practice at the MTS Centre.

The move to put Budaj on waivers signals the Jets' intention to start the regular season this week with Ondrej Pavelec and Michael Hutchinson as the No. 1 and No. 2 goaltenders respectively.

Maurice said he has enough confidence in Hutchinson to give him a chance this season to prove he's NHL-ready.

"Mike has earned the opportunity to develop here. And if that means he stays and flourishes here, then good for us," said Maurice. "But there's no crystal ball on what we do with development. Mike has earned that right, but now having some depth in the goaltending position is something as a coach you like."

The move to acquire Budaj on Sunday created some confusion in Jets Nation about Hutchinson’s immediate future with the NHL team, but in the end it all proved to be much ado about nothing.

Hutchinson said he was informed by Jets management on Sunday that the team intended to keep him in Winnipeg and send Budaj down.

"Nothing really changes for me," said Hutchinson. "It's always great to have depth in an organization. It's kind of nice to have that because it creates competition and pushes you hard in practice."

This morning’s practice was the first for the Jets since a series of moves on Sunday pared their roster down to 23 healthy players and a couple of injuries, which is where they need to be by Tuesday’s cutdown deadline.

Defencemen Zach Bogosian, who was injured during against a game against the Calgary Flames last Thursday, and Toby Enstrom, who was hurt in a game against the Flames on Saturday, were both full participants in practice on Monday.

Meanwhile, the Jets confirmed that defencemen Ben Chiarot and Keaton Ellerby, who were both put on waivers on Sunday, cleared on Monday and have been assigned to St. John’s.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 10.07.2014
A statistical comparison and analysis of Byfuglien the forward and Byfuglien the defenceman

THE NUMBERS

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Corsi percentage</th>
<th>Goals percentage</th>
<th>Points per game</th>
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5-on-5 points last season

Two goals, 13 assists, 15 points in 46 games on defence

Six goals, five assists, 11 points, in 32 games at forward

THE ANALYSIS

Whether a forward or a defenceman, Byfuglien will be playing the point on the power play and 4-on-4 situations; therefore, only 5-on-5 minutes are used for the analysis.

Corsi percentage is the percentage of pucks the team directs at their opponents net while the player is on the ice. Corsi closely relates to puck-possession time and scoring chance differentials, where over 50 per cent means outpossessing and out-chancing the opposition. Goal percentage is essentially plus/minus but for 5-on-5 minutes only, where over 50 per cent means outscoring the opposition. Goal percentage also closely resembles high-profile events people tend to emphasize in importance, or "high-grade scoring chances".

Last season, the opposition outscored the Jets with Byfuglien on the ice as both a defender and a forward. The Jets had a better goal percentage with Byfuglien as a forward, but better Corsi with him as a defenceman.

Outscoring is the desired outcome, however, most statistical hockey analysts use Corsi because it predicts future goal percentage better than past goal percentage. The difference in Corsi for Byfuglien as a defenceman both last season and the previous three years is small, while his goal percentage was much higher during his run as a defenceman from 2010-13. Goals and high-grade scoring chances are rare, and are less resistant to the influence of goaltenders and puck luck.

In all three situations we see Byfuglien's goal percentage is lower than his Corsi. One reason for this may be defensive-zone lapses. Another possibility is the organization posting the fifth-worst 5-on-5 save percentage in the league over the last four seasons combined. It could also be both.

THE CONCLUSION

Byfuglien's best play, according to the statistics, came as a defenceman during a larger sample size from 2010 to 2013. His Corsi was better, his goal percentage was better, his points per game average was higher and he was a plus in goals for and goals against.

Byfuglien's numbers dipped last season on defence and resulted in his change to forward. Once moved to forward, all of his numbers improved but for his Corsi. But the sample size was fairly small at only 32 games.

All in all, over his career, Byfuglien has been more effective for a longer period of time when utilized as a defenceman. So say the numbers.

All numbers derived from NHL.com play-by-play reports

Statistical data provided by Garret Hohl
He is adamant Dustin Byfuglien will remain a forward, but perhaps Paul Maurice is selling his coaching talents a bit short. And, by extension, hurting his team.

Byfuglien has a higher ceiling as a defenceman than a forward. The counter is he can do loads more damage on the blue-line. Last season, with a forward group that often sputtered and was a two-line entity until Byfuglien joined the mix, it was best for the Jets to move the behemoth off the blue-line.

Too often Byfuglien appeared winded and disinterested when the puck was in the Winnipeg Jets' defensive zone. His gaffes were like neon paint spilled on a virgin sheet of ice.

In a move born of both desperation and frustration, Claude Noel moved Byfuglien from his beloved blue-line post to the wing. The decision wasn't enough to save Noel's job, but when Maurice arrived he refused to reverse field and left Big Buff where Noel had parked him.

And it worked. Byfuglien added a dimension the Jets were missing in the forward corps and the team put together a nice run before finally slipping in the last month and missing the playoffs.

Roster changes in Winnipeg, however, make discussing a move back to defence for Byfuglien worthwhile. Not to mention the effect Maurice might be able to have on Byfuglien's defensive-zone play.

Byfuglien is useful both as a forward and a defenceman. Winnipeg's biggest need right now would appear to be on the blue-line. If Maurice can figure out a way to have Byfuglien defend with as much gusto as he puts into his offensive forays, the Jets could be a better team.

It’s not overstatement to say Byfuglien can change the Jets all by himself. He has vast abilities, more than any other player in a Jets jersey. As a defenceman he can be a No. 1. As a forward, he’s a second-line right-winger at best.

Over his career, Byfuglien's Corsi, goals percentage, points per game average and goals for/goals against numbers have all been higher when he’s been used as a defenceman. During a stretch from 2010 to 2013 he put up his best numbers while patrolling the blue-line. The numbers dipped during the first half of last season on defence, then all his numbers, save his Corsi, improved slightly once he moved to forward.

It's obvious where he can have more of an impact. Byfuglien has shown he can be elite in many ways -- as a defenceman. As a forward, not so much. The rub, as most Jets observers can attest, is Byfuglien can cut both ways. All of his soaring statistics as a defenceman can be undone by defensive blunders at key moments of a game.

Can coaching have an impact? Monitor his minutes and try to find some way to have him work on paying more attention in his own zone. Byfuglien's defensive issues aren't due to a lack of talent or hockey sense. They come down to focus. Can Maurice get the player to sharpen his defensive approach? Certainly the benefits suggest the exercise is worthwhile.

Winnipeg's lineup with Byfuglien at forward leaves a defence with almost every player playing above his natural station. Install Byfuglien with Toby Enstrom in the top pairing and everyone else can move back a slot. Put Zach Bogosian with Jacob Trouba in the second pairing and Mark Stuart with Paul Postma or Grant Clitsome in the final pairing.

It would be a substantial improvement should Byfuglien accept the assignment and develop a passion to defend. He can still be a rover and a nightmare for the opposition to plan against, but when the puck is in his zone, he must defend. Otherwise his detractors outweigh his worth and Maurice is better off using Byfuglien on the wing. A bit of a waste perhaps, but Buff is Buff and the Jets will have to live with it. Up front, losing Byfuglien isn't a death blow. Newcomers Adam Lowry, Mathieu Perrault and T.J. Galiardi will almost certainly be an improvement over what was offered from James Wright, Olli Jokinen and Devin Setoguchi one season ago.

Maurice was right last season when he concluded Byfuglien the defenceman was a problem. Moving him to, then keeping him at forward was the most expedient way to stop the bleeding.

But the cure for last year may not be what best serves the Jets today.

Byfuglien is by far the most challenging of the Jets to coach. Getting the most of his abilities won't be easy. But Maurice seems to have a different way with this group. And while it may prove to be only temporary, why not strike while the iron is hot?

No doubt, a man like Maurice, who has taken on huge challenges in hockey, is up for the test. Why not see if he can unlock the secret, taking Byfuglien from frustrating to dominating.

And what's the harm in trying? If it fails, we all know Byfuglien can be a positive factor as a forward. What it comes down to is what Maurice expects from this player. Good is nice. All-world is better.
Jets are same, same, but somehow... different

By: Paul Wiecek
Posted: 10/7/2014 1:00 AM

Give Winnipeg Jets head coach Paul Maurice credit -- he not only knows a cliché when he hears one, he knows when he says one.

Maurice -- who has worked both sides of the microphone in his hockey career -- put both skills on display Monday when he interrupted his own answer to a reporter's question about why fans should expect this year's Jets to perform better than last year's when the two teams are so similar personnel-wise.

"We're going to work really, really hard at getting better every day..." Maurice began, before catching himself. "Sometimes when it comes out of my mouth I realize, 'Jeez, that sounds like you could be hearing that in a bunch of cities.'"

With the clichés dispensed with, Maurice tried again to answer the No. 1 question on the minds of Jets Nation as the team heads into the start of its regular season Thursday: Why should fans expect a team that finished out of the playoffs last season to do better this year when the only personnel changes are the addition of three role players -- Mathieu Perreault, T.J. Galiardi and Adam Lowry.

"I have a belief that we are a better team now," Maurice began. "I know that our top-end athletes are more fit -- that I know. I think there's some development that happens just through experience. We've got a very young team, but a lot of them have some games on them.

"So our expectations are higher for some players, even at a young age. And I think positionally and structurally, we're better than we were last year."

Maurice also added while he was impressed with his team's competitive fight right from taking over behind the Jets bench midway through last season, "there was a need for getting them all to fly in the same direction. And we're just going to keep working on that."

Forward Andrew Ladd, who as team captain is also responsible for getting players flying in the same direction, says this year's team might be largely the same, but it's also very different.

"I think maturity in a lot of players is going to help. I think Paul has helped a lot in that regard," said Ladd. "He's going to help to get guys to a different level -- just the pace in practice and the things he demands.

"And then the specific roles he's putting guys in -- that will result in some good things, too."

With so few personnel changes in the off-season, if the Jets are going to make the playoffs in a Central Division that looks significantly improved over last year they are clearly counting on getting better performances out of the players they had last season.

That begins with defenceman Zach Bogosian, who's played just 88 games and mustered just 25 points in his last two injury-riddled seasons.

The good news is Bogosian is only looking forward these days and wanted nothing to do with talk of his injury-riddled past Monday.

"I don't really think about it too much, to be honest with you. The past is the past, you can't worry about what happened there," he said. "I'm just trying to work for the future and put in a lot of hard work. That's something I take pride in."

Bogosian echoed his coach and his captain when he was asked why he thinks this year's team will be better than last year's club.

"It's another year of experience. And more guys have gotten a good summer of training and gotten ready that way. We have a pretty young team and some young guys in big roles that will only get bigger. So just learning from that will be a big thing for us."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED 10.07.2014
The Winnipeg Jets won't find out until 11 a.m. today whether they can keep newly acquired goaltender Peter Budaj.

Regardless of whether the Jets get to keep the nine-year NHL veteran -- who has to clear waivers for Winnipeg to send him down to their AHL affiliate in St. John's -- one thing is now clear: Michael Hutchinson has won the job as Ondrej Pavelec's backup this season.

Hutchinson impressed in a late-season call-up last season and had a solid, if unspectacular, training camp over the past month to earn what head coach Paul Maurice described Monday as "the right" to prove he's ready to be a full-time backup in the NHL.

"Mike has earned the opportunity to develop here. And if that means he stays and flourishes here, then good for us," said Maurice, describing Budaj as an insurance policy in the event Hutchinson falters.

"There's no crystal ball on what we do with development. Mike has earned that right, but having some depth in the goaltending position is something you like."

The move to acquire Budaj in a Sunday trade that sent forward Eric Tangradi to the Montreal Canadiens created some confusion in Jets Nation about Hutchinson's immediate future with the team, but in the end it proved to be much to do about nothing.

Hutchinson said he was informed by Jets management Sunday evening the team intended to keep him in Winnipeg and send Budaj down.

"Nothing really changes for me," said Hutchinson. "It's always great to have depth in an organization. It's kind of nice to have that because it creates competition and pushes you hard in practice."

Pavelec, meanwhile, took the goalie moves in stride. "We just got a really good goalie -- that was pretty much it for me," said Pavelec.

Maurice poked a little fun at the media Monday when he was asked if the decision to send highly touted rookies Nikolaj Ehlers, Nic Petan and Josh Morrissey back to their junior teams was a bit disappointing.

Maurice noted there was also quite a bit of hand-wringing a few years ago when the Jets sent Mark Scheifele down, only to have him make the club last year and have a sensational rookie season.

"I was working in the media for parts of the Mark Scheifele debacle... how his career was coming to an end and how he was a total bust," Maurice grinned. "And now he's one of the best players on the team."

Maurice said he loved what he saw in Ehlers, Petan and Morrissey during camp, but they just weren't ready, for various reasons, to make the jump to the NHL. "I see so many of those 18-year-olds coming in, where you're watching them practise and you're thinking that it's going to be next year, or two years from now, when they're going to be able to do what they just tried."

"So they just tried to get around a guy and he got his hand on his hip. And that happened a bunch of times with (Ehlers). You saw what he was trying to do and you just know when he gets a little older, a little stronger, a little faster that he's making that play..."

"We've got three really good young players that are going to be Winnipeg Jets. I loved their camp, but forcing them into the lineup had absolutely no benefit, in my mind, to them or the hockey team."

One youngster who did make the Jets out of training camp was forward Adam Lowry, who was breathing a sigh of relief in the locker-room Monday.

"It's pretty exciting. You work all summer and your whole career to get up to this point and to be able to start in the NHL. It's definitely an exciting feeling," said Lowry, who the Jets said will wear No. 17 this season.

"I was pretty anxious to wait and find out. It's kind of out of your control once exhibition season was done, so I was pretty nervous."
Canucks send Nicklas Jensen to minors

October 6, 2014. 10:37 am
Elliott Pap

The Canucks’ youth movement took another hit Monday when the team dispatched 21-year-old winger Nicklas Jensen, their first-round pick in the 2011 draft, to the American Hockey League’s Utica Comets.

Jensen had four points, 12 shots on goal and was an even player in six pre-season games. He was the only forward left on the roster who did not require waivers to be sent down.

With the move, the Canucks still have 24 players in camp, one over the 23-man limit needed before the regular season begins Wednesday in Calgary.

However, the team still has the option of placing a player on injured reserve to buy itself some time. Centre Bo Horvat, 19, remains with the team and is one of the injured players. He is not eligible to be assigned to the Comets so it appears he will be sticking around for a bit. Defenceman Frank Corrado, also injured, is the only player left who can be sent to Utica without waivers.

Injured defenceman Kevin Bieksa, along with Horvat and Corrado, were not on the ice during Monday’s full team practice.

Here were the lines at practice Monday: Daniel Sedin-Henrik Sedin- Radim Vrbata; Chris Higgins-Nick Bonino-Alex Burrows; Derek Dorsett-Shawn Matthias-Jannik Hansen; Brad Richardson-Linden Vey-Zack Kassian; Tom Sestito extra.

Monday’s defence pairings were: Alex Edler-Chris Tanev; Dan Hamhuis-Luca Sbisa; Ryan Stanton-Yannick Weber.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Mitchell captaincy the latest chapter in uncanny Canucks-Panthers connection

By Cam Cole, Vancouver Sun
October 6, 2014

It is a fact, one to puzzle over — or, depending on your address, to marvel at — that Willie Mitchell is the fourth former member of the Vancouver Canucks to ascend to the captaincy of the Florida Panthers.

And there have been only eight wearers of the “C” in the Panthers’ dubious 21-season history.

Following in the skate-steps of two other ex-Canuck defencemen, Bryan McCabe (2009-11) and Ed Jovanovski (2013-14), and of course Pavel Bure (2001-02), Mitchell at least has two championship rings, albeit with L.A., post-Vancouver, to flash around the room as evidence of leadership ability.

The others … well, all were excellent players: McCabe and Jovanovski one-time Olympians (McCabe replaced an injured Jovo on the 2006 team in Turin), and Bure, presumably, given the Florida captaincy purely on the strength of his breathtaking talent.

Only Jovanovski, as a kid during Florida’s lone season of glory in 1996, and Bure with the Canucks in ’94, even made it to a Cup final.

But now there’s Mitchell, the 37-year-old from Port McNeill and his appointment Monday adds to the often head-scratching predilection Vancouver and Florida seem to have developed for each other’s talent.

You can make a case that deals with Florida were the hill that ex-Canucks GM Mike Gillis died on, professionally speaking, though of course there are no hills worth the name on Florida’s featureless landscape, unless you count Space Mountain.

Gillis dealt speedy forward Michael Grabner, glacial Steve Bernier and a first-round pick to Florida for defenceman Keith Ballard, who became a colossal waste of money and a semi-permanent member of Alain Vigneault’s doghouse.

He traded Mikael Samuelsson and Marco Sturm, neither of whom, admittedly, had much left, to Florida for forward David Booth, who became a colossal waste of money and a semi-permanent resident of the medical room (where he once more is stationed, in Toronto).

Gillis signed Panthers free agent defenceman, hard-shooting Jason Garrison to a rich, six-year deal in July of 2012, based on a good offensive season in Sunrise, and then watched the Canuck power play die a painful death (hardly Garrison’s fault, by any means, but still …)

And most egregiously, Gillis took his predecessor Dave Nonis’s canny trade for Roberto Luongo and, with the aid of a gargantuan 12-year, $64-million contract, turned it into a goaltending mess so big and ugly, he could never escape it and ended up unloading Luongo at the trade deadline — back to Florida, naturally — for goaltending prospect/suspect Jacob Markstrom, who’s now in the minors, and centre Shawn Matthias, who may or may not be able to play on the third line.

Maybe the idea of selecting as a trading partner a team as far away as geographically possible was appealing.

Or possibly it was just a case of “Florida’s so far from winning, there’s no chance this deal can come back to haunt us.”

But either way, Panthers GM Dale Tallon ought to at least name a wing of his presumably palatial Florida home after Gillis.

Looking at it another way, the back-and-forth with Luongo alone almost balanced the books.

Not only did the Canucks come out well ahead of then-Panthers GM Mike Keenan on the original deal for the goaltender in 2006 — the Canucks were able to off-load public-relations problem Todd Bertuzzi amid his post-Steve Moore trauma, though they had to include a couple of useful players, goalie Alex Auld and defenceman Bryan Allen — but when forced to deal the goaltender at the trade deadline last March because of the enormous headache it had become, Gillis actually managed what had been considered impossible: dumping Luongo’s contract on Tallon (or anyone.)

Mostly, though, the Canucks-Panthers commerce has been pretty one-sided.

Bryan Murray got the Russian Rocket from Vancouver in 1999, as well as Brett Hedican and Brad Ference, for Dave Gagner, Jovanovski, Kevin Weekes and Mike Brown (not that one, the other one.)

Bure wasn’t just the best player in the deal, he was the best by a mile.

And although Gillis was able to mine Florida’s system for journeyman Chris Higgins, who was pretty much on his last chance, and third-liner Tanner Glass, the sheer size of the Booth-Ballard-Garrison mishaps were enough to sink his regime, even if the Luongo-Cory Schneider disaster hadn’t occurred.

Then again … Bure lasted just 56 games as Panthers’ captain, and McCabe only a season-and-a-half, before each was traded, nine years apart, to the New York Rangers.

And Jovanovski, handed the “C” at the start of the 2013-14 season, was bought out the following June.

Willie Mitchell will be 39 years old when his two-year, $8.5-million deal with the Panthers expires in 2016.

Happy for him, of course. He’s a solid, stay-at-home defenceman, solid guy, great quote.

But whether he will outlast the captaincies of his ex-Canuck ancestors, or even whether the club will still be in Florida two years from now, are mysteries yet to unfold.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Kuzma: Sestito awaits the call as Flames assemble tough fourth line at Monday’s practice

By Ben Kuzma, The Province
October 6, 2014

The mantra for manning the fourth line is simple: Get pucks deep, don’t take a penalty, and don’t get scored on.

“And maybe get in a couple of hits, because an offensive-zone shift is as good as a goal,” Tom Sestito stressed Monday.

Yes, hits. And perhaps a scrap if circumstances dictate — which could be the case during Wednesday’s regular-season opener in Calgary, because the Flames had Brandon Bollig, Lance Bouma and Brian McGrattan aligned at practice on Monday. That’s a lot of fourth-line testosterone. Although they combined for 34 preseason penalty minutes, it’s hard to imagine the opener getting as goofy as the Torts Tunnel Tirade at Rogers Arena last Jan. 18.

Then again, who knows? Home openers are often statement games.

The Canucks plan to counter with Shawn Matthias between Jannik Hansen and Derek Dorsett on the fourth line.

Not Sestito. Well, not yet.

“That remains to be seen,” cautioned Canucks coach Willie Desjardins. “We’ll see how practice goes and what happens. We have to be aware of what they (Flames) may do and you have to plan and we’re going to focus on playing hard. Tommy has some really good things in his game. He’s got good hands and real good vision. He has shown those things and we want him in there to play the game, and I don’t want him in there for fighting.

“If that happens, that’s what he has to do. But he has to be able to play eight or nine minutes.”

After leading the NHL in penalty minutes (213) and fights (19) last season, Sestito’s challenge is to earn the trust of Desjardins. He must turn the 6:27 minutes of average ice time last season — it ranged from 2:26 to 16:16 on various lines and circumstances — into two more reliable minutes. This isn’t a three-line John Tortorella team where the fourth line was either a circus, rodeo or dumping ground for struggling players. It was no place to make your mark as more than a physical presence.

“I showed Torts I could play, but last year my confidence was as low as it could get,” admitted Sestito. “A coach can’t give you confidence, but he can really take it away. With Willie, I feel more confident. Torts would tell you good things you did, and the next game you would play two minutes.

“Nothing against Torts, but when Willie came in here everybody was calm and relieved. Everybody isn’t walking on their tip-toes. Everybody was nervous last year and that was tough when you’re on the fourth line or the sixth defenceman. You don’t want to make any mistakes and that’s when you usually end up making them.

“This is a better team and I think for sure we can make the playoffs.”

For that to occur, there has to be a marked improvement in the 26th-ranked power play and 28th-ranked offence. There also has to be tenaciousness, something that waned last season as the Canucks often dumped pucks in and went for a line change rather than being more physical.

Sestito, 27, has a year left on his contract at $850,000 US and you can’t put a price tag on what he can bring when push comes to shove. Especially in the ultra-tough Pacific Division, where the Canucks won one road game last season (1-8-2) outside of Edmonton and Calgary: a 4-2 win in San Jose on Nov. 7.

When a Jan. 13 game in Los Angeles erupted into mayhem in the opening minute, Sestito answered the call.

He went after Jordan Nolan after the Kings winger rammed Henrik Sedin into the plexiglass, but was deemed the aggressor against an unwilling Nolan. Sestito was assessed two minutes for instigating, five minutes for fighting, 10 minutes for instigating and a game misconduct.

All this in one second of registered ice time.

“Highest paid player — ice to salary,” Sestito joked at the time. “But that guy (Nolan) has got to answer the bell once in a while. It’s a joke. It’s embarrassing for him. I’d be embarrassed. I don’t want to put the team down for seven minutes, but I also don’t want them taking runs at Hank and Danny or any of the star players we have.”

Sestito should get some help in that department because Dorsett is a pit-bull irritant. They played in the AHL together and have had a grudging respect for each other. And there will be nights when they will both be needed to play hard and play policeman.

‘He’s an agitator,” said Sestito of Dorsett. “Guys hate playing against him and he can put in goals by going to the net. He’s a guy we need and for a smaller guy, he’ll fight anybody. He’s tough as nails and he hits everything.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Willie Desjardins unveiled his (sort of) season-opening lineup at Monday’s practice with few surprises, except for a third line that is full of moving parts.

It features rookie Linden Vey in the middle between usual centre Brad Richardson, who moves to left wing, and big winger Zack Kassian on the right.

Vey, who had an impressive five points (2-3) in five pre-season games, is expected to add some offensive buzz to a Canucks third line, but Desjardins will utilize defensive driving in the faceoff circle by having Richardson take most of the draws. Vey was inconsistent in the circle in the pre-season and managed to win just 22 per cent in the final game against the Oilers on Saturday. Richardson was the Canucks’ top faceoff practitioner last season, winning 55.2 per cent of his draws.

“That’s something we’ve been working on,” said Vey, 23, who has played in just 18 NHL games. “I think I’ve been getting better from the first game to the last. I’ll continue to work on it. It’s key for the team. You control the puck more when you win faceoffs.”

Desjardins clearly likes the certainty he gets from Richardson, alongside a young player who doesn’t have a lot of NHL experience.

“I think the good thing is that Richardson can take left-handed draws and Vey can go on the right side, and that’s a good combination in that way,” said Desjardins. “I think Vey is a really good young player and I think Richardson gives him some experience. I think the combination has potential. But you’ve got to come through and propel it. We’ll be watching the first few games to see how they do.”

Putting Kassian with Richardson also makes sense, in that the two had a good run together in the latter part of last season and seemed to develop some chemistry.

“Me and Richie seem to play really well together,” said Kassian. “He works really hard and he’s always in good position. It’s nice to start the season with someone familiar.”

The Canucks are entering the new season — on Wednesday in Calgary — knowing they need offence from every corner of the lineup. That’s something Richardson, who’s known more for his defensive play, acknowledges.

The Sedins, as usual, will get a lot of attention from the opposition’s shutdown players, so secondary scoring will be key.

“They (the Sedins line) is going to get the heavy defencemen, guys that try to wear you down,” said Richardson, who’s back in the lineup after taking a hard hit along the boards against Calgary 10 days ago but is ready for the opener. “That’s where you need secondary scoring, because it’s going to be tough for them to do it every night. If you want to have a good team you’ve got to have guys step up.”

HOW THEY LINE UP

Based on Monday’s practice, here is the expected Canucks lineup for the season opener in Calgary on Wednesday. Note: If Kevin Bieksa is able to play, it’s likely either Luca Sbisa or Yannick Weber will come out of the lineup.

Forward
D.Sedin-H.Sedin-Vrbata
Higgins-Bonino-Burrows
Richardson-Vey-Kassian
Hansen-Matthias-Dorsett
Defence
Edler-Tanev
Bad news for Jensen, but good for the Canucks

By Jim Jamieson, The Province
October 6, 2014

Nicklas Jensen gave his best shot to cracking the Canucks lineup, but fell just short — as the big and skilled Danish winger was the NHL club’s final cut before the season begins on Wednesday in Calgary.

It wasn’t particularly good news for Jensen, 21, who put up two goals and four points in six pre-season games, but it was for the Canucks. For the first time since the Cody Hodgson days, the club has had excellent minor league options (former first-rounder Hunter Shinkaruk was sent down last week) at forward if injuries strike.

The assignment on Monday of Jensen to Utica, N.Y., of the American Hockey League leaves the Canucks with 14 forwards (including the injured Bo Horvat) eight defencemen (including the injured Kevin Bieksa and Frank Corrado) and two goaltenders. That’s one over the 23-man roster limit, but players placed on the Injured Reserve list don’t count toward the roster number.

Canucks head coach Willie Desjardins was complimentary of Jensen following practice.

"I think we want him to play," said Desjardins, said of the demotion to Utica. "If he’s not going to be in our first game, we might as well get him down there so he’s playing games. We can always call him back if we want to. I thought he had a real good camp. He’s got good speed. There’s lots of things he’s done to make us know he can play at this level."

Desjardins wouldn’t commit to having Bieksa back for Wednesday’s game. If Bieksa and Corrado can’t play, the Canucks would be down the minimum six healthy defencemen. Bieksa was apparently injured on Thursday in Edmonton. He played the entire game, but hasn’t played since.

Desjardins said all three injured players have been skating a little bit on their own, but not yet with the team.

Though rookie Bo Horvat still hasn’t played since suffering a shoulder injury on Thursday in Edmonton, Desjardins gave every indication the 19-year-old would remain with the team after he’s ready to play. Horvat can’t be sent to the AHL due to his age but junior would be an option.

"I think he’s played real well," said Desjardins. "I think he’s proven that he’s sound defensively. He’s a heavier-body guy. This injury is not what he needed at this time. It’s tough for him, now the other guys get a step ahead, now he’s got to come back. How he comes back from that, we’ll wait to see. But what he did before, I thought he was pretty good."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Willes’ Musings: Canucks may be better, but are they a playoff team?

By Ed Willes, The Province

October 6, 2014 10:39 PM

They’re a day late, which is the story of my career, but we’ll still offer a Tuesday version of the musings and meditations on the world of sports.

— Here’s the question about the Vancouver Canucks as they prepare for the 2014-15 season. They’ll be improved. But in relation to what?

If your yardstick is the 2013-14 team, you might want to choose another standard. Lest you’ve forgotten — and it might take years of intensive therapy to drive the nightmare away — the Canucks finished 12th in the West last season and scored fewer goals than any team in the Conference. The one player who did score 20 goals — Ryan Kesler — asked to be traded away. And this was all while the team was firing the president/GM and head coach.

Suffice to say Roger Goodell has had a better year.

For this season, then, it can reasonably be said the Canucks have changed the atmosphere around the team and improved the bottom half of their lineup. As for their frontliners, it just doesn’t seem possible that Henrik and Daniel Sedin will be as unproductive as they were last season, just as it seems possible that one of Nick Bonino, Zack Kassian or Linden Vey will enjoy a breakout year.

So the Canucks will be better than they were last season. But so will every team that finished ahead of them in the West with the possible exception of San Jose, and the Sharks were pretty damn good to begin with.

That’s the real challenge facing the Orcans this season. Anaheim, which finished first in the West last season, added Kesler. Colorado has a stacked young team and now has Jarome Iginila. St. Louis made the biggest splash in the off-season, signing Paul Stastny. The Blackhawks and Kings have been the two best teams in the NHL for the last four seasons. Minnesota, who was on the upkick anyway, added Thomas Vanek. Dallas you ask? They added Jason Spezza and Ales Hemsky.

And those, with the exception of the Sharks, are just the teams that made the playoffs in the West last season. The Canucks also have to climb over Phoenix, Nashville and Winnipeg before they can think about a post-season berth.

Now, it’s possible that everything breaks right for them. The Sedins combine for 150 points and Radim Vrbata scores 30 goals. Bonino centres a meaningful second line while Alex Burrows and Jannik Hansen enjoy bounce-back seasons. The kids make a solid contribution. And the Canucks goaltending, with Ryan Miller and Eddie Lack, finishes in the top three in the Conference.

If all that happens, then you can start fantasizing about the playoffs. The more likely scenario is the Canucks give it a run before they come up short late in the season. If they make the playoffs, they should build a statue to Trevor Linden, Jim Benning and Willie Desjardins. As things stand, it will considered a successful season if they’re playing meaningful games in late March.

— Some fearless predictions for the upcoming NHL season.

1) Steven Stamkos edges out Sidney Crosby and Anze Kopitar for the Hart Trophy.

2) John Gibson wins Calder over Johnny Gaudreau and Leon Draisaitl.

3) Norris goes to P.K. Subban over Victor Hedman and Duncan Keith.

4) Tampa’s Jon Cooper wins Adams (coach of the year) over Lindy Ruff in Dallas and Willie Desjardins.

5) Vezina goes to Carey Price over Ben Bishop and Jonathan Quick.

6) Three fantasy sleepers: Patric Hornqvist, Pittsburgh; Alex Galchenyuk, Montreal; Jonathan Huberdeau, Florida.

7) Breakout teams: East: Tampa; West: Dallas.

8) Vezina: Carey Price.

9) Step backwards: East: Detroit; West: San Jose.

10) In the Stanley Cup final, Anaheim over Montreal in six.

— If you consider yourself a serious golfer, you must make the pilgrimage to Bandon Dunes on the Oregon coast. This isn’t a choice. It’s a moral obligation. Do it. You’ll never forget the experience.

— Given their 27-17 win over the Washington on Monday night, it’s pretty clear the Seahawks are the best team in the NFL. But who’s the second best?

After five weeks, there are no undefeateds and just seven teams with one loss. Denver, you suspect, will be there at the end of the season and the Chargers look like a mean piece of business. Beyond that, just about any team that isn’t the Jets, Oakland or Jacksonville is in the mix, which is just another reason for the NFL’s popularity.

— And finally, while it’s a little unsettling to look at the American League playoffs without the Yankees and Red Sox, and now the Tigers and Angels, there must be a little part of every baseball fan who’s delighted by what’s transpired.

The Kansas City Royals are ranked 19th among MLB teams in payroll. The Baltimore Orioles are 15th. Yes, both teams feature high-price stars but their real success lies in drafting, player development and adroit trading.

For a long time, we were told those skills can triumph over money; that you don’t have to buy a team if you build it the right way. It was a quaint notion. The problem was, with the exception of a Tampa here or there, you seldom saw the well-managed teams succeed.

Maybe this is a one-off and, maybe, the oligarchs come back with a vengeance next season. But it’s been nice, for once, to see the working stiffs drink the champagne.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.07.2014
Nick Jensen is going to be a Comet again.

To no one’s real surprise, the 2011 first rounder was demoted to Utica on Monday morning.

He played well in preseason but being still waiver-exempt, this was the easy move.

The 21-year-old winger scored 3 goals and 3 assists in 17 games for the Canucks last season. He had 15 goals in 56 games for Utica; he struggled out of the gate but scored 14 times in his final 22 games for the Comets.

With the likes of Linden Vey, Nick Bonino, Alex Burrows and Zack Kassian all battling for space on the second line, it was going to be tough for Jensen to crack the lineup off the top. Jannik Hansen and Chris Higgins look set to be the third line wingers, while some combination of Shawn Matthias, Derek Dorsett, Bo Horvat and Brad Richardson will make up the fourth line.

There are now 14 forwards on the Canucks’ opening night list. Two will sit.

Jensen was the 15th forward in that mix.
Jensen the final cut, as Canucks display their opening night lineup

October 6, 2014. 2:36 pm
Jim Jamieson

Nicklas Jensen gave his best shot to cracking the Canucks lineup, but fell just short – as the big and skilled Danish winger was the NHL club’s final cut before the season begins on Wednesday in Calgary.

It wasn’t particularly good news for Jensen, 21, who put up two goals and four points in six preseason games, but it was for the Canucks. For the first time since the Cody Hodgson days, the club has excellent minor league options at forward (including already demoted Hunter Shinkaruk) if injuries strike.

The assignment on Monday of Jensen to AHL Utica leaves the Canucks with 14 forwards (including the injured Bo Horvat) eight defencemen (including the injured Kevin Bieksa and Frank Corrado) and two goaltenders. That’s one over the 23-man roster limit, but players placed on the Injured Reserve list don’t count towards the roster number.

Canucks head coach Willie Desjardins was complimentary of Jensen following practice.

“I think we want him to play,” said Desjardins, said of the demotion to Utica. “If he’s not going to be in our first game, we might as well get him down there so he’s playing games. We can always call him back if we want to. I thought he had a real good camp. He’s got good speed. There’s lots of things he’s done to make us know he can play at this level.”

Desjardins wouldn’t commit to having Bieksa back for Wednesday’s game. If Bieksa (and Corrado) can’t play, the Canucks would be down the minimum six healthy defencemen. Bieksa was apparently injured on Thursday in Edmonton. He played the entire game, but hasn’t played since.

“If he’s ready to go, then he’ll go,” said Desjardins.

Desjardins said all three injured players have been skating a little bit but not yet with the team.

Though rookie Bo Horvat still hasn’t played since suffering a shoulder injury on his first shift on Thursday in Edmonton, Desjardins gave every indication the 19-year-old would remain with the team after he’s ready to play.

“I think he’s played real well,” said Desjardins. “I think he’s proven that he’s sound defensively. He’s a heavier body guy. This injury is not what he needed at this time. It’s tough for him, now the other guys get a step ahead, now he’s got to come back. How he comes back from that, we’ll wait to see. But what he did before, I thought he was pretty good.”

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Richardson-Vey-Kassian
Hansen-Matthias-Dorsett
Defence
Edler-Tanev
Hamhuis-Sbisa
Stanton-Weber
Goal
Miller
Lack

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.07.2014
The nasty contract impasse between Ryan Johansen and the Columbus Blue Jackets is over after the parties agreed to a three-year, $12 million deal. Will bitter feelings remain from the negotiations? Will Johansen have trouble matching last season’s numbers after missing all of training camp and the preseason? Scott Burnside and Pierre LeBrun debate.

Burnside: Well, my friend, one of the uglier contract squabbles of the past few years has finally come to an end with emerging Blue Jackets star Ryan Johansen signing a three-year deal worth $12 million on the eve of the regular season. As most hockey fans know -- especially those in Columbus who were biting their nails as this saga dragged through training camp -- the Blue Jackets and their top center were at odds over his value to the team after his breakout season a year ago. Things got so ugly that president John Davidson and general manager Jarmo Kekalainen publicly revealed the numbers of various options they had put before Johansen and his agent Kurt Overhardt.

In the end, not a surprise the two sides ended up finding some common ground as the Blue Jackets will pay $3 million for each of the first two years before providing a significant bump to $6 million in the third and final year. The contract will still leave one more year of restricted free agency for Johansen, who had 33 goals last season and looks like he’s headed for the stratosphere. Were you surprised that the Blue Jackets agreed to the big jump at the end of the deal, and perhaps more to the point, is this the kind of thing that taints the relationship between player and management for the long term?

Columbus center Ryan Johansen had a breakout season with 33 goals and 30 assists.

LeBrun: The key was obviously for Columbus to swallow hard and accept that $6 million salary in Year 3. It’s more money in Year 3 than the Jackets would have preferred, but in the end, I think they came to the conclusion that, if he continued to play like he did last season, he would probably get that kind of money in salary arbitration after a two-year bridge deal. So at least they get contract peace for an extra year now. "I think Columbus did a good job with this contract in the end," one player agent told ESPN.com on Monday.

But for Overhardt and Johansen, the Year 3 salary is huge: it means that the team’s qualifying offer in the summer of 2017 has to be at $6 million. It also means that if Johansen files for salary arbitration in the summer of 2017, he is guaranteed only a one-year award, which bridges the gap to unrestricted free agency for him.

So much can happen between now and then. For starters, if he continues on his track from last season, you better believe the Jackets will try to avoid arbitration in the summer of 2017 and get him signed to a long-term deal before then. But the question is, where is this relationship now? A lot of hurt feelings during this process. Some players have long memories.

Burnside: Agreed on the long memories, although that third-year paycheck may take a lot of the sting out of what has transpired in recent weeks. What is more pressing will be how Johansen responds to the new deal and the fact he has missed all of training camp. The Blue Jackets are in a bit of a dicey spot. They created all kinds of expectations within the marketplace and beyond by having a solid season capped off by a strong playoff series against Pittsburgh that saw them win their first postseason game(s). They brought in Scott Hartnell, and I think many figured them to be in a position to challenge for one of the top three spots in the Metropolitan Division. But Nathan Horton is hurt (again) and won’t be ready for the start of the season. Boone Jenner, who really emerged along with Johansen as a young leader for the Blue Jackets, is out with a hand injury. Does Johansen try to do too much as he drops straight into regular-season action? I think that’s a danger. And we’ve seen young players try to prove their worth coming out of difficult contract talks -- Drew Doughty a couple of years back is a good example -- and get off the rails and take a long time to get back. The Blue Jackets can’t afford to have that happen. Thoughts?
ESPN / Elliott ready to take the reins for Blues

By Pierre LeBrun

Brian Elliott finally has the chance to prove he can handle the load as a No. 1 goalie.

It is hard not to pull for Brian Elliott this season.

Whether it was Jaroslav Halak or Ryan Miller in his way over the past few years, Elliott wasn't ever the guy the St. Louis Blues seemed prepared to ride for real.

He's finally getting a shot to start the season as more of a "1A" option as opposed to "1B," although there will certainly be instant pressure from young Jake Allen, whom some view as the long-term guy anyway.

Still, all Elliott has ever wanted is an honest-to-goodness shot after forever being the good-enough backup or spot starter, but rarely the depended-on, No. 1 guy. Now he's got it, but he's got to play well to keep it.

"He's come in as the No. 1 goaltender into camp, because of his experience and that guys are very comfortable with him," Blues GM Doug Armstrong told ESPN.com last week. "Jake is going to have to take starts away from him, not the other way around. Brian has always been the guy that had to take starts away from the other guy, now he just has to protect his turf."

A chance, finally. But don't go looking for relief in Elliott's voice. He's not going to relax now.

"I've learned not to take anything for granted," Elliott told ESPN.com. "I know from experience that whatever title you're given, it's all performance-based. It's a 'What-have-you-done-for-me-lately' league. You have to perform."

"I just have tried to keep the same mentality and routine going into this season. It can all be just swept away, there's always someone coming for your spot. You always have to stay on your toes."

You can imagine what Elliott thought about his future with the Blues on Feb. 28, when the season-long rumors finally came true, the Blues making a blockbuster deal with the Sabres that netted them Miller.

Elliott was not perceived as the in-house solution, not after losing to the Los Angeles Kings in back-to-back years in the playoffs (Elliott was in goal for the injured Halak in those series). So Miller it was. The Blues were all-in.

"I knew that making that big of a deal, they would have to sink or swim with their decision and I knew I probably wouldn't get an opportunity in the playoffs," Elliott said. "It was a little bit tough to take just to know how hard you worked with your teammates the past three years. I've had the opportunity in the past to be the guy in the playoffs, it's tough to sit on the bench and watch that."

"But for [Miller], it was a tough situation for him, too. Basically we had to win the Stanley Cup or it was going to be unsuccessful. I knew it was going to be a tough situation for him."

The Blues lost to the Chicago Blackhawks in the opening round and Miller wasn't the answer.

Mindset rather than physical talent has been the biggest question about Brian Elliott.

Partly because the Blues spent money on Paul Stastny and Jori Lehtera up front, but also because it was finally time to give the guy a chance, Armstrong decided not to try to re-sign Miller and instead approached UFA-to-be Elliott about staying on in a bigger role.

"We met and basically it was to see if I wanted to come back," Elliott said. "I said to him, 'To be honest with you, when you made the trade for [Miller] ... it's basically I don't think I'm in the plans anymore.' So I'm like, 'If you're serious about it, I'd like to talk to Hitch about it and talk about the plans for the future.'"

Yes, Elliott wanted to stay on, but he wanted to hear from Blues head coach Ken Hitchcock that he would get a fair shot at being the man in goal.

"I wanted an opportunity to be the guy, or just be rewarded for playing well," Elliott said. "I felt at times over the past few years, I'd play well, you get a shutout in Pittsburgh, and then you don't play for three, four or five games. It's tough when you do feel good and you don't have a chance to get out there."

Not that he doesn't get it. Halak was the bigger investment at the time. He understands that part of the business.

"Which is understandable, it's about contracts too," said Elliott. "You want to get all you want from each contract, I understand that. But it was a tough situation to be in at times."

Armstrong didn't know how his meeting with Elliott would go, either.

"I wasn't sure whether he would want to come back or not," the Blues GM said. "He wanted to make sure we wouldn't go out and sign somebody else. He wanted the chance to be the No. 1 goalie. And now it's just straight competition, just two guys now fighting for ice time. And I think that's all he wanted, an actual fair chance."

Elliott put up a .922 save percentage in 31 games with the Blues last season. Even in his playoff series loss to the Kings in the spring of 2013, he gave up only 12 goals in six games. His team didn't score for him. His critics will say it's when he gives up goals, though, not how many.

He's put up good numbers most years, but hasn't won over everyone in terms of seeing him as a true No. 1.

"I think technically he's strong, I don't think anybody ever believed that was a problem," said a goalie coach for an Eastern Conference team. "The concern at times with him has been mentally, when he's been given the ball, he hasn't always been able to sustain it, if you look at this time in Ottawa, for example.

"Physically, he's about as good as anybody. But can he handle the pressure of being No. 1? Who knows, perhaps this is his time."

Elliott is 29 now. He has put in his time. Perhaps it is indeed his time.

"He's an interesting story," Armstrong said. "When he came in with us right at the beginning, he really had to swallow hard and take a two-way deal and come in and compete with Ben Bishop [for the backup job behind Halak]. That was a really good camp, and quite honestly it was really close. Ben didn't need waivers to go down. Brian and Jaro won the Jennings that year. We eventually traded Ben and kept Brian. He has earned everything he's got."

Allen, 24, will push, no question about it. Elliott welcomes the partnership in goal.

"I see a little bit of myself in Jake right now, I was kind of in his position coming in young," Elliott said. "He was an All-Star in the AHL before and I was as well before I got called up. But it's still a jump to the big leagues, you have to get used to that. I knew there would be a good opportunity this season to take the reins, but I also knew these young guys coming up have a lot of skill, a lot of talent."

"It's a good fit, we get along, we bounce things off each other every day. 'Why do you tie your pads that way?' Stuff like that. We learn from each other. I try to be the best teammate I can be and help a guy like that out. I know I was in that position before and it helps to ease yourself into it when you have an older guy that's been around for a bit and knows what it takes to get to the next step."

In his seventh NHL season, Elliott finally gets his real chance. What makes it more rewarding is that it's on a Cup contender. That's what matters most to Elliott.

"When you're on a good team like this, it makes it so much more fun when you go out there and expect to win every night. Some teams don't have that," Elliott said.

"It's just a real fun opportunity at my age. The core group of guys here are kind of all in the same age group, 28 to 31, we feel like we've been around, we've battled against the guys that have done the same, and now it's our turn. It's exciting."

ESPN LOADED: 10.07.2014
When the Jets returned to Portage and Main three years ago, the pure joy of having NHL hockey back in Winnipeg was enough to inspire the team’s passionate fan base. It had been 15 years after all; the homecoming bash was tremendous. But last season, after the Jets finished with 84 points and missed the playoffs yet again, the hangover finally started to set in. If there is a cure for what ills Winnipeg, though, it comes in the form of six-foot-two defenceman Jacob Trouba—a franchise player in the making who’s been compared to both Chris Pronger and Rob Blake by former coaches.

It’s premature to suggest that a 20-year-old sophomore deserves to be mentioned in that company, but Trouba has already proven that he was a steal at No. 9 in the 2012 draft—especially considering that he was the fifth defenceman taken.

"Can you tell me who the other four were?" asks Red Berenson, head coach at the University of Michigan, where Trouba played for a year before entering the draft. "And have any of them played as well as Jacob Trouba, in his situation?"

Trouba was already a known commodity when he arrived at Michigan in 2012, but Berenson didn’t realize what his freshman blueliner was truly capable of until his first skate in training camp. His skill and physical ability were similar to most elite players his age, Berenson says, but his competitive streak set him apart.

"It was like a Stanley Cup game at every practice," Berenson says. At the end of the season, Berenson—who has coached the Wolverines for three decades, following a long NHL career—took Trouba aside.

"You’re as ready as any defenceman I’ve ever had," he said. "If you want to leave, I don’t blame you."

In Winnipeg, Trouba benefited immediately from the team’s reliance on young talent. After losing more than a month of his rookie season to an injury he sustained smashing face-first into the boards, Trouba finished with 10 goals and 29 points in 65 games—a single point less than Tobias Enstrom, the Jets’ top-scoring defenceman, who played all 82. He was arguably Winnipeg’s best blueliner, with considerable offensive talent and intimidating strength for a guy still in his teens.

Jets fans can be encouraged by Trouba’s development. In three years with the U.S. national development team, Trouba showed remarkable poise and maturity, says Danton Cole, a coach with the program.

"He was a calming influence on the bench and the ice," he said. "He turned into a complete player with an understanding that there are a lot of different ways to affect the game and it’s not always just running somebody over."

Though this almost certainly won’t be the year for a parade in The Peg, Trouba gives Jets fans something—something!—to hope for. He and centreman Mark Scheifele are the future of an organization still working with the leftovers of its Thrashers days. The headache will last a bit longer, but then a new kind of party will begin.
Counting down the final 30 days to puck drop on the 2014-15 NHL season, Sportsnet previews all 30 NHL teams in reverse order of how we believe they will finish the regular season.

A dozen reporters and analysts from Sportsnet’s hockey brain trust — Doug MacLean, John Shannon, Chris Johnston, Damien Cox, Mark Spector, et al. — submitted a listing ranking all the teams in order of how they think the NHL season will shake out. We crunched the numbers and will be unveiling our consensus standings projection from worst to first.

Anaheim is our second-ranked team.

Off-season grade: A. Fresh off his General Manager of the Year award and a record-setting season for the Ducks franchise, Bob Murray upgraded his team by picking up Ryan Kesler, who was looking for a way out Vancouver. In truth, the Ducks could have sat still and it would’ve been hard to criticize Murray, whose team finished the season with a franchise-best 116 points, good for second overall in the league, behind only Boston. After being a Cup favourite all season, the Ducks fell to the rival Los Angeles Kings in a ridiculously good conference semifinal. Anaheim’s best move was to keep the moves minimal but significant, adding talent and strength on the second line. An upgrade on defence would’ve been ideal, but there wasn’t much in the market that would fit with the franchise.

Greatest strengths: The Ducks had the best offence in the league last season, averaging 3.21 goals a game. Ryan Getzlaf finished second in overall scoring, behind Sidney Crosby. Corey Perry was fifth. With Kesler as its No. 2 centre, Anaheim looks even more dangerous this season. They paid a price to get him — Nick Bonino, Luca Sbisa and two draft picks—but it was a gamble worth taking.

Greatest weaknesses: The Ducks went into the playoffs last year with three possible starting goalies: veteran Jonas Hillier plus rookies Frederik Andersen and John Gibson. It was an odd situation for such a successful team to find itself in — without a clear guy to ride through the playoffs. Ultimately Gibson won the role and was remarkable through the conference semis against the Kings. With Hiller gone to Calgary, the position belongs to Gibson and Anderson, both highly touted, both young and unproven. The Ducks have put their faith in youth between the pipes. The move might pay off, but it leaves a big unknown heading into a year where nothing less than a Cup will do.

Biggest story line to watch: Ryan Getzlaf finished second in Hart Trophy voting last season, and he and Corey Perry have become the most dangerous linemates in the league. They are also reaching their peak, so this team is looking to win now. But the West is a wild, dangerous place, and the Ducks won’t have an easy path to the Cup. The main questions will be whether the addition of Kesler can put the Ducks over the edge, and whether the young goaltending tandem of Andersen and Gibson is stable enough to ride all the way.

2014-15 prediction: A top three team in the West, the Ducks will reach the conference final—at least.
Where’s the fun—or the glory—in making reasoned, realistic predictions for the 2014-15 NHL season? You’re right, and nobody cares because a lot of other people were right, too. You’re wrong, and it’s like you couldn’t even correctly predict a simple outcome.

Those kind of predictions are for the weak. We believe in going hard or going home. So these are real predictions—not probabilities—things that might not happen, but are just likely enough that if you offered us the right odds, we’d snap them up as prop bets right now.

And we’ve got one for each team—today we’re tackling the Western Conference. (You can find the East right here—please note that it was published a full two days before Jeff Skinner’s latest head injury.) Enjoy, and come see us in April.

Anaheim Ducks: With Teemu Selanne out of the power-play picture (and yes, despite his complaints, he saw the fourth-most PP time among Ducks forwards) speedy youngster Devante Smith-Pelly (we like him because he has a hyphenated last name!) steps into the void, crashes the net and emerges with 20-25 goals and a whole lot of fans in California.

Arizona Coyotes: The ‘Yotes become the only team in the NHL to have defencemen finish 1-2 in team scoring, as both Keith Yandle and Oliver Ekman-Larsson top 50 points. Mikkel Boedker finishes third on the team with 49. The Coyotes do not finish third.

Calgary Flames: Flames fans will enjoy their team’s youth movement, watch its possession game continue to blossom and will absolutely not be wishing for the season to end by February. While the Flames will still miss the playoffs in a stacked Western Conference, fans will have seen enough from a handful of prospects by March that there will be genuine hope for contention in the near future—and in Calgary, predictions don’t come much bolder than that.

Chicago Blackhawks: Last season’s leading scorer Patrick Sharp finishes no better than fifth on his team in points, behind Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Marian Hossa and… Brandon Saad, who plays a major power-play role and finishes with 66 points.

Colorado Avalanche: It’s not an unlikely prediction to say the Avs lack of a possession game catches up with them and they come crashing back down to earth. Many expect that, so here’s two more specific predictions: Nathan McKinnon takes a bigger leap than anyone expected, topping 80 points, and Semyon Varlamov takes a bigger step back than anyone imagined, finishing with a SV% around .912 after ending last year at .927.

Dallas Stars: Every year there’s a team pegged to make a huge leap that doesn’t get there, this year, that’s the Stars. Jason Spezza and Ales Hemsky struggle with injuries and don’t deliver the secondary scoring the team badly needs, and Kari Lehtonen plays just 47 games and can’t find a groove. Everybody’s preseason darling loses a dogfight with the Wild down the stretch and misses the playoffs by a point.

Edmonton Oilers: Hey—remember Nail Yakupov? That huge bust who was benched at times last year? Yeah, he’s not a bust at all and after returning to camp with a new attitude and an improvement on the defensive end, he’s rewarded with prime PP time and scores more goals than he had total points last season (24). He’s still a minus player though—but he’s above -10, which is a victory in itself.

Los Angeles Kings: The Kings are a very good team and nothing changes that. They finish third in the conference and enter the playoffs riding the hot hand of...goalie Martin Jones. (Hey, this team is a machine—you gotta really reach for something that’d be shocking to see in Los Angeles.)

Minnesota Wild: The offence in Minnesota explodes, turning the Wild from a quietly competent team that makes the playoffs as a wild card and loses in the second round into a fun, exciting team that makes the playoffs as the second wild card and loses in the first round. Oh, and Darcy Kuemper is the unquestioned starter by season’s end.

Nashville Predators: The Preds are the worst team in the Central division—yes, worse than the Jets!—but discover several young stars along the way, as Calle Jarnkrok, Filip Forsberg, Seth Jones, Roman Josi and Ryan Ellis all make big strides. In related (and somewhat more shocking) news, a couple of San Jose’s pluggers start the season hotter than they’ve ever been. It apparently takes the Sharks’ “brain” trust a few weeks to realize that Thornton makes the players around him much better and move him back into the top six. They definitely do not wet themselves at the first签of playoff adversity, nor does their goaltending go south or their team grit disintegrate. None of that happens. Nosiree.

Vancouver Canucks: The Sedins return to the list of the NHL’s top 20 scorers. Ryan Miller returns to All-Star status. Radim Vrbata becomes every poolie’s favourite misspelled name and, in general, the Canucks prove that goallending and coaching are the two quickest routes to a turnaround in hockey. They hold their own in a tough division and clinch the West’s top wildcard spot.

Winnipeg Jets: An angry Evander Kane lets his stick do the talking, silencing all the critics who were wondering why, at age 23 and having spent every NHL season on a bad team, he doesn’t play with a veteran winner’s poise and composure. Anyway, he scores 38 goals and this time the media criticizes him for not talking enough. After the Jets miss the playoffs, he literally begs management to trade him to a U.S. market.
As with all things that happen around the Toronto Maple Leafs, this will be exaggerated and distorted.

Some will say it shows the influence of Brendan Shanahan, or even Kyle Dubas, who is quickly being elevated to the status of the most influential assistant GM in the hockey world before his 30th birthday and before he’s spent a single season in pro hockey. Those who believe in analytics above all else are riding high right now, and Dubas, by all accounts a promising hockey man, is their champion.

But the decision to put enforcers Colton Orr and Frazer McLaren on waivers today shouldn’t be minimized, either. Put bluntly, it never would have happened two years ago when Brian Burke was in charge, and it didn’t happen last year when Dave Nonis was running the show.

The thinking has clearly changed around the Air Canada Centre, and those who have always (mistakenly) thought of Nonis as nothing more than a Burke clone will naturally attribute this change to the new people in the organization.

Fair enough. It doesn’t necessarily matter. What matters is that the belief that muscle and intimidation are critical elements in building a successful hockey club–whether it’s to protect your own stars or keep the other side “honest,”–clearly is no longer a guiding principle with this team.

It should be noted that this has as much to do with McLaren and Orr and their weaknesses as hockey players as it does with a new approach by Leafs management. If either player could take a regular shift and score between five and 10 goals a season, they’d likely still be on the roster.

In other words, the Leafs might still like to use an enforcer, but one capable of doing other things as well. If they could lay their hands on Wayne Simmonds, they would. And remember: David Clarkson was tied for the team lead in fights last season with nine majors, and he’s still on the roster.

Toronto led the NHL in fights the past two years, and has only three playoff wins and two ugly collapses—one in Game 7 of the 2013 playoffs, one in the final month of the 2013-14 season—to show for it. Leafs head coach Randy Carlyle clearly wanted at least one enforcer on his roster at all times, and unless he’s changed his views on the use of muscle in the game, today’s moves suggest that just like the appointment of two new assistant coaches this summer, his views have been overruled.

Without Orr and McLaren—and if unclaimed on waivers, one or both could reappear later this season—the Leafs still have players willing to engage if necessary. But just among Orr, McLaren, Mark Fraser and Mike Brown two seasons ago there were 39 fights in a shortened 48-game season, so obviously there’s a new course being charted here.

Keeping tiny Brandon Kozun and moving Orr and McLaren sends a pretty powerful message as to the type of hockey club the Leafs want to develop. Even keeping former first-round pick Stuart Percy on the back end, a finesse rearguard with an excellent first pass but a decidedly non-physical approach, tells you something about the way this regime is now thinking.

Tough guys, from Tiger Williams to Ken Baumgartner to Tie Domi, have always been remarkably popular in Toronto hockey circles, and all three played on teams that made it to the NHL’s Final Four.

But this is 2014. The Kings and Rangers made it to last spring’s Stanley Cup final without either team employing a recognized heavyweight, and both were in the bottom third of the league for most fights. There’s little hard evidence to suggest carrying a designated “policeman” makes a positive difference anymore, and even less to support the long-held belief that fights change the course of individual games.

Burke brought the “truculence” philosophy to Toronto when he arrived in late November 2008, and now that he’s in Calgary, the Flames spent on muscle this summer. So there are still plenty of people in the game who believe it matters, and matters a lot.