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Ducks' McMillan expected to produce

By ERIC STEPHENS
2011-10-20 21:44:14

ANAHEIM – To fill the spot vacated when Jason Blake suffered a torn tendon above his left wrist, Ducks coach Randy Carlyle promoted Brandon McMillan to the second line alongside Teemu Selanne and Sakko Koivu.

With that also comes expectations, and McMillan's job now isn't about keeping that spot warm.

"I think it's what it is," Carlyle said. "It's an opportunity. (I had) a conversation with him. Just don't accept that you're playing there. We need production. Don't expect that just because you're the guy that's practiced there, that that's going to continue if we don't get production.

"This game is about producing and winning. It gets masked if you're not producing and you're winning because you kind of fly under the radar. At some point, even the best players get criticized for not producing."

McMillan is getting the first crack at trying to fill in for Blake, who is expected to be out until mid-to-late January at the earliest. McMillan, a second-year player, is another of the youngsters the Ducks are relying on to complement their stars.

The book on the British Columbian isn't extensive, particularly in a quiet start to the young season. But McMillan showed his versatility and capacity for secondary offense as a rookie when he posted 11 goals and 21 points in 60 games.

There were times when McMillan was spotted alongside Selanne and Koivu for shifts during games, but this is about securing the chance to play with them from start to finish.

"It's a whole new experience playing with these guys full time so far," he said. "I'm learning every day."

Since he jumped up to their line after Blake was hurt in the third period of last week's home opener against San Jose, McMillan has been studying his new linemates and making mental notes on what tendencies they display.

And if he isn't watching them, McMillan is getting direct advice from Koivu and Selanne on where he needs to be on the ice for them to flourish as a unit.

"It's a little different," he said. "Because those guys are so skilled and they make some plays that you don't expect. It's a totally different game out there when you're playing with those guys. You just kind of read off them and kind of learn."

Playing on a line that focuses more on creating offense now means McMillan must strive to create a balance between getting his proven linemates the puck as quickly as he can while also trusting that he can also hold onto it and make plays for them.

Selanne understands the balance between telling the winger where they need him to be and allowing him to freedom to expand his game.

"We don't want to take away the creative stuff away or anything what he's used to," Selanne said. "There's a couple of things we want him to do. Basic things.

"If he doesn't know where we are, (then it's) where to put the puck or where we're going to put the puck if we don't see anybody open. A couple of basic things. Nothing major."

Some other players have shown promise as a rookie and then regressed as a sophomore. McMillan wants to show Carlyle and the rest of the Ducks brass he won't fall into that category.

"I do it for myself as well," McMillan said. "You don't want to come in and have a poor season. I'm here for the team as well. And I've got to work hard and be the player I was last year and even improving on that would help this team out a lot."
Ducks' Getzlaf greets 1 millionth visitor

By JEFF MILLER
2011-10-19 20:09:41

SANTA ANA – He was there 2½ years ago when the first customer entered the Science of Hockey exhibit at the Discovery Science Center.

And Ryan Getzlaf was there again Wednesday when the 1 millionth customer entered.

It was Zachary Geiss, 8, a second-grader at Mary Star of the Sea Elementary in San Pedro.

"This was meant to grow the game and help kids learn about the sport of hockey," Getzlaf said. "Having a million customers come through here shows this is definitely doing its job."

The exhibit opened in April of 2009, thanks largely to the support of Ducks owners Henry and Susan Samueli.

To mark the occasion of the 1 millionth visitor, they are conducting "Anaheim Ducks Week" at the Science Center through Sunday. Children ages 3-14 wearing Ducks gear (hat, T-shirt or jersey) receive free admission.

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Bruins break out of slump against Leafs

By Fluto Shinzawa
Globe Staff / October 21, 2011

Of the multiple positives that emerged from the Bruins’ 6-2 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs last night at TD Garden, the ones that didn’t appear on the scoresheet are the qualities that coaches especially prefer.

On each of the Bruins’ four even-strength goals (the other two came on the power play), the Bruins hurtled into the offensive zone. Speed at one end of the ice is often the result of good habits at the other end.

In practice on Wednesday, a little more than 12 hours after an embarrassing 4-1 loss to Carolina, the coaching staff emphasized hard skating, crisp breakouts, and an insistence on every forward to come back hard for the puck.

Last night, because the Bruins executed in the defensive zone, they got some of their best scoring chances of the season.

“We were able to make those good, crisp, clean, short passes, especially in the defensive zone when we were breaking out,” said Milan Lucic. “That’s what gave us so much success last year. We were a good team breaking out. As much as it is the defensemen moving the puck to us, it’s our job to get open for them. I think we did a better job giving them outlets.”

It can be a challenging system. Claude Julien demands his forwards to skate harder than those on other teams. But that come-back-hard system, when executed correctly, is the foundation for many good things. It’s easier for defensemen to initiate breakouts. Because the forwards are starting deep in the defensive zone, they have more ice with which to rev up their wheels. Opponents’ gaps become slacker.

Last night was a textbook example.

At 17:49 of the first period, after Nathan Horton and Zdeno Chara had scored power-play goals, the Bruins made it a 3-1 game. Lucic had speed going over the offensive blue line because he came back hard to take a pass from Andrew Ference. Lucic’s dish to Chris Kelly ended with the center backhanding the puck over Jonas Gustavsson.

After a scoreless second, the Bruins grabbed a 4-1 lead at 2:08 of the third. Again, the new No. 2 line of Kelly, Lucic, and Tyler Seguin was involved. Kelly started the play deep in the defensive zone with a chip off the right wall to Seguin. In turn, Seguin hurtled up the right side, while Lucic provided middle drive. Seguin blew past Dion Phaneuf, taking the Toronto captain’s stick with him, then spotted Lucic for a bang-bang tap-in. It was the left wing’s first goal of the season.

“When we’re supporting each other coming up the ice as a five-man unit, that’s when we get our most opportunities,” Lucic said. “That was evident tonight.”

Patrice Bergeron gave the Bruins a 5-1 lead at 10:08. He had too much speed going over the offensive blue line for the Leafs to defend. With a quick snap, Bergeron (game-high nine shots) went high glove on Gustavsson. Seguin capped the six-goal rally by taking a pass from Lucic and going high glove on the Toronto goalie one last time.

“More of a north-south type of game,” Julien said. “Quick up, going in with some speed, and you saw guys driving harder to the net than I’ve seen this year.”

Aside from an early David Steckel goal - the center’s shot skimmed off Kelly’s stick and beat Tim Thomas - and a third-period Mikhail Grabovski strike, the Bruins had few complaints in handing the Leafs their first loss of 2011-12.

They limited Phil Kessel to one shot. The line changes (Horton with Bergeron and Brad Marchand, David Krejci back, between Benoit Pouliot and Rich Peverley) resulted in chemistry. The power play hit paydirt twice on its first two chances. Chara, scoreless in six previous games, put up a goal and two assists. Ference tied a career high with three helpers, two on the power play.

Even a Thomas mistake turned into a game-changing save.

Midway through the second, when the Bruins held a 3-1 lead, Grabovski had finished serving a penalty for holding the stick. As Grabovski stepped out of the box, an errant Krejci pass landed on the forward’s stick. Thomas had failed to slam his stick on the ice to indicate to his teammates that a penalty was expiring.

With no teammates in sight, Thomas had only himself to blame. So at 8:43 of the second, when he flashed his left pad to smother Grabovski’s breakaway bid, Thomas made up for his error.

“I kind of helped cause the breakaway,” said Thomas (26 saves). “So I had extra motivation to stop that breakaway. I just really wanted to stop that one because I’d kind of made a mistake beforehand.”

For one night, it was a job well done. But the Bruins have seen this before. After a near-perfect 4-1 win over Tampa Bay on Oct. 8, the Bruins stumbled in their next two games against Colorado and Carolina. Following a 3-2 shootout win on the road against Chicago, the Bruins embarrassed themselves at home against the Hurricanes.

Last night will mean little if they don’t turn in good habits and crisp execution once more tomorrow against San Jose.

“Lot of good things that came out of tonight’s game,” Julien said. “It’s being able to translate that into consistency.”

As usual, attention zeros in on Kessel

By Kevin Paul Dupont
Globe Staff / October 21, 2011

Even with a Stanley Cup in hand, it seems the season doesn’t really start for the Bruins until Phil Kessel comes to town with the Maple Leafs. Every season needs a focal point or two, and Kessel is that, though he isn’t the only one, what with all the history there is around here with a certain team from Montreal.

Two-plus years removed from his Black-and-Gold days, Kessel, 24, still makes the distant descendants of the Gallery Gods take notice. He could have stayed here, coulda been a contendah (maybe a Cup winnah, too), but he forced a trade to the Leafs after three years, and Bruins fans still feel shortchanged for their emotional investment.

Will the story line ever end?

“Well, that’s up to you guys,” said a smiling Claude Julien during his morning media session, long before his defending Cup champs pinned a convincing 6-2 loss on the Leafs at the Garden. “It’s certainly not created by us. We’ve turned the page.”

Not the Garden fans. Not yet. Maybe never. Late in the first period last night, just before the Bruins boosted their lead to 3-1, Kessel controlled the puck deep in the Boston zone, along the left wall.

“Boo!” came the calls from the sellout crowd of 17,565. “Boooooooo . . .”

In the opening minute of the second period, Kessel raced into Boston’s zone on right wing with the puck, then promptly slipped and fell on the new sheet of ice. The Black-and-Gold faithful cheered, almost with as much fervor as they did when Kessel was a hometown hero.

And late in the third period, after Tyler Seguin boosted Boston’s lead to 6-1, the crowd brought back a familiar chant: “Thank you, Kes-sell! . . . Thank you, Kes-sell!”

Seguin, drafted No. 2 overall in 2010 with one of the two first-round picks the Leafs gave up for Kessel, finished the night 1-2-3.

Kessel, as has often been the case here, finished the night 0-0-0 and minus-1. For his 16:19 in ice time, including nearly three minutes on the power play, he landed only one shot on net and attempted only two others. He made the night a certified Full Thornton when he refused to meet with the media after the loss.

The crowd gets juiced up not just that Kessel is outta here, of course. It’s also because he is running hot from the start again this season, which has been his trademark since joining the Leafs.

In 2009-10, his first season in Blue and White, shoulder surgery kept him out of the lineup until the start of November, but he bolted out to a 10-5-15 start in his first 15 games. Kessel then came to Boston for the first time Dec. 5, posted a line of 0-0-0/minus-3, and went from Dec. 9 to Jan. 8 (18 games) with a paltry 4-2-6.

Last season, Kessel again ran hot from the start with a 7-2-9 line in his opening eight games. Then came a big chill of 5-6 weeks, beginning with another 0-0-0 outing against the Bruins, in which he went 3-2-5 over 20 games. Another one-month stretch, spanning January and February, left him 0-5-5 over 11 games.

It doesn’t get much more off-on than that, does it? The pattern was not unlike his three seasons in the Hub. In Toronto, the 2006 No. 5 overall pick connected for 30 and 32 goals in his first two seasons, but his offs were as cold as his ons were hot.

Question is, will he stay hot in 2011-12? Is this the season he finally breaks out for 40-50 goals? The Leafs paid him to be a franchise forward, their offensive centerpiece, and that has yet to happen.

“What the difference is this year,” said Brian Burke, the Leafs GM who traded for Kessel, “is that’s he’s playing a 200-foot, 60-minute game now. He’s out there for the last minute of tight games, every situation on the ice.”

The Leafs may not get a true sense of Kessel’s upside until he finally plays with a bona fide No. 1 center. They added ex-Sabre Tim Connolly for that role, but he remains out with injury.

It was precisely the streaky play that left the Boston front office unconvinced in the summer of 2009 that Kessel was the right fit for their lineup. He had dynamic speed (still does), a sizzling shot (perhaps even a touch stronger now), and was among the few players in the league who gave defensemen the shakes when he cracked the blue line.

Bruins GM Peter Chiarelli wanted to fit him in financially around David Krejci money (three years, $3.75 million per), or perhaps a touch more, but it became clear as the summer of 2009 rolled on that the Leafs were willing to put much bigger money in his bank account. Within hours after he was dealt to the Leafs Sept. 18, he would be $27 million richer for his next five years of employment.

While the Bruins had questions, the Leafs had confidence and cash.

Entering last night, Kessel led the league in points (12) and goals (7), and was tied for seventh in assists (5). No matter how he plays over his next 76 games, it’s guaranteed that he won’t stay on that pace, which would project to 197 points. No one comes close to that anymore.

Last night, Kessel had nothing, and the rest of the Leafs had little more. The season has begun in earnest in the Hub of Hockey.

Even before Steven Kampfer took the TD Garden ice yesterday morning, it was clear he would be making his season debut last night.

The Bruins had assigned Matt Bartkowski to Providence, indicating that Kampfer, who has been rehabbing from a knee injury, was ready to enter the lineup.  

“I’ve been a while, but I’m excited for it,” Kampfer said before the 6-2 win over the Maple Leafs. “I’m ready to go. I feel good. I’m just going to go out there and try to play my game, play simple, and help get this team get 2 points.”

In 12:28 of ice time, Kampfer had one assist, blocked two shots, and landed one puck on Leafs goalie Jonas Gustavsson. Kampfer was paired mostly with Andrew Ference in even-strength situations.

“I liked the way he skated and moved the puck,” coach Claude Julien said of Kampfer. “He seemed to play on his toes instead of his heels. That was good to see from a first game. He played a decent game for us.”

After a slow start in training camp, Kampfer found his legs halfway through the preseason. The puck-moving defenseman projected to be the spare blue liner when the Bruins broke camp. But on Sept. 29, when he pinched down the wall in a preseason game against Ottawa, Kampfer collided with Jared Cowen, spraining the medial collateral ligament in his left knee.

Until last night, Kampfer could only watch as his teammates struggle to find their rhythm.

“It’s definitely more stressful watching, especially when you can’t do anything to help change the outcome,” Kampfer said. “I think that’s more frustrating than anything. You sit there and you realize that the team may be struggling, but you can’t do anything to help.

“Now that I’m healthy, I can try and help this team.”

The Bruins were happy to welcome back Kampfer. Bartkowski was pushed into third-pairing duty because of Adam McQuaid’s spotty health. McQuaid missed the season opener against Philadelphia because of a virus, and sat out his third straight game last night because of a neck injury suffered Oct. 12 against Carolina.

In three games, Bartkowski proved to be far from NHL-ready.

“He has to go there, play, and make quicker decisions with the puck and knowing what to do when he gets it,” said Julien. “The pace of this league is a little quicker. At times, we just felt he’s maybe a little slow in reacting. That got him in trouble at times. More playing time will certainly help him in regards to that.”

Krejci returns

David Krejci returned to the lineup last night after missing three games because of a core injury suffered in practice Oct. 11.

Krejci, formerly the No. 1 pivot, centered the third line between Benoit Pouliot and Rich Peverley. Krejci had 17:07 of ice time, perhaps more than Julien anticipated, landed three shots, and won 11 of 16 faceoffs.

Prior to Boston’s first power-play goal, Krejci beat David Steckel, Toronto’s ace draw man, on an offensive-zone faceoff.

“He probably gave me a little bit more than I thought he would,” said Julien. “I had talked to him before the game when we decided he was going to be in. I explained I’d see how he handled the ice and how he handled himself out there. According to that, we’d gauge his ice time.”

Horton responds
Less does mean more for Milan Lucic

By Stephen Harris / Bruins Beat | Friday, October 21, 2011 | http://www.bostonherald.com | Boston Bruins

Milan Lucic may not be the most important Bruin, but he's on the short list.

Lucic has become what old-time hockey writers used to call "a stemwinder," or a guy who is a leader, a catalyst and someone who gets his team moving.

When Looch is moving the way he was last night, you can pretty well bet the B's are in good form, too — which was definitely the case in their sorely needed 6-2 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs at the Garden.

Lucic, like Terry O'Reilly and Cam Neely before him, becomes a better player when he is not thinking about scoring goals, but rather focusing on moving his feet and playing hard, physical hockey. Amazing how that works: Less is more.

After practice Wednesday, Lucic, who had just one assist in the first six games and had his line broken up, was saying he intended to get back to a simpler style of play.

"I'm trying to do too much, and it's causing me to do nothing," he said. "I just have to step back and focus on playing that straight line, hard, up and down the wall."

Last night, the results were obvious to one and all, as Lucic (goal, two assists) and new linemates Chris Kelly (goal, assist) and Tyler Seguin (goal, two assists) had themselves a night.

Inspired early by Shawn Thornton's impressive fight against the ultra-tough Colton Orr, the Bruins looked like the B's for one of the few times this season. They played with energy, checked hard, won battles, supported each other, were first on the puck and had urgency in their play.

Were they careless with the puck at times? Yep, but this was a big step in the right direction.

"Especially in the first period and the third, not just for myself but the whole team, we had success because we were moving the puck forward," Lucic said. "We were moving our feet and making short, crisp passes. When we did that and were supporting each other up the ice — coming up as a five-man unit — that's when we get our most opportunities."

Boston Herald LOADED: 10.21.2011
Bruins back on game with rout of Leafs

That's more like it

By Steve Conroy  Friday, October 21, 2011  http://www.bostonherald.com  Boston Bruins

Bruins fans couldn't have asked for much more last night.


And when young Tyler Seguin ripped home his second goal of the season to cap a three-point night for the sophomore, the crowd showed its appreciation with another derisive "Thank you, Kessel" chant.

It was that kind of night at the Garden, the Bruins pummeling their former teammate Phil Kessel and the Maple Leafs, 6-2, handing Toronto its first regulation loss of the season and wiping out the memory of the frustrating loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night.

The Bruins ripped open a 3-1 game with third-period goals from Lucic, Patrice Bergeron and Seguin and secured a much needed, convincing victory. Andrew Ference (three assists), Lucic (goal, two assists) and Zdeno Chara (goal, two assists) joined Seguin in the three-point club.

“We didn’t have any passengers tonight,” said winger Shawn Thornton, who set the tone with a spirited bout against Toronto tough guy Colton Orr just 1:54 into the contest. “Everyone did their job and it was pretty relevant to the way things ended up.”

After the loss to Carolina, coach Claude Julien tossed his top nine forwards into a bag, shook it up and dropped out three new combinations. None looked bad, but the best might have been the Lucic-Chris Kelly-Seguin trio, as each scored a goal. The Brad Marchand-Patrice Bergeron-Nathan Horton group also looked good, as Horton scored the first goal of the night (one of two power plays in the first period) and looked more engaged all night.

“Good things happen when you move your feet, and especially playing with those guys,” said Horton of Marchand and Bergeron. “They’re so fast and they make such good plays cycling. I just try to move my feet so I can keep up with them.”

Whether it was a matter of the players clicking or just responding to a wakeup call, it all worked out.

“I think it was definitely a good thing because no one really had too much chemistry,” said Seguin, who moved back to wing after three games at center. “And when all the lines are mixed up you kind of just focus on playing your best, and with that everyone kind of just focused on their game and what they have to do in taking accountability and I think that’s why we were successful. Not thinking about the chemistry and just thinking ‘I need to do my role and things will work out’ and that’s what happened.”

It wasn’t a perfect night. In the last half of the second period, with the B’s up 3-1 and the Leafs still in it, the Bruins had great difficulty getting out of their own zone.

But as he did all last spring, Thomas made the saves. He made 14 stops in the period, his best coming on a Mikhail Grabovski breakaway after the Leafs forward jumped out of the penalty box to corral a loose puck at center ice.

“I lost track of how many people were coming out of the box, so I didn’t bang my stick to give my (defense) any warning,” said Thomas. “I just really wanted to stop that one because I had kind of made a mistake beforehand.”

After that hiccup, the Bruins got back to business in the third period, refusing to allow any more drama to creep into this one.

With the exception of that second period, Julien was happy with the performance. Now he’d like to see another one tomorrow night against another former Bruins star, Joe Thornton, and the San Jose Sharks. If so, the B’s may have their first winning streak of the season.

“We need to reinforce (last night’s effort) by having a good game (tomorrow) against San Jose, another team who’s very good on paper and should be one of the elite teams but is off to a slow start,” said Julien.

“These kind of teams, like ourselves, San Jose, you never know on any given night what you’re going to get right now.

“And, if we get the best of San Jose, we’re going to have our hands full.”

Boston Herald LOADED: 10.21.2011
We will probably be measuring the Phil Kessel trade that netted the Bruins three high draft picks for years to come, but it’s still looking like a pretty good deal for the Bruins despite only one of those picks having played for them.

Tyler Seguin, the No. 2 overall pick last year, continues to show he’s blooming quite nicely in his second year. He had a goal and two assists last night and, perhaps even more indicative of his growth, made a terrific, desperate backcheck in the third period to break up a scoring chance.

“It was the end of my shift and I had to dive,” said Seguin. “I didn’t have enough juice in my legs — just tried to make the best out of something if I could.”

While Seguin is rounding into the complete player coach Claude Julien wants all his players to be, it is still the offensive gifts that could make him a special player. In the first period last night, he did a terrific job of moving the puck on a power play that led to Zdeno Chara’s goal. In the third, he and new linemate Milan Lucic took turns feeding each other for pretty goals.

“I’m going to do that every game now if he keeps giving me that nice pass,” said Seguin with a smile. “On his goal, he just drove to the net and luckily I got to his stick. And on my goal he took everyone with him. He’s got such a good body that protected the puck and put it right on my tape, and luckily it went in.”

Consider Lucic equally impressed with Seguin.

“Yeah, he has a great shot,” said Lucic. “The quickness, he’s got great hands, he’s got that scoring touch and that’s why he was picked so high in the draft and it’s great to see him play with more confidence and get more comfortable as he grows and matures.”

As for Kessel, the NHL’s leading scorer was shut out for the first time this season.

“Well, we know that he’s having a hell of a year so far, he is on top of the league and he is playing extremely well. And we were just trying to obviously play really tight and take away as much time and space for him,” said Chara, who blanketed him like he usually does.

Many happy returns

David Krejci returned to the lineup after missing three games with a core injury. He played 17:07 and went 11-of-16 in the faceoff circle, centering a line between Benoit Pouliot and Rich Peverley.

“For a guy who hadn’t played in a while, he looked pretty good,” said Julien. “He made some decent plays, and I don’t think I was expecting more than what I saw tonight from him. He probably gave me maybe a little bit more than I thought he would.”

Steven Kampfer and Matt Bartkowski were in a neck-and-neck competition near the end of training camp for the seventh-defenseman spot. For now, it looks like Kampfer has won it by default.

Kampfer returned last night from the knee injury that put the battle on hold, with Bartkowski sent down to Providence to make room. In three games, Bartkowski was minus-2 while averaging 6:07 of ice time. He struggled particularly in Tuesday’s loss to Carolina, when he was on the ice for the first goal and only played 4:29 despite Joe Corvo missing the second half of the first period and Chara serving 19 penalty minutes.

“It’s just a matter of him playing a little bit more,” said Julien. “I thought that his training camp was extremely good. He showed signs of being a little bit better, he got stronger, and right now I think that he just has to go over there and play and maybe make some quicker decisions with the puck and knowing what to do when he gets it.

“The pace of this league is a little quicker, so at times we just felt that he was maybe a little slower reacting and that kind of got him in trouble at times. So more playing time will certainly help him in regards to that.”

Kampfer helped his own cause last night. He played 12:28 and was a plus-2.

“I like the way he skated and moved the puck,” said Julien. “He seemed to play on his toes instead of his heels, and that was good to see for a first game. I thought, again, he played a decent game for us.”
Leino, Myers get into the act for Sabres

By John Vogl
News Sports Reporter
Published:October 20, 2011, 10:28 PM

SUNRISE, Fla. — It’s been a quiet start to the season for Ville Leino and Tyler Myers. The Buffalo duo entered Thursday’s game in Florida with just two points between them, but it hasn’t really been a huge deal because the Sabres have been winning anyway.

Against the Panthers, the Sabres won because of them. The hot-starting trio of Ryan Miller, Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek certainly helped, too.

The Sabres easily dropped the Panthers, 3-0, in BankAtlantic Center to continue their success away from home. The victory was the third straight for Buffalo, with all of them coming on the road. They improved to 5-1 overall and 4-0 on the road.

"That was probably our best game of the year," coach Lindy Ruff said.

The return to the score sheet by Leino and Myers helped stake the Sabres to a 2-0 lead in the second period. Neither put the puck in the net, but their plays made it happen.

Myers was near the end of an already-productive shift when he stepped up to keep the puck in the Florida zone. The defenseman slid to the middle and slipped a pass to Pominville on the right side. Vanek, camped at his home away from home at the top of the crease, tipped the captain’s low shot past goalie Jose Theodore with 2:32 gone in the second.

The assist was just the second of the season for Myers.

"It was a great team effort," Myers said. "Millisie played really well, but we gave him a lot more help than we did last game. That's the way we want to play against teams."

Leino, who scored in the season opener but had been blanked in the four games since, keyed the Sabres’ second goal. The center knocked defenseman Keaton Ellerby off the puck deep in the Florida zone, then skated alone toward the net. Leino waited for a driving Pominville to arrive and set up the wide-open captain for a tap-in with 3:04 remaining.

Leino was part of Ruff's forward line shake-up, done to try to awaken some of the slumbering Sabres. Tyler Ennis, who entered the night with no points in five games, moved to left wing for center Derek Roy and right wing Drew Stafford. Nathan Gerbe departed that line to join preseason mates Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta. The moves left Leino with left wing Cody McCormick and right wing Brad Boyes.

"I felt the best today I’ve felt, and the team effort was there again," Leino said. "I’m just going to try to keep building off that."

The top unit of Luke Adam in the middle of Vanek and Pominville remained the same. After another multipoint night by the wingers, there’s no reason to think about changing it.

"A win like that definitely feels like a more of a team win," said Vanek, who sent the announced crowd of 14,811 toward the exits with 2:29 left when he scored on the power play. "That's more the type of hockey we want to play."

The Sabres, who were dominated for much of their previous outing in Montreal, turned the tables on Florida. They took five of the first seven shots en route to a commanding 38-22 edge. Most of Miller's stops were routine, with pucks bouncing off his pads as if they were trampolines. He bounced to the postgame handshakes with his 23rd career shutout.

"We owed him one," Ruff said. "That was important, too, for the way we played in Montreal. That last 40 minutes -- and especially when leading -- we stayed away from the odd-numbered stuff and we were going to make Florida earn something if they were going to get it."

The Panthers had a surprise addition to their lineup, and the forward was very familiar to the Sabres and their fans: Tim Kennedy. Florida summoned the South Buffalo native from San Antonio of the American Hockey League after center Shawn Matthias was unable to play. He had no shots, three hits and a minus-2 rating.

The Sabres headed to Tampa Bay following the game. They visit the Lightning on Saturday to close their road trip.

"The way we've started this year, it's been really good," Myers said. "There's obviously some work to be done, but we want to build off the way we've been playing."

Buffalo News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Buffalo Sabres shut out Florida Panthers

Written by
The Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — The Buffalo Sabres are at home on the road.

Thomas Vanek scored two goals, and Ryan Miller made 22 saves for his first shutout of the season in the Sabres’ 3-0 victory over the Florida Panthers on Thursday night.

Jason Pominville added a goal and an assist for the Sabres.

Buffalo has five wins in its first six games and is undefeated in four road games. Buffalo, which opened 4-0 on the road two years ago, travels to Tampa on Saturday to finish up its trip.

Miller shut out Florida after making a season-high 40 saves Tuesday night in a 3-1 victory in Montreal.

"I thought that was probably our best game of the year when it comes to supporting the puck, coming out together, coming out with speed," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said.

"We owed (Miller) one, so I thought that was important, too, for the way we played in Montreal. I thought that last 40 minutes and especially when leading we stayed away from any of the odd-numbered stuff and we were going to make Florida earn something if they were going to get it."

The Panthers never really mounted much of a scoring threat, and only managed six shots in the final period. After scoring seven goals at Tampa on Oct. 17, the Panthers have not scored since.

Jose Theodore made 35 saves for Florida.

Buffalo opened the scoring at 2:33 of the second period. Pominville took a shot from the right circle that Vanek deflected into the net. Vanek has at least a point in each game this season.

"When the puck is going in, you don't think as much as you just let go," Vanek said.

The Sabres made it 2-0 later in the second. Ville Leino passed from the left of the net across to Pominville in front and he poked the puck past Theodore with 3:04 left.

"That second one was a good play by Ville. I drove the net and he was able to find me," Pominville said.

Vanek's slap shot during a power play went over Theodore's shoulder with 2:29 left in the third.

"I looked up and down and over, I had a lot of time. I knew if I could just pump it and get him down, I'd get it over his glove," Vanek said.

The Panthers have only had 42 shots on goal in their past two games.

"Jose (Theodore) stood on his head at times in the first period," Florida's Kris Versteeg said. "I'm not saying the effort wasn't there but we have to do a little more to assist him."

"There's a lot of skill over there (Buffalo) but we gave them way too much respect."

Democrat and Chronicle LOADED: 10.21.2011
Calgary Flames

Flames' charitable ways lead to overtime loss to Rangers

By John Down, Calgary Herald October 21, 2011 1:47 AM

Captain Jarome Iginla shells out $2,000 to KidSport Calgary for every goal he scores.
Alex Tanguay turns over $200 to the Canadian Cancer Society for every assist he earns and defenceman Mark Giordano is good for a $25,000 donation to the Habitat for Humanity.

That's only a few good deeds a large number of Calgary Flames do each and every NHL season.

On Thursday night, however, the New York Rangers were the recipients of a little charity.

Ryan McDonagh, uncovered in the low slot and a loose puck on his stick, whipped the gift into a gaping net and over a diving Henrik Karlsson with just 0.5 of a second remaining in the overtime clock to provide the Broadway Blueshirts with a sudden 3-2 victory at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

It was only the fourth time in 107 career jousts the two teams have gone to overtime and the Rangers now have won all four.

"We played hard. We played a good game. It's definitely a difficult goal with 0.5 seconds (left in overtime). . . it was a great bounce for them," said Iginla, who scored once and also collected an assist. "It's tough because Hank played really well for us in net tonight . . . yeah, it's a tough one."

"But the guys played hard," Iginla added. "Guys were ready. We had some good chances. Style-wise and game-wise that's the way we want to play."

Tanguay picked up two helpers as the redshirts moved to 1-0-1 after two games of this six-game homestand. The third match will be Saturday at 2 p.m. against the league's youngest team, the Nashville Predators.

Mark Giordano, who unleashed seven shots, also scored for the home side.

Marian Gaborik, with a game-leading eight shots on goal, and former Flame Brandon Prust, who scored short-handed, replied for the Rangers, who played Game 5 of a franchise record, season-opening seven-game road trip.

Karlsson was solid in taking on 29 shots, including six in overtime, during his second start of the season for the Flames. An often brilliant Henrik Lundqvist, who blanked Vancouver on Tuesday with a 40-save outing, made 33 saves for New York.

The Flames probably deserved to have this one in the bag during regulation time with a dominant third period push after the two clubs battled pretty much on even terms through the first 40 minutes.

But it was the first period that gave everyone paying customer their money's worth.

Two fights, two goals by each team, three special teams goals, 20 hits (13 by the Flames) and several choruses of boos aimed at former Calgary first round draft pick Tim Erixon. It was easily the most entertaining first period of the season by the Flames.

"We want to get our crowd into it, giving them something to cheer about early," said defenceman Cory Sarich, following the morning pre-game skate. "That helps us get into the game, so we want to put together a really good effort."

Sarich not only was prophetic, but was directly involved in two of the goals — one for and one against — as he made three trips to the penalty box.

The first one resulted in Gaborik's fourth goal of the season and the Rangers' first power-play goal of the season, ending an 0-for-16 slump.

Sarich's third banishment came shortly after he had to answer to Kris Newbury for deckin Brad Richards. Newbury got the instigator penalty and Giordano popped his first goal of the season on the power-play.

The other fight saw Tim Jackman duke it out with Mike Rupp.
Former Flame on the hot seat in return to Calgary

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald October 21, 2011 2:37 AM

The horde of panting reporters, both local and visiting, thundered toward the far corner of the guests’ quarters.

Tim Erixon, taking a breather after Thursday’s morning skate at the Scotiabank Saddledome, was soon engulfed by notepads and cameras.

Dressing-room neighbour Jeff Woywitka, taking stock of the situation, fairly whistled. “Timothy!”

The mocking tone was instantly familiar — a parent scolding a naughty boy.

Which, in the eyes of many Calgarians, Erixon is.

This summer, when the Calgary Flames had made every intention of signing Erixon, their 2009 first-round pick, they hit an insurmountable snag.

Namely, the hand-forcing duo of Erixon and agent Rick Komarow.

According to Flames general manager Jay Feaster, the team exhausted all options trying to get a deal done with the highly touted defender. With a deadline looming, Feaster shipped Erixon — and a fifth-round pick — to the New York Rangers for Roman Horak and two second-round picks (Markus Granlund, 45th overall; Tyler Wotherspoon, 57th).

“That’s a player that we very much would have liked to have on our blueline,” Feaster had noted that day — June 1.

“No matter how many ways we expressed it, no matter how many ways I tried to explain it, there just wasn’t a comfort level (for the Erixon camp),” Feaster continued then. “It was at that point in time that we decided we had to salvage.”

The Rangers’ visit this week represented the first crack at getting the young man’s side of things.

What developed, however, was an uncomfortable 150 seconds for Erixon, soft-spoken at the best of times.

“I thought my agent and Calgary could come to an agreement — it didn’t happen,” said the 20-year-old, whose father Jan skated for the Rangers (1983-93). “Then they traded me. I was surprised when it happened. But a nice surprise.

“I had nothing against Calgary. A great city and everyone was good to me. It was never about the money. Just some small issues.”

What small issues?

“I don’t really think I have to explain myself. I know what happened.”

Erixon was also asked what kind of reception he expected from Flames fans. Boos perhaps?

“If they feel like they have to do that, it’s up to them. I don’t really care about that.”

Care or not, No. 53 got it big time from the leather-lunged faithful at the Saddledome, starting with his first shift.

(Brandon Prust, twice a member of the Flames, didn’t think jeering would affect the lad. “He’s so young, maybe he won’t even notice. When you’re that young, you’re just full of piss and vinegar. That stuff shouldn’t bother you too much.”)

On the issue du jour, New York skipper John Tortorella refused to bite.

“It’s none of our business,” he said. “I don’t deal in the politics of it all. We’re just coaching the kid.”

Horak, in the other dressing room, is an innocent bystander — and a bright spot — in the ordeal.

Already signed, he’d dutifully reported to Flames tryouts — after having previously attended two camps with the Rangers (who’d picked him in the fifth round in 2009) — and exceeded all expectations by making the club.

“They drafted me . . . and it was a good experience there,” Horak, 20, said of the Rangers. “I appreciate the chance I’m getting here.”

Horak, no fool, declined to weigh in on Erixon’s controversial snub.

“That was his decision, right? I don’t want to say anything about that. If he’s happy, he’s happy.”

Erixon, of course, did not represent to lone coulda-woulda-shoulda on Saddledome ice Thursday.

To the surprise of many, the Flames had muscled into the Brad Richards sweepstakes on July 1. With their big pile of loot — plus the centreman’s relationship with Feaster from their days with the Tampa Bay Lightning — the Flames became, at least for one day, players in the open market.

He does admit the Flames’ bid caught him off guard.

“I didn’t see Calgary in the picture,” said Richards. “All along it wasn’t a team I saw because of cap space. You look through the teams to see who has money available. But right away Jay called . . . and I wanted to hear him out, see what he had to say. It was a great offer. They were all great offers. But in the end, I just had to pick one.”

Because despite a reported $64 million (over nine years) on the table — and pleading phone calls from Jarome Iginla — Richards opted for Broadway.

“It was a good day for me — I got to pick a team,” he said. “But unfortunately, I couldn’t pick every team. There was a lot of great people talking to me, great chances and opportunities.”

Game Story: N.Y. Rangers 3 Calgary 2 OT

By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald October 21, 2011 2:44 AM

Three Stars
1. N.Y. Rangers G Henrik Lundqvist — Don’t get to see him very much, but lots there to like. Trickier shots to handle.
2. Calgary D Mark Giordano — For his robust first period alone (four shots, three hits, one blocked shot, one goal, plus-one)
3. N.Y. Rangers LW Brandon Prust — Pots a first-period shortie, kills penalties, grinds like crazy. Useful player to have, no?

Why the Flames lost
Because they lose focus for a split second in OT. . . . They are toppled in the special-teams battle. Sure, they score once on the power play. But the Rangers match that — plus drain a short-handed goal. . . . And handed a PP with less than three minutes remaining, they do nothing. . . . Facing a world-class goalie like G Henrik Lundqvist didn’t help the locals, either. He might like D Mark Giordano’s PP shot back, but very strong otherwise.

Flames
Forwards
A. Tanguay, D. Moss, J. Iginla
C. Glencross, O. Jokinen, L. Stemniak
N. Hagman, B. Morrison, R. Bourque
T. Jackman, M. Stajan, T. Jackman
Defence
C. Butler, J. Bouwmeester
M. Giordano, S. Hannan
D. Smith, C. Sarich
Goaltenders
H. Karlsson (starter), M. Kiprusoff
Rangers
Forwards
D. Stepan, B. Richards, M. Gaborik
B. Dubinsky, A. Anisimov, R. Callahan
R. Fedotenko, B. Boyle, B. Prust
M. Rupp, E. Christensen, K. Newbury
Defence
R. McDonagh, D. Girardi
T. Erikson, M. Del Zotto
J. Woywitka, S. Eminger
Goaltenders
H. Lundqvist (starter), M. Biron
Scratches
Rangers — D Brendan Bell, D Michael Sauer (shoulder), D Marc Staal (concussion), LW Wojtek Wolski (groin). Man-games lost: 12

Rangers 3 Flames 2 (OT)
First Period
Penalties — M Rupp NYR (Fighting) 2:07; T Jackman Cgy (Fighting) 2:07; C Sarich Cgy (Interference) 4:16; C Sarich Cgy (Hooking) 10:42; M Gaborik NYR (Hooking) 11:56; K Newbury NYR (Instigator) 14:59; C Sarich Cgy (Fighting) 14:59; K Newbury NYR (Fighting) 14:59; K Newbury NYR (Misconduct) 14:59; B Boyle NYR (Roughing) 19:07; A Tanguay Cgy (Roughing) 19:07.
Second Period
No Scoring
Penalties — D Girardi NYR (Interference) 6:52; R McDonagh NYR (Delay of Game) 10:30.
Third Period
No Scoring
Penalties — J Woywitka NYR (Delay of Game) 17:16.
Overtime
5. New York, R McDonagh 2 (D Girardi, B Dubinsky) 4:58.
Penalties — None.
Shots on goal by
New York 10 6 7 6 — 29
Calgary 12 8 12 3 — 35
Referees: Gord Dwyer, Brad Meier.
Linesmen: Mark Shewchyk, Mark Wheler.
Att. at Calgary — 19,289.

Next up
Brian McGrattan and the Nashville Predators drop into town Saturday for a matinee (2 p.m., The FAN 960, Sportsnet West).
The Flames have a start schedule for their two goalies.

And tonight, against the New York Rangers, it says . . . backup Henrik Karlsson, not workhorse Miikka Kiprusoff.

Meaning the 27-year-old puts his 4-6-6 career record against Marian Gaborik and company. If anyone has a problem with that, well, too bad.

"We have a plan in place that we’re going to stick to," said coach Brent Sutter. "We’ve said all along that we want to see Kipper playing in less games. And he personally knows that it’s the right thing for him, too. So to do that, we’ve got to get our other guy in . . . so Karl’s going to get a chance to play.

“So it’s managing the schedule properly . . . we don’t want Karl sitting for a month and not playing. We need him getting in games. This was something that was discussed in the summer.”

Further, Sutter blamed Karlsson’s opening performance of the season — a sloppy 5-2 loss in St. Louis — on the team.

"His first game, we weren’t very good in front of him — we played a 20-minute game that night," he said. "We didn’t play well like we need to. He just needs to be good (tonight). I’m not putting any more pressure on him than there needs to be. He just needs to be a good goalie for us and make good saves.”

As far as other lineup changes tonight, expect none.

Meaning C Roman Horak, former pick of the Rangers, and LW Tom Kostopoulos are still out. So, too, is D Anton Babchuk.

Sutter was also asked about using the blue-shirted presence of D Tim Erixon — he of the summertime snub — as motivational fuel tonight.

“Well, it’s not something that’s your real focal, focal point inside the dressing room," he said. "We have to think about their overall team. They’ve obviously got a good goaltender (Henrik Lundqvist). Their forward group is really good. But we certainly know the (Erixon) situation and recognize it. I don’t need to comment any more on that.”
CALGARY - You knew a Swedish goalie named Henrik was going to win the game.

The one you’d have expected to be the difference came out on top, with Rangers netminder Henrik Lundqvist being the difference in a 3-2 overtime victory over the Calgary Flames at the Saddledome.

For the Calgary Flames, though, Henrik Karlsson’s performance does bode well and make the decision by head coach Brent Sutter look like the right one. It was a given Swedish goalie named Henrik was going to win the game.

It ended up being the one most figure would make the difference, New York Rangers netminder Henrik Lundqvist, in a 3-2 overtime tilt with the Calgary Flames.

For the Flames, though, Henrik Karlsson’s performance was good enough to make the decision by head coach Brent Sutter look like the right one.

As outstanding as No.-1 goalie Mikka Kiprusoff was in the previous game, Sutter decided to continue with the summertime plan and start Karlsson.

The lanky goalie provided a strong 26-save performance, spoiled by an unlucky bounce with just two seconds remaining in overtime.

Dan Girardi’s long shot went wide of the net but bounced off the end boards right to Ryan McDonagh’s stick on the other side of the rink, and he buried the chance to ruin Karlsson’s outing.

“I felt good, but it doesn’t help. We still lost,” Karlsson said. “But I’m going to keep working. I feel pretty good out there, but it wasn’t enough.”

“I thought there was 30 seconds left, I was really disappointed to hear there was two seconds left. It would have been fun to have a shootout there.”

Karlsson’s career record is a substandard 4-6-7, but he couldn’t be faulted in this one.

In fact, his teammates let him down, mainly by wasting a pair of second-period powerplays and another chance in the final minutes of regulation.

It’s time for Karlsson to take the next step and start winning more often, but performances like Thursday night’s will give him a better chance.

IN THE CORNERS

For all those Flames fans who figured Brandon Prust was just a no-mind scrapper, guess again. The two-time Flames winger who is now a fan favourite in New York is also a big Broadway show fan, making the Big Apple a great city to live in for him. Prust’s introduction to theatre stems from his uncle, Paul McQuillan, a multi-talented actor, singer and musician, whose credits include Buddy, the story of Buddy Holly, Beauty and the Beast and Blood Brothers. The latest performance Prust recommends is Rock of Ages. In fact, McQuillan was going to live at Prust’s place while with the travelling company of Beauty and the Beast, but that’s when Prust was traded to the Phoenix Coyotes ... Flames rookie Roman Horak took the warmup but didn’t play. Seems like a missed opportunity seeing as he was drafted by the Rangers and would have had some extra jump ... For those who think the media reaction to Karlsson getting the start in net for the Flames was harsh, take a gander at what the Vancouver Province did. The paper wrote an editorial imploring the Canucks to deal away embattled goalie Roberto Luongo to the Tampa Bay Lightning for Vincent Lecavalier. Among the lines: “Tampa needs better goaltending; we need a power forward. Lou’s wife could finally be closer to her family, and Lecavalier could play hockey again in a city that actually cares about his sport.”

OFF THE GLASS

It was no surprise but sure strange to hear the boos rain down on Tim Erixon. How many rookies playing their fifth NHL game are greeted in that manner? Then again, not many pull the “I don’t want to play there,” so it’s to be expected ... Tom Kostopoulos won’t score many goals, but had to think he was for sure on the board in the first period before Karlsson robbed him with a great stop ... Back to Mr. Prust, you have to wonder why the Flames never tried him in the roles he has with the Rangers, killing penalties and checking. All he seemed allowed to do was give energy by fighting ... The Flames really must work on their powerplay. Two chances in the middle of the second period and no shots ... Can’t help but think Tim Jackman was told to play with more grit in his game than so far this season. He had his best outing by far, not by because of the first-period scrap with Mike Rupp but by forechecking and driving to the net ... For those keeping track, Jarome Iginla has 12 goals and eight assists in 18 career games against the Rangers.

SWEET #Flames fans doing an outstanding job of Booing #Erixon tonight. Their concentration is impeccable. Well done, fellow fans, well done!

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
All fists on deck for Canes

By CHIP ALEXANDER - calexander@newsobserver.com

ST. LOUIS -- The Carolina Hurricanes' practice had ended Thursday and Tim Gleason was on a stationary bike, sweating hard, pushing himself. In a way, the defenseman looked like a heavyweight fighter preparing for his next bout. You never know - Gleason's next skirmish could come tonight against the St. Louis Blues.

The last two games have seen Gleason go at it. He tangled with Paul Gaustad of the Buffalo Sabres last Friday. Then there was the matter of dealing with a wild-eyed Nathan Horton of the Boston Bruins in Tuesday's road game.

With the Canes leading the Bruins 2-1 in the third period, Horton suddenly wanted a piece of Gleason in front of the Canes' net. But Gleason refused to go, absorbing some heavy punches while having his jersey pulled over his head by Horton.

"He gave me a shot and I gave him a shot in the game," Gleason said Thursday. "He just kind of came back and I didn't know he was going to do that. It's a 2-1 hockey game."

Few people have ever seen Gleason shy away from a confrontation. If a guy hits him, he's going to hit back.

But not this time, not with Horton. Horton got a double-minor for roughing, the Canes got a 5-on-3 power play and eventually a 3-1 lead after Eric Staal scored. Carolina won 4-1.

"That won us the game. That was the difference right there," defenseman Bryan Allen said.

Are we seeing a new Tim Gleason?

"I just have to concentrate on keeping my head," Gleason said. "I have to pick my spots. There will be a time when I'll be able to do it."

"So it's not a new Tim Gleason, but maybe a little more disciplined."

The Hurricanes have guys who are willing to fight. Gleason obviously will go. So will Allen and defenseman Jay Harrison.

But as the Canes proved against the Bruins, they seem to know when to fight and when not to.

"None of those three men have to prove that they can do it," Canes coach Paul Maurice said Thursday. "That has a lot to do with it."

"There's that whole subculture in the NHL - the tough guy. When you're in your first year and somebody calls you out, you've got to answer that bell. They've all done it enough now that they can pick their spots, and not in terms of who they fight but when they fight. When we're up 2-0 on the road, we're not looking for a fight."

Against the Sabres, Gaustad first went after Allen but fought Gleason. In the third period of the Bruins game, Boston's Milan Lucic went after Gleason but wound up with Allen. Earlier in the game, Harrison and Horton looked to go, but Harrison wound up being punched by Zdeno Chara.

"Tempers were high," Gleason said of the Bruins game. "They were more frustrated and I think we knew that. We kept our composure and it helped us win that hockey game."

"I actually thought Lucic and I were going to do it but Allen came in. But that's good. We help each other out. We protect ourselves and our players."

Harrison said he can understand a team that's trailing using a fight as a rallying point, to get the home fans going. But there are unwritten rules - some of which have been broken during the past two games.

"It's not a street fight," he said. "You don't hit guys when they're down. When refs come in, usually hands come off.

"It varies with different guys as to what they think is fair and not fair. But nobody likes to get jumped and nobody likes to get hit over the top. I personally don't like getting punched over referees."
Top line comes through for Hawks
Toews and Sharp each score in 3-1 victory over Avalanche

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter
11:53 PM CDT, October 20, 2011

DENVER — Filled with as much talent as just about any line in the NHL, it was just a matter of time before the Blackhawks’ top trio took over a hockey game.

That time came Thursday night against the Avalanche as Jonathan Toews and Patrick Sharp came up big offensively with goals to complement a stellar Corey Crawford in the nets to help the Hawks subdue red-hot Colorado 3-1 before a crowd of 17,523 at the Pepsi Center.

The line featuring Toews, Sharp and Andrew Brunette had played well in the Hawks’ first five games, but had only three goals total while skating five-on-five.

"We weren’t worried," said Toews, who put the Hawks out front with his third goal of the season when he took a nifty pass from Daniel Carcillo—who was on the ice as the Hawks made a line change—and beat Avalanche goaltender Semyon Varlamov with a back-hander to the top shelf late in the opening period.

"We know we just have to keep working hard; even (Thursday night) we could have had two or three more. All three guys are playing together when you know where your two linemates are and you’re not letting the other team kill your plays too quickly. Eventually you’re going to get scoring chances and we got a lot of them. It’s something we want to build on."

Toews’ goal got the Hawks off on the right foot and Crawford kept them there with a strong effort against an Avalanche team that entered the game riding a five-game winning streak. Crawford finished with 31 saves as he won the battle of the goaltenders. Varlamov made several spectacular saves and stopped 27 pucks, but the Hawks came out on top for the fourth time in their last five games to improve to 4-1-1 overall in sweeping the two-game trip.

"They’re a fast team and have a lot of skill," Crawford said. "We kind of match up really well against them as we play fast and have a lot of skill. It was nice to get a good win like that."

After Ryan O’Byrne scored in the second to tie it 1-1, the Hawks got the game-winner from Sharp with 7:02 remaining in the third when he buried a shot from the left circle.

"We played a little better supporting each other and using our strengths," Sharp said of the top line. "It’s just one game and I feel like we’ve been getting better every game so far this season. The biggest thing is that we’re winning and it feels nice to contribute in the win."

Marian Hossa added an empty-net, short-handed goal as the Hawks penalty-killers came through, shutting down the league’s top power-play unit on both of its chances.

"(When) we got the big goal by Jonathan, that was the key," Hossa said. "After that we just hung there and Crawford made some key saves and when the game went on we became the better team."

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Frolik waiting for goals to come
Forward contributing on Hawks' most consistent line

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter
October 21, 2011

Let's not trim DENVER — Michael Frolik is one-third of what has been the Blackhawks' most consistent forward line but the winger doesn't have the offensive numbers to show for it.

Entering Thursday night's game here against the Avalanche, Frolik had two assists over the first five games while skating with Bryan Bickell and Dave Bolland.

"It's a little bit frustrating, especially when you have chances," Frolik said before the game. "The confidence would be higher if you had some goals. I try not to think about it too much and just play my game."

Frolik endured a 32-game goalless skid last season, during which the Hawks acquired him in a trade with the Panthers for Jack Skille. As a rookie, Frolik finished with 21 goals in 2008-09, the same number the next campaign and 11 last season. Frolik came on for the Hawks in their first-round playoff loss against the Canucks with two goals and three assists in seven games.

Frolik, who has meshed well with Bickell and Bolland, is averaging 15 minutes 58 seconds of ice time per game.

Full strength: The Hawks have been at full strength since Marian Hossa returned from an upper-body injury earlier this week. That means John Scott and Sami Lepisto and winger Rostislav Olesz have been healthy scratches the last two games, including Thursday's.

"Things (can) change quickly," coach Joel Quenneville said. "It's nice knowing guys are competing for ice time. That makes for a healthy situation."

One-timer: Former center John Madden, a member of the Hawks' 2010 Stanley Cup championship team, practiced with the Wolves this week but the 38-year-old free agent chose not to sign a contract.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Blackhawks set to face red-hot Avalanche

By Chris Kuc
Tribune reporter
1:47 PM CDT, October 20, 2011

DENVER -- It's a surging Colorado Avalanche team the Chicago Blackhawks will face Thursday night at the Pepsi Center in Denver.

The Avalanche has won five consecutive games -- all on the road -- after dropping its season opener. The Hawks have played well lately, winning three of their last four games and have earned at least one point during that span.

"We're feeling pretty good about our game, too," said Hawks captain Jonathan Toews, who had a goal and three assists in four games against Colorado last season. "We know they're playing with a lot of confidence so we'll be ready for what they can do, but most of all it's just about preparing ourselves for this game and playing a smart road game. If we do that we can keep winning the way we have in the last four games and hopefully get a streak going."

Corey Crawford will start his third consecutive game in goal for the Hawks. The netminder is 1-2-0 with a 2.29 goals-against average and .909 save percentage in three career appearances against the Avalanche.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Ice-cool Corey Crawford comes up big against Avalanche

DENVER — Apparently, Corey Crawford is as calm and cool on the inside as he projects with his outward demeanor.

Faced with the top power play in the league with two minutes to play in the third period of the Blackhawks' game against the Colorado Avalanche, Crawford only had one thing going through his head.

“Nothing,” Crawford said. “That’s one of the keys. My head is completely clear, and I’m just playing. I’m reaching out there and battling. That’s a fun way to play when you’ve got nothing going on in your head.”

Crawford came up with two of his 31 saves during the penalty kill before Marian Hossa sealed a 3-1 victory with an empty-net goal Thursday at the Pepsi Center.

“You can see that cool-natured style that he’s got,” captain Jonathan Toews said. “He’s an easygoing guy off the ice. Not a lot bothers him. I think it’s the same way on the ice.”

Crawford kept the Hawks in it in the first period despite his team being outshot 13-6. Crawford has been exceptional in first periods this season, allowing no goals in five games.

“I think it’s important,” Crawford said of his first-period performances.

“Getting the first goal is huge. The percentage of teams winning after scoring the first goal is really high. You never want to be chasing during the game; you always want to get the first one.”

Crawford followed that up with an even better start to the second period. He repeatedly came up with big stops, including a double-save on Daniel Winnik and Gabriel Landeskog before Ryan O’Byrne scored on a puck that deflected off his body to tie the game at 1 with 3:58 left in the period.

“[Crawford] stole the game for us,” Hossa said. “He made some really key saves, and he was strong and kept us in the game.”

Crawford also got helped out in the second by defenseman Brent Seabrook, who tracked back to strip David Jones from behind on a breakaway. Seabrook also had a game-high six blocked shots.

Patrick Sharp scored the game-winning goal 7:20 into the third, when he peeled in from the left circle and fired past Semyon Varlamov after the Avalanche goalie had saved a shot from Andrew Brunette.

“I knew he was maybe not down and out but recovering to get back,” Sharp said. “I figured maybe a quick shot from the side there would sneak by him or create a rebound.”

Daniel Carcillo came to the Hawks wanting to show there was more to his game than a willingness to drop the gloves. He did his part to help shed that reputation with a sharp backhand pass that set up Toews’ first-period goal.

“That was a great play,” Toews said. “He was at the end of his shift, [Patrick Kane] came off and I had the time to skate all the way from the bench and go all the way to the zone. He and [Brunette] were still working the puck, keeping the play alive, and he had great vision with a little backhand pass.”

The Hawks have killed 10 consecutive penalties over the last four games, including both against the Avalanche.

“It was a great little two-game road trip for us,” Toews said. “We got four points — just what we needed — and we’ll go back to our own barn and finish off the week with a lot of energy.”

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Dave Bolland’s dream: 50 goals

By Ben Meyer-Abbott

DENVER — Perhaps the best thing about the answer Dave Bolland gave when asked how many goals he was hoping to score this season was the look on Jamal Mayers’ face.

“I don’t know,” Bolland said before the Blackhawks’ game Thursday night against the Colorado Avalanche. “It’d be nice if I got 50.”

One stall over in the visitors’ locker room at the Pepsi Center, Mayers’ eyes appeared as if they were going to pop out of his head before he deadpanned, ‘Why limit yourself?’

Even coach Joel Quenneville piled on when he heard about how many Bolland was hoping to score.

“Yeah, well I do, too,” Quenneville said. “But we’re dreaming.”

For the record, Bolland doesn’t have a number in mind.

“Hopefully the goals will come, but [the priority] for myself is taking pride in my defensive zone and taking care of that first of all,” Bolland said. “That’s what’s going to win us games.”

Bolland leads the Hawks with four goals, a number he reached on Dec. 29 last year in his 29th game.

5-pointer

Duncan Keith was on the ice for all five goals Tuesday against Phoenix to improve to plus-2.

“Yeah, that’s a change,” Keith said. “It’s nice to be plus, for sure.”

Detroit Red Wings defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom won the Norris Trophy, given to the league’s best defenseman, with a minus-2 rating.

Streaking

The Hawks-Avalanche game featured two players — Marian Hossa and Colorado’s Milan Hejduk — who have 11 consecutive 20 goal seasons.

Jarome Iginla has the longest active streak of 20-goal seasons with 12.

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Crawford holds down fort as Hawks get win

By Tim Sassone

This is the kind of start the Blackhawks had in mind.

Led by Corey Crawford’s 31 saves, the Hawks made it a sweep of their two-game road trip Thursday with a 3-1 win over the Avalanche at the Pepsi Center.

The Hawks improved to 4-1-1 — while Crawford is 3-1-1 in his 5 starts.

Patrick Sharp’s goal with 13:40 to play snapped a 1-1 tie, while Marian Hossa added a goal short-handed with 1:10 left.

Hossa scored into an empty net after Colorado pulled goalie Semyon Varlamov for a 6-on-4 power play with Brent Seabrook serving a late tripping penalty.

The goaltending was great on both sides, with Varlamov making 3 sensational saves on Seabrook, Michael Frolik and Marcus Kruger on shots that seemed certain to be goals.

The Hawks led 1-0 after the first period despite getting outshot 13-6.

Crawford was the story until Jonathan Toews put the Hawks ahead with his third goal of the season.

“We weathered the storm with him holding the fort early in the game when we were sloppy,” Hawks coach Joel Quenneville said. “He was strong all game long.”

Toews roofed a backhander over Varlamov at 16:02 on a feed from behind the net by Daniel Carcillo, whose strong shift leaked over into the Toews’ line coming onto the ice.

Crawford was big again in the second period as the Avs took over the momentum early.

But Crawford had no chance on Ryan O’Byrne’s tying goal at 15:17 — a Matt Duchene shot that was deflected twice, the second time off the body of O’Byrne in front.

The Hawks did have a great chance to go back ahead late in the second period, but Varlamov stopped a pinching Seabrook alone in front off a feed from Toews behind the net.

Sharp’s go-ahead goal in the third period came after defenseman Duncan Keith broke up a 3-on-2 at the Hawks’ blue line. It was a 2-goal night for the line of Toews, Sharp and Andrew Brunette.

“That whole line, it was nice to see them get some production and something to show for it,” Quenneville said.

Keith played his second huge game in a row and was plus-5 with 3 assists on the two-game trip that included Tuesday’s win in Arizona.

“It’s a combination of things,” Keith said of his own play. “The team is playing great and Crawford is playing great. I’m starting to feel a lot more comfortable with Leds (partner Nick Leddy).”

The Hawks killed both power plays by Colorado, which came into the game ranked first in the NHL thanks to 7 goals in its last 12 opportunities.

The Hawks have killed 16 of their last 17 minor penalties.

The Hawks took a penalty for having too many men on the ice just 2:07 into the game but killed it with Crawford standing tall.

DENVER — Patrick Sharp broke a tie early in the third period and the Chicago Blackhawks went on to beat Colorado 3-1 on Thursday night, snapping the Avalanche’s winning streak at five. Jonathan Toews and Marian Hossa also scored and Corey Crawford made 30 saves to help the Blackhawks sweep a two-game trip that started in Phoenix on Tuesday night. Ryan O’Byrne had a goal and Semyon Varlamov stopped 28 shots for Colorado. The Avalanche’s winning streak came on the road. They’ve lost both home games this season. Sharp made it 2-1 with 13:40 left. Andrew Brunette put a hard shot on Varlamov from the slot and the rebound went to Sharp along the boards. Sharp skated into the right circle and beat Varlamov over his right shoulder for his second goal of the season. Colorado had a chance to tie it when Brent Seabrook drew a minor for tripping with 2:12 left. The Avalanche pulled Varlamov with 1:28 left, but Hossa scored into an empty net with 1:10 left. The Blackhawks opened the scoring in the second period after being outshot 13-6 in the first 20 minutes. Toews lifted a backhander over Varlamov’s right shoulder with 3:58 left in the period, his third goal of the season. O’Byrne tied it at 1 with his first goal of the season. The defenseman pinched down and deflected Matt Duchene’s shot past Crawford with 4:37 left in the first. The goal stood after a video review. Colorado’s best chance to score in the first came with 6:49 left when Ryan O’Reilly broke through the defense, but Crawford stopped him. Notes: Avalanche C Peter Mueller (head) missed his fourth straight game. Mueller missed all of last season after sustaining a concussion late in the 2009-10 season. ... O’Byrne’s goal was Colorado’s first at home this season. The Avalanche were shutout in their opener and needed 95:27 to get their first goal at Pepsi Center. ... The teams will play again Saturday night in Chicago.

Rundown: Pat, Edzo talk Hawks from Denver

CHRIS CLARK

The Blackhawks travel west to take on the Colorado Avalanche in the opener of a home-and-home series in Denver on Comcast SportsNet. Here's an inside look at the things Pat Foley and Eddie Olczyk will be talking about during tonight's broadcast.

In the open

Blackhawks special teams: They truly were special Tuesday night in Phoenix with Marian Hossa logging a power-play goal and Dave Bolland's shortie lighting the lamp.

Putting in work: Edzo busts out the telestrator to break down the hard work the Hawks put in against the Coyotes on goals by Jamal Mayers and Bryan Bickell.

Know thy enemy: The Avs have won five in a row coming into tonight's game, and Andrew Brunette faces his former mates for the first time since joining he Hawks.

In the game

Here's a rundown of the topics we'll hit on during the game broadcast ...

• Coach Joel Quenneville's time with the Avs
• Brunette's "magic" trick ... he's one of three Colorado players to score a hat trick on nothing but power-play goals
• Jonathan Toews on faceoffs this season
• Bolland being among the league's top 3 in shooting percentage this season

Coverage of tonight’s game on Comcast SportsNet starts at 7:30 with Chicago Blackhawks Pregame Live, followed by the puck drop at 8, LIVE from Pepsi Center.

DENVER -- Every team benefits from a good give and take. And after Corey Crawford gave the Blackhawks the early bail-out, his teammates took control with a stellar third period.

Patrick Sharp scored the go-ahead goal about halfway through the third period and Crawford stopped 31 of 32 shots in the Blackhawks 3-1 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Thursday night. The Blackhawks collected four points on this two-game road trip and also ended the Avs' five-game winning streak.

But it wasn't looking that way early, when the Avalanche were controlling the tempo and spending tons of time in the Blackhawks' zone. Crawford stood up to the barrage, stopping the Avs on all 13 first-period shots they had.

Even the one goal he did give up, a Ryan O'Byrne tally in the second period, was an odd one that went off O'Byrne's body and past Crawford.

"We weathered that storm with him holding the fort. It was very sloppy. We were in their end the first 10 minutes," coach Joel Quenneville said. "He was strong all game long. His position was so good."

Crawford said he's felt strong to start every game this season, including Thursday.

"I'm able to feel like that right at the start of the game and that's important to have a good feeling right off the top of the bat," he said.

Marian Hossa scored an empty-net, short-handed goal to secure the game. Avalanche goaltender Semyon Varlamov was as strong as Crawford, stopping 27 of 29, some in grand fashion.

Once the Blackhawks got past their early sluggishness -- and the relentless attack from the Avalanche -- they started to find their groove. They were once again getting contributions across the board, including their top line. Jonathan Toews scored his third of the season off a Daniel Carcillo feed to give the Blackhawks an early lead.

"We know we just have to keep working hard. Even tonight we could've had two or three more," Toews said. "It's a good sign when you're around the net. You know where two linemates are, you're not letting the other team kill your plays too quickly, and you're going to eventually get scoring chances."

Sharp's goal came from the left point, a typically successful place for him. Sharp, who got the rebound off Andrew Brunette's shot that Varlamov fought off, nearly passed the puck out.

"I knew (Varlamov) was maybe not down and out but recovering. He made a big save on Bruno and I wanted to pass to (Duncan Keith) but I thought maybe a quick shot would sneak past him or create a rebound or something," he said.

The Blackhawks are finding early season success because they're not just relying on one person. Yes, Crawford probably had to do too much early again, but the help eventually came. Be it the forward lines or defensive pairings, the Blackhawks are feeling good in their setup.

"We've have different lines contributing every night and that's just what we need," Toews said. "We had a great little two-game road trip. We want to win a lot early and put ourselves in good position."
Avalanche lose to Blackhawks, 3-1

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 10/21/2011 12:46:07 AM MDT
Updated: 10/21/2011 12:46:14 AM MDT

The opportunity to win a sixth consecutive game — and first at home — was inviting for the red-hot Avalanche on Thursday night at the Pepsi Center.

Problem was, getting multiple pucks past Chicago Blackhawks goalie Corey Crawford proved too much of a challenge for a team that had exceeded so many expectations on the road.

Crawford hardly outplayed Colorado netminder Seymon Varlamov, who was superb, but Crawford got the win as the Blackhawks triumphed 3-1 to snap the Avs' five-game winning streak.

"I think it was a tossup game," Avs center Paul Stastny said.

Colorado (5-2), however, failed to get anything more than a garbage goal from low-scoring de-fenseman Ryan O'Byrne, who tied it at 1-1 when a puck caromed off his right glove and past Crawford late in the second period. The Avs trailed 2-1 late in the third when coach Joe Sacco decided to turn a 5-on-4 power play into a 6-on-4 advantage by pulling Varlamov for the extra attacker.

The move didn't pan out, as Marian Hossa sealed the win with an empty-net goal with 1:10 remaining.

"I'd do that every time," Sacco said of pulling Varlamov in that situation. "When you have an opportunity to make it 6-on-4, that's the way we're going to play. We had a couple of chances right before their empty-netter. I waited until about the one-minute mark until we had full possession in the offensive zone, but that's a risk I'm willing to take all the time."

Jonathan Toews and Patrick Sharp also scored for the Blackhawks, with both even-strength goals coming against the Avs' top defensive pairing of Erik Johnson and Jan Hejda.

Johnson, who again led Colorado in ice time (21:51), was minus-3 on the night and is now a team-worst minus-7.

"They made some good plays and hemmed us in our D-zone," Stastny said. "They got some pretty good players and movement that kind of confused us."

Sacco can live with the loss, which can be made up with a win at Chicago on Saturday night.

"Both goaltenders played very well. Our goaltender made some really good saves — some incredible saves," Sacco said. "It was a well-played game. We didn't get the results we wanted, but I thought, honestly, our guys played hard."

O'Byrne's equalizer at 15:27 of the second period was a product of being lucky and good.

The big defenseman drove to the net on the wing opposite puck-carrier Matt Duchene, and Duchene's shot caromed off traffic, and then off O'Byrne's glove and behind Crawford.

It was O'Byrne's first goal in an Avalanche uniform — 71 games since joining the club early last season in a trade with Montreal. He has just three goals in 199 career NHL games.

"It was a lucky one," O'Byrne said. "I was thinking the other day that I hadn't scored in a long time."

At the time of the rare tally — Colorado's first goal of the season at the Pepsi Center — the Avs were outshooting Chicago 20-14.

"They were fast and have a lot of skill," Crawford said. "It was a close game. It was back and forth. It was nice to hold out and get a win like that."
Avalanche's Mueller misses pregame skate with "head injury"

The Denver Post
Posted: 10/21/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Avalanche forward Peter Mueller wasn't scheduled to play in Thursday's game against the Chicago Blackhawks. But he was expected to continue to skate with the team, yet he did not participate in Thursday's pregame skate at the Pepsi Center.

Avs coach Joe Sacco said Mueller, who missed all of last season with concussion symptoms, wasn't feeling well after Wednesday's practice and will not skate with the team today or in Saturday's game at Chicago. He has not played in the past four games, and the team finally listed him on the injured list Thursday with a "head injury."

Whether Mueller had a brief bout with concussion symptoms and is on the mend, or might miss a lot of time, remains unclear. But it would be against current NHL protocol to have a player skate who said he was suffering from concussion symptoms.

"I don't think anyone of us really know the details about it," Avs forward TJ Galiardi said of Mueller's absence. "Obviously, it's not as bad as last year, because he has been on the ice."

The Avs recently consulted with Dr. Robert Cantu, a Boston-based, prominent concussion specialist who has helped treat many NHL players, including Mueller.

Mueller completed practice Wednesday and briefly spoke to reporters.

"Feeling great," he said. "Just, you know, getting everything back in the loop and waiting for my time to (get the) call."

Footnotes.

Each NHL team designates one game this season as "Hockey Fights Cancer Awareness Night," and Thursday was Avalanche's chosen date. Among the many activities to promote awareness, 14-year-old twins Michael and Marina Karas of Parker were introduced pregame. The twins' father, Jeff Karas, a local hockey coach, was recently diagnosed with leukemia. . . . Colorado's healthy scratches were defenseman Matt Hunwick and forward Kevin Porter. . . . Former Avs forward Andrew Brunette, 38, is in his first season with the Blackhawks. . . . The Avs will practice this morning before traveling to Chicago for Saturday's game.

Mike Chambers,
Avalanche left wing Peter Mueller was not skating this morning as the team prepares for tonight's game against the Chicago Blackhawks, and Avs coach Joe Sacco said today that Mueller has also been scratched for Saturday's game against the Blackhawks game in Chicago.

"He's not feeling well," Sacco said. "After (Wednesday's) practice he notified us he wasn't feeling well. When we get back from our game in Chicago, we'll see how he is the next day."

Mueller has been scratched the past three games after playing ineffectively in the first three.

"I don't think anyone of us really know the details about it," Avs forward TJ Galiardi said. "Obviously, it's not as bad as last year because he has been on the ice. I don't even know what's wrong with him, whether he just has a cold or not. We're all rooting for him. He made such a good comeback. It's very unfortunate to see but until I know more details I don't know how to comment."

Mueller missed all of last season with postconcussion symptoms, and all signs point to Mueller having had a return of concussion symptoms.

The Avs consulted recently with Dr. Robert Cantu, a prominent concussion specialist based in Boston who has helped treat many NHL players, including Mueller.

Whether Mueller had a brief bout with symptoms and is on the mend, or might miss a lot of time, remains unclear. But it would be against current NHL protocol to purposefully have a player skate who said he was suffering from concussion symptoms.

Earlier this week, when asked about his condition, Mueller said: "I'm just trying to get in some practices and get some good days behind me. That's about it. Just trying to get good days."

Blue Jackets notebook: Mason has little room for error

By  Shawn Mitchell
The Columbus Dispatch Thursday October 20, 2011  6:36 AM

Blue Jackets goaltender Steve Mason was scheduled to have his first night off on Tuesday, but a groin injury to backup Curtis Sanford put him in net for another loss.

Like the Jackets (0-5-1), Mason is winless. He ranks 34th in save percentage (.883) and 33rd in goals-against average (3.34). But he said he liked much of what took place in front of him during a 3-2 loss to the Dallas Stars.

“We did a lot of good things,” Mason said. “Hopefully, that carries over into Detroit (on Friday).”

Coach Scott Arniel said he has not lost confidence in Mason, instead pointing to the Jackets’ offense. They have scored two goals in every game and are tied for 25th in scoring.

“When you’re scoring two goals a game, it doesn’t matter which goaltender is in there,” Arniel said. “You’re putting an awful lot of pressure on those guys. Yes, Steve can be better. But Steve is also giving us a chance each night to win.”

With Sanford expected to miss two to four weeks, the Blue Jackets are expected to recall goaltender Allen York from minor-league Springfield today. York missed two games for Springfield because of a shoulder injury but practiced Tuesday and was declared healthy by Blue Jackets general manager Scott Howson.

Injuries to regular backup Mark Dekanich, Sanford and York prompted the Blue Jackets to use Mathieu Corbeil, an unsigned draft pick, as an emergency backup against Dallas.

Former Ohio State standout Mike Betz was brought in to serve as a practice goaltender yesterday.

Betz recently earned a Ph.D. in economics and works as a researcher at Ohio State.

He was happy to help the Jackets deal with their dearth of goaltenders.

“I talked to my boss and told him the situation,” he said. “He’s a really good guy. It’s a flexible job.”

Back at it

Defenseman Marc Methot participated fully in practice after missing the Dallas game because of a lower-body injury.

“He moved pretty good today,” Arniel said. “That’s a good sign. Having him against Detroit would be big.”

Aaron Johnson, scratched in four of the first five games, replaced Methot. He played some aggressive shifts but committed a turnover in his zone that led to a Dallas goal.

The New York Rangers beat Vancouver 4-0 on Tuesday, leaving the Jackets as the only winless team in the NHL. … Forward Cody Bass sported a right-eye shiner yesterday, one day after making his Jackets debut. He fought Dallas forward Jake Dowell in the first period after laying a hit on Adam Pardy in the corner.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.21.2011
Blue Jackets' Boss supports Amiel, Howson

By Aaron Portzline
Dispatch Sports Thursday October 20, 2011 6:36 AM

It’s rather early to be handing out votes of confidence to those charged with turning around the Blue Jackets. Then again, it’s getting awfully deep into the season — six games, two weeks and counting — for the Blue Jackets to still be looking for their first win.

Yesterday, Blue Jackets president Mike Priest watched most of an hour-long practice, with general manager Scott Howson seated to his right. In separate interviews, Priest and Howson acknowledged it’s “getting late early” this season, that the 0-5-1 start has been frustrating and disappointing.

“Obviously, I’m disappointed with the start,” Priest said. “I’m very frustrated by everything the team has had to endure that’s been somewhat outside the norm of what you’d expect.

“The (James) Wisniewski suspension. The injuries to players who make an impact, in their own way. You have to overcome those issues, but at the same time it still seems like all of the excitement felt by the fan base has … we’ve kind of let the air out of the balloon.”

The Blue Jackets are no different than their fans in at least one respect — a state of shock seems to have fallen over Nationwide Arena. After a summer of big moves, they expected to field a club that could score goals and play their way to the Stanley Cup playoffs. Despite a payroll of nearly $64 million, the Jackets have scored only 12 goals and led for only 41:03 out of 365 minutes of playing time.

Injuries and absences have played a part. Wisniewski, an offensive defenseman, has two more games to serve on his eight-game suspension. Winger Kristian Huselius (torn chest muscle) is out for at least another month or two, and winger/enforcer Jared Boll (broken thumb) is a month or so away.

Now, No. 1 center Jeff Carter (broken foot) is out indefinitely.

“We are missing important players from our lineup,” Howson said, “but we haven’t responded properly to the missing pieces. If you look at a team like Pittsburgh, who is missing a lot of their players … they’ve still found a way to get wins. We haven’t done that.”

Priest gave Howson and coach Scott Amiel votes of confidence, saying they can’t be judged until the full club is given time to play together.

“I absolutely feel (that we can win),” he said. “Time will tell, but we are absolutely committed to winning. We demonstrated that this summer, and we’re not going to rest until we win. We hoped we wouldn’t be where we are. We have to keep pushing through this, but we also need to see our team. We don’t have our team.

“When we have our whole team assembled, and we have time to digest it, then we’ll be able to really take a hard look and evaluate it.”

Howson said he’s firmly behind Amiel, even though the Blue Jackets have one regulation win in their past 28 games dating to last season. They are 3-17-8 overall in that span.

“Three wins overall … that’s an alarming statistic,” Howson said. “But it’s hard to connect the end of one season with the beginning of another. I think we have a great coaching staff and we’re going to find our way out of this.”

Other general managers have called asking about trades, Howson said, but he’s not close to making any moves.

“But you can’t sit idly by and let this continue on this course,” Howson said.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jamie Benn, Stars working hard to improve in the faceoff circle

MIKE HEIKA  
Staff writer  
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Published: 20 October 2011 08:55 PM

Steve Ott remembers the first time he stepped into the faceoff circle against Joe Nieuwendyk in training camp.

“He had that puck back so fast, I didn’t know what hit me,” Ott said of the Hockey Hall of Famer who had a 59.4 percent career faceoff winning percentage. “Then, [Mike] Modano came in and did the same thing, and I realized it’s a whole different world up here.”

Winning faceoffs in the NHL is an acquired talent, and one that Ott is hoping he can help linemate Jamie Benn learn. Ott started his career around 49 percent back in 2003-04 but last season ranked tied for sixth in the league at 56.6 percent. It took a lot of hard work to get there.

“I had so much help from guys like Manny Malhotra and Stu Barnes, and really so much of it is just repetition and hard work,” Ott said. “I really do think experience really helps you.”

Ott has been the lone savior for the Stars in the circle for the last few seasons, but he’s off to a slow start this season (52.2 percent) by his own high standards. That’s one of the reasons the Stars ranked 24th in faceoff winning percentage at 47.7 percent going into Thursday’s games. Free agent Vernon Fiddler (a 52.7 percent career winner) is expected to be a big help, but the Stars also would like to get Benn above 50 percent on a consistent basis.

Benn won 43.1 percent of his draws last season but has pushed that up to 54.3 percent in the first six games. Not bad for a 22-year-old who didn’t start playing center until two seasons ago.

“It’s a work in progress,” Benn said. “There’s a lot of tricks that people use, and you really do have to work on it every day. I’m miles ahead of where I was, but I still have a lot to learn.”

And Ott is hoping to be a good teacher. The two are linemates, and Ott takes a lot of the draws for Benn. However, he also points out weaknesses in an opposing center.

“I can cheat some, because I know he’s there, and that helps,” Benn said of the fact that if he gets tossed out of the circle, Ott is there to take the faceoff instead. “But, really, I just think that it’s good we’re both out there and can talk about it.”

New Stars coach Glen Gulutzan said improving the faceoff winning percentage is paramount for the team.

“It’s huge in just about every area,” he said. “It gives you extra time killing penalties, it gives you extra time on the power play. I think one of our biggest problems with the power play right now is we’re not winning enough draws. Bottom line, it’s easier when you have the puck.”

The Stars have one inherent problem in the circle. Good teams have a mix of right-handed and left-handed centers. The Stars are almost exclusively left-handed. Adam Burish is right-handed, but he’s taken only 12 faceoffs so far.

“That hurts us, for sure,” Gulutzan said. “But what we have to do then is work harder to tie the puck up on the weak side and get the wingers even more involved in the battle. It can’t just come down to the centers, everyone has to get involved.”

And that work extends to the practice ice.

“It’s definitely something you can improve,” Ott said. “It’s really an area where the harder you work, the better you get.”

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Souray misses practice for maintenance day, expected to play Friday at Anaheim

Mike Heika / Reporter
mheika@dallasnews.com | Bio

2:14 PM on Thu., Oct. 20, 2011 | Permalink

Stars defenseman Sheldon Souray missed practice Thursday on a maintenance day. Souray has battled various injuries throughout his career, and he took a shot to help ease some pain in his wrist.

"He has to wait 24 hours and he'll be fine," Stars coach Glen Gulutzan said. "He'll skate tomorrow in the pregame. We just have to wait 24 hours after he got the needle for his wrist. His wrist bugs him from time to time. He has to get it done and we just have to manage the time."

Souray, 35, has been a great free agent add for the Stars. He signed a one-year deal for $1.65 million in the summer and after six games, he has a goal and four assists.

"I can't say enough about Hammer. He's been real good here," Gulutzan said. "Offensive production, we obviously don't want to stop now. But if it did, we're fine, because his defensive play has been very sound."

While Souray has taken some ill-timed penalties, he also has provided the team a physicality that has been lacking.

"He's given us some bite back there," Gulutzan said. "He's a very hard to play against guy. He's given us a good voice in the locker room. There's no offensive pressure on him. What he gives us is great, but we like the way he defends and plays D and the presence he brings us."

Practice lines stayed pretty much the same.

Morrow-Ribeiro-Ryder
Ott-Benn-Eriksson
Burish-Fiddler-Dvorak/Wandell
Nystrom/Barch-Dowell-Petersen
Goligoski-Pardy
Fistic-Robidas
Grossman-Daley

Kari Lehtonen will get the start in goal on Friday, meaning there is a very good chance Andrew Raycroft gets his second start of the season Saturday at LA. Raycroft didn't look bad, but was the victim of a poor team game when he took a 5-2 loss in Chicago on the second of back-to-back nights in his only other appearance. Gulutzan was asked if he pondered maybe mixing the two starts up and allowing Raycroft the first start, because too often the backup goalie gets the more challenging task in a back-to-back.

"I've talked to Razor about that, because in some ways he has a tougher job," Gulutzan said. "But Razor has looked good lately, and there's no reason why he can't give us a solid performance."

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Stars-Ducks preview: Lehtonen has chance to shut down MVP

Mike Heika / Reporter
mheika@dallasnews.com | Bio
9:38 PM on Thu., Oct. 20, 2011 | Permalink

Key matchup: Corey Perry vs. Kari Lehtonen
Perry was the league MVP last season but is off to a slow start with two goals in five games. Lehtonen is one of the NHL's hottest goalies with a 5-0-0 record and 1.58 GAA.

Key stat: 237
Career power-play goals for ageless Ducks winger Teemu Selanne, tied with Brendan Shanahan for most in NHL history. Selanne is one short of tying Dave Andreychuk for 13th all-time in regular-season goals at 640.

Injuries
Anaheim: LW Jason Blake (arm) is out.
Dallas: D Sheldon Souray (wrist) is probable.

Notable
The Stars are 5-1-0 and coming off a 3-2 win Tuesday in Columbus. ... The Ducks are 4-1-0 and coming off a 3-2 win Monday over San Jose. ... Former Stars goalie Dan Ellis had 41 saves in that game, but Jonas Hiller is expected to start against the Stars. Hiller is 4-3-1 in his career against the Stars with a 2.40 GAA and .933 save percentage. ... Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen is 3-4-2 in his career against the Ducks with a 3.21 GAA and .898 save percentage. ... Stars C Mike Ribeiro has 38 points (nine goals, 29 assists) and is plus-15 in 37 career games against the Ducks.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Stars take rest day to prepare for tough weekend

Mike Heika / Reporter
mheika@dallasnews.com | Bio

The Stars are 5-1-0 and have two days between Tuesday's win in Columbus and games Friday and Saturday in Anaheim and Los Angeles.

So the coaching staff gave the team a day of rest today.

``We have to maximize our rest days,'' coach Glen Gulutzan said. ``We'll give them a physical rest day and a mental rest and then get right back at it tomorrow.''

Gulutzan added: ``We think rest is as important as practice. You have to try to maintain (energy), and not chase it.''

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Mac Engel: Bill Guerin to NBA players: It's not worth it

Posted Wednesday, Oct. 19, 2011
By Mac Engel

To all NBA players who stand unified against the godless owners, read these words of warning from a former NHL player about the reality of losing an entire season:

"It's not worth it. Get a deal done," former Dallas Stars forward Bill Guerin said during a phone call last week.

There was not a single NHL player during the Great Lockout of 2004-05 who was a bigger proponent of the union’s fight than this man. No one believed in the cause more than Guerin, and to hear him admit this is a bit stunning.

"I learned a big lesson: It's not a partnership. It's their league, and you are going to play when they want," he said.

Today, Guerin has hindsight and his experience serves as a giant caution to any player who thinks losing a game, much less an entire season, to this lockout is a good idea. His message is simple: Get what you can; start playing; you are not going to win what you think.

"It is not worth it to any of them to burn games or to burn an entire year. Burning a year was ridiculous," Guerin said. "It wasn't worth me giving up $9 million a year, or 82 games plus the playoffs, then having a crappy year and being bought out.... Guys in the NBA making $15 million or however much better think long and hard about this."

The NBA is stuck in a nasty labor fight with the players' union, and the league already canceled the first couple of weeks of the regular season.

NBA Commissioner David Stern has cautioned that if a deal isn't done soon there will be no games through Christmas, at least.

When reflecting on the NHL lockout that wiped out the entire 2004-05 season, Guerin sounds like a man who had reality shoved down his throat. There is no bitterness in his voice, just truths, which aren't necessarily positive. The truth is Guerin, or any player, really isn't in charge as long as those who are cutting the checks are unified. If it doesn't sound that much different than your job, it's because it's not.

"We could have waited two years and they would have waited us out -- I would have given an extra 2 percent back to play that year," Guerin said. "When you are in the heat of battle, and you are fired up, you don't think what they are doing is right. But it's not about what is right or wrong -- it's their league. It's theirs. I feel, personally, I didn't like guys giving up a year of their career, for what? A few less bucks? Guys are making more money now than they ever have."

Much of what is taking place right now between the players and owners sounds and feels very similar to the early days of the NHL lockout in 2004. Stern has total autonomy. No owner is talking, which means Stern has solidarity and leverage.

"The only thing you can die in the battlefield for in something like this is guaranteed contracts; everything else is nickel-and-dime stuff and it's not worth it," Guerin said.

Guerin, 41, is retired, and works part time as an assistant for the Pittsburgh Penguins.

He lives with his wife and their four children in Long Island, N.Y., and can do so because he took care of his money while he played.

With the economy in a full dog paddle, and the Occupy Wall Street movement gaining traction, neither side appears to be winning the PR battle. No one sides with owners because they embody the "Big Bank/Wall Street" element that has become all that is wrong with the world.

We all know by now that just because they reduce their costs means they will certainly not pass the savings on to the consumer. They pass the savings on to themselves.

Meanwhile, no one cares about guys who play basketball for a six-figure check.

"People say it's OK for ownership to make money because they worked hard to make money and afford to buy a sports franchise," Guerin said. "But the athlete is dumb and good at his sport and fortunate to play sports and make millions."

This reminds me of the Chris Rock bit on Rich vs. Wealth: "Here is the difference," Rock says, "Shaq is rich. The white man that signs his check is wealthy. I ain't talking about rich, I'm talking about wealth."

This stupid thing could end today, tomorrow, next month or whenever.

Most of us have problems that don't compare so we don't care about this. For the vast majority of us, the NBA is a luxury rather than a need. We don't really need the NBA, because it's just a movie.

Guerin sounds like a man who learned this lesson, and one of the many truths that exist in our world.

"For so long, I thought so long and hard about it," he said. "But when you think about it, I tell guys it wasn't worth it."

Star-Telegram LOADED: 10.21.2011
GameDay: Dallas Stars-Anaheim Ducks preview
Posted Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011

Stars at Ducks
9 tonight, Honda Center, Anaheim, Calif.
TV: FSSW Radio: KTCK/1310 AM

Records: Stars 5-1-0, 10 points; Ducks 4-1-0, 8 points

Notable: The Stars’ hot start includes only two road games, a loss at Chicago and a win at Columbus on Tuesday. But it’s road work now.
Tonight is the first of three straight games at Pacific Division rivals. The Stars visit Los Angeles on Saturday and end the trip Tuesday at Phoenix....
Anaheim has won four in a row, matching the best start in franchise history.

Looking for comments?
Star-Telegram LOADED: 10.21.2011
Red Wings look to improve power play starting tonight vs. Blue Jackets
Team working hard on improving at both activities

By HELENE ST. JAMES

DETROIT

During the past week, the Red Wings have taken two days off, worked on their power play and played a lot of ping-pong.

The goal now is to turn being rested and prepared into victory No. 5 tonight against Columbus at Joe Louis Arena. The Blue Jackets haven't won in regulation since March 12.

"They're a team that hasn't won that has the ability to win," coach Mike Babcock said Thursday. "I guarantee they'll be working hard. They had 38 shots against Dallas, they scored power-play goals, they looked dangerous. They'll be battling hard, and they'll be desperate. We're going to have a tiger by the tail, so our preparation is so important. We have to be ready, because they're going to be hungry."

In addition to being 4-0 and having allowed only five goals, the Wings have nearly everyone available; defenseman Mike Commodore, a former Blue Jacket, is steadily improving after a knee injury. The Blue Jackets are 0-5-1, have allowed 20 goals and are without top defenseman James Wisniewski (suspended) and top-six forward Jeff Carter (injured).

"They've got talented players not playing, but they've still got Rick Nash -- he's a hell of a player," Danny Cleary said. "We play them quite often, and they always give us a good game. And it's important for us to play well after a week of practices."

There has been ample power-play work thrown in to counteract being 1-for-19, but overall the Wings are pleased with how quickly they've gotten out of their own zone and how much they've controlled the puck.

Players have been similarly adept at handling ping-pong balls. They got hooked on the sport during training camp in Traverse City, and two tables now sit in the hallway outside the locker room.

Johan Franzen and Ty Conklin are among the best on the team, though Franzen claimed "I've got Conks' number. I've beaten him, like, five times."

"Everyone likes playing ping-pong," Cleary said. "Now we're going to arrange this big ranking system and try to have a tournament. We know who the top players are -- Patty Eaves is No. 1, two is Franzen, three is probably Conklin."

Cleary ranked himself, Valtteri Filppula, Niklas Kronwall and Jonathan Ericsson as the next-best group, while one of the best puckhandlers on the team admitted he was one of the worst with a paddle in his hand.

"I'm probably bottom three," Henrik Zetterberg said. "I'm not a big ping-pong player. We'll see if we're going to do a tournament, if I can climb the ladder a little bit."

The Detroit Red Wings are primarily focused on their next opponent, the Columbus Blue Jackets, who come to town Friday not having won a game this season. Secondarily, there's Ping-Pong to be played.

After a week off, the Wings take a 4-0 record up against the Blue Jackets, who are 0-5-1, having scored 12 goals and allowed 20. Their prime off-season free-agent signing, defenseman James Wisniewski, is serving an eight-game suspension, and their prime off-season trade acquisition, Jeff Carter, is sidelined with a foot injury.

The Wings' only injury is defenseman Mike Commodore (a former Blue Jacket), who said he isn't ready but is getting there.

Officially, the Wings aren't taking the Blue Jackets lightly.

"They always play good against us," forward Henrik Zetterberg said. "We have some problems with them, and they will probably come up and play a good game tomorrow, and if we're not focused on playing well, we won't win the game."

In the meantime, there's Ping-Pong to be won. The Wings got hooked when there were tables available during training camp in Traverse City and ended up getting two tables set up in the hallway outside their locker room at Joe Louis Arena. Some aren't very good -- such as Zetterberg -- while others, led by Patrick Eaves, Niklas Kronwall and Ty Conklin, are headliners.

"I'm playing Conklin a lot," forward Johan Franzen said. "Patty Eaves is the best, but Conklin is close. You try to play someone you're kind of equal with; that's the most fun. It just happens to be Conklin. I've got his number. He's got like one win, and I've got five against him. It's fun."

Eaves has been playing "for a while. There's a bunch of us that are pretty competitive -- Mule, Conks, Kronner. There are some good players on this team. Now it's kind of turning into a league, if you will."

Detroit— The Red Wings are only four games — and four victories — into their season, but Jiri Hudler already has been a big surprise.

On a roster of talented scorers, Hudler is making an early impression and giving opposing defenders another offensive threat to worry about.

"I got lucky a couple of times," said Hudler, who has four points (two goals, two assists), including the winner in the opener against Ottawa. "Sometimes you can have 10 chances to score and get nothing and sometimes you get one and it goes in."

It's a stark contrast to Hudler's 2010-11 season, when he had 37 points (10 goals, 27 assists) in 73 games and was a career-worst minus-7.

In 2009-10, he played for Dynamo Moscow in Russia's Kontinental Hockey League, and had 54 points (19 goals, 35 assists) in 54 games.

"I had a couple of good seasons before I went to Russia, but I never had (this type of) good start," Hudler said. "I feel good physically and it's nice to have this start, but we're just four games in — it's nothing to be excited about."

Hudler had his best season with the Red Wings in 2008-09, when he notched 57 points, improving on 42 points the previous season.

But Hudler doesn't want to dwell on the past.

"I wasn't happy with last year," he said. "But it's all behind me and this is a new season and a new opportunity."

Creating depth

If Hudler, 27, can continue to be an effective scorer and provide quality ice time, captain Nicklas Lidstrom says it will adds to the corps of scorers the Red Wings have.

"It just gives us more depth," Lidstrom said. "We have (Henrik) Zetterberg and (Pavel) Datsyuk and (Johan) Franzen, but if we can get him up to a point a game, it just adds another threat."

Though the point-per-game pace is hard to maintain, anything close provides a tougher overall offense to defend.

"He's been great," said Franzen, Hudler's linemate. "We've always known that he can score and make nice, nifty plays.

"He's worked really hard in the summer and it shows. The whole team feels like we have great depth, so it feels like we can get that scoring from any line and any player, so that takes the pressure off of guys as well."

Hudler is tied with Franzen for the team lead in points, but understands his scoring must be within the overall scheme of the team system.

"We have a lot of skill on this team," Hudler said. "Everybody can score and the first four games, we've played our system pretty well and it's great to see.

"I'd rather be 4-0 than 0-4. The start (to the season) is important, but you have to carry it through the season."

Working it out

The past few summers, Hudler had been working out in Los Angeles during the offseason.

But this offseason, he changed venues, heading to Montreal to train with Jonathan Chambers, who also trains Ultimate Fighting Championship fighters.

Hudler said his agent recommended the regimen.

"It wasn't fighting, but it was getting stronger and in shape and those athletes are in phenomenal shape," Hudler said. "You've got to think everybody in the NHL is in great shape at this time. At the beginning of the season, everybody is strong. The turning point is after Christmas as to how everybody feels."

During the workouts, Hudler focused on improving his strength and endurance — and that work not only is paying off on the ice, but in other ways, as well.

"I think he's working hard off the ice," Lidstrom said. "I think he's more committed to playing well. You can tell he's more focused in the locker room and in the weight room and that's transferred over to the ice."

"We saw a couple of years ago that he's a playmaker, but he's working hard without the puck, too — in front of the net or open spots. He's got that hockey sense and he knows where to go."

Although Hudler got some of the same conditioning and strength training as UFC fighters, don't count on him becoming the tough guy or enforcer for the Red Wings.

"I don't want to get hurt," he joked.

Detroit News LOADED: 10.21.2011
Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings: Notebook
Winless Blue Jackets will be hungry to beat Wings

Ted Kulfan/ The Detroit News

Detroit— Facing the Blue Jackets tonight could be a blessing — or a trap — depending on your way of thinking.

While the Red Wings remain unbeaten in four games (4-0), the Blue Jackets are the lone team in the NHL without a victory (0-5-1).

"I guarantee you they’ll be working hard," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "They’ll be battling hard and they’ll be desperate."

"Desperate" was used on several occasions by several Red Wings in describing the Blue Jackets.

Still looking for a victory, and without forward Jeff Carter (fractured foot) and Canton native defenseman James Wisniewski (suspended) — both high-profile offseason acquisitions — the Blue Jackets are in serious need of a victory.

"We just want to keep this thing going," center Henrik Zetterberg said.

Far-flung viewers

Zetterberg was one of the happiest players in the locker room after learning the NHL had worked out an agreement to broadcast every game live through the Nordic region.

"I talked to my dad this morning and he was fired up," the native Swede said. "My dad is retired. That's all he does, is watch hockey."

And with seven Red Wings from either Sweden or Finland, there are a lot of family and friends rejoicing.

"I know they were looking for games and couldn't find them," captain and Swedish native Nicklas Lidstrom said. "Games start at 1:30 (a.m., for a 7:30 p.m. start in Detroit), but they'll re-run them so they can get up and still know the score. It's great news."

Commodore progressing

Mike Commodore (sprained right knee) continues to practice, but Babcock doesn't expect him to be in the lineup.

"Mike knows it's pro hockey," Babcock said. "You have to come back and win a job and that's the way it is. Players are playing good and the opportunities aren't as good, and when they aren't playing as good the opportunities are better. You just get yourself prepared."

Wings color choice is pink

Anyone who wears pink to tonight’s Red Wings game could win prizes as well as help a good cause.

Tonight is the fifth annual Breast Cancer Awareness Night for the Red Wings, who host the Blue Jackets at 7:30 p.m. at Joe Louis Arena.

Among the activities in the arena concourse will be a silent auction, puck draw, 50/50 raffle and a special sale of pink winter knit hats with all proceeds benefitting the Liggott Breast Center in Grosse Pointe Woods and the Weisberg Cancer Treatment Center in Farmington Hills.

Fans who wear pink will be entered to win a 2011-12 team-signed jersey by picking up a raffle ticket on the concourse behind Section 126. There, fans can also participate in the puck draw or bid on one of 37 items at the silent auction.

Plane crash haunts Hudler

Following last month’s plane crash in Russia that killed 43 people, including members of the KHL’s Lokomotiv Yaroslavl team, Jiri Hudler and the NHL community mourned the loss of many friends and former teammates.

Hudler said he knew several of the players killed, and still finds the tragedy difficult to talk about.

"I had close friends from (the Czech Republic), the Russian players and the coach from here (former assistant Brad McCrimmon)," he said. "It was hard for every hockey player. It was a shock.

"Sometimes, I still can't believe it happened. It's tough to talk about because they were friends and the respect for the family and what they're going through — I have no words."

Blue Jackets at Red Wings

Faceoff: 7:30 Friday, Joe Louis Arena, Detroit
TV/radio: FSD/WXYT

Outlook: The Blue Jackets have been outscored 20-12 this season. ... Blue Jackets RW Rick Nash is off to a good start with six points (two goals) in six games. ... G Jimmy Howard will start for the Red Wings, with Ty Conklin starting Saturday against the Capitals.

Detroit News LOADED: 10.21.2011
DETROIT -- The Detroit Red Wings would not have paired Jonathan Ericsson and Jakub Kindl together on defense last season because of their inexperience.

But they have formed a solid third pairing through four games.

Kindl leads the team with a plus-6 rating, Ericsson is second at plus-5.

"They're getting games under their belt and they're playing well for us," Red Wings coach Babcock said. "They're two huge guys — one is 6-foot-5 (Ericsson), the other is 6-3 (Kindl), and they're both over 220."

Kindl simply said they're keeping it simple.

"Be solid defensively, don't get beat one-on-one, move the puck and join the rush," Kindl said. "We've played together in the minors before (in Grand Rapids). He's the one who'll tell me what to do basically. He's the one leading the charge. We're both protecting each other."

Kindl has taken a significant step in his second season.

"He's playing with confidence, he's competing hard, he's stronger, he's making plays, he's not (avoiding) going into corners," Babcock said. "He's got a skill set, but you got to be comfortable at the (NHL) level, you got to get your confidence and then it starts to show. When you have a good game, it builds and leads to another good game."

Kindl started training camp as the seventh defenseman. Mike Commodore's knee injury created an opportunity, and Kindl has seized it. It is Kindl's job to lose.

"Mike knows it's pro hockey, you got to come back and then you got to win yourself a job," Babcock said. "When people are playing good the opportunity is good and when people aren't playing good the opportunities are better. I don't think anyone wishes their teammates don't play well, you just get yourself prepared."

Commodore said he's not likely to be available this weekend. The Red Wings play at Washington on Saturday.

DETROIT -- Two teams who appear to be headed in opposite directions will
meet Friday at Joe Louis Arena when the undefeated Detroit Red Wings (4-
0) host the winless Columbus Blue Jackets (0-5-1).

The Blue Jackets will be desperate, the Red Wings will be delighted to play
a game after five days off.

"They're a team that hasn't won. I guarantee they'll be working hard,"
Detroit coach Mike Babcock said. "They had (40) shots against Dallas (in a
3-2 loss Tuesday). Dallas' goaltender (Kari Lehtonen) was real good.

"They'll be battling hard and they'll be desperate. We have a tiger by the
tail, so we got to be ready to battle. We got to protect home ice and they're
going to be hungry."

The Blue Jackets will be missing their two big off-season acquisitions.
Defenseman James Wisniewski is suspended (he's eligible to return
Tuesday at home against the Red Wings) and forward Jeff Carter has a
broken foot.

The Red Wings skated with the same line combinations and defense pairs:
Zetterberg-Datsyuk-Cleary (Brunnstrom working in)
Hudler-Filppula-Franzen
Bertuzzi-Helm-Abdelkader
Miller-Emmerton-Holmstrom-Eaves (rotating)
Lidstrom-White
Kronwall-Stuart
Ericsson-Kindl

Mike Commodore (IR, knee) continues to practice but said he doesn't think
he'll be available this weekend.

Howard (starting Friday)
Conklin (starting Saturday in Washington)

EDMONTON — Tick tock, tick tock. Shutout win to shootout loss.

Edmonton Oilers goalie Nikolai Khabibulin was 1.2 seconds from blanking the Minnesota Wild 1-0, which would have been the 11th time the Oilers have beaten an NHL team by that score — and the first since Jeff Deslauriers blanked the Philadelphia Flyers in February 2010.

But winger Dany Heatley banked one past Khabibulin from a near-impossible angle to tie the score 1-1, then the Wild won in the skills contest on Matt Cullen's backhand roof job for a 2-1 victory at Rexall Place.

To rub a box of Sifto salt into the wound, Oilers centre Eric Belanger had Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom dead to rights in the shootout but hit the post — the second time he'd heard a cacophony of posts in the game as the Oilers tumbled to Minnesota for the eighth straight time.

Belanger, who used to play with Backstrom and the Wild, also rang a shot off the iron while killing a penalty.

"I wouldn't say I was cheating on the play, but I wasn't right up against the post and it hit the inside of my pad," said Khabibulin, whose has lost two 2-1 shootout games to the Wild this year.

Devin Setoguchi scored the game-winner in Minnesota last week.

Heatley, who was boooed every time he touched the puck because he said no thanks to a trade here from the Ottawa Senators for Ladislav Smid, Andrew Cogliano and Dustin Penner in 2009, had seven shots on Khabibulin. His tying goal was a prayer from almost the goal-line, with Khabibulin's teammates ready to pile over the boards to congratulate him on what would have been his 44th career shutout.

"I still thought I had it. I thought I'd reached down with my glove. I guess I didn't," said Khabibulin.

"I knew time was going down. I was just trying to get it on net. Usually, those plays don't work, but we had lots of time in their end (with Backstrom pulled for an extra attacker). You're just kind of scrambling and buzzing and, finally, we found a way to pull it in," said Heatley.

"The tough thing is we won the draw. That hurts. In the end, it's a good lesson even for us veterans (Belanger, Shawn Horcoff, Tom Gilbert, Ladislav Smid and Ryan Smyth) who were on the ice to talk it over so it doesn't happen again," said Smyth, who fed Ryan Jones for the game's first goal 16 minutes into the opening period, stealing the puck from Greg Zanon and hitting Jones for a tap-in on Backstrom.

"When Heatley's goal went in, yeah, I was hoping time had run out," said Smyth.

Until Heatley's goal silenced the boobirds, the only thing of note he'd done was accidently slice captain Mikko Koivu with his skate blade on the left side of his neck and chin all the way over to his right side eight minutes into the third frame. Heatley had been dumped by Horcoff.

Koivu never returned and took a whack of stitches, but the Wild said he was fine after the game.

"He's tough," said Heatley.

Belanger, who had shovelled a backhand past Backstrom but off the crossbar while short-handed, faked a shot in the shootout and had a gaping net but, again, was denied by the iron. If he scored, it would have equalized Cullen's goal.

"If I had it do over again, I'd make the same move and nine out of 10 times that goes in," said Belanger, who could have given the Oilers a 2-0 lead short-handed but, again, the gods frowned on him.

“I know Backstrom from playing with him for three years. Disappointing because we could have won this one. We have to learn from this I guess and move on,” Belanger said.

This loss stings more than any of the others in the Wild’s domination of the last year or so, however.

“We played fine and it came down to 10ths of a second,” said Oilers coach Tom Renney, who rolled four lines.

“We’ll end this streak. To hell with it. We’ll end it.”

ON THE BENCH: The Oilers sat defenceman Theo Peckham for the second time in six games. Peckham also dressed as a seventh D-man in Calgary.

Early version by JOANNE IRELAND

EDMONTON — The visitor’s power play wasn’t sputtering, it had stalled, so much so that the Minnesota Wild had gone three games without a goal.

And they hadn’t won a game on the road since the 2010-11 season opened, going 0-1-1 on their way to Rexall Place.

If anything was going to cure the Wild, it was going to be a game against the Edmonton Oilers.

The Wild had won seven straight games against the Oilers, including their 2-1 shootout victory on Oct. 13.

So even though there were just under two seconds left on the clock at Rexall Place on Thursday night and the Oilers were up by a goal, the Wild found a way to keep the streak alive. With an extra attacker on the ice, Wild forward Dany Heatley put the equalizer past Nikolai Khabibulin at 19:58 to send the teams to overtime.

Matt Cullen then beat the Oilers veteran with the only goal in the shootout to lift the Wild to a 2-1 victory.

Jordan Eberle, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Eric Belanger were all denied by Niklas Backstrom.

“It’s the same thing over and over. Like (Oilers head coach Tom Renney) said, he’s a little sick of it. It’s not so much about them as it about us,” Jones said after the morning skate and before he scored his second of the season.

The Wild swept the season series in 2010-11, outscoring Edmonton 23-9. They have a commanding, inexplicable streak of 17 straight wins over the Oilers in the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn.

“I don’t know what it is. I really don’t have an answer,” said Wild winger Cal Clutterbuck.

The Oilers jumped out to a 1-0 lead after Ryan Smyth picked off a pass and sent the puck over to Jones, who redirected it past Backstrom at 16:06 of the first period.

The teams combined for just 16 shots on net in the first 20 minutes.

“Any team can frustrate you if you’re not paying attention to your own game plan,” Renney had said earlier on Friday. “The bottom line is we want to play the game a certain way.”

Taylor Hall, who had been knocked out of Tuesday’s game against the Calgary Flames with a head cold, was back on the top line with rookie Nugent-Hopkins and Eberle, who is long overdue for his first goal of the season.

Eberle has been creating chances, but still hasn’t been rewarded with his first goal of 2011-12.

All that stood between Belanger, who played his best game in an Oilers uniform, and his first goal with the club was the iron he hit on a short-handed breakaway.

At the other end, of the rink, Khabibulin denied Cullen on a breakaway in the second to preserve the 1-0 advantage, then turned away the first 11 shots he saw in the third.

The Oilers let a 1-0 slip away in Calgary on Tuesday night, losing 2-1 to the Flames with Devan Dubnyk in net.

Edmonton Oilers

Gagner

By Joanne Ireland, edmontonjournal.com
October 20, 2011

EDMONTON - After it was tested and re-tested, the oil derrick at Rexall Place was back in service for Thursday’s NHL game between the Edmonton Oilers and Minnesota Wild.

The hefty apparatus had malfunctioned on Monday because there was too much slack in one of the cables. As it was being hoisted up to its resting place in the rafters, the derrick dropped down over the players bench and nearby stands.

A safety inspection took place the following day, after which a few modifications were made before it was certified for action.

“I just happened to be there watching it from ice level,” said Oilers president and CEO Patrick LaForge. “I saw it jerk as it was being lifted off the ice. So did our operations crew. There was some thought to just freezing it in location, but they followed through, put it back in the rafters, and after the game we lowered it for the inspectors.”

Since 2000, the derrick has been a feature of the club’s pre-game show, serving as a passageway for the players.

“When it dropped into location, the motors continued to run until there was slack in the cable,” said LaForge. “Then, when it was lifted back up, the derrick dropped because of it.

“We had an independent engineering firm certify it as ready go to after there were some changes made, and Occupational Health and Safety looked at the inspections report, checked out the solutions and certified it.”

Yeo settles into new gig

Mike Yeo, the new man in charge of the Minnesota Wild, is 38 years old — just five years older than goaltender Niklas Backstrom and four years older than Matt Cullen.

But he says he has not approached this head coaching job any different than he did last season when he was guiding the Houston Aeros, the Wild’s American Hockey League affiliate, to the Calder Cup final.

“I’ve always believed the only way to coach is to just be yourself. What I did last year and what I’ve done this year is the same,” he said. “I’m fortunate. I have a great group of guys here to work with.”

Yeo, the youngest coach in the NHL, took over for Todd Richards on June 17.

“We have a different mindset, a different attitude, but I do think we’re still learning,” said winger Cal Clutterbuck. “It’s more of a goal, as a team, to do the little things right in and right out. We’re very detail-oriented.

“We’re trying to get to a point where we can be the same team every night, doing the exact same things.”

Hall back at work

After spending a game in sick bay, Taylor Hall, the Oilers’ industrious sophomore winger was back on the ice for Thursday’s contest against the Wild.

“I just had a really bad head cold. Everything was clogged up and it just got to the point where I couldn’t sleep,” he said of the ailment that KO’d him for Tuesday’s game against the Calgary Flames.

“I was fortunate last year, I didn’t get sick. I didn’t even miss any practices, but I just got a little bit rundown. When I woke up in Calgary, I just knew I couldn’t play ... if I’m tired, I show it. I need to be pretty rested.”

Gagner to return Saturday

Centre Sam Gagner will play his first regular-season game on Saturday when the New York Rangers visit Rexall Place.

Gagner left the Sept. 24 pre-season game against the Flames with a high ankle sprain.

“It’s never fun watching, especially having had my season cut short last year,” he said. “I felt pretty good in the pre-season. I was ready to go then this happened.”

Short shifts

— With Hall sick earlier in the week and Jordan Eberle (blocked shot) dinged up in Calgary, the Oilers had Barons forward Ryan Keller on standby. He never left Oklahoma City.

— The 7:30 midweek starts are going to be the norm whenever another Canadian team is playing on the same night in the Eastern time zone. The schedule was laid out that way to prevent overlapping television broadcasts.

— Devin Setoguchi and Dany Heatley swapped places for the game against the Oilers, with Setoguchi returning to the right side and Heatley moving to left wing. Yeo made the move to see if he could speed up their games through the neutral zone by putting them back on their strong sides.

“I’ve played the right side since I was six years old,” said Setoguchi, who arrived with two goals in six games. “Who knows, maybe it will work out better.”

— Yeo is still waiting for Setoguchi, acquired from the San Jose Sharks in the off-season, to assert himself and be a little bit more aggressive in games. “That’s just a matter of him having the confidence to not to defer (to his linemates),” said Yeo.

Hockey will always be in Wayne Gretzky's blood

By Robin Short, St. John's Telegram October 20, 2011

ST. JOHN'S — Nattily dressed, as always, Wayne Gretzky takes his seat in the big, green leather chair to the left of former New Brunswick premier Frank McKenna.

In front of 900 or so paying customers and adoring fans, he says all the right things.

This is the corporate Wayne Gretzky, the erstwhile hockey great, and conglomerate onto himself. The Wayne Gretzky who is a pitchman for TD Bank — which presented the Breakfast with the Great One Tuesday morning at the St. John's Convention Centre — and Ford and EA Sports, is a restaurateur, wine maker and Lord knows what else.

This is Wayne Gretzky, with handlers and managers scripting every move.

Bobby Orr? He came to town a few years ago and hung out at the arena for a day with the Chevrolet Safe and Fun program.

Ray Bourque? Perhaps the second-best defenceman to play the game lined up at Tim Hortons Saturday morning for a large double-double and nobody noticed, save for one keen hockey mom.

Gretzky? He comes with a security detail.

It's a testament to the icon's star power, the rare athlete who is recognized as much by his jersey number as his name, an athlete who just may be Canada's most famous product. But you want to know something about Wayne Gretzky?

For all of the fame — and, yes, definitely yes, fortune — he's just a hockey guy. And like all hockey guys, there's nothing quite like a coffee at the morning skate, talking hockey, and at the rink later that day, in the press room or the press box, talking more hockey.

"Listen," Gretzky was saying at the Delta, after the breakfast gathering was officially over, "people ask me all the time, 'What do you do to replace the game of hockey?' And it's simple: you can't. Will never happen.

"Hockey was my life, and everything I have in my life I owe to hockey. The people I've met, the places I've been, the excitement I've had in my life . . . it's all because of one thing.

"Nothing can replace hockey."

It's hard to believe, but the skinny little kid in the tucked-in Edmonton Oilers' jersey, the fresh-faced boy on the cover of Sports Illustrated, the man who cried when he was traded to the Los Angeles Kings, is 50 years old.

Save for a few age lines, Gretzky still looks like he could skate a shift or three in the NHL.

Then again, sticking out of Gretzky's breast pocket are — gasp! — a pair of reading glasses. Maybe that 92-goal season was that long ago, after all (though we joke that if Gretzky had the specs back then, maybe he'd have hit 100 goals).

"I'll always miss the game . . . it was part of life forever. Ever since I was three years old, in some way, shape or form I was getting ready for a season and another game of hockey.

"But the realization is nothing lasts forever. I loved every minute of it, every part of it. But life moves on. I truly enjoyed every bit of being a National Hockey League player."

Of course, Gretzky was still involved in the NHL up until a few years ago, enjoying moderate success as coach of the Phoenix Coyotes.

But then the franchise’s majority owner, Jerry Moyes, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, claiming he had lost $200 million.

Moyes intended to sell the team to BlackBerry tycoon Jim Balsillie, who was to move the franchise to Hamilton, Ont. — much to the NHL's chagrin (commissioner Gary Bettman steamed over Balsillie's bombastic ways).

But before the U.S. court system could decide whether Balsillie or the NHL itself would take over the Coyotes (the courts decided on the league), Gretzky stepped down as coach.

His record was a pedestrian 143-161-24, Phoenix never did make the playoffs under his watch.

Gretzky had agreed to a 10 per cent stake in the team in 2000, accepting the roles of alternate governor, managing partner and head of hockey operations.

However, because he was reportedly making $8.5 million a year to coach Phoenix, with neither Balsillie nor the league prepared to pay that kind of cash, Gretzky stepped aside.

He's still owed $9 million or $10 million in connection with his minority stake in the club.

Since then, Gretzky hasn't had an official job or even, some would contend, a very high profile in the league.

Imagine the Irish Tenors playing the bongos? Etch A Sketch in the Louvre? Some things are hard to fathom.

Gretzky won't go there. He feels he owes his life to the game, so he's certainly not about to slag it now.

For now, Gretzky fills his schedule with speaking engagements, like the TD gig Tuesday, and hanging around the house watching hockey and getting in Janet's hair.

"My wife says I'm a hockey junkie," he says. "The hockey channel's on all the time in my house. And if I'm not watching hockey, I'm a huge baseball fan."

Gretzky's interest in baseball was certainly ratcheted up a notch this summer when his oldest boy, Trevor, was drafted by the Chicago Cubs.

Trevor was set to attend college in San Diego, but opted instead to turn pro.

Next year, said Gretzky, he will probably head to Boise, Idaho, for Class-A ball.

So for Gretzky, the gleaming sheet of ice has, for now, been replaced by white foul lines and the whirl of pine tar.

"It quenches the thirst, I guess, but it's a different quench," he said.

"Trevor's 18 and he's now a professional athlete, which is exciting.

"But for me, it's just as much fun going to Little League with my 11-year-old as it is watching my older boy play ball."

Gretzky said his biggest thrill, from a team perspective, was the first Stanley Cup in 1984, when the upstart Oilers ended the New York Islanders' string of four straight championships. From an individual standpoint, nothing tops the 50 goals in 39 games in 1981, a record that might remain forever.

But Gretzky also got quite a charge out of running the 2002 Canadian Olympic team, a team that won Canada's first men's hockey gold medal in 50 years. He was steering the ship again in 2006, but things didn't work out so well in Turin, Italy, as Canada dropped a 2-0 decision to Russia in the quarter-finals.

Steve Yzerman ran Team Canada at the 2010 Olympics and, recently, Gretzky's former running mate with the Oilers and New York Rangers, Mark Messier, has worked with the national team at world championships.

But Gretzky, it seems, is satisfied to watch his ship sail with Hockey Canada's national teams.

"I haven't really thought about that very much," he said. "One of the great experiences in my life was being part of Team Canada."

"But for me, again, I just enjoy watching it now. I've put in my time, I've been there, done that, it was fun and exciting and I'm glad I did it. But now it's time for other people to venture in and have that opportunity."

No doubt, others will fill Gretzky's shoes as Team Canada architects this year, next year and 10 years from now. And Canada will always be a team to beat.

As for Wayne Gretzky, the player, there will be other superstars, just as Jean Beliveau followed The Rocket, and along came Orr, and Lafleur and Lemieux and Sidney Crosby.

It's a part of evolution.
Want to bet you will never see another Great One?

After spending a game in sick bay, Taylor Hall, the Oilers industrious winger, will return to the top line for tonight’s contest against the Minnesota Wild.

Hall missed Tuesday’s game against the Calgary Flames.

“I just had a really bad head cold. Everything was clogged up and it just got to the point where I couldn’t sleep,” he said after the morning skate. “I felt a little bit foggy out there just because I haven’t done anything the last couple of days, but I’m sure by tonight I’ll be fine.”

Shawn Horcoff was not on the ice, but head coach Tom Renney said the captain just had the morning off and that he would be in the lineup. Finally, Jordan Eberle, who was dinged up after taking a shot in the 2-1 loss to the Flames, is also expected to play.

Because of all the question marks, the Oilers pulled Ryan Keller up from Oklahoma City Barons. He isn’t expected to play.

“"I was fortunate last year, I didn’t get sick. I didn’t even miss any practices but I just got a little bit run down," continued Hall. “When I woke up in Calgary, I just knew I couldn’t play. I had a fever... And if I’m tired, I show it. I need to be pretty rested.”

Gagner will return on Saturday

Centre Sam Gagner could have been pressed into service today but Renney said he will hold him out for one more game. That pushes Gagner’s return from a high ankle sprain to Saturday.

Hurt in the pre-season, Gagner will have missed six games.

“It’s never fun watching, especially having had my season cut short last year,” he said. “I felt pretty good in the pre-season, I was ready to go then this happened.”

Derrick back in operation?

It sounds like the oil derrick at Rexall Place will be back in operation tonight. The hefty apparatus was swinging over the players bench and the stands on Monday because there was too much slack on one of the cables.

A safety inspection took place the following day.

The Oilers are expected to send out a statement later today.

I Preferred The Dullness To The Heartbreak

Posted by:
Jonathan Willis

I seem to recall Gary Bettman mentioning, more than once, that he’s seen 2-1 games that were every bit as enjoyable as big offensive showings. There’s no denying a 2-1 game can provide plenty of entertainment. There’s also no denying that this was not one of those entertaining 2-1 games.

After a slow third period, where the Oilers held on with grim determination to their one goal lead, the Wild – and to add insult to injury, not just any member of the team, but Dany Heatley – scored the tying goal from a sharp angle with all of two seconds left. Nikolai Khabibulin played a superb game overall, but that was a brutal, soul-crushing goal.

Here are the player grades for the Oilers, with 10 being a “perfect” game, 9 extraordinary, 8 great, 7 good, 6 above average, 5 average, 4 below average, 3 poor, 2 terrible and 1 deserving of almost instant demotion.

Here are the player grades for the Oilers, with 10 being a “perfect” game, 9 extraordinary, 8 great, 7 good, 6 above average, 5 average, 4 below average, 3 poor, 2 terrible and 1 deserving of almost instant demotion.

Taylor Hall, 5. Quiet night for Hall and the rest of his line, all of whom disappeared late in the third with the game on the line. And by disappeared, I don’t mean they played poorly – I mean that they didn’t play at all. Hall took his last shift with 10 minutes left in the game.

Ladislav Smid, 6. Honestly, I went back and forth on Smid all game. On the one hand, he was clearly involved and spend the entire evening trying to keep a handle on the Heatley/Setoguchi/Koivu line. He made four hits and blocked five shots. His penalty-killing work was strong. On the other hand, his passing game was decidedly uneven and a quick glance at the scoring chance numbers isn’t encouraging.

Ryan Whitney, 6. Clearly still finding his way after a long stretch off the ice, but there’s something delightful about his ability to make a crisp, confident pass out of his own end.

Shawn Horcoff, 7. I’m not sure if I’ve ever seen a forward lead his team in ice-time (I feel like I have, but can’t recall a specific example) but Horcoff came awfully close tonight. 23:52 overall, just a hair behind Tom Gilbert for the team lead, and he was clearly Renney’s go-to shutdown center.

Cam Barker, 5. I’m really not sure that Barker was as bad as he looked at times; the guy moves at a painful pace and I’m not wild about him being paired with Sutton, but it seems to me that third pairing did okay with their ice-time tonight.

Jordan Eberle, 7. I understand that the Kid Line isn’t the trio sent out to defend a lead, but I found Eberle’s benching particularly frustrating. He was offensively active for the majority of the evening and even though he didn’t score he did create opportunities.

Eric Belanger, 6. Single-handedly fixing the Oilers’ fortunes in the face-off circle. Won twice as many face-offs as he lost and spent a lot of his time alternating in the shutdown role with Horcoff.

Linus Omark, 6. Fairly typical Omark game; he did cute things, and generated some offense. The thing that keeps jumping out at me about this guy is how much defensive zone work he gets – admittedly, some of it comes from being joined at the hip to Belanger (and to a lesser extent Paajarvi) but he is being asked to do a lot more than just add offense.

Andy Sutton, 4. Sutton adds size and a strong physical game – I’m sure it will wear off eventually, but I keep being struck by just how big he is – but he lacks speed in a big way, and it’s especially evident when he’s paired with Barker.

Ryan Jones, 6. Another goal for Jones, albeit one where Ryan Smyth did the lion’s share of the work. Provided a lot of activity and energy but remains the weak link on his line.

Nikolai Khabibulin, 8. Say what you will about the Heatley goal – and from that angle, with no time on the clock, the goalie has to stop it – but Khabibulin had a phenomenal game otherwise. Minnesota got their chances and the biggest reason this game was a shutout for the vast majority of the night was because of Khabibulin. He earned his first star distinction.

Lennart Petrell, 5. It was a low-event night, and the coach rewarded Petrell, Lander and Eager with ice-time late in the game, but Petrell sure didn’t manage much the other way. Once again showed a willingness to engage physically.

Corey Potter, 6. Potter’s been the Oilers’ biggest revelation in the early going in my opinion, simply because of how little was expected of him. He’s got a multifaceted game and even though he didn’t record a point tonight he was involved offensively.

Ben Eager, 6. I never see this guy enough in any one game to feel strongly about him, but he sure seems like a tough guy who can play a bit too. I didn’t like the fact that he took an extra slashing penalty on his fight, but other than that I don’t have much negative to say. The fact that Renney didn’t bump him off the line late in the third showed a certain level of trust.

Anton Lander, 6. It’s fainst praise, given his line-mates, but Lander was easily the best offensive option of his line. Played a solid if unspectacular game.

Tom Gilbert, 7. Once again led the Oilers in ice-time, and once again spent most of it against the best possible opposition. Gilbert continued his improved physical play over a year ago tonight.

Magnus Paajarvi, 6. I wonder, sometimes, at Paajarvi’s style – he spends an awful lot of time on the outside, and it also seems that possession switches in a negative way when he’s the guy making decisions with the puck – but he’s fast and seems to know where to be in his own end. Plus, of course, he’s a joy to watch.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, 5. This simply wasn’t Nugent-Hopkins’ game. The coach benched him in the third (as he’s been wont to do lately) and he wasn’t able to make hay with his offensive minutes the way he has so often this season.

Ryan Smyth, 6. The goal was all Smyth; he intercepted Zanon’s – well, whatever it was – and set Jones up on the doorstep. Other than that he took a funny goalie interference penalty and rode shotgun for Horcoff in the tough minutes role. Had a good but not great game, overall.

Learning on the job for RNH

Jim Matheson

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins played the fewest minutes of his short, first month NHL career Thursday only getting on the ice for 15 shifts, just five in the last 25 minutes against the Minnesota Wild.

The Edmonton Oilers’ rookie, who leads them in goals with four and points with five, had 13:22 of ice-time. Eight forwards—Shawn Horcoff, Ryan Smyth, Ryan Jones, Eric Belanger, Magnus Paajarvi, Linus Omark, Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle—played more than the 18-year-old centre who watched as Oilers’ coach Tom Renney rolled four lines pretty much throughout and also used Horcoff and Belanger considerably more in the middle.

Until Thursday’s short work, RNH’s minutes played have been up and down. He’s played the least, ironically against the Wild, maybe because Renney knows how good Minnesota captain Mikko Koivu is and wants his 30something vets Horcoff or Belanger out against one of the NHL’s most underrated (except for his $7 million plus contract) player.

RNH only had 15:18 ice-time in St. Paul a week ago. His high was 18:59 in the 2-1 loss in Calgary Tuesday. In this one, even while sitting for long stretches, Renney played a hunch and sent him out for the shootout but he was foiled on his first NHL attempt, sliding a backhand off Nik Backstrom and wide of the net.

Neither Nugent-Hopkins or his dynamic linemates Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle got much face-time, actually. Hall, who missed Tuesday’s loss in Calgary with the flu, played just 4:14 over the last 25 minutes (third period and OT). Eberle only played 13:24 in total. As a trio they had six shots, four by Eberle, still looking for his first goal.

“As a trio I thought they were having a little difficulty,” said Renney. “And I had two centreman winning draws pretty regularly (Belanger was 12-6, Horcoff 10-10) and a third guy close to 50 percent (Anton Lander at 6-7). That kind of affected Nuge a bit.”

Nugent-Hopkins, who only played 15 more seconds 5-on-5 than Lander, only took three draws all night, going 1-2.

Oilers Beat Wild 1-0 Through 59 Minutes And 58 Seconds

Even without Jacques Lemaire, the Minnesota Wild rarely allow the Edmonton Oilers to score more than two goals. Regardless of personnel, the Wild seem to have the ability to turn a game into a neutral zone snooze-fest, bereft of end-to-end play or scoring chances. Tonight's game was a little different - there were chances, and there were a few rushes here and there, but it wasn't enthralling. It was Minnesota Wild hockey. And the Oilers were outdoing the Wild at their own game. Until there was 1 second on the clock, that is.

The first period was high tempo, for a Wild game, that is. Ryan Smyth was called for goaltender interference, though a number of replays showed Backstrom so far away from his goal that he may have been going for a line change when the contact took place. Khabibulin made a couple of excellent saves on the ensuing power play, then wasn't tested for the rest of the period. Shawn Horcoff pulled off a brilliant move on a 2-on-2 with Taylor Hall, dropping the puck behind to Hall and bulling his way to the net. Both defensemen converged on Horcoff and Hall had both open ice and an enormous three-man screen to work with, but flubbed the puck.. The Oilers opened the scoring after Greg Zanon inexplicably chased a puck behind his net, turned, fell and fired a near-blind pass up the left boards. Ryan Smyth was waiting for the pass, and through a perfect pass in front to Ryan Jones for the Burrows-like tap-in. The sequence was strange - Zanon had no reason to hurry, and even though Louie DeBrusk called it a "great forecheck", Jones peeled off in the circles in front. It was a clear HUA on Zanon. Ben Eager goaded Brad Staubitz into a fight with a slash which concerns me. Should Eager be the guy starting fights, just one month after a concussion? He took three shots to the face from Staubitz before going down.

The second period was similar to the first, this time without the goal, but the Wild got selectively physical with the Oilers, namely with Linus Omark, Lennary Petrell and Anton Lander. Lander especially drew Minnesota's ire - he was hit by four different Wild during the second, three of them late and Guillaume Latendresse threw an obvious, though uncalled, elbow to Lander's face late in the second. The second period was really Linus Omark's period. We've seen how dominant he is with the puck on the cycle, and we've seen how well Magnus Paajarvi plays off of Omark's game, but now that Eric Belanger has figured out how to play with Omark, he's added second deep cycling forward to that line. They controlled a couple of shifts and created scoring chances in the second, but couldn't cash.

The third period was a careful one for the Oilers. Tom Renney went into serious match-up mode and tried to ride out a 1-0 lead. The Oilers surrendered chances to the Wild, and weren't generating much in the third themselves. Renney stapled the Hall-Hopkins-Eberle line to the bench for the last seven minutes of the game and chose to send Lander and Petrell over the boards with Smyth, Horcoff or Belanger instead. Khabibulin kept knocking pucks down and covering them up for faceoffs and the whole strategy was working. Until Khabibulin decided it was time for a bad goal with 1.2 seconds left and allowed Dany Heatley to poke a puck in to tie the game.

They beat the Flames for 54 minutes. They beat the Wild for 59 minutes and 58 seconds. Bring on the narratives about "learning to win", "killer instinct", and "putting games away".

Wild beat Oilers for eighth straight time

By ROBERT TYCHKOWSKI, QMI Agency

EDMONTON - Never mind Dany Katz, Minnesota has owned the Oilers for so long Edmontonians should be building the Wild a free arena.

But when 16,839 fans at Rexall Place dozed off to sleep Thursday night, they fully expected to wake up and discover that the slump was finally over.

The Oilers went up 1-0 in the first period and since it was clearly going to be a week or two before the next goal, the lead seemed safe.

It was safe in a scoreless second.

And it was safe for all but 1.2 seconds of the third.

That's when Dany Heatley — yes, THAT Dany Heatley — scored from behind the end line to send the Oilers into a state somewhere between shock and nausea.

"That's unbelievable," said defenceman Ryan Whitney. "I actually stood up on the bench, turned around, said @%$%^ yeah! and gave someone a high five. I thought we won."

He wasn't alone. But it went to a shootout where Jordan Eberle, Ryan-Nugent Hopkins and Eric Belanger all missed. Matt Cullen scored the only goal Minnesota would need to beat Edmonton for the eighth straight time.

Head coach Tom Renney lit into his players afterward.

"He has a right to be upset," said Whitney. "He said we deserved a better fate, but we just had awful puck management.

"In the second period there were three shifts in a row where they had a three-on-two. The league is too good to let up."

It was another in a string of dreadfully boring Oilers games. Like the 3-1 win over Nashville or the 2-1 loss to Calgary before it, this one made soccer look exciting.

"Usually it's the other way around, they get the goal and they sit back, play one forward," said Ryan Smyth. "We got our goal early and then sat back in the second, but in the third I thought we were doing the little things a little better.

"It was an unfortunate bounce. I was hoping the clock had run out."

Edmonton scored first when Greg Zanon served up a horrible giveaway from behind his own net 16 minutes into the first period. He put it right on Ryan Smyth's stick, who slid it to Ryan Jones who made it 1-0.

And that was it ... til Heatley broke their hearts.

To work as hard as they did for 59:58 and only get a point is heartbreaking. And how about the fans ... it's one thing to watch that bad a game if you win, but to watch a stinker and then lose it like that. Ouch.

Especially after a 1-0 lead late in the third period in Calgary disintegrated into a 2-1 loss in regulation.

"We're playing well, we're doing a lot of good things, but we have to close, these are games we have to win," said Belanger, who hit the crossbar on a shorthanded breakaway and the post in the shootout.

"We have to learn from this. The last two games are hard to digest — we should have come out with four points and we only have one. It's frustrating."

Coaches will obsess over the defensive mistakes, but not getting the second goal is just as big an error on Edmonton's part. That's three games in a row now that the other team has dictated the pace.

"We had 30 shots on net, we had a lot of pucks to the net, a lot of bodies to the net," said Belanger. "We just have to find a way to score more goals to give ourselves a little breathing room."

Let's hope so, because there's no future in trying to win 1-0.
EDMONTON - Four losses in four games to Northwest Division teams. And they gassed leads in all four.

The worst team in the NHL these past two years have been the Edmonton Oilers with the back-to-back 30th place finishes. And they did it despite playing in the worst division in hockey.

And now they’re doing it again?

When you go 6-13-5 and 8-14-2 in the Northwest Division, you belong in the basement.

And when you start the season 0-4 against a division in which four of five teams missed the playoffs last year, has anything changed?

OK. This time they took it late.

It was 1-0 Edmonton with 1.2 seconds left when Dany Heatley, who would have been totally invisible all night if some fans hadn’t chosen to boo him when he came close to the puck, was the benefactor of a bad goal by Nikolai Khabibulin, who was one brick shy of looking like he’d rebuilt the Bulin Wall.

So the Oilers’ lose in the shootout for the second time in as many weeks to the Wild.

And that’s now eight straight losses to Minnesota, including all six last year and the first two this season.

Oilers have lost 17 straight in Minnesota going back four years and almost four months. The Wild has more wins against Edmonton than any other opponent.

The Oilers, when they gassed a 1-0 lead to lose 2-1, late in Calgary the other night made it nine losses in a row to the Flames in the Saddledome.

And you know how the Sedin twins pad their points and Roberto Luongo his win percentage and save percentage against Edmonton.

With Minnesota this night, it looked like Tom Renney decided if he couldn’t beat ‘em, he’d join ‘em.

So Edmonton became the Oilerzzzzzzzzz.

He essentially benched the top line of Jordan Eberle, who had to lead the team in chances, Taylor Hall and rookie Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who was kept out of the faceoff circle for all but three appearances in which he won one.

Ryan Smyth, Shawn Horcoff and his line played over 23 minutes while the kids had 23 fewer minutes.

“Frustrating to lose a game like that,” said Eberle. “We had the game the whole time.”

He said he’s not worried that he has yet to score despite the chances.

“I’m not worried about it at all. They’re going to go in.”

But it’s six games into the season and the list of Oilers who have yet to score (eight of the 10 goals have been scored by somebody named Ryan) is ridiculously long.


Renney said he’s not concerned with 10 goals in six games.

“Nope. Not yet. We’ll get it going.”

Eberle said the top line went away from the game plan.

“We need to manage the puck better and chip it in.”

Nugent-Hopkins, who was given a shot in the shootout but failed, said he was pined because “I wasn’t handling the puck well.”

The bottom line is that the Oilers aren’t going to win many games 1-0. But so far this season they’re trying.

“I thought we played fine,” said Renney. “It came down to 100th of a second.”

Nugent-Hopkins?

“He played fine. As a line, I thought they had difficulty.”

Whoa. Isn’t this supposed to be different this year? Isn’t this a team which is supposed to be much more accountable and trying to play meaningful games in the spring?

What about gassing four leads and losing four games to Northwest Division teams?

“I have nothing but confidence in this team. They’re a pleasure to coach because they want badly to do the right thing.”

And what about those eight straight losses to Minnesota?

“We’ll end that streak,” said the coach. “To hell with it. We’ll end it.”

I preferred Ryan Smyth’s view.

“Unacceptable,” he said of the result. “Close isn’t good enough here anymore.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
EDMONTON - Devin Setoguchi has never been asked to play this many minutes in a game before.

However, having traded their best defenceman in order to acquire the Taber native, the Minnesota Wild are going to try and get the most out of the former 30-goal scorer.

"I averaged about 14, 14-and-a-half minutes a game in San Jose for five years," Setoguchi said. "Higher minutes means for higher responsibilities. You have to be quicker on your shifts, you can't extend them, if you're going to be out there 20-plus minutes, you have to keep your shifts quick. It's just another adjustment, but so far it's been working out well.

"It comes down to everything, fitness, nutrition and just taking care of yourself. The more minutes you play the more tired you're going to be and the more recovery you're going to need."

With the Wild, Setoguchi is averaging nearly 20 minutes per game playing on the club's top line with Mikko Koivu and Dany Heatley, also acquired from the Sharks.

According to Wild rookie head coach Mike Yeo, it's not necessarily about Setoguchi getting used to the increased ice time, but instead the added responsibility.

"I think the biggest adjustment with Seto is for him to open the door and say 'Here I am,'" Yeo said. "I think he's deferred a little bit to those guys. That's normal for younger guys, you're playing with two great players and perhaps the mentality is to allow the older guys to do all the work and make the play and just be there when they need you."

At 24, Setoguchi could be the face of the franchise for years to come. The Wild are hoping he regains the form which saw him score 31 goals in his rookie season.

"What I would like to see from him is to assert himself and say 'I'm a huge part of this line,' make plays happen himself, be more aggressive," Yeo said. "I'd like to see his speed be more of a factor and to me it's just a matter of him having the confidence and not to simply defer to those guys and take the initiative himself."

DERRICK BACK IN ACTION

There might have been some trepidation by the Edmonton Oilers skating under the Oil Derrick to start the contest Thursday against the Minnesota Wild.

The replica Derrick malfunctioned on Monday, as a cable snapped, sending it swinging into the boards in front of the Oilers bench as it was being raised back to it's anchoring spot above the scoreboard.

The Oilers along with Northlands and Aquila Productions, reviewed the circumstances of the malfunction and concluded the device was once again safe to use during the team introductions.

"It has been a long few days, however, we are pleased with the process that has taken place, including the approval we received from the Occupational Health and Safety Board," said Oilers President Pat LaForge in a statement. "Ensuring the safety of everyone inside Rexall Place is, and always will be, our main objective."

RYAN GAME

Those Oilers struggling to score may want to think about changing their name to Ryan. Of the 10 goals the team had scored heading into the game against the Wild, seven had been credited to either Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Ryan Jones, or Ryan Smyth. Jones connected again Thursday scoring in the second period to make it eight-of-11. However, Ryan Eberle or Ryan Paajarvi do not seem to have the right ring to it.

TICKET EXCHANGE

Jared Spurgeon is used to shelling out for tickets when the Minnesota Wild are in town. The local product has plenty of family and friends wanting to watch him play when his club is at Rexall Place. Yet, now that he's a regular on the Wild blue-line and the team comes to town four times this season including an exhibition contest, things were getting kind of costly for the second-year defenceman.

"We made a deal that we would alternate and I would pay for one and they would pay for the other," Spurgeon said. "I had to get a lot of tickets for the exhibition game, but lucky for me, it's their turn this time around."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
EDMONTON - Taylor Hall isn't sick anymore, unless you count being sick and tired of losing to the Minnesota Wild.

The Oilers are hoping their dynamic young winger, back after missing Tuesday's game to illness, can help Edmonton change its fortunes against a team that's beaten them eight straight times.

"I feel a lot better now, almost back to 100%," said Hall, who took part in the morning skate Thursday. "I felt a little bit foggy out there just because I haven't done anything the past couple of days but I'm sure by tonight I'll be fine."

It's kind of unfortunate that you have to miss games that aren't injury related but that's the way it goes.

"I'd been feeling pretty bad the last few games and just kind of hit a boiling point and decided that taking one game off is better than missing four if I let it get worse."

While the Oilers needed Hall in Calgary last game, he was back in Edmonton, needing a few Halls himself.

"I didn't really have the flu. I wasn't throwing up or anything like that, just a really bad head cold with a bad sore throat," he said. "Everything was clogged up, it got to the point where I couldn't sleep and just had no energy."

He's back just in time to help try and solve a Wild team that swept the Oilers last season, beat them in a shootout earlier this season and hasn't lost to them in 17 home games.

It doesn't look like a lopsided fight on paper, but it is.

"It's kind of hard to believe," said Ryan Jones. "It's just one of those things; sometimes you lose hockey games and sometimes you lose them to the same team. But there's no real mis-match out there.

The Oilers believe they're as good right now as they've been in years and that home ice advantage will snap the eight-game streak.

"Yeah, they're a team that seems to have our number," said Jordan Eberle. "Losing the shootout this year was kind of bitter. But we have a team this year that is definitely different from last year as far as the leadership crew and the veterans and the work ethic. We feel confident that we can win hockey games and that's what we expect to do tonight."

LATE HITS... Nikolai Khabibulin (1-0-1) with a 0.96 goals against average and .957 save percentage starts in goal for the Oilers... D Theo Peckham is a healthy scratch.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Florida Panthers shut out for second game in row as Sabres roll 3-0

By George Richards
grichards@MiamiHerald.com

The Panthers had little problem putting the puck into the net Monday night, scoring seven goals to spoil the Lightning’s home opener.

Things have not been so good since.

Florida has been shut down and shut out in its following two games, first by former teammate Tomas Vokoun and Washington on Tuesday and then by Buffalo’s Ryan Miller on Thursday. In the Panthers’ second home game of the season, Miller made just 22 saves and led the red-hot Sabres to a 3-0 victory at BankAtlantic Center.

Buffalo, which lost its only game on home ice this season, is now 5-1-0. The Panthers haven’t scored a goal since Jason Garrison whipped one past Dwayne Roloson late in Monday’s win.

Florida’s scoreless streak is now at 2 hours 3 minutes 16 seconds. The Panthers were previously shut out in consecutive games last March against the Rangers and Blackhawks.

Florida is averaging just 21 shots in its past two defeats.

“I don’t think we tried hard enough,” coach Kevin Dineen said flatly. “There are a lot of little things that go on during the course of a game. … That’s six periods in a row that we showed little snapshots here and there, but we’re a far way away from where we were four or five days ago. We need to address that and soon.

We got outworked in our home building and that has some sting to it. It’s the first time for a lot of us who are new here. It’s got to stop right now.”

Missing pieces

Florida was missing a few parts on Thursday as Ed Jovanovski didn’t play because of a sore hip, Sean Bergenheim missed his second straight game because of what is being called “soreness,” and Shawn Matthias has a stomach ailment.

Even though the Panthers got things going in their offensive zone, they couldn’t solve Miller. Of his 23 career shutouts, two have come against Florida.

The Panthers biggest problem on Thursday was their inability to clear the puck around the net.

On Buffalo’s first goal, Thomas Vanek redirected a shot from Jason Pominville after the Panthers gave up the puck in their own zone. Vanek’s goal, the game-winner, came 2:33 into the second period.

Pominville, Buffalo’s captain, made it 2-0 late in the period when he knocked in a nice feed from Ville Leino — a player the Panthers pursued when the free agency market opened July 1. Vanek scored his second of the night on a power play with 2:29 left.

Florida’s Jose Theodore made 35 saves in the loss — his first as a member of the Panthers on home ice. He won his Sunrise debut with the Panthers last Saturday when Florida beat the Lightning 3-2 in a shootout.

The Panthers were 2 for 3 killing penalties and went 0 for 1 on the power play. In the past two losses, Florida has had just three power play opportunities.

“We have to keep it out of the net on the penalty kill,” said Kris Versteeg. “Jose stood on his head at times for us.”

KEARNS MAKES DEBUT

With Matthias and Bergenheim out, the Panthers recalled forwards Tim Kennedy and Bracken Kearns from their AHL affiliate in San Antonio.

Kearns made his NHL debut Thursday, becoming only the second 30-or-older player to make their NHL debut with the Panthers. Magnus Svensson was 32 when he made his debut back in 1995.

Kearns has spent the past seven seasons toiling in the minor leagues. On Wednesday, Dennis Kearns — Bracken’s father, who played with Florida GM Dale Tallon in the early days of the Vancouver Canucks — texted birthday greetings to Tallon.

Tallon responded that Bracken had a strong camp, and with three goals in three games with San Antonio, would be called up eventually. Thursday, Bracken Kearns got the call he’s been waiting on for a long, long time.

“Unbeknownst to me, we needed a couple guys so here he is. It’s kind of cool,” Tallon said. “He’s been waiting a long time. This is no gift, though. He earned this. He’s a usable player and a good kid.”

Saturday’s game at Houston was Kearns’ 429th in the minors; Kearns has played for seven different teams since leaving the University of Calgary in 2005.

Miami Herald LOADED: 10.21.2011
Panthers sent to second straight 3-0 loss by Sabres

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel
11:04 PM EDT, October 20, 2011

SUNRISE — Just when the Panthers discovered a power play, they forgot how to score at even strength.

Panthers coach Kevin Dineen doesn't believe in excuses, and in Thursday night's 3-0 loss to the Sabres at BankAtlantic Center there were none.

"If we don't work harder than other team we're not going to have a chance," Dineen said. "We need to address some of our system. I don't like the way we responded. That's six periods in a row."

Unlike their 3-0 loss to the Capitals on Tuesday, the Panthers weren't playing their third game in four days, and they didn't have a rookie making his first NHL start. Also, they were home.

Still, they came across another quality goaltender in Buffalo's Ryan Miller and a red-hot line in Thomas Vanek-Jason Pominville and rookie Luke Adam, who Dineen coached in the AHL. Vanek scored twice (6 goals) while Pominville scored the other, to go with two assists.

"We had more energy tonight for sure," said Panthers forward Kris Versteeg. "We definitely got to figure out a way to score more goals 5-on-5, because the last couple of games when you get [3 power plays] you got to find ways to win games in other areas."

It's the first time the Panthers have been blanked in successive games since March 22 and 23rd last season by the Rangers and Blackhawks. They haven't scored over the last 123:13, or since Jason Garrison's goal with 3:13 left in Monday's 7-4 victory over the Lightning.

Sure, regulars Sean Bergenheim, Shawn Matthias and defenseman Ed Jovanovski were scratched due to assorted maladies. But that doesn't excuse the same quintet of young defensemen Keaton Ellerby and Erik Gudbranson, along with David Booth, Jack Skille and Tim Kennedy from failing to clear the puck on the first two Sabres' goals.

Miller notched 22 saves for his 23rd shutout, but first this season.

The Sabres have won four straight, three on the road, and improved to 5-1, for their best start since 2008-09 when they began 5-0-1. The Panthers fall to 3-3 with a home game against the Islanders on Saturday.

The Sabres ended the scoreless duel 2:33 into the second period when Pominville threw the puck on net where Vanek deflected it past Jose Theodore, who played well in defeat (35 saves). Buffalo maintained possession when Booth and Skille couldn't control the loose puck.

The Sabres took a 2-0 lead after two periods, when at 16:56, again the Panthers' failure to clear the puck in their own end cost them. Ellerby, who replaced Jovanovski (sore hip), coughed up the puck to center Ville Leino, who then found Pominville on the doorstep for an easy stuff shot.

In a role reversal of sorts from last season, the Panthers came into the game ranked second on the power play, but just 29th when skating 5-on-5 (four goals).

Vanek capped off the loss with a wicked slap-shot power-play goal at 17:31 of the third.

Long-awaited debut

Center Bracken Kearns, who was called up earlier Thursday, along with Kennedy from the Panthers AHL affiliate in San Antonio to fill in, played with center Ryan Carter and Matt Bradley.

"I didn't have time to think about it," said Kearns, who arrived in the middle of warmups and then played 6:30 with two hits. "I was too excited."

Kearns made his debut at 30, and is just the second Panther to do so. Magnus Svensson was 32 when he made his debut for Florida in 1981.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 10.21.2011
Vanek, Miller leads Sabres past Panthers

The Associated Press
Updated: 11:18 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011
Posted: 10:11 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, 2011

The Buffalo Sabres are at home on the road.

Thomas Vanek scored two goals, and Ryan Miller made 22 saves for his first shutout of the season in the Sabres’ 3-0 victory over the Florida Panthers on Thursday night.

Jason Pominville added a goal and an assist for the Sabres.

Buffalo has five wins in its first six games and is undefeated in four road games. Buffalo, which opened 4-0 on the road two years ago, travels to Tampa on Saturday to finish up its trip.

Miller shut out Florida after making a season-high 40 saves Tuesday night in a 3-1 victory in Montreal.

"I thought that was probably our best game of the year when it comes to supporting the puck, coming out together, coming out with speed," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said.

"We owed (Miller) one, so I thought that was important, too, for the way we played in Montreal. I thought that last 40 minutes and especially when leading we stayed away from any of the odd-numbered stuff and we were going to make Florida earn something if they were going to get it."

The Panthers never really mounted much of a scoring threat, and only managed six shots in the final period. After scoring seven goals at Tampa on Oct. 17, the Panthers have not scored since.

"That's six periods in a row, where we had little snap shots, but we're a long way from where we were (a few) days ago," Panthers coach Kevin Dineen said.

Jose Theodore made 35 saves for Florida.

Buffalo opened the scoring at 2:33 of the second period. Pominville took a shot from the right circle that Vanek deflected into the net. Vanek has at least a point in each game this season.

"When the puck is going in, you don't think as much as you just let go," Vanek said.

The Sabres stretched it 2-0 later in the second. Ville Leino passed from the left of the net across to Pominville in front and he poked the puck past Theodore with 3:04 left.

"That second one was a good play by Ville. I drove the net and he was able to find me," Pominville said.

Vanek's slap shot during a power play went over Theodore's shoulder with 2:29 left in the third.

"I looked up and down and over, I had a lot of time. I knew if I could just pump it and get him down, I'd get it over his glove," Vanek said.

The Panthers have only had 42 shots on goal in their past two games.

"Jose (Theodore) stood on his head at times in the first period," Florida's Kris Versteeg said. "I'm not saying the effort wasn't there but we have to do a little more to assist him. There's a lot of skill over there (Buffalo) but we gave them way too much respect."

NOTES: The Sabres previous best start was 5-0-1 in 2008-09. ... Buffalo C Jochen Hecht, who hasn't played this season, was scratched because of a concussion. ... Florida D Ed Jovanovski missed the game because of a hip injury.

Palm Beach Post LOADED: 10.21.2011
Kings shut down the Coyotes, 2-0

Goalie Jonathan Quick records his second consecutive shutout and 100th career victory as the Kings extend their winning streak to three games.

Associated Press
11:22 PM PDT, October 20, 2011

PHOENIX — Jonathan Quick may be on pace to equal last season's start.

A year ago, the Kings won 12 of their first 15 games. At the beginning of the current season, the Kings are 4-1-1, and have given up only nine goals in six games.

On Thursday night, Quick made 28 saves for his second straight shutout, leading the Kings to a 2-0 victory over the Phoenix Coyotes. Two nights earlier, Quick shut out St. Louis in the Kings' home opener.

"This team has great accountability," said Quick, who has 16 career shutouts. "We take pride in our defensive game, and have come to expect solid play on defense."

Dustin Brown and Kyle Clifford scored in the second period.

Phoenix dropped to 2-3-1 in front of an announced crowd of 7,128.

In recording his 100th NHL win, Quick became the first Kings goalie to turn in back-to-back shutouts since Mathieu Garon on April 1-3, 2006.

Quick was required to make only a few difficult saves. Two came in the first period when the goalie stopped defenseman Rostislav Klesla in close, and then deflected Ray Whitney's 20-foot blast from the slot into the left corner.

Later, Raffi Torres, open in the slot, shot wide on a Phoenix power play five minutes into the final period, and late in the period with the Kings' Mike Richards off for tripping, the Coyotes pulled goalie Mike Smith for an extra attacker, but could not dent Quick.

"Each guy is doing his job and it's a total team effort," defenseman Rob Scuderi said. "We're playing a strong team game and when things are easy, they go your way."

The Kings entered the game as the fourth-best defensive team, and proceeded to shut down Phoenix. Though the Coyotes outshot Los Angeles in the opening period, the Kings tightened through the final two periods and held Phoenix to a combined 17 shots.

In the meantime, the Kings eliminated good Phoenix chances by essentially standing at the blue line, and prevented the Coyotes from penetrating into the offensive end.

Plus, the Kings' solid puck movement through the neutral zone cut down Phoenix's chances against Quick.

Kings make it another Quick night in 2-0 victory over Phoenix

By The Associated Press

Posted: 10/20/2011 10:19:26 PM PDT
Updated: 10/20/2011 10:56:39 PM PDT

PHOENIX - Jonathan Quick may be on pace to equal last season's start.

A year ago, the Kings won 12 of their first 15 games. At the beginning of the current season, the Kings are 4-1-1, and have allowed only nine goals in six games.

On Thursday night, Quick made 28 saves for his second straight shutout, leading the Kings to a 2-0 victory over the Phoenix Coyotes. Two nights earlier, Quick shut out St. Louis in the Kings' home opener.

"This team has great accountability," said Quick, who has 16 career shutouts. "We take pride in our defensive game, and have come to expect solid play on defense."

Dustin Brown and Kyle Clifford scored in the second period.
Phoenix dropped to 2-3-1 in front of an announced crowd of 7,128.

In recording his 100th NHL win, Quick became the first Kings goalie to turn in back-to-back shutouts since Mathieu Garon on April 1-3, 2006.

Quick was required to make only a few difficult saves. Two came in the first period when the goalie stopped defenseman Rostislav Klesla in close, and then deflected Ray Whitney's 20-foot blast from the slot into the left corner.

Later, Raffi Torres, open in the slot, shot wide on a Phoenix power play 5 minutes into the final period, and late in the period with the Kings' Mike Richards off for tripping, the Coyotes pulled goalie Mike Smith for an extra attacker, but could not dent Quick.

"Each guy is doing his job and it's a total team effort," defenseman Rob Scuderi said. "We're playing a strong team game and when things are easy, they go your way."

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The Kings struck early in the second period, and made that goal stand up.
Brown banged in his own rebound on a power play less than a minute into the period, and that was all Quick needed.

"The bottom line is we have to find ways to win," Phoenix coach Dave Tippett said. "We need to be more determined and would like to see us execute better with the puck."

The Kings increased their lead when Clifford, crashing down the left wing, converted a pass from Kevin Westgarth into his first of the season at 15:23 of the second period.

Despite that the Kings opened with two games in Sweden, and five of their first six on the road, the 4-1-1 record is no mistake.

"When we saw the schedule, players began preparing for this stretch," Kings coach Terry Murray said. "We have great leadership; veteran players and each took it upon themselves to recognize what we faced in the opening two weeks of the season."

NOTES: Phoenix captain Shane Doan is a goal short of 300 for his 16-year NHL career. ... Kings defenseman Drew Doughty missed his second straight game after sustaining an upper-body injury in Philadelphia. ... The Kings return to Staples Center for games against Dallas and New Jersey. ... After
Murray postgame quotes (Oct. 20)

Posted by Rich Hammond on 20 October 2011, 11:20 pm

Terry Murray’s postgame thoughts…

(on being able to roll four lines…)

MURRAY: “The contribution was huge tonight from the fourth line. Right from the first period, their first shifts, they had the energy and the awareness to support each other, getting pucks in, and had good energy stuff going on in the offensive zone. Westie gets involved with Bissonnette and I think we fed off a lot of the energy that they gave us tonight.”

(on handling the Coyotes’ strong start…)

MURRAY: “They lost the other night here at home against Chicago but played very well in their previous game. We saw the energy on the video, the way they are capable of coming out and playing, and here tonight they played very well at the start of the game. I thought we kind of were feeling our way a little bit in the first part of the game. The fourth line was the one line that seemed to be going for us. I think it gave us the support and the dig-in attitude, as we got into the second.”

(on the defense limiting the pressure against Quick…)

MURRAY: “Not a lot, but in the early part of the game, the first period, I think we gave up several quality scoring chances, grade-A scoring chances, just through that good play of Phoenix and us not managing the puck well enough, just not ready to go emotionally and mentally with the pace of the game. Quick stood tall at that time, in the early part of the game, and finally we got a power-play goal and then a tremendous goal by the fourth line.”

(on the game…)

MURRAY: “As we got into the second and third period, I think we just picked up our pace of play. We started to play the type of game that we showed against the Blues in our home opener. I thought we played well there. We moved the puck well. We were a little hesitant (early in the game), had the puck on our stick a little too long in our D-zone in the first period, and I think the Coyotes, they really fed off of that. They created some turnovers, some great scoring chances, and that’s where Quick had to step up for us in the first.”

Kyle Clifford’s postgame thoughts...

(on his goal…)
CLIFFORD: “It was just a heads-up play by Westie. We practice that in practice a lot. We just read off each other. It was a great drive by Lewie there, and Westie made a heads-up play on the far side there.”

(on the 4-on-2 break on his goal…)
CLIFFORD: “You definitely have to take advantage of them and capitalize on them. Whenever that happens, you just take advantage of them.”

(on the strong defensive effort…)
CLIFFORD: “We’ve just got to keep a level head here and take it one game at a time and keep our focus on the next game and play strong defensively.”

(on whether he was looking short-side all the way on the goal…)
CLIFFORD: “I’ll say I was. [laughs]”

EDMONTON, ALBERTA - As if Dany Heatley wasn't Public Enemy No. 1 already in these parts, the man who snubbed Edmonton ruined Nikolai Khabibulin's masterful shutout bid with 1.2 seconds left in regulation Thursday night.

Heatley, who wouldn't waive his no-trade clause to come to Edmonton after asking out of Ottawa two years ago, scored a stunning goal to somehow lift the Wild out of the doldrums before it prevailed in the shootout by a 2-1 score over the Oilers.

"To snap two points from the jaws of defeat there, it was a pretty good feeling," coach Mike Yeo said after the latest overtime-forcing game in Wild history.

Matt Cullen, the Wild's best forward all night, scored his third shootout goal of the season, and three Oilers couldn't beat Niklas Backstrom after a 30-save effort through overtime.

In a snap, the Wild went from a certain-looking loss to a ninth straight victory over its favorite foe.

"We made some mistakes, but I thought we really took over the game in the second and third," said Heatley, who had a season-high seven shots. "I think we felt it was just a matter of time before we would tie it up, and this time we did."

Heatley, standing at the side of the net, took Pierre-Marc Bouchard's pass from behind the cage and appeared to bank it between Khabibulin's pad and the post. The puck dropped a few inches from the goal line and rolled in.

"I knew time was going down. Just trying to get it to the net," said Heatley, who credited a late Oilers timeout for giving the Wild a chance to regroup and draw up a play. "Usually those plays don't really work, but we had a lot of time in their end. Just kind of scrambling and buzzing and finally found a way to pull it in."

Maybe it was destined because the Wild hadn't been shut out in Edmonton since its first visit Nov. 3, 2000. The Wild's rally was impressive considering it played the final 21 minutes without defenseman Greg Zanon, who aggravated his groin injury, and the final 17 minutes without captain Mikko Koivu, who suffered a terrifying gash to his chin and neck.

At 8:17 of the third, Heatley was tripped by Shawn Horcoff. His skate came up and sliced Koivu, who had stitches from the left side of his chin and neck area all the way to the right side.

But Koivu is OK.

"He's tough," Heatley said.

"As a team, we seemed to use that as a rallying point, like let's go get her done," Yeo said of playing without Zanon and Koivu.

In the first half of the game, the Wild had to overcome own-zone turnovers, faceoff futility, little traffic in front of Khabibulin and a poor power play.

The power play, which is 3-for-27 this season and 0-for-14 the past four games, started off fine. But Khabibulin picked up where he left off a week before during a 34-save effort in St. Paul.

He robbed Heatley twice early. But the Wild's next three power plays were hideous, especially late in the second when the Oilers outchanced the Wild 2-0. Eric Belanger hit the post on a breakaway, and Backstrom stopped Anton Lander on a 2-on-1.

The Oilers jumped out to a 1-0 lead late in the first on Ryan Jones' tap-in after Zanon handed the puck to Ryan Smyth. But the Wild found its game, especially in the third.

"It was such a huge goal [by Heatley] for us to stay with it and stick with it and keep fighting and battling," Cullen said. "By no means was it pretty, but
Heatley, Setoguchi change sides

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO, Star Tribune
Updated: October 21, 2011 - 12:38 AM

EDMONTON, ALBERTA - It may seem like a small tweak, but Wild coach Mike Yeo hopes it will pay big dividends.

After an entire preseason and six games of Dany Heatley and Devin Setoguchi playing on their off wings, the left-shot Heatley moved to his natural left-wing position and the right-shot Setoguchi to his natural right-wing position Thursday night against the Edmonton Oilers.

Setoguchi had spent his entire pro career playing right wing. But since coming to Minnesota from San Jose, he moved to the left side in order to accommodate Heatley, who likes playing the off wing and had done so previously in Atlanta and San Jose.

But with the line struggling to generate offense and speed coming through the neutral zone, Yeo made the switch in hopes of jump-starting the top line.

"I've never really played the left side before, so we were trying it out," Setoguchi said. "Heater wanted to play right, so I figured I could play left. It's nice at times and sometimes it's not, like catching a pass. I'm used to playing the right side and he knows how to play the left, so we'll see how this works out."

Yeo also moved Heatley and Setoguchi back to their strong sides because he noticed a tendency of both players skating east-west instead of north with the puck.

"The tendency is to pull it back to the forehand and then look towards the middle of the ice a lot," said Yeo, who noted that Setoguchi's two goals through six games came from the right side of the ice.

Setoguchi was dropped to the second line Tuesday against Pittsburgh when Yeo looked for a spark from the team. But Yeo said Setoguchi must get out of the habit of trying to force pucks to Heatley and deferring to both Heatley and linemate Mikko Koivu.

Yeo wants the 24-year-old Setoguchi to "open the door and say, 'Guys, here I am,'" Yeo said. "You're playing with two great players, and the mentality is to maybe let those guys do all the work and make the play and then kind of be there when they need you.

"I'd like to see him assert himself and say, 'I'm a huge part of this line.'"

This is a big adjustment year for Setoguchi, who was always fighting for ice time in San Jose. Setoguchi averaged between 15 and 16 minutes a night his first three years in the NHL — 15 minutes, 12 seconds a game last year. Through six games, he's averaged 19:17 a game with the Wild.

Yeo said Setoguchi has been too stationary as he waits for Heatley and Koivu to make plays. He wants him to be tenacious on the puck and use his speed to drive wide on defenders.

"If he's playing really well, you should see a lot of movement in his game," Yeo said.

No lineup changes

Despite threatening to tinker with the lineup Thursday after a disappointing loss to the Penguins, Yeo came back with the same 18 skaters and goaltender (Niklas Backstrom) against the Oilers.

"I do like giving guys a chance to respond," Yeo said. "It's tough. We have guys that we want to get into the lineup right now [Nick Johnson, Matt Kassian, Justin Falk], and we have guys that we want to continue to give games to and build some consistency with the group we have.

"We're trying to juggle those decisions every day."

Etc.
Thursday's Wild-Edmonton game recap

Updated: October 21, 2011 - 12:32 AM

GAME RECAP

STAR TRIBUNE'S THREE STARS

1. Matt Cullen, Wild: Best Wild player through 65 minutes, and scored his 15th career shootout goal (3-for-3 this season).

2. Nikolai Khabibulin, Oilers: After 34 saves last week vs. Minnesota, his shutout bid was ruined by Dany Heatley with 1.2 seconds left in the third.

3. Niklas Backstrom, Wild: Made 22 of his 30 saves in the final 45 minutes; then went 3-for-3 in the shootout.

By THE NUMBERS

3-FOR-27 Wild's power play this season (11.1 percent).

15 Wild wins in Edmonton, its most in any opposing city.

36 Wild wins vs. Edmonton, its most against any opponent.

MICHAEL RUSSO

Star Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Wild players take their faceoffs seriously

By Bruce Brothers
bbrothers@pioneerpress.com
Updated: 10/21/2011 12:17:50 AM CDT

EDMONTON, Alberta - Faceoffs are "the game inside the game," according to Wild center Kyle Brodziak, who admits that he sometimes tries to stare down the opposition center in a bit of gamesmanship before the puck is dropped.

Faceoffs often go unnoticed by average fans, Brodziak said Thursday before the Wild played the Edmonton Oilers at Rexall Place, but not by players.

"It is a big thing," he said. "It's puck possession. You start with the puck and don't have to chase."

Brodziak went into the game in Edmonton having won 57 of 108 draws for a team-best 52.8 percentage, just ahead of Mikko Koivu's 50 percent for winning 59 of 118 faceoffs.

"You go against a guy 15 or 20 times a night, it becomes a little bit of a personal battle," Brodziak said. "It's something that I take a lot of pride in."

Winning a draw comes down to timing and anticipation, Brodziak says, and there really are no trends to rely on, Koivu said.

Asked what he hopes to do when the puck is dropped, Koivu shook his head.

"I'll keep that to myself," he said.

Brodziak said after he finds a way to beat a particular player, that player alters his own technique.

"It's the game within the game," he said, "and I have fun doing it. If you look the centerman in the eye and know you're not going to lose the draw, you kind of have a mental edge on him. It's a battle that I like winning."

Taking sides: Wild coach Mike Yeo tried left-shooting Dany Heatley on the right side and right-shooting Devin Setoguchi on the left side for stretches of the past few games but decided going into the game in Edmonton that he'd switch them back.

"We want to get those guys back on their strong sides," Yeo explained, adding that sometimes a player lined up on the opposite side from the way he shoots might tend to drift across the ice looking for a forehand shot rather than skate directly at the net.

"Part of it is, I believe Heater is comfortable on the right side because he's played a lot of time over there," Yeo added, "but Seto, this is new for him. When I look back at the two goals he's scored, both have been from the right side of the ice. So part of it is to make him a little more comfortable."

Aeros notes: Defenseman Drew Bagnall, who has been recovering from offseason shoulder surgery and working out with the American Hockey League Houston Aeros, cleared waivers by the Wild and is expected to be in the lineup when the Aeros play the first of back-to-back games tonight in Charlotte.

The AHL also suspended Aeros forward Carson McMillan for four games for an illegal hit to the head. McMillan will be eligible to return to the lineup Oct. 29 at home against Oklahoma City.

Through four games, Casey Wellman leads the Aeros in scoring with four goals.

Briefly: Yeo made no changes in his lineup against the Oilers after Minnesota's 4-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday night in a game he was not pleased with. "I do like giving guys a chance to respond," he said.

-- Wild scratches Thursday were defenseman Justin Falk and forwards Matt Kassian and Nick Johnson. Forward Cody Almond and defenseman Mike Lundin remain on injured reserve.

Wild 2, Oilers 1 (SO): Dany Heatley goal with 1.2 seconds left gives Wild new life

Pioneer Press

Updated: 10/21/2011 12:16:58 AM CDT

RECAP: Dany Heatley's tying goal with 1.2 seconds left in the third period forced overtime, and the Wild rallied to beat Edmonton in a shootout on Thursday night at Rexall Place.

The Oilers led 1-0 when Ryan Jones tapped in a goal-mouth pass from Ryan Smyth at the 16:06 mark after a Wild turnover.

It stayed that way until the Wild pulled goalie Nik Backstrom for an extra attacker and Heatley scored to tie it. Matt Cullen scored the only goal of the shootout.

MEANING: Minnesota came into this game having lost four of its past five games and in need of points to hold on to the seventh spot in the West.

ETC.: Defenseman Greg Zanon played in his 400th NHL game but was troubled by a groin injury and was out of the lineup late in the game.

- Bruce Brothers

UP NEXT: at Canucks, 3 p.m. Saturday, FSN, KQQL-FM 107.9

Wild snatch victory from near-certain defeat in Edmonton

By Bruce Brothers

bbrothers@pioneerpress.com

Updated: 10/21/2011 12:15:50 AM CDT

EDMONTON, Alberta - The Wild came up with one of the most dramatic wins of the season Thursday night at Rexall Place.

Unable to score through 59 minutes, 58.8 seconds, Minnesota somehow defeated the Edmonton Oilers 2-1 in a shootout.

Dany Heatley scored the tying goal with 1.2 seconds left in regulation to force overtime after coach Mike Yeo pulled goaltender Niklas Backstrom for an extra attacker.

"To snatch two points from the jaws of defeat there, it was a pretty good feeling," Yeo said.

The Wild did it short-handed, too; they were without center Mikko Koivu and defenseman Greg Zanon for much of the third period - Koivu because of a big cut in his chin when he was hit by Heatley's skate blade and Zanon because of a groin injury.

"That, to me, is something that's going to be very important with our group," Yeo said. "When we're faced with adversity, when we're faced with a challenge, then we welcome that. We look forward to those opportunities, and we rise to the occasion."

They did on this occasion, although the full house at Rexall Place was expecting something different.

The Oilers were clinging to their 1-0 lead into the final seconds before Yeo inserted a sixth skater. The puck popped free to Heatley to the right of the Oilers' net, and Heatley beat Nikolai Khabibulin to tie it up.

Yeo said it was no surprise that Heatley, booed all night by Oilers fans who remembered he vetoed a trade from Ottawa to Edmonton three years ago, came through.

"It was like he was refusing to lose," the coach said.

Heatley shrugged it off, saying he felt confident.

"We really took over the game in the second and third," he said. "I really felt it was just a matter of time before we tied it up."

Koivu, who was still in the Wild dressing room after the game with a nasty-looking gouge in the lower part of his chin, might be ready to go Saturday when the Wild play in Vancouver, Yeo said.

Heatley was more optimistic.

"He's tough," Heatley said. "He'll be all right."

The game went through a scoreless overtime, and in the shootout Backstrom was unyielding in the Minnesota net while Matt Cullen scored on the Wild's first chance to give them the win.

Cullen said it could have been over much sooner except for Khabibulin, who like Backstrom made 30 saves.

"We stuck with it," Cullen said.

Even though the Wild were stuck on zero for more than 59 minutes, Cullen added, they kept applying pressure.

"It's easy to get frustrated, it's easy to get down when pucks aren't going in," he said, "but we've got to be smart enough to know that while we're getting scoring chances, we're creating opportunities. If we're going to become a good team it's good to see we can play like that for 60 minutes. The fact that we can do it is a positive."

Montreal Canadiens
defenceman Hal Gill to skate in his 1,000 career NHL
game Thursday
There exists an interpretation of the French expression - qui aime bien
châtie bien - that can roughly be translated as : you only give hell to the
people you like.
By that standard, Canadiens defenceman Hal Gill is one of the most-loved
people in Montreal.
The man known as Skillsie - in college some wiseacre customized the 'Gill'
nameplate over his locker to read Skills: 0 - is playing his 1,000th career
NHL game on Thursday in Pittsburgh, the city where he won his one and
only Stanley Cup ring.
Here's a sample of the warm fuzzies in the Habs' room:
"A thousand games, and he still hasn't made a good pass," marvelled Mike
Cammalleri, who quickly added a disclaimer, "that one's not mine, it's one
of the other guys."
"He's probably the most annoying guy I've ever played with," said Scott
Gomez. "He can't go more than 30 seconds without hearing the sound of
his own voice. There should be a Hal Gill rule to make him shut up."
With friends like these....
In truth, Gill actually is beloved by his peers, what's not to like about a big
lug who didn't bother showing up for his own draft and who's career
prospects were given last rites after the last NHL lockout when new rules
came into force to limit clutching and grabbing - what Gill refers to as "all
that good stuff."
"It's actually an amazing accomplishment, everyone in here couldn't be
happier for him," said Cammalleri.
Gill excels at one thing: strategic taking up of space. In fact, he may be
better at it than just about anyone in NHL history - when the six-foot-seven
Gill kills penalties he is quite literally almost doing the work of two men.
Of course, his conspicuous lack of meanness and the fact that he's about
as quick as the average battleship has typically driven fans in Boston and
Toronto, his first two NHL destinations, mental.
But part of Gill's charm is that he doesn't really much care about what
people think of him, after all, he was never supposed to be here, let alone
play 1,000 games.
"I get it. I'm not pretty to watch . . . hopefully my family still likes me," Gill
smiled.
Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.21.2011
'We're not doing things the right way,' Montreal Canadiens' Hal Gill says

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette October 21, 2011

PITTSBURGH - Hal Gill's 1,000th National Hockey League game didn't have the result he wanted.

Arron Asham had better luck with his 700th game.

Gill and the Canadiens suffered their fourth consecutive loss while Asham scored a goal as part of the Penguins 3-1 win over the Canadiens Thursday at the Consol Energy Centre.

"We're not doing things the right way and a team like that that plays really well as a team made us pay the price," Gill said. "It's frustrating. We have to find a way to get the little things done. There's a lot of second-guessing on this team. We're not playing with certainty and we're losing a lot of battles as the result of it."

Gill turned in his usual workmanlike effort as he played 17:42, blocked three shots and contributed to a perfect night for the Montreal penalty-killing unit. He wasn't on the ice for any of the Pittsburgh goals.

He said the Canadiens' problem had nothing to do with a lack of effort.

"We have to go out with a plan and go with it," Gill said. "If it works or not, we have to play it even if we lose, but eventually it will work."

Both teams are riddled with injuries and fourth-liners Asham and Joe Vitale stepped up with goals for the Penguins. Asham scored when he knocked a rebound out of the air and he had to wait through a video review before the score was confirmed.

"I don't get a lot of goals, so I was sitting on the bench with my fingers and toes crossed," Asham said. "It's great to get to 700 games. I played my first game as a Canadien against the Penguins and I played my 700th for them. I hope there are more milestones in the future and maybe I can play 1,000 like Hal."

Head coach Jacques Martin had to do some scrambling after Scott Gomez left the game with an upper-body injury early in the first period. But captain Brian Gionta said the loss of Gomez wasn't a major factor in the defeat.

"We got away from our system," Gionta said. "We didn't forecheck. We were too spread out. We know we have the right makeup. We just have to be better prepared and be on the same page.

"Obviously, Scott's a big part of our team but they're missing big guys, too. Injuries are no excuse."

Gionta scored the Canadiens' lone goal, spoiling Marc-André Fleury's shutout bid with 1:36 remaining.

"It's disappointing because you don't get too many chances for (a shutout)," Fleury said. "But it's always good to get a win."

"We seemed to have trouble handling the puck tonight," Martin said. "If you look at the goals they got, we had a lot of turnovers and they capitalized. Our lack of execution hurt. Our last two games, we created a lot of scoring chances but tonight is wasn't there."

Martin said he's still looking for the point men on the power play to get more shots to the net.

"I think (Pittsburgh) has the No. 1 penalty-killing team in the league, but we didn't do a good job exploiting what they gave us," Martin said.

One encouraging note for the Canadiens was the return of left-winger Michael Cammalleri, who missed three games with a cut on his left knee.

"I felt good," said Cammalleri, who logged more than 19 minutes in a variety of roles. "I have to learn to play with (the cut), but it was okay.

"We're not playing very good. The big thing for me is that we seem to be squeezing the sticks a little bit," Cammalleri said. "We need to stickhandle a little bit, skate with the puck, make some tape-to-tape passes. That's where it all starts."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
It's officially UGLY

Posted by Mike Boone

No Crosby?
No Malkin?
No Letang?
No problem.
The tougher, faster, hungrier Penguins skated circles around the Canadiens, smacked them all over the ice, forced errors and won with dismaying ease.

Pathetic and depressing.
Scary to think what the score would have been if Crosby et al had played.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
Montreal Canadiens lose fourth straight after 3-1 defeat in Pittsburgh

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette October 20, 2011

PITTSBURGH - The Canadians dropped a 3-1 decision to the Pittsburgh Penguins at the Consol Energy Centre Thursday. It was the fourth consecutive loss for the Canadians, who dropped to a 1-4-1. Sorel native Marc-André Fleury stopped 27 shots, losing his shutout when Brian Gionta scored with 1:36 to play.

Penguins get the bounces: Deflections played a role in the first two Pittsburgh goals. Neal scored at 8:55 of the first period when his shot grazed off defenceman Josh Gorges, hit a post and then caromed off the back of Carey Price’s leg. Joe Vitale scored at 2:38 of the second period when he deflected Deryk Engelland’s harmless looking shot from the point.

Hand-eye coordination: That was the key to a third-period goal for Arron Asham, whose NHL career began in Montreal. Price blocked Engelland’s drive from a sharp angle but Asham, who was playing his 700th NHL game, hit the rebound in mid-air and then waited for a video replay to confirm that his stick wasn’t above the crossbar.

Cammalleri returns: Michael Cammalleri returned to the lineup after missing three games with a cut on his right knee. He started the game on the fourth line with Andreas Engqvist and Mathieu Darche, but played a more prominent role as the game progressed. He played 19:32 with significant time on both the power play and penalty kill.

Killer instinct: The Canadians had four power plays but were unable to score against the NHL’s No. 1 penalty-killing unit. The Penguins have gone seven games without giving up a power-play goal. They not only have limited the opposition to one goal in 31 opportunities, but they also have scored a league-leading three shorthanded goals. The Canadians also enjoyed a successful night on the penalty kill as the Penguins went 0-for-5 on the power play.

Gomez leaves with injury; Jacques Martin was forced to juggle his forward lines after Scott Gomez left the game with an undisclosed upper-body injury. Gomez was injured when he was hit early in the game by Engelland. He returned to the ice for one shift before packing it in.

Penguins feed students: Students started lining up early in the morning on a cold and blustery day to buy one of the 200 tickets available for American Eagle Student Rush Night and the Penguins players saluted their perseverance by having pizza delivered to the queue. It’s the continuation of a tradition that began in 2006.

Sold out but not filled: The Penguins announced a standing-room sellout crowd of 18,403 but, as has been the case with the three sellouts at the Bell Centre this season, there were hundreds of empty seats. One local suggested the no-shows were frustrated Pirates’ fans who stayed home to watch two real baseball teams in the World Series.

What’s next: The Canadians will be looking for their first win at the Bell Centre this season when they play the Toronto Maple Leafs Saturday (7 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio-990).

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
Montreal Canadiens' Hal Gill honoured by fans in Pittsburgh

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette October 20, 2011

PITTSBURGH - Defenceman Hal Gill played his 1,000th National Hockey League game and the Pittsburgh crowd gave him a standing ovation during a TV timeout in the first period.

And why not? After all, the Penguins haven’t won the Stanley Cup since Gill left to sign with the Canadiens as a free agent in 2009.

Gill’s tenure in the Steel City, which was marked by a montage that included Gill hoisting the Stanley Cup, was brief but the guy they call Skillsie left an impression on his teammates and the fans through two playoff runs.

“Three days ago we were aware that this would be his 1,000th game and there were jokes in our dressing about what we should do to honour his longevity in this league,” said Penguins head coach Dan Bylsma. “It’s pretty amazing. He was a big part of our Stanley Cup team and you never like to see that tall, lanky fellow on the other side with his big stick.

“I know he’ll be getting taps from our players. We’ll do something so he understands what an accomplishment it is to play 1,000 games.”

Gill has a good appreciation of what goes into playing 1,000 games and about his role here where he formed the Penguins’ shutdown defence pair with Rob Scuderi.

“I worked hard and I think the fans here appreciated that,” Gill said. “I love the competition. Even in practice, you get to play against the best in the world. You play against Sid (Crosby), you play against (Michael) Cammalleri and you want to play your best. And then you get into a game and it’s heightened because there’s a crowd involved and everything’s on another level.”

Boston drafted Gill in the eighth round (207th overall) in 1993 before he started his collegiate career at Providence and he made his NHL debut four years later.

“It was in Vancouver,” he recalled. “It was a tough one. I had a couple of shifts and it wasn’t my best game. But it was fun being out there. It was probably the most exciting time in my life up to that point. But winning the Cup here kind of tops everything.”

“I was drafted because I was a longshot,” Gill said. “I was big and they figured that maybe I’d do something someday. The way my career has gone has been good because I’ve had to prove myself at every level. It’s not good enough to have a good year, you have to back it up with another one. It’s kept me sharp.”

Crosby wants to get hit: Speaking of Crosby, The Kid is facing a classic Catch-22. The Penguins don’t want to send him into battle before he takes some hits to prove that he’s fully recovered from his concussion, but he can’t anyone to hit him in practice.

Crosby said his teammates have been treating him with kid gloves.

“I think the guys have been giving me too much space out there,” he complained. “I’ve even tried to provoke them, but nothing happens. We’ll see what happens, but you want to get into those situations, not just getting hit but being able to think and react. You can only do so many drills by yourself.”

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
Skillsie left his mark in Steeltown

By PAT HICKEY, The Gazette October 21, 2011 3:07 AM

Defenceman al Gill played his 1,000th National Hockey League game and the Pittsburgh crowd gave him a standing ovation during a TV timeout in the first period.

And why not? After all, the Penguins haven't won the Stanley Cup since Gill left to sign with the Canadiens as a free agent in 2009.

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"I think the guys have been giving me too much space out there," Crosby said. "I've even tried to provoke them but nothing happens. You can only do so many drills by yourself."

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
Nashville Predators bench Pekka Rinne after poor start

Written by
Josh Cooper | The Tennessean

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — The Predators’ coaching staff didn’t believe Pekka Rinne had played that poorly. But with the score 4-1 in favor of Vancouver after the first period Thursday, Nashville gave Anders Lindback his first action of the season.

In 40 minutes of work, Lindback made 23 saves on 24 shots.

“You really don’t have the time to think too much,” Lindback said. “I just try to stay prepared all the time, and when I go in, try to just be ready and find the puck and position well. It’s not the situation you want to come into, but it’s my job.

“I felt pretty good coming in there. I got a couple of shots right away, so I got into it.”

Two of the goals on Rinne were flukes. Daniel Sedin’s goal bounced off Rinne’s back, and Henrik Sedin’s goal went off Kevin Klein’s stick. Still, Rinne took responsibility for each of them.

“There’s no excuses,” Rinne said. “A good team like that, they always try to crash the net and have bodies in front and get deflections and tips.”

Wilson fights: It takes quite a bit to set Predators forward Colin Wilson off. Before Thursday, Wilson had just five fights as a professional hockey player, according to hockeyfights.com.

But Canucks forward Maxim Lapierre baited Wilson into his sixth tussle of his career at the end of the first period.

“He punched me in the face,” Wilson said. “You can’t get your head pushed back and not do anything about it.”

Predators Coach Barry Trotz said that spark was missing from Wilson’s game a year ago, and he was happy to see him take matters into his own hands.

“He’s giving you effort,” Trotz said. “It’s an area where he’s showing maturity where he’s bringing it every day.”

Trotz calls out Ekholm: The official stat line will say that rookie defenseman Mattias Ekholm played 13:20 with a minus-1 rating. But Trotz said there were many more issues in Ekholm’s game than the final numbers.

“I thought he was horrible, absolutely horrible,” Trotz said.

Bergfors in: Forward Niclas Bergfors played in his second game as a Predator. He played 8:15 and recorded four shots on goal.

Tennessean LOADED: 10.21.2011
Nashville Predators lose 5-1 to Vancouver Canucks

Written by
Josh Cooper | The Tennessean

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — In a quiet locker room in the basement of Rogers Arena, the Nashville Predators talked about their effort and about how they believed they were back on the right track.

Even after a 5-1 loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday night, the Predators (2-3-1), who haven't won since they took both games on the road in the opening weekend, found some good.

"At least we have something to build off of now," Predators defenseman Ryan Suter said. "Before, if you don't work hard, you're not going to get very far. Now we're finally working hard, and it will come.

"We just have to hang in there and stick together. When things get hard, you have to pull together."

Predators Coach Barry Trotz intimated that the overall youth of the team could be taking a toll. With veteran forwards Mike Fisher and Martin Erat as well as defenseman Francis Bouillon all out, Nashville is the youngest team in the league with an average age of 26 years.

"Our youth shows at time," Trotz said. "We have some young players who are playing a little higher than they need to. You're in the league, you're going to have to line up against the best in the league. If you're scared of that, get a dog, because this is the NHL, boys."

The Predators fell into some old habits and made a few new ones Thursday.

Vancouver outshot Nashville 40-26, meaning the Predators have yet to outshoot an opponent this season.

Also, Nashville found itself in the penalty box often. Last season, the Predators took the second-fewest penalties in the NHL with an average of 8.8 minutes per contest. They took 11 for a total of 30 minutes Thursday, though two were fighting majors.

"When you take 11 penalties, they can throw two pretty good power plays at you," Trotz said. "That's really taxing on a lot of guys."

Coming off a 4-0 loss to the New York Rangers, the Canucks struck early. Just 2:11 into the game, forward Daniel Sedin banked a shot off the back of Predators goalie Pekka Rinne, and the puck ended up in the net. Predators forward Matt Halischuk answered 1:50 later, but Vancouver came back with three unanswered goals to end the first period ahead 4-1.

The Canucks chased Rinne after the first period, the first time this season he had been pulled early. Rinne made 12 saves on 16 shots. Anders Lindback came on in relief and made 23 stops.

Tennessean LOADED: 10.21.2011
Predators routed in penalty-filled return to Vancouver

Staff reports

Anders Lindback stopped 23 of 24 shots he faced in his first action of 2011-12. The Vancouver Canucks scored four times against starter Pekka Rinne, though, and the Nashville Predators lost 5-1 [1] Thursday at Vancouver. The first meeting of the season between the teams that played a six-game Western Conference semifinal series last season (Vancouver won in six games) turned into the Predators’ fourth straight defeat and their most lopsided of the season.

Nashville (2-3-1) was outshot for the sixth time in as many games this season. Vancouver’s advantage was 40-26. Matt Halischuk tied it 1-1 when he scored 4:01 into the contest. Vancouver went back on top 1:55 later and added two more within a span of 1:26 later in the first period.

Rinne was pulled after the first period. He allowed four goals on 16 shots. The first goal against him came when a pass from behind the net bounced off his back and in. The final one came when a deflected pass left him out of position to defend a subsequent shot.

Any chances for the Predators to mount a comeback were thwarted by a steady stream of penalties capped by coincidental calls against defensemen Ryan Suter (hooking) and Shea Weber (boarding, unsportsmanlike conduct) at 5:12 of the third period.

In all, 11 penalties were called against Nashville for a total of 30 minutes, a season-high. Vancouver had 10 power-play opportunities and converted twice. Ryan Kesler, who had five goals and six assists during the playoff series, capped the scoring with his first goal of the season, 54 seconds after Weber and Suter were sent off together.

Nashville completes its current three-game road trip with an afternoon game Saturday at Calgary (3 p.m., Fox Sports-Tennessee).

Nashville City Paper LOADED: 10.21.2011
Predators' playoff nemesis returns just in time for regular season meeting

By David Boclair

Just in time.

As if the Nashville Predators did not see enough of Ryan Kesler in last season's Western Conference semifinal playoff series, they will be just the second team this season to have to face the player known as "Superman."

Kesler missed the Canucks' first five contests because of offseason hip surgery but returned Tuesday in a 4-0 loss to the New York Rangers and reported no issues related to the injury he sustained late in last season's playoffs.

The Predators play at Vancouver, 9 p.m. Thursday (SportSouth).

"I felt good out there. Obviously there's little things that are going to come and I've got to stay patient," Kesler said, according to the Canucks' website. "It's all in the process and that's what I have to focus on and keep getting better every day."

Kesler played 19:07 and had three shots in the loss to the Rangers.

He was far more menacing last May when the Canucks eliminated the Predators in six games.

The 6-foot-2, 202-pound center had five goals and six assists, which meant he had a hand in all but three of Vancouver's goals. His three power play goals were more than every other player on both teams combined. Two of his goals were game-winners.

His 11 points were a postseason series record against the Predators and his six assists tied the mark for the most by an opposing player.

The odd part was that he barely showed up on the scoresheet during the 2010-11 regular season. In the four meetings between the teams, Kesler had no goals, no assists and a minus-5 rating.

"I expect to get better every game," Kesler said Tuesday.

It is difficult to imagine he could be any better than the last time he faced the Predators.

Nashville City Paper LOADED: 10.21.2011
Colin White, 11 years a Devils defenseman, returns to New Jersey

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger The Star-Ledger

San Jose Sharks player Colin White (wire) Jason O. Watson/US

Presswire Former Devils defenseman Colin White is making his first visit to New Jersey since signing with the San Jose Sharks as a free agent in August.

The interview ended abruptly when Colin White’s children entered the visiting locker room at the Prudential Center.

"Dad!" 2-year-old Cale White yelled.

It was a precious moment for White, the ex-Devils defenseman, who now plays for the San Jose Sharks. Since leaving for the Bay Area on Aug. 23 to get ready for training camp, White had not seen his family — which has remained in New Jersey — before the Sharks arrived Wednesday for Friday night’s game against the Devils at the Prudential Center.

"I talk with the kids every day — I get to see them on (Face Time), at least," he said. "That’s huge. But yesterday was the first time I’ve seen them in two months. They’re coming out to visit November and December and stuff, so this was the longest stretch we’ll go without seeing them."

White, of course, was bought out by the Devils over the summer and shortly afterward signed as a free agent with the Sharks. And after 11 seasons and two Stanley Cups with the Devils, White is making the adjustment of playing for a different organization.

"It’s been good — the guys, great bunch of guys," White said of his new teammates. "It’s just a different locker room, different look — obviously, different colors."

White said perhaps the biggest surprise to him was just how big hockey is in San Jose. The Sharks have been among the NHL’s elite for a few years and their building is sold out every night. They are off to a slow start this year, just 1-3 and at the bottom of the Pacific Division, but they are once again expected to challenge for the Stanley Cup. White has played in all four games, partnered on defense with Jason Demers. He has averaged just under 14 minutes a game and is playing at a minus-1.

White said he keeps in touch with some of his old Devils teammates — he talks to David Clarkson a lot, and said he would text Martin Brodeur at some point today.

"Obviously, I have friends — I’ll always be friends with some of the guys," he said. "I’m looking forward to tomorrow night."

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Former Devil Barry Tallackson was one of 21 European-based American players named to the U.S. team for the Deutschland Cup, a tournament to take place in Germany Nov. 11-13. Tallackson plays professionally in Berlin, Germany.

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.21.2011
Martin Brodeur 'happy to be able to go on the ice' before practice

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger The Star-Ledger

Martin Brodeur admitted he was worried that his injured right shoulder didn't seem to be getting any better for two straight days, which is why he went to go see the doctor and have an MRI taken of the joint.

"I was nervous," the Devils goaltender said today after skating for the first time since getting hurt in last week's 2-1 shootout victory over the L.A. Kings.

"For me, I didn't feel like going through what I did three years ago (when he missed 50 games because of a torn biceps tendon). Whenever you're getting MRIs, it's because they feel something's wrong. And so it was important for me to have my head clear on the results and the advice of the doctors that I saw. And I was pretty pleased both guys said the same thing."

The MRIs showed only a bruise, and Brodeur was able to skate today before his teammates practiced in advance of Friday night's game against the San Jose Sharks at The Rock. Brodeur said he felt good during his skate, able to carry the weight of his blocker glove and goal stick. He didn't face shots, but was able to stick-handle, pass and shoot the puck.

"I'm just happy to be able to go on the ice a little bit and rehab it to a (greater) extent," Brodeur said.

"It was feeling pretty good, and I came to a point where I wasn't getting better for two days, and so just for precaution, we just went for an MRI and you have them read the MRI and I wanted to talk to our doctor," Brodeur said of his visit to the doctor on Tuesday.

"I talked to (the team doctor and) another doctor to make sure it was okay for me to continue rehabbing, continue making strides without damaging it worse," Brodeur said. "And they all said to just go ahead, try to rehab it. I think, mentally, it helps you when you know that there's nothing that's going to affect it. I've felt these kinds of injuries before, but not to that extent."

Brodeur wasn't the only one to feel better after hearing what the doctors had to say.

"I slept a lot better last night after I heard that," Devils coach Pete DeBoer said.

Brodeur is expected to be out 7-10 days, according to the Devils' press release on Wednesday — though GM Lou Lamoriello said it is possible the 39-year-old goalie may return before that. Brodeur certainly will miss at least the next two games — Friday against the Sharks and Saturday in Pittsburgh against the Penguins — and said whether he goes with the Devils on the week-long, four-game trip that starts Saturday and continues with games in Los Angeles (Tuesday), Phoenix (next Thursday) and Dallas Oct. 29 will be determined by how the shoulder progresses. He said right now there is still pain when he does his rehab exercises, but he said he can lift his arm to brush his teeth and comb his hair now, without pain.

"I've got to listen to what my body's going to tell me," Brodeur said. "I might just go and not improve for three days, and if I don't (improve), I'm not going to go on the trip.

"But if I feel that I have a chance to play on the road trip — depending on what Lou wants me to do, as far as rehab — if I start skating and getting shots more and more and more, common sense is to play with the guys, be with the guys, so I'm ready to go as soon as possible."

Brodeur said there is fluid in his shoulder that is causing him some pain when he does certain activities in his rehab. Skating with his equipment on and carrying his stick was no problem, he said.

Johan Hedberg (3-0, 1.41 goals-against average) will face the Sharks tonight, backed up by rookie Keith Kinkaid, who was called up on an emergency basis from AHL Albany last Saturday.

DeBoer said his confidence in Hedberg is "very high" at the moment, and he wouldn't even rule out the possibility that Kinkaid may play at some point, too.

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.21.2011
Martin Brodeur skates before Devils practice

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger The Star-Ledger

Hey folks, Colin here again, filling for Rich for a second day. Just walked in to the practice rink and saw Marty Brodeur exiting the ice. He's out 7-10 days with a bruised right shoulder, as per the Devils' release yesterday, but he looks fine to me. We just asked Devils PR if we can get an interview with him today and we'll see if they set it up for us.

In the meantime, the ice is being resurfaced and practice for everyone else is going to start momentarily. I'll update as needed. Also, the Sharks are practicing here this afternoon, so I'll stick around and see if I can hook up with Colin White then.

By the way, the shades are open, so if you're in downtown Newark, near Lafayette Avenue, come on by and check out a little of practice.

Talk later.

Star Ledger LOADED: 10.21.2011
Ex-Devil Colin White gets an early treat in October

By TOM GULITTI
STAFF WRITER
The Record

NEWARK – Colin White's return to New Jersey this week with the San Jose Sharks is a homecoming for him on multiple levels.

The former Devils defenseman will face his old teammates for the first time in tonight's game at Prudential Center. That's the business part of the trip.

The personal part began after the Sharks arrived in New Jersey on Wednesday and White was able to go to his house to see his wife, Amy, and their three children — 9-year-old daughter, Jordyn, and sons, John, 6, and Cale, 2.

"This is the first time I've seen them since I left," White said Thursday after Amy and the kids watched the Sharks practice at Prudential Center. "I went out there on Aug. 23, so I haven't seen them for a while. A lot of FaceTime (online video chats). I talk with the kids every day. I get to see them on that at least. That's huge."

White, 33, had the final season on his contract bought out by the Devils on Aug. 2 and he signed a one-year, $1 million contract with the Sharks the next day. That brought to an end a 10-season Devils' career that included the 2000 and 2003 Stanley Cup titles.

Rather than move the entire family to San Jose for possibly only one season, Amy remained in New Jersey with the children so their schooling would not be disrupted. So, having the Sharks play in New Jersey only two weeks into the season worked out well for White.

That allowed him to spend Wednesday and Thursday nights with his family. "I was looking forward to it and, obviously, the kids were very excited to get me home for a couple of nights," White said.

After playing his entire NHL career with the Devils — they drafted him 49th overall in 1996 — being in a new organization and living on the West Coast has been an adjustment for White. Thursday was his first visit to Prudential Center as a visitor.

"It's a little different," he said. "I saw a couple of the guys as they were leaving today [after the Devils practiced]. I just said, 'Hi' and stuff. But, yeah, it was a little different coming down to the rink today."

Although he's no longer a Devil, White has kept in touch with some of his former teammates, particularly right wing David Clarkson.

"I still talk to Clarkie quite a bit," White said. "I'm sure I'll text [goalie] Marty [Brodeur] or something today. Obviously, I'll always be friends with some of the guys, but I'm looking forward to [tonight]."

BRODEUR SKATES: Brodeur said his bruised right shoulder "felt good" during an on-ice workout with goalie coach Chris Terreri before Thursday's practice. Brodeur took shots from Terreri and worked on his stick handling.

It was his first time on the ice since he bruised his right shoulder diving to make a save eight days ago against Los Angeles.

"I was just happy to be able to go on the ice a little bit and rehab it to a little more extent," Brodeur said. "We're happy with the way it's been feeling."

After tonight's game, the Devils play in Pittsburgh on Saturday and then return to New Jersey for a day before flying to Los Angeles on Monday and practicing there. Brodeur is hoping to accompany the Devils and at least practice and possibly play on that trip, which includes games in Los Angeles, Phoenix and Dallas.

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.21.2011
Devils can't forget White's eye injury

By MARK EVERSON

Last Updated: 9:12 AM, October 20, 2011
Posted: 2:19 AM, October 20, 2011

The little trail of blood from the corner of David Clarkson's left eye yesterday was a poignant reminder of that terrible day Sept. 19, 2007.

With former Devil Colin White coming in with the Sharks for his first game tomorrow against the team he played with for 10 seasons, the laceration seemed almost eerie.

"That's the way it always happens. The puck rides up your stick," Clarkson said of the cut that resulted from a stick-blocked shot.

That's the way it happened to White, except a few stitches didn't suffice. White essentially lost clear vision in his right eye when struck by just such a self-blocked shot, now more than four years ago.

White likely could have taken disability and been paid through this season, but instead he elected to resume playing with a shield and shadowy vision in his right eye.

"He has always played hard. But that injury to his eye affected his game," said Patrik Elias, who teamed with White all 10 seasons. "Before he fought a lot. He was scrappy. He didn't give a [hoot]. And he played a lot of minutes against the best players."

"It's tough to imagine. I don't know how anyone does it," Dainius Zubrus said of playing with significantly impaired vision. "It's one thing when your body's sore, but your vision? It's tough to adjust. There are going to be spots you'd see that you're not seeing."

Clarkson said he wasn't moved to don a faceshield after yesterday's episode.

"The way I play, fighting and everything else, I just couldn't do it," Clarkson said.

White, 33, has moved on from that injury, in two senses. Besides trying to ignore his sight handicap, he's wearing a different uniform.

He was bought out of his final $3 million contract season by the Devils during the summer, to receive $2 million. The Sharks promptly signed him to a $1 million deal, and now it's West Coast Whitey. He's been looking forward to tomorrow since he signed.

"I'm sure it will be emotional for me," White told The Post. "There are a lot of friends, a lot of relationships with those guys. But once the game starts, it's going to be strictly hockey."

The Sharks are expected to contend again for the Stanley Cup but have opened 1-3, 13th of 15 in the West.

"It's been different. It's definitely a change for me, being in a different organization. But every organization is a little different, and still the main goal is the same — to win. That doesn't change with any team," White said.

"I'm sure there will be bumps on both sides, not necessary towards any particular player. But we need the win."

Earning Points, if Not Yet a Nickname

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — It would help if the Islanders’ top line had a catchy name. Then more people would take notice that not just John Tavares, but also his wingmen, P. A. Parenteau and Matt Moulson, are off to hot starts this season.

“I don’t think there’s any need for us to have a name,” Tavares said after practice at Nassau Coliseum in preparation for Thursday’s road opener at Tampa Bay, which the Islanders lost, 4-1.

In the first five games this season, Tavares has five goals and three assists, setting the league abuzz and raising expectations that he is joining fellow No. 1 overall draft picks like Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby, Patrick Kane and Steven Stamkos in the high-scoring elite.

Parenteau has a goal and six assists, putting him among the league’s top setup men. He was not initially even going to play on Tavares’s line, having been relegated to third-line status in training camp.

And Moulson has two goals and two assists for the Islanders (3-2). He is rarely in the conversation when talk turns to the N.H.L.’s top forwards, even though he is trying for his third straight 30-goal season.

Nicknaming lines is not as popular as it used to be, and hockey may be a bit poorer for it. The names of forward combinations course through the game’s history, from the Rangers’ Depression-era Bread Line (Frank Boucher, Bill Cook, Bun Cook) to the Islanders’ dynastic Trio Grande (Bryan Trottier, Mike Bossy, Clark Gillies) and the Crash Line that helped win the Devils’ first Stanley Cup (Bobby Holik, Randy McKay, Mike Peluso).

It would be premature to assign as lofty a place to the Tavares-Parenteau-Moulson triad — they have skated together only since last season — but they certainly show promise. In a 4-2 victory here over the Rangers on Saturday, Tavares had three of the Isles’ goals, with Moulson the other, and Parenteau had three assists. It was Tavares’s second straight 4-point game.

“We seem to know where each other are, for the most part, every shift,” Moulson said.

Tavares, 21, scored an impressive 24 and 29 goals in his first two N.H.L. seasons. But he was perhaps unfairly seen as something of a letdown.

In Canada he was a teenage celebrity, breaking scoring records in the Ontario Hockey League and winning two gold medals with the junior national team. But when he did not immediately vault to the top of the N.H.L. scoring ranks, he was considered an underachiever.

Last summer, Tavares trained hard and took skating instruction, as so many N.H.L. players now do, and patiently answered questions about the relative obscurity of playing on Long Island as opposed to the Toronto area.

“A lot of times I’m going out to dinner and relaxing and there’s not the attention maybe you receive from back home,” he said.

But last month he showed just how happy he was to stay when he signed a six-year, $33 million contract extension with the Islanders.

Parenteau’s trajectory has not been as glamorous, but it has had its own kind of pressure.

“I was in the minors for a lot of years, maybe longer than I should have been,” he said. “But I stuck with it. Now I’m getting rewarded for it.”

DRAFTED 264TH over all in 2001 by Anaheim, Parenteau did not make his N.H.L. debut until 2006-7, with Chicago, and had to wait until 2009-10 for his next call-up, with the Rangers. But though he played well in limited action and scored 8 points in 22 games, Coach John Tortorella said, “I worry about his skating.” He was not re-signed.

Parenteau caught on with the Islanders last season and finally won a regular N.H.L. job, scoring 20 goals. But he was probably best remembered for jawing at the Rangers’ bench after scoring in an eventual 6-5 loss, prompting the Rangers’ Sean Avery to wryly declare that he would inform city nightclubs not to admit Parenteau.

Parenteau, Tavares and Moulson scored 58 goals in 55 games last season after Coach Jack Capuano first started them as a unit last Dec. 13 — a goal a game, just like the Rangers’ old GAG line of Jean Ratelle, Rod Gilbert and Vic Hadfield.

Nevertheless, Capuano penciled in the 28-year-old Parenteau for the third line this fall, with the Islanders’ top pick in 2010, Nino Niederreiter, set to play alongside Tavares and Moulson. But when Niederreiter was sidelined with a groin injury, Parenteau resumed his old place.

“Just because Nino was on that line in training camp doesn’t necessarily mean I’m going to keep Nino on that line,” Capuano said. “There’s a lot of hockey to be played until Nino comes back.”

Moulson, 27, scored 31 goals last season and 30 the season before, his first two with the Islanders. Before that, he spent three fruitless years buried in the minors with the Los Angeles organization.

Moulson, Parenteau and Tavares say they are good friends and hang out together off the ice. Tavares stayed with Moulson and his wife for two weeks over the summer, said Moulson, who also said he often has his linemates over for dinner.

“Johnny costs us a fortune every time he comes over because he eats so much,” Moulson joked.

Chris King, the Islanders’ radio announcer, said he might have a name for the Tavares-Parenteau-Moulson trio. “I was thinking ‘Jump Line,’ for John, Matt, P. A. — J.M.P.,” jump,” King said.

“Thanks, King,” but I think we need something a little cooler,” Moulson said amid much laughter. “French Connection, Legion of Doom, yeah. But Jump Line?” He was still laughing.

Isles Fall; Rangers Win in Overtime

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Metro Pucks: Rangers Win in Overtime; Isles Fall to Tampa Bay

By CHRISTOPHER BOTTA

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The game was a return for Tim Erixon, the Flames’ first-round pick who declined to sign with Calgary, forcing a trade to the Rangers. Playing his fifth N.H.L. game Thursday, the 20-year-old defenseman was confronted by the Calgary news media after the Rangers’ morning workout about why he slighted the franchise.

“I had nothing against Calgary,” Erixon said. “I love the organization, and it’s a great city. Everybody was good to me. It was never about the money. There were just some small issues, and it’s in the past now.”

Asked to detail the issues, he declined to provide further details. “I really don’t think I have to explain myself,” he said. While he was booed by Calgary fans every time he carried the puck, Erixon played well in the game, especially during a pair of shifts in overtime.

While Comeau Sits Again, Isles Lose at Tampa Bay

The Islanders lost to Tampa Bay, 4-1, on Thursday, failing to sustain an offensive attack after dominating the Lightning in a victory in New York a week earlier.

“We didn’t skate in the first period,” Islanders Coach Jack Capuano said after the game. Tampa Bay “set the tone right away. Our line combinations, for whatever reason, couldn’t generate any offense. We weren’t able to establish our forecheck. They had more zone time than we did tonight.”

Although John Tavares created some scoring chances, the Islanders’ first line was held scoreless after dominating performances in the team’s last two games — wins over Tampa Bay and the Rangers. The Islanders’ only goal, by Michael Grabner, came in the third period after they were trailing, 3-0.

Asked about the possibility of altering some of his forward lines, Capuano said: “Yeah, I think there’s a good chance of that happening. Some guys deserve more of an opportunity. But there’s nothing to panic about yet.

The Islanders have a minor lineup controversy. The last two games, the team has scratched Blake Comeau, a third-line wing who scored 24 goals last season. In an early-season stretch in which the Islanders have received little offense outside of their first line, the benching of Comeau is suspicious.

Capuano’s non-responses to requests for an explanation have not clarified the Comeau matter. The coach has said his lineup decision is between him and the player, but Comeau said he has not received an explanation.
New York Islanders drop 4-1 decision to Tampa Bay, as Lightning defense makes all the difference

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Originally Published: Thursday, October 20th 2011, 11:57 PM
Updated: Friday, October 21st 2011, 2:21 AM

TAMPA, Fla. - The Tampa Bay Lightning focused on defense and it paid off against the New York Islanders.

Vincent Lecavalier had a goal and an assist to help the Lightning stop a five-game losing streak with a 4-1 victory over New York on Thursday night.

"It was about discipline," Tampa Bay coach Guy Boucher said. "Everybody was on the same page."

Ryan Malone, Steven Stamkos and Brett Clark also scored for the Lightning. Tampa Bay limited the Islanders to just 17 shots.

"Definitely, that's the way we want to play," Lecavalier said. "Last year we were successful because we played like that."

Tampa Bay reached the Eastern Conference finals last season, losing a seven-game series to Boston.

The Islanders got a goal from Michael Grabner. New York had won three in a row, all coming during a season-opening four-game homestand.

"They outworked us," New York coach Jack Capuano said. "They had more desperation to their game. They got around our goaltender, and our forwards didn't get around their goaltender. And to me that was a huge difference in the game, their net presence versus our net presence."

After allowing five power-play goals in a 7-4 loss to Florida on Monday, the Lightning had just three penalties Thursday, including one as the game ended.

Malone put the Lightning up 1-0 with a rebound power-play goal from the slot with 3:26 left in first. The Lightning outshot New York 14-6 during the period.

"All around we played better ... It feels good," Malone said.

Lecavalier made it 2-0 at 15:14 of the second. Stamkos, playing in his 250th NHL game, extended the lead to 3-0 with 14:35 to go in the third.

"We controlled the puck in their end for the majority of the game," Stamkos said.

After Grabner cut it 3-1 at 7:55 of the third, Clark scored late in the period.

New York went almost 13 minutes without a shot in the second before Tampa Bay goalie Mathieu Garon stopped a long-range shot by Brian Rolston.

"Overall, we didn't play very good," Grabner said. "We didn't get enough pucks to the net in the first two periods. We've got to get better and get back to the little things... Getting the puck to the net from every angle and get 30 or 40 shots every night."

Garon made three saves on John Tavares in the first. The New York center was held scoreless after picking four points in each of his previous two games. Marc-Andre Bergeron had an assist, extending his point streak to five games. The Tampa Bay defenseman has six assists and eight points over the stretch.

New York goalie Al Montoya had a modest two-game winning streak end, which included a 34-save performance in a 5-1 victory over Tampa Bay on Oct. 13. He had 26 saves Thursday.

NOTES

Islanders G Rick DiPietro (concussion) faced shots in goal and did skating drills during a one-hour morning workout. He resumed practicing this week... Tampa Bay D Eric Brewer was in the lineup, one day after undergoing an MRI exam for an undisclosed injury... Rolston played in his 1,191st game, which tied him for 92nd place with Gilbert Perreault and Marc Bergevin. Rolston assisted on Grabner's goal... Islanders LW Blake Comeau was a healthy scratch for the second consecutive game.
Islanders coach won't tinker with lines

By BRETT CYRGALIS
Last Updated: 7:03 AM, October 20, 2011
Posted: 2:20 AM, October 20, 2011

It was like Jack Capuano knew it was coming, and if there were any silent contemplation before his answer, it was indiscernible.

"There's no question our secondary scoring, we're going to need it," the Islanders' coach said yesterday.

Through four games of the season, the Islanders (3-1-0) have 11 goals. Eight have come from the three forwards on the top line: John Tavares (five), Matt Moulson (two) and P.A. Parenteau (one).

The six forwards who make up the next two lines have combined for two goals, two assists and a minus-3 rating.

"I'm not going to blow the lines up right now or start to dismantle anything," Capuano said, looking ahead to tonight's game at Tampa Bay, followed by Saturday's game at the Panthers.

"If they were getting chances that would be one thing," Capuano said, "but right now they're not getting too many chances in the games that we've played."

The third line got a wake-up call before Saturday's 4-2 win over the Rangers. Capuano scratched left wing Blake Comeau in favor of enforcer Trevor Gillies, who played 2:47. That line is centered by Josh Bailey, with veteran Brian Rolston on the right wing.

"Basically, what he decided to do with Blake doesn't really concern me; it's out of my control," Bailey said. "I just wanted to focus on my game. You try to just prepare yourself mentally and physically, and I think we did that."

The second line of Kyle Okposo-Frans Nielsen-Michael Grabner has managed the group's two goals but hasn't exactly made the lines roll.

"Obviously you can't expect those guys [first line] to carry us all season," Bailey said. "We need to take some pressure on them and put some pucks in, as well."

Goalie Rick DiPietro (concussion) skated in practice yesterday for the first time in a week, and will make the trip. Capuano was undecided on whom would start in goal in either game.

Milan Jurcina (groin) skated in the morning and will make the trip, while Nino Niederreiter (groin) skated early but will not make the trip.

Islanders fail to fire, fall to Lightning

By ARTHUR STAPLE  arthur.staple@newsday.com

TAMPA, Fla. -- John Tavares and his line have buried enough of their scoring chances to mask the fact that the rest of the Islanders haven't contributed much offensively so far.

Thursday night, with a charged-up Lightning team facing them, the Islanders had a few good chances to put their hosts on their heels. But that didn't happen, and the rest of the night was a hard slog, with some bad giveaways and spotty defensive-zone play.

Kyle Okposo missed a golden scoring chance less than two minutes into the game and the Islanders mustered only 17 shots in a 4-1 loss to the Lightning.

"Absolutely," Okposo said when asked if the game would have gone differently had he been able to beat Mathieu Garon after a clearing pass caromed right to him alone in the slot. "I've got to put that in the net."

Okposo got shuffled off his usual spot with Michael Grabner and Frans Nielsen early in the second period, with the Islanders going the first 12:42 of the second without a shot on goal.

Grabner beat Garon on the rush 7:55 into the third to cut it to a 3-1 deficit, but the Islanders had been burned by too many gambles to recover.

"We didn't execute our forecheck and we didn't get to the net," Jack Capuano said. "Overall, they played better than we did."

The Okposo-Grabner-Nielsen line at times was the Isles' top line last season, but there's been a gulf between Tavares' line, with Matt Moulson and P.A. Parenteau, and the Nielsen line so far. Okposo had a team-high four shots on goal Thursday night, but that trio was out of sync again.

With former Islander Nate Thompson and a Tampa Bay checking line matched against Tavares' line for the first 45 minutes, the Islanders needed production from other sources. It wasn't there.

"Last year it felt like we had two or three odd-man rushes a game. I can remember one, maybe, this year," Okposo said. "We've got to figure it out."

"It can't just be Johnny's line every night," Nielsen said. "It feels like sometimes with us, we've got one guy working hard and two guys watching [on the forecheck]. We have to work together."

Al Montoya was decent in goal, not as good as he'd been, but he needed some offense. It came too late as the Islanders have sandwiched three solid wins with a pair of ugly performances so far this season.

After Okposo missed his chance early, the Lightning got pucks deep and caused havoc in front of and around Montoya, leading to a couple of power plays. Ryan Malone converted the second of those with 3:28 left in the first to make it 1-0.

The Islanders ended their shot drought 12:18 into the second, but a turnover and some lax defense allowed Vinny Lecavalier to wrist one behind Montoya (26 saves) with 4:46 to go in the second.

Steven Stamkos beat Montoya from the doorstep 2:30 before Grabner's goal, and Brett Clark's point shot sealed it with 3:01 to play.

"They beat us at our own game a bit," Mark Eaton said. "They got pucks deep, they got on our D and they got shots on net. We know if we're not at our best, that's the result we're going to get."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Roloson is ignoring Parenteau's comment

By ARTHUR STAPLE  arthur.staple@newsday.com

TAMPA, Fla. -- Dwayne Roloson hasn't exactly started the season the way he finished the last one for the Lightning, and he wasn't terribly pleased at being pulled after allowing five goals in 27 minutes at Nassau Coliseum last week.

The former Islander said he's not bothered by P.A. Parenteau's comment after that 5-1 win by the Islanders. Parenteau said he was "so happy [we chased him]. You can write that one down."

Some Islanders privately expressed the same sentiment, feeling that Roloson was a bad teammate during the final weeks with them last season before he was dealt to Tampa on New Year's Day for defenseman Ty Wishart.

"It's a personal thing for him, I guess," Roloson said of Parenteau. "He feels that way, and he has that right to feel that way. But right now, my focus is on what I've got to do to help the Tampa Bay Lightning win hockey games. That's his own personal interests or whatever."

Roloson did not get the start Thursday night after allowing seven goals to the Panthers on Monday. Mathieu Garon got the call instead.

Comeau sits againAlso sitting out was Islanders wing Blake Comeau, who was a healthy scratch for the second straight game as Trevor Gillies took Comeau's slot among the 12 forwards.

"Obviously, you want to be in the lineup every night. It's tough watching," Comeau said after he skated with injured D Milan Jurcina and Gs Evgeni Nabokov and Rick DiPietro, the latter of whom took shots on goal for a second straight day after suffering a concussion eight days ago.

Comeau and assistant coach Doug Weight talked Thursday. After scoring 24 goals last season, Comeau had just one shot on goal and no points in the first three games and was scratched Saturday.

"[Weight] just told me to keep working hard in practice and that the coaching staff has all the faith in the world in me," Comeau said. "This is just the way it is right now."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.21.2011
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NY Rangers’ Ryan McDonagh scores with 1.8 seconds left in OT, Blueshirts beat Calgary Flames 3-2

By Pat Leonard
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

Originally Published: Friday, October 21st, 2011, 12:26 AM
Updated: Friday, October 21st, 2011, 2:09 AM

CALGARY - Ryan McDonagh has made a habit out of stumbling early and starring late, so in that sense, the Rangers defenseman is much like his own team.

McDonagh slammed the puck home with 1.8 seconds left in overtime to lift the Blueshirts over the Flames, 3-2, Thursday night, redeeming himself after several early turnovers and handing the Rangers (2-1-2) their second straight win.

"I was probably trying to be too fancy a bit, especially behind the net," McDonagh said of his three giveaways. "Fortunately, we were able to fight through it, bring our style back in the third and carry it into overtime."

Marian Gaborik ended the Rangers’ drought on the power play and Brandon Prust - who wore the "winning hat" afterward in the locker room - sweetened his homecoming to the franchise that drafted him with a shorthanded goal in the first period.

But all four regulation goals were scored in the first period, and then almost 45 minutes of scoreless hockey expired before McDonagh ended it.

On the winning goal, Brandon Dubinsky dropped the puck back at the right point to Dan Girardi, who slapped a shot wide and to the short side of the Calgary net behind goalie Henrik Karlsson (26 saves). McDonagh swiftly slid into the left circle as the puck came out and buried his shot right into the back of the net.

"I was really happy to see the puck go in," said Henrik Lundqvist (33 saves), who robbed Calgary forwards Tom Kostopoulos and Tim Jackman in the first two periods to keep the score tied, 2-2, going into the third. "They have some skilled guys in the shootout."

The Rangers have gone to overtime in three of their five games to open the season.

"I'm excited about getting the two points," John Tortorella said, "but more importantly, for most of the game I thought, we played better as a team."

Brad Richards recorded his 500th career assist on Gaborik's goal just 4:53 into the game - his team-high fourth goal of the season.

Brian Boyle's hard work led to Prust's goal. Calgary (2-3-1) selected Prust in the third round (70th overall) of the 2004 NHL draft and traded him twice - once to Phoenix and once to the Rangers in February of 2010 after reacquiring him from the Coyotes.

Rookie defenseman Tim Erixon was booed every time he carried the puck. The Flames selected him 23rd in the 2009 draft, but he wouldn't sign with the club and eventually was traded to the Rangers for a pair of second-round picks and prospect Roman Horak.

"Yeah it was like he was a 15-year vet who's been around the league and everybody hates him," Prust said.

The 20-year-old Erixon called the booing "not too bad," and Tortorella praised him for his poise.

HEALTHY CHOICE: The Rangers may get two injured players back in the lineup Saturday.

Winger Wojtek Wolski (groin) said he hopes to play against the Edmonton Oilers if he doesn't suffer any setbacks in practice Friday, and defenseman Michael Sauer (shoulder) believes he is "closer" to returning to game action.

There were no updates on All-Star defenseman Marc Staal, who continues to battle headaches related to a February concussion.
NHL Power Rankings: Washington Capitals lead the charge as road-weary NY Rangers check in at No. 15

By Pat Leonard
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER
Thursday, October 20th 2011, 10:58 AM

CALGARY - All this travel has my brain spinning, but it looks like I'm landing on Washington for the NHL's top team early on.

I know, I know, the Caps are regular season heroes. Bruce Boudreau's team finished atop the Eastern Conference last season, only to be swept out of the second round by the Lightning. And that was nothing compared to their 2009-10 debacle, when they won the East running away only to fall to the Canadiens in a seven-game first round series.

But this season, we've already seen all four of last spring's conference finalists stumble out of the gate, leaving the door open for some mainstays and other surprise clubs to slide up the power rankings early on.

So take a look, and then let us know how you feel the 30 NHL teams line up below:

1. Washington Capitals (5-0-0, 10 points, 1st in Southeast)

After accumulating 107 regular-season points last season, second in the NHL only to the Vancouver Canucks (117), the Caps have opened with five straight wins for the first time in franchise history. Now new goaltender Tomas Vokoun - who signed a one-year, $1.5 million deal this summer – is 4-0-0 with a 1.94 goals against average. The regular season heroes have returned.

2. Philadelphia Flyers (4-0-1, 9 points, 2nd in Atlantic)

With big free-agent signing Ilya Bryzgalov between the pipes, Philly has defeated the Bruins, Devils, Canucks and Senators. The Flyers lead the league in goals per game (3.80), have Claude Giroux's seven points anchoring a potent offense, and have only lost one, in overtime, 3-2, to the LA Kings and their former forwards, Mike Richards and Simon Gagne.

3. Detroit Red Wings (4-0-0, 8 points, 1st in Central)

Jimmy Howard (3-00, 1.63 GAA) and Ty Conklin (1-0-0, 0.00 GAA) each have a shutout, which is why the Wings are giving up a league-low 1.25 goals per game. That is bad news for the rest of the Western Conference, since Detroit's offense is one of the league's most dangerous – Jiri Hudler and Johan Franzen lead the team, which finished third in the West last season, with four points apiece.

4. Buffalo Sabres (4-1-0, 8 points, 2nd in Northeast)

Lindy Ruff's bunch hasn't scored fewer than three goals in a game yet, led by left wing Thomas Vanek, who is in a five-way tie for third in the NHL with eight points. Producing steadily with goalie Ryan Miller as your anchor and a deep bench is certainly one way to win consistently. Buffalo played in the four-team NHL Premier in Europe, defeating both the Ducks and Kings.

5. Los Angeles Kings (3-1-1, 7 points, 3rd in Pacific)

LA's top line is off to a flying start: center Anze Kopitar, right wing Justin Williams and new left wing Simon Gagne have combined for nine goals and 23 points in five games. Kopitar is second in the NHL with nine points (four goals, five assists). The Kings were weary after starting the season in Stockholm, Berlin, Newark and Philadelphia, respectively, but they escaped the brutal opening schedule with seven points.

6. Anaheim Ducks (4-1-0, 8 points, 2nd in Pacific)

Haven't blown anyone out in wins over San Jose (2), St. Louis and the Rangers, while losing their opener in Finland, 4-1, to the Sabres. But Jonas Hiller has been strong in net and the Ducks have struck an early balance with nine players at two points or more. That complements what most feel is the NHL's top line of Corey Perry, Ryan Getzlf and Bobby Ryan.

7. Colorado Avalanche (5-1-0, 10 points, 1st in Northwest)

The Avs shut out the reigning Stanley Cup champion Bruins, 1-0, on Oct. 10 and have managed three shootout or overtime wins to surprise everyone after finishing 14th in the Western Conference last season.

8. Toronto Maple Leafs (4-0-1, 9 points, 1st in Northeast)

Right wing Phil Kessel leads the league in goals (seven) and points (12). Toronto has had the luxury of five home games to start the season, so we'll know much more about the Leafs once they visit the Bruins, Canadiens, Flyers and then the Rangers at the Blueshirts' Oct. 27 home opener.

9. Chicago Blackhawks (3-1-1, 7 points, 2nd in Central)

The Cup champions of two seasons ago are tied for second in the NHL in goals per game (3.40) and have some big-time forwards in Patrick Kane (six points), Patrick Sharp (five) and Marian Hossa (four). If Corey Crawford and Ray Emery can hold strong in goal, the 'Hawks will give teams fits all season.

10. Pittsburgh Penguins (4-2-2, 10 points, 1st in Atlantic)

No Evgeni Malkin (he's missed five of eight games to rest a surgically repaired right knee). No Sidney Crosby (he's only practicing) yet. But the Penguins are still 3-1-1 on the road. Things could be worse. Unfortunately, if Malkin is out for an extended period of time, they may get worse.

11. Dallas Stars (5-1-0, 10 points, 1st in Pacific)

The Stars traded games with the Blackhawks and got two wins over the winless Columbus Blue Jackets, so it's tough to read them early. But they lead a talented Pacific Division early and boast goaltender Kari Lehtonen (5-0-0, 1.58 GAA).

12. Carolina Hurricanes (3-2-1, 7 points, 2nd in Southeast)

The 'Canes were the last team out of the playoffs last season and got out to a slow 0-2-1 start this fall. But they are now riding a three-game winning streak, defeating the Sabres in between two victories over the slumping Bruins. Cam Ward is again logging heavy minutes in net. Joni Pitkanen and Jeff Skinner are the points leaders (six apiece), and Eric Staal leads Carolina with three goals.

13. Boston Bruins (2-4-0, 4 points, 3rd in Northeast)

The reigning Stanley Cup champions have trudged out of the gate, and on Tuesday they lost their cool, totaling 68 penalty minutes in a 4-1 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes. Zdeno Chara, Brad Marchand, Nathan Horton and Milan Lucic all received 10-minute misconducts, and coach Claude Julien was ejected. It's still early, but the B's (averaging a league-low 1.67 goals per game) will have to be leaps and bounds better to defend their Cup.

14. Islanders (3-1-0, 6 points, 3rd in Atlantic)

Ladies and gentlemen, John Tavares (eight points, five goals, three assists). The Isles centerman has fans on Long Island excited, and Al Montoya and Evgeni Nabokov have both looked sharp in net, offsetting temporarily, at least - the early setback of yet another Rick DiPietro concussion. Defenseman Mark Streit, out all last season, has made a huge difference in his return to the lineup.

15. Rangers (1-1-2, 4 points, 5th in Atlantic)

The Blueshirts may have forgotten what Madison Square Garden looks like, playing their first four games in three different countries – Sweden, the U.S. and Canada. They picked up a much-needed 4-0 win over the Canucks, but are still the only NHL team without a power play goal this season (0-for-16). Henrik Lundqvist has stood on his head in net, including a 40-save shutout of Vancouver, while Brad Richards leads the team in points (four).

16. Vancouver Canucks (2-3-1, 5 points, 4th in Northwest)

The Canucks got second-line center Ryan Kesler (offseason hip surgery) back in time to face the Rangers, but they promptly were beaten 4-0 as the home crowd jeered inconsistent goaltender Roberto Luongo (3.70 GAA). The Western Conference champs also can't stay out of the penalty box early on.

17. San Jose Sharks (1-3-0, 2 points, 5th in Pacific)

Top goaltender Antti Niemi missed the first three games after having a cyst removed from near his knee. Newly-acquired Martin Havlat doesn't make his Sharks debut until Friday. The Sharks have outshot their past three opponents 110-65 and been outscored 8-4 in those games. Despite losing twice already in regulation to the Ducks, the results should improve for last season's Western Conference second seed.
18. New Jersey Devils (3-1-0, 6 points, 4th in Atlantic)

The Devils’ only loss so far is to Philadelphia. Martin Brodeur is out seven to 10 days to rehab a right shoulder injury, but reportedly will not require surgery. So the Devils will continue to lean on Johan Hedberg, who has been sparkling so far (3-0-0, 1.41 GAA) as the offense manages just 1.75 goals per game (second worst in the NHL). Big-money left wing Ilya Kovalchuk is the team points leader (four points, two goals).

19. Nashville Predators (2-2-1, 5 points, 3rd in Central)

Last season’s Western Conference fifth seed has faced only one 2010-11 playoff team this season and managed two wins. Center David Legwand (eight points) is keeping the Preds afloat, but Nashville will need Pekka Rinne again to be the 2.12 GAA goaltender he was last season if they can’t score more goals.

20. Tampa Bay Lightning (1-3-2, 4 points, 4th in Southeast)

The Lightning beat the Hurricanes, 5-1, in their season opener and haven’t won since. With sixteen goals surrendered in three regulation defeats, everyone is looking at the defense and goalie Dwayne Roloson (league-worst 5.09 GAA) for answers after Tampa finished fifth in the East with 103 points last season.

21. Montreal Canadiens (1-3-1, 3 points, 4th in Northeast)

Montreal’s only victory came against the Winnipeg Jets, and the Canadiens are winless their past three games (0-2-1). They’ll need much more from the defense, including 22-year-old P.K. Subban (one point), due to the losses of Roman Hamrlik (Capitals) and James Wisniewski (Blue Jackets) from last year’s playoff team (sixth in East).

22. Calgary Flames (2-3-0, 4 points, 5th in Northwest)

The Flames finished just three points out of the Western Conference 8th seed last season and are hoping a six-game homestand that began with a 2-1 win over Edmonton on Tuesday will help them overcome three early losses. But right winger Jarome Iginla (one point in five games) must get going for them to be competitive.

23. Phoenix Coyotes (2-2-1, 5 points, 4th in Pacific)

Beating the Predators and Jets gives Phoenix two early wins, but giving up 11 combined goals to the Sharks and Blackhawks is a cause for concern. Winger Shane Doan (seven points) leads the Coyotes, last season’s sixth seed in the West.

24. Florida Panthers (3-2-0, 6 points, 3rd in Southeast)

Monday’s 7-4 road win over the Lightning was quite an impressive outburst for the Eastern Conference’s worst team a season ago. Tuesday’s 3-0 shutout loss to the host Capitals, on the other hand, was not. Brian Campbell and Kris Versteeg each have seven points apiece to lead Florida.

25. St. Louis Blues (2-4-0, 4 points, 4th in Central)

St. Louis won at home against the Flames and on the road over the Sharks, but Jaroslav Halák’s 3.47 GAA and 1-4-0 record has this squad singing the Blues early. St. Louis has lost its last two to the Ducks and Kings by a combined score of 9-2.

26. Edmonton Oilers (2-2-1, 5 points, 3rd in Northwest)

They haven’t lost by more than one goal, defeated the Penguins in a shootout and got a hat-trick from rookie center Ryan Nugent-Hopkins in a 4-3 loss to the Canucks. RNH (four goals) leads the Oilers, who look as if they have what it takes to dig out of last season’s dead last finish in the West.

27. Minnesota Wild (2-2-2, 6 points, 2nd in Northwest)

The Wild have been in most games, but can they keep it up over the next five games, when they draw the Oilers, Canucks, Ducks and Red Wings back-to-back? Newly-acquired wingers Dany Heatley (three points) and Devin Setoguchi (two points) from San Jose are two players Minnesota is counting on to help them improve from a 12th place finish. Losing to the lowly Senators in a shootout, of course, is not a good sign.

28. Winnipeg Jets (1-3-0, 3 points, 5th in Southeast)

Hockey is back in Winnipeg for the first time since the old Jets moved to Phoenix in 1996. The team formerly known as the Atlanta Thrashers got its first win of the season over Pittsburgh on Monday but then stumbled and lost in overtime to Toronto Wednesday, coughing up a two-goal lead.

29. Ottawa Senators (1-5-0, 2 points, 5th in Northeast)

Defenseman Erik Karlsson has eight points, but the Sens have given up five goals to the Red Wings, six to Toronto, seven to Colorado and seven to Philly. At least Ottawa is hosting the All-Star Game.

30. Columbus Blue Jackets (0-5-1, 1 point, 5th in Central)

The NHL’s only winless team had better get its first victory in Ottawa on Saturday, because otherwise the Blue Jackets’ next nine games include two with the Blackhawks, two with the Red Wings, and one each against the Sabres, Ducks, Maple Leafs and Flyers. Yikes.
Sean Avery making noise with Whale in Hartford, but NY Rangers coach John Tortorella can't hear him

By Pat Leonard
DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER
Thursday, October 20th 2011, 4:00 AM

VANCOUVER - Sean Avery skated Wednesday for the first time since his AHL assignment, and then did what he does best: started yapping. But when word of the winger's discontent reached John Tortorella in Canada, the Rangers coach wouldn't engage.

Avery, who cleared waivers and sent to the minors on Oct. 4 while still with the team in Sweden, was asked whether he expects the Rangers to recall him from the Connecticut Whale.

The winger told ESPNNewYork.com, "Probably not. I doubt it," and said of whether the Rangers gave him a fair chance to make the NHL roster: "I'd say it's pretty obvious. I'll let everyone else decide for themselves."

Tortorella received the news of Avery's comments after Wednesday morning's skate in Vancouver before the Blueshirts flew east to Calgary for Thursday night's game against the Flames. But coming off a 4-0 win over the Canucks and with issues still to address with his team's play, the coach wasn't interested in revisiting the Avery saga.

"No, I'm so busy worrying about this team. This is the first time I've heard about it," Tortorella said. "We go about our business here, and I know that's a story I'm sure that's going to be talked about a lot, because Sean was here and very well-liked, but again I'm coaching this hockey club here. Talk to Kenny (Whale coach Ken Gernander). I don't know what's going on down there. So I can't comment on it."

Avery has been nursing an injured right shoulder. He told ESPNNewYork.com that he received a cortisone shot Tuesday and had options to play in Europe but decided to play in Connecticut instead.

IT'S THE PENALTIES, STUPID

The Rangers predictably were much more upbeat Wednesday just 12 hours after shutting out the Canucks, 4-0, for their first victory of the season.

But Tortorella is trying to correct his team's lack of discipline (shorthanded eight times) before Thursday night's showdown in Calgary (9:30 p.m. ET, MSG) against the Flames (2-3-0).

"There are penalties through aggression, if you want to be a part of an aggressive team. There are penalties through absolute stupidity and nonsense," Tortorella said. "We will take penalties the way we're trying to play; there are going to be some penalties called. The ones that you just - that just make no sense - those have to be rectified."

Rangers' Wolski ignores comment from coach

By LARRY BROOKS

CALGARY, Alberta -- Wojtek Wolski took the high road, which was pretty much the only sane way for the Rangers forward to go, claiming Thursday morning he did not know he'd essentially been called a malingerer by John Tortorella on Wednesday and did not want to know what the coach had said about him.

"I didn't hear and I'd rather not know," Wolski, who has been sidelined with a groin issue since the Oct. 7 opener in Stockholm, said after he remained on the ice doing sprints and extra work following the morning skate preceding the match here against the Flames.

Tortorella, obviously frustrated with the winger, made the crack a day earlier that, "We can't get him out of the tub," in response to a question about Wolski's estimated return to the lineup. The coach then said, "I guess" when asked if the hot tub was part of the treatment Wolski was receiving for the injury that, first flared up in training camp and sidelined him for three of the final five preseason games.

Professed ignorance aside, Wolski said he believes he will be ready to play in Edmonton on Saturday night if he has no issues in the aftermath of his strenuous skate.

"I hope I get to play the next game," said Wolski, who played 10:34 in the opener against the Kings while on a line with Derek Stepan and Mats Zuccarello. "If I can go full out without pain [Friday], I want to play in Edmonton."

Wolski, who allowed the opportunity to play on the top line with Brad Richards and Marian Gaborik slip through his fingers during training camp, said this is the first groin injury he's incurred. It's possible that the injury is a result of the work he did over the summer during which he changed his stride by getting lower to the ice.

"I don't want to pick apart what I did over the summer, but I am making small changes in what I do," he said. "I'm working hard to try to get back as quickly as possible."

When Tim Erixon was the focus of intense media attention in Stockholm, he was being celebrated for making his NHL debut in his homeland. The 21-year-old, freshman pro defenseman was again the focus of media attention here, but it was for a very different reason.

Erixon had refused to sign with the Flames after having been a first-round, 23d overall selection in the 2008 Entry Draft. Faced with the prospect of losing his rights prior to this June's draft, Calgary GM Jay Feaster traded Erixon to the Rangers in exchange for two second-rounders and center Roman Horak, a 2009 fifth-round pick.

The Flames organization obviously feels betrayed.

"It's not something that's going to be a focal point inside the room but we certainly know the situation," Flames coach Brent Sutter said. "We recognize it."

Erixon said money was not the root cause of his decision to spurn the Flames' offer, but that "small issues," he did not care to disclose formed the basis for his decision.

"It was nothing against Calgary; it's a great city," he said. "I thought my agent would come to an agreement but it didn't happen. That's all in the past right now. I don't think I have to explain myself."

Henrik Lundqvist is scheduled to make his fifth straight start. ...Michael Sauer, sidelined for three straight games with a shoulder injury, said, "There's a big improvement. I don't imagine it will be too much longer." ...

No news regarding Marc Staal, which cannot be good news.
Rangers benching Prust for 'stupid penalty'

By LARRY BROOKS
Last Updated: 3:52 PM, October 20, 2011
Posted: 2:26 AM, October 20, 2011

CALGARY, Alberta -- Brandon Prust is as honest as they come both on and off the ice. So it was no surprise when the Rangers' winger indicted himself for taking a "stupid" offensive-zone, holding-the-stick penalty at 13:18 of the first period, after which he was stapled to the bench until the 1:20 mark of the third in Tuesday's 4-0 victory in Vancouver.

"Nobody likes to sit and watch, but as a team we're taking way too many penalties that we're trying to cut back on, and my penalty was stupid, so I paid the price for it," Prust told The Post following the team's light skate in Vancouver that preceded their flight here for tonight's match against the Flames.

"I was told why I was sitting but I didn't need to be. I know it was a stupid penalty."

Coach John Tortorella initially declined to explain why Prust's penalty became the breaking point following an opening three games in which the Blueshirts were shorthanded 19 times, with not one of those situations caused by an infraction taken by No. 8. But after a moment, the coach explained it perfectly.

"There are penalties we are going to take through aggression and we want to be an aggressive team, but the penalties we take through absolute stupidity and nonsense have to be rectified," said Tortorella, whose team was shorthanded nine times in the victory fashioned by Henrik Lundqvist's brilliant, 40-save night.

"I'm not going to be benching guys left and right. I trust our hockey club. I want [everyone] to understand that. But we can't have those kinds of mindless penalties, because we get enough the other way.

"You know, Pruster has done a lot of heavy lifting for this hockey club," the coach said. "I don't want anyone to lose sight of that, what he's done for us and will continue to do."

Prust, who made the headman feed to Michael Del Zotto that initiated the rush on which Michael Rupp scored the first goal at 2:22, also was hit with a most questionable boarding call at 4:09 of third when Canuck defenseman Andrew Alberts crumpled the moment he was touched.

"The guy stepped into me and fell," said Prust, who finished with 7:12 of ice. "If the refs are going to call all that stuff, then I really don't know . . .

"Forechecking is my game. I go in with one hand on my stick going for the puck and the other I have up on the guy's back. I never take a penalty forechecking. I never run guys from behind. The guy lost his balance and I got the penalty."

Though obviously not pleased with the call, Tortorella would not criticize it or what appears to be an overzealous crackdown on checking along the walls. The coach, however, left no doubt about what he felt about the play.

"We're going to try and play the game the way we need to play," he said, alluding to his club's Black-and-Blueshirt mentality. "We're going to continue to play that game."

Even before being benched, Prust's role had diminished over the first two weeks of this season. A primary penalty-killer last season who tied for third in the NHL with five shorthanded goals, Prust has been supplanted in the man-down rotation by Derek Stepan.

"Penalty-killing is something I have to earn," he said. "I have to work for that."

Rangers coach takes shot at wounded Wolski

By LARRY BROOKS
Last Updated: 4:11 PM, October 20, 2011
Posted: 2:01 AM, October 20, 2011

CALGARY, Alberta -- In just about one month, Wojtek Wolski has gone from getting the first opportunity to play left wing on the first line with Brad Richards and Marian Gaborik to becoming an unmistakable object of derision by coach John Tortorella.

Wolski has missed the last three games with a groin issue he first developed midway through Rangers training camp. Tortorella was asked following yesterday's practice in Vancouver whether the winger might be available for tonight's match against the Flames.

"We can't get him out of the tub," the coach said, despite the fact Wolski practiced yesterday after taking part in the morning skate on Tuesday.

Asked whether that meant Wolski was getting hot-tub treatment for the groin, Tortorella said: "I guess."

Wolski, who likely would replace either Erik Christensen or Kris Newbury on the fourth line when he returns, is in the final year of his contract under which he carries a $3.8 million cap hit.

Presumably there are hot tubs in Hartford, too.

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Michael Sauer, who has been sidelined the last two games after aggravating the shoulder injury in Stockholm that he first sustained in a Sept. 26 exhibition game in Philadelphia, said, "It's better, for sure."

"I have to start getting into battles in practice and see how it responds," Sauer said after taking part in a practice that for the most part was a non-contact exercise for the club. "Then again, they might say if I'm ready for hitting that I should test it in a game; I don't know.

"I definitely feel an improvement. But I have to get back on the ice and also stay on top of it with my off-ice work. But am I closer? Most definitely."

Tortorella said he had not checked Sauer's status with medical trainer Jim Ramsay, but regarded the defenseman as, "day to day."

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Marty Biron, who has not played since the Oct. 2 exhibition match in Zug, Switzerland would seem the likely starter in goal tonight. . . . The Rangers, 0-for-4 on the power play in 4:29 on Tuesday, are 0-for-16 in 23:38 for the season. The Rangers killed all eight Vancouver power plays in 12:29 of man-advantage time and have killed 24 of 27 while down for 41:29. Brian Boyle and Brandon Dubinsky have put the Rangers in shorthanded situations four times apiece, most among the club in that dubious distinction.

Rangers beat Flames in OT as McDonagh scores game-winner

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Record

CALGARY, Alberta — Defenseman Ryan McDonagh scored with 2 seconds remaining in overtime to give the Rangers a 3-2 victory over the Calgary Flames on Thursday night.

Rangers' Marian Gaborik, center, from Slovakia, celebrates his goal with teammates Michael Del Zotto, left, and Ryan Callahan during the first period of Thursday night's game.

AP

Rangers' Marian Gaborik, center, from Slovakia, celebrates his goal with teammates Michael Del Zotto, left, and Ryan Callahan during the first period of Thursday night's game.

With a crowd in front of goalie Henrik Karlsson, Dan Girardi shot the puck wide off the end boards and it caromed out the other side to McDonagh and he scored into the open side.

Marian Gaborik and former Flame Brandon Prust also scored for New York (2-1-2). The Rangers have won the first two games of their four-game trip through Western Canada. They play in Edmonton on Saturday night.

Brad Richards had an assist and has points in each of his first five games as a Ranger.

Jarome Iginla and Mark Giordano scored for Calgary (2-3-1).

The Flames are 1-0-1 on their season-high, six-game homestand.

After a four-goal first period, both teams were blanked over the final 45 minutes.

Flames coach Brent Sutter, staying true to his commitment to lessen Miikka Kiprusoff's workload this season, went with Karlsson in net.

In his second start of the season, the 6-foot-6 Swede made 26 saves.

In the third period with the Rangers pressuring around the Flames' net, Karlsson thwarted Prust from the side of the net after he was set up by Brian Boyle.

Karlsson was especially sharp in overtime, making five stops before the winner by McDonagh.

Henrik Lundqvist, coming off a 40-shot shutout in Vancouver in his last start, made 33 saves for New York. His best stop came on a first period rebound when he denied Tom Kostopoulos of the go-ahead goal, stretching across the crease to get his arm on the dangerous shot from the slot.

Lundqvist also turned in back-to-back saves with the game tied in the third, After stopping Jay Bouwmeester's dangerous drive from the wing, the goalie jabbed out his pad to deny Curtis Glencross on the rebound.

Bergen Record LOADED: 10.21.2011
CALGARY -- From turnovers to missed assignments to a penalty for clearing the puck over the glass, Ryan McDonagh was a defensive mess all night.

But the second-year defenseman erased it all in dramatic fashion when he scored with 1.8 seconds left in overtime Thursday night to propel the Rangers past the Flames, 3-2.

"I know myself, I was trying to be too fancy instead of keeping it simple, but I was able to fight it all off," McDonagh said after the Rangers' second consecutive win on this four-game western trip.

McDonagh's second goal of the season came courtesy of a rush down the right side by Brandon Dubinsky as time wound down, a shot off the lively end boards by Dan Girardi -- and McDonagh creeping in on the left to beat Henrik Karlsson.

"There were some problems," John Tortorella said. "It has happened quite a bit with Mac where there's some struggles. He doesn't let it get him down; he fights through it. It's a great experience for him."

Besides McDonagh's clutch shot, it took another stellar effort by the penalty-killers -- including a shorthanded goal by former Flame Brandon Prust, who returned here for the first time since a 2009 trade -- and the Rangers' first power-play goal in 17 opportunities to get two points at the Scotiabank Saddledome.

With the score tied at 2, the Flames went on their fifth consecutive power play when Jeff Woywitka was whistled for clearing the puck over the glass, a delay-of-game penalty, with 2:44 left in regulation. But Henrik Lundqvist, with 33 saves, turned back the Flames again to send the game into the extra session.

On the other end of the special teams, Marian Gaborik scored his fourth of the season on the power play at 4:53 of the first period to set the tone. "We get a lead, we don't take the first penalty tonight, we were just more consistent as a hockey club," Tortorella said.

He shook his head at a shirtless Prust, who was wearing the winning hat, the black fedora that was brought from Europe that Brad Richards awards to the key player after a win, a prize that was bestowed on Lundqvist on Tuesday.

"I settled in after the first shift," said Prust, who scored five shorthanded goals last season. With Cory Sarich in the box, a wide-open Prust skated into the slot, took Brian Boyle's pass from behind Karlsson and went high stick side for a 2-1 edge at 13:42.

Last year, the two teams met once, with Martin Biron stopping 31 shots in a 2-1 win at the Garden on Nov. 22. There were four goals in the first period alone Thursday night.

Just 58 seconds after Gaborik scored on a setup from Derek Stepan, the Flames tied it. Girardi mishandled the puck along the left boards and Jarome Iginla slipped past McDonagh at the right post for a tap-in of Alex Tanguay's pass.

Then, after Prust's score, the Flames responded with a power-play goal of their own. Kris Newbury dropped the gloves with Sarich after the defenseman ran Richards (who had notched his fifth point on Gaborik's goal) from behind, and Newbury received an instigator penalty. At 15:51, Mark Giordano's high shot from the point zipped untouched past a screened Lundqvist as Dubinsky missed a block attempt.

The home crowd, unhappy with rookie Tim Erixon's refusal to sign a contract after he was drafted No. 23 overall in 2009 and his subsequent trade to the Rangers in June, burst into boos each time the 20-year-old touched the puck. But Erixon blocked out the jeers and played with poise.

"Tremendous," said Tortorella, who was so pleased with the win that he gave the team a day off from practice Friday before Saturday night's game in Edmonton -- one stop closer to home.
Tim Erixon can expect to hear boos in Calgary

By STEVE ZIPAY  steve.zipay@newsday.com

CALGARY -- The forest of television cameras, microphones and notebooks enveloped the locker room space of Tim Erixon. Thursday's pregame media semicircle was one that generally surrounds megastars such as Alex Ovechkin or Sidney Crosby -- not a soft-spoken 20-year-old Swedish defenseman who probably wouldn't be wearing a Rangers jersey at this point of the season if not for injuries to Marc Staal and Michael Sauer.

In an ideal world, Erixon would be learning the ins and outs of the demanding job of playing the blue line in North America with the Connecticut Whale and in AHL cities such as Springfield and Bridgeport.

Not in Calgary, a hockey metropolis that Erixon shunned.

Erixon, the son of former Ranger Jan Erixon, was drafted by the Flames in the first round with the 23rd overall pick in 2009. Teams have two years to sign a player after drafting him and own exclusive negotiating rights. The 6-2 defenseman played in Sweden for those two years but declined to sign last May and forced the Flames' hand. The club either had to trade him -- and his agent, Jay Grossman, provided a short list of preferable teams -- or lose him by his re-entering the draft under rules governing unsigned European draft picks.

So on June 1, the Rangers acquired Erixon with a fifth-round pick in last summer's draft for a pair of second-round picks and forward prospect Roman Horak, who made the Flames but was scratched Thursday night at the Saddledome, where Erixon was expected to be booed.

Erixon handled the throng at his locker calmly, insisting that he had nothing against Calgary but that it was a "nice surprise" to get traded to the Rangers. "There were just some small issues for me," he said, not necessarily monetary ones. Asked what those issues were, he said: "I don't really think I have to explain myself."

As for the expected jeering from fans at the Scotiabank Saddledome, Erixon said quietly: "If fans want to do that, it doesn't bother me."

Erixon, who is projected as a top-four defenseman, had a decent training camp but initially was assigned to Hartford. However, because of the Rangers' injuries, he opened the season with the team in Sweden and has played in every game since. He hadn't registered a point entering Thursday night's game but was a plus-2.

"He's in a situation where he's put in some minutes against some pretty good players," coach John Tortorella said. "He's very coachable, he can move the puck, he's learning a new system and how we play, so he's coming along just fine. To get thrown into where he is right now at such an early age, with the scrutiny on it all, he's handled himself very well."

Flames coach Brent Sutter said Erixon's return wasn't a "real focal point" in the locker room. "They've obviously got a good goaltender. Their forward group is really good. But we certainly know the [Erixon] situation and recognize it. I don't need to comment any more on that."

Brandon Prust, who played for the Flames for three seasons before being traded to the Rangers in the 2009-10 season and also made his return, had this piece of advice for Erixon when the booing begins: "Just block it out. He's so young, maybe he won't even notice."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Wojtek Wolski hopes to return soon

By STEVE ZIPAY  steve.zipay@newsday.com

CALGARY -- Wojtek Wolski, who has missed four of the first five games with a groin strain, pushed hard in Thursday’s morning skate and hopes to play Saturday night in Edmonton.

The left wing, who said he hopes to be able to “go the full practice [Friday] without any pain,” denied that he heard or read coach John Tortorella’s comment Wednesday (“We can’t get him out of the tub”) nor did he want to have it read to him.

“I've been working hard at getting back as quickly as possible,” said Wolski, who is earning $3.8 million in the final year of his contract. “I'm trying to simulate as much as I can what it's like in a game and try to make sure that there's no times where I feel like I don’t have the strength or the power to compete for pucks. At this point in time, I'm trying to make sure I'm healthy and it doesn't keep creeping back every couple weeks, because I don't want to be missing a game here, playing one and missing another one.”

Biron to start soon

Backup G Martin Biron, who played in the fifth regular-season game last season, is expected to start against either the Oilers Saturday night or the Jets on Monday night. He was 8-6 with a 2.13 GAA last season before his collarbone was broken in practice Feb. 28.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Rangers win late in overtime, 3-2

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Brad Richards had an assist and has points in each of his first five games as a Ranger.

Jarome Iginla and Mark Giordano scored for Calgary (2-3-1).

Luongo quiets critics, for now, with win

By MATTHEW SEKERES

Vancouver goaltender steps up his game in 5-1 rout of Nashville

The Vancouver Canucks, goaltender Roberto Luongo and the team's sagging power play all needed redemption Thursday.

All three got just that.

The Canucks got back into the win column with a 5-1 victory over the Nashville Predators at Rogers Arena. Luongo silenced his critics - momentarily - by making 24 saves, and the power play struck twice in 10 attempts after being held scoreless in the previous game despite eight chances.

Daniel Sedin led all scorers with three points while Henrik Sedin and Alexander Edler added two points each. Ryan Kesler scored his first goal of the NHL season - in his second game after returning from August hip surgery - and eight Canucks hit the scoresheet in a game that was over after 20 minutes.

Roberto Luongo

It could only happen in a Canadian market in the third week of the NHL season, but one Vancouver newspaper has already advocated trading Luongo to the Tampa Bay Lightning for centre Vincent Lecavalier. Both players have no-trade clauses as part of their decade-long deals.

Canucks general manager Mike Gillis has routinely said that he doesn't believe in asking players to waive no-trade clauses because it amounts to trying to renegotiate terms. Luongo's play has come under scrutiny again after he received a Bronx cheer Tuesday in a 4-0 loss to the New York Rangers (although those same fans failed to boo Vancouver's 0-for-8 power play). More sarcastic applause came again Thursday when Luongo corralled a long Nashville clearing attempt.

Another groan greeted a Luongo gaffe in the first period. He tried to clear the puck near his crease with a wave of his stick, but missed and allowed Matt Halischuk to shovel the rubber into an empty net.

Mikael and Marco

It hasn't been a glorious start to the season for wingers Mikael Samuelsson and Marco Sturm. For Samuelsson, evidence emerged Thursday when the Canucks scratched him for the Predators game because of "stiffness" stemming from off-season sports hernia surgery. The team said it was a maintenance day and wasn't serious.

That decision opened the door for Sturm, who was a healthy scratch Tuesday against the Rangers after five nondescript games to begin his Canucks career. Signed as a free agent last summer, Sturm finally showed that he can still play in the NHL. He generated a first-period chance by skating the puck through two zones, then drove to the net and the puck went off his skate. The on-ice officials ruled that it was no goal because the puck was kicked in, and a video review did not overturn the call.

In the middle period, Sturm was stopped on an odd-man rush, and he drew a hooking penalty on Ryan Suter early in the third.

Nashville defence

Normally a strength, the Predators' structure and goaltending blew up in a four-goal first period that chased starting goaltender Pekka Rinne from the game. Daniel Sedin scored less than three minutes into the contest, banking a puck past Rinne from behind the net.

Henrik Sedin answered his brother's goal on the power play with a shot that was tipped past Rinne by Preds defenceman Kevin Klein. Dale Weise scored his first NHL goal with a deflection at the 12-minute mark, while Chris Higgins completed the first-period assault with a rebound goal on a two-on-one.

Backup Anders Lindback fared better in the second frame, stopping all 15 Canuck shots, but was beaten by Kesler in the third period during a two-man disadvantage.
Senators use Jets to halt skid

By SEAN GORDON

Ottawa stops three-game losing run with 4-1 victory

The resident wits on the Interwebs have taken to calling the campaign 'Fail for Nail'.

And in the turtle derby for the right to draft Samia Sting winger Nail Yakupov - the consensus top prospect for the 2012 NHL draft - the Winnipeg Jets have nosed in front of another favourite to occupy the basement of the Eastern Conference, the Ottawa Senators.

After getting smoked 7-2 by Philadelphia in their last home game, the Sens put together a much stronger effort in coming back from a goal down to comprehensively beat the visiting Jets 4-1.

"Today was a bit of a gut check for us, a character game, and I'm glad we came through," said Ottawa centre Jason Spezza, who scored the winner and assisted on two others.

"It was a really important [result] ... but it's still only one game, we have to find a way to be consistent," added Spezza's linemate Milan Michalek, who scored two and added an assist.

A few feet down the hall, the Jets were left to rue another up-and-down performance that saw them unable to capitalize on several gilt-edged opportunities - Craig Anderson turned away 35 of the 36 shots Winnipeg directed at the Ottawa net.

Asked whether his team will display the same level of desperation Ottawa did in their next home game against Carolina, Jets centre Kyle Wellwood said, "We're going to be desperate for the whole season the way things are going."

It's not like they didn't give it their all.

Jets coach Claude Noel pulled goalie Ondrej Pavelec with five minutes left in the game and with Ottawa's Erik Karlsson in the penalty box.

"That was a pretty creative move on the power play, it created a little chaos for us," said Spezza.

Noel was unimpressed after the game, saying, "We had to try something, we were down two goals ... I can't say it helped us."

There is a sense that Noel and his assistants are already weary about their team's losing ways, asked whether top-line winger Blake Wheeler, who briefly left the game with what appeared to be a leg injury, was okay, Noel blurted, "Physically or mentally?"

"I thought we skated for two periods ... we're looking for production and we didn't get it," he said, alluding to the meagre point totals from his top line of Wheeler, Bryan Little and Andrew Ladd.

A warm welcome from the Ottawa fans in the pre-game hoopla provided little more than cold comfort.

The main sub-plot in this contest featured a couple of teenagers, who shared the ice for the first time a little over six minutes into the first period.

Winnipeg's 18-year-old rookie, centre Mark Scheifele, lost the defensive zone faceoff - a sore point for the Jets so far this season - to Ottawa's 18-year-old, centre Mika Zibanejad.

Seconds later, Zibanejad suddenly found the puck on his stick in the slot, his sizzling snap-shot caromed off defenceman Dustin Byfuglien and narrowly went wide of the net.

A little later, Scheifele pulled off a little sleight-of-hand to set up Evander Kane for a scoring chance and jousted with Ottawa defenceman David Rundblad after a whistle.

Early in the third Zibanejad was robbed of his first NHL goal by Pavelec, who parried his one-timer off a rush; Scheifele, for his part, was denied on a late power-play.

As if often the case with young players, both showed flashes of their considerable talent in a 3-1 Ottawa victory that saw the Sens halt a three-game skid.

Neither dominated, which illustrates the trickiness of the decision the Senators and Jets will shortly have to make concerning two players picked sixth and seventh respectively in last June's draft.

Starting the clock on a player's entry-level contract is no small matter in the salary-cap era, but the temptation may be strong for a pair of teams that will take all the offence they can get - although the smart money says both will be sent to a lower level after their ninth NHL game to hone their skills and bulk up.

Both were blanked from the scoresheet on a night where Byfuglien would open the scoring at 14:39 of the first on a nice pass from Alexander Burmistrov, last year's 18-year-old experiment for the then-Atlanta Thrashers.

"[Burmistrov] has been our best forward. A 19-year-old player is our best player," Noel groused.

To that point, the Senators had bossed the game and nearly opened the scoring on a double-minor penalty to Burmistrov, Pavelec's left post denying Karlsson.

Milan Michalek evened the score for Ottawa on a second-period power play.

Later in the frame, Spezza put Ottawa up 2-1, and Daniel Alfredsson scored from a Johnny Oduya turnover to salt the game away. Michalek's empty-netter was immaterial to the outcome, Zibanejad nearly potted his maiden NHL goal with Pavelec on the bench, although he'd surely prefer to celebrate his first marker after beating a goaltender.

Zibanejad has had a strong preseason, but has had trouble imposing himself in the regular season - despite an injury to centre Peter Regin on Thursday there are broad hints he will continue his development in the Swedish Elite League this winter.

"We're going to make a decision based on what's best for Mika," Ottawa coach Paul MacLean said when asked about his prize rookie before the game.

Afterward, he was content to simply observe: "Mika had a good game, he gave us some really good shifts."

Scotiabank Place has proven a happy hunting ground for teenagers in this young NHL season: Colorado's Gabriel Landeskog scored against the Senators in his first game in Ottawa, as did Philadelphia's Sean Couturier.

Both are 18, both were selected in the top 10 in this past June's amateur draft.

And if both Landeskog and Couturier look virtually assured of playing a full season for their respective NHL teams, there is no such certainty regarding Scheifele and Zibanejad.

The good news is they won't have to wait more than a week or so to know their fate - if either plays 10 games they must stay with the team for the rest of the year.

Scheifele allowed that managing distractions - the prospect of returning to junior being one of many for him to deal with - has posed the biggest challenge in his six weeks in the big time.

"I've tried to talk to people on the team to see how they dealt with it ... the main advice is just 'play your game', you don't want to be thinking too much about that stuff," the lanky centre said of his prospective return to the OHL's Barrie Colts. "But I know it's there."

Kane and Burmistrov both made the team as 18-year-olds - they were the Thrashers' first round picks in 2009 and 2010 - as did defenceman Eric Bogosian.

"It's definitely a big learning curve in your first year, I just told him that you want to take in as much information as you can," said Kane, a 19-goal scorer last year.

In Ottawa's room, by contrast, there are no players who can relate a similar experience to Zibanejad.

Sure, Karlsson played his first NHL game as a 19-year-old, as did Jared Cowen and Spezza, but all had apprenticeships in junior or the minors.
Perhaps burned by their experience with former first overall draft pick Alexandre Daigle, who played in his draft year but quickly flamed out, the Senators haven't had an 18-year-old in their lineup since Marian Hossa, who played seven games in 1997-98 before being returned to junior.

It would be surprising if the Sens were to deviate from the practice that has prevailed since.

Though the trio of precocious former first-rounders in Winnipeg's lineup hint at an organizational philosophy that's different from Ottawa's, such is no longer the case since the Jets left Atlanta.

Either way, Scheifele is trying to focus on the now.

"I've stuck it in the back of my mind," he said.
NHL takes small step toward solving its TV problem in Europe

By DAVID SHOALTS

Hockey fans in continental Europe and Russia remain without access to games on television two weeks after the season started

The NHL took a small step toward solving its TV problem in Europe Thursday, with the emphasis on small.

The league announced it has reached an agreement with Modern Times Group, a television company based in Stockholm, to show all NHL regular-season and playoff games in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway. But hockey fans in continental Europe and Russia remain without access to games on television two weeks after the season started and they continue to express their outrage on the social networks.

While the multi-year agreement with MTG is good news for the large number of fans in Scandinavia, there is a catch. Most of the games will be shown on pay-TV channels operated by MTG and only "certain games" will be available on free channels, according to an NHL press release.

At this point, the only way for European fans outside of the Nordic countries to watch NHL games is on their computers if they subscribe to the league's video-streaming service.

The problem started when the NHL, figuring it could make lots more money from European television, did not renew its deal with ESPN America when it expired after last season. The U.S. cable television giant was the only carrier for all European countries.

Instead, the NHL formed a partnership with two companies, Medge Consulting and Advisers Media International. Neither company owns television networks or stations but both were to act as third parties selling the NHL rights in Europe, Africa and the Middle East to a variety of television networks.

This meant the NHL went from a single outlet in those regions, ESPN, to different outlets in almost every country, which also meant negotiating multiple deals. Naturally, the process dragged on and now only the Nordic countries have the games on TV and other European and Russian fans are steaming.

The idea from the NHL's side was to tailor each television package to each region. So if a few NHL teams had lots of Swedish players, more games from those teams would be shown in Sweden.

Also, ESPN often showed NHL games only on cable packages that cost more for the viewer. In addition to wanting more money for its rights, the NHL was also hoping carriers in some countries would put at least some games on cheaper or free channels.

But the complexity of doing multiple deals left the NHL without anything to offer its European fans once the season started. At this point, it's not clear when those fans will get to legally watch hockey on anything other than their computers.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.21.2011
CBC cancels Punjabi-language broadcast of Hockey Night in Canada

October 20, 2011

The broadcasts began during the 2008 Stanley Cup. Stats from the 2006 census show that Punjabi is fourth among non-official languages used in Canada.

The program had already been pulled off the air once last year because of funding problems, but was brought back after public outcry.

“This decision was effective as of the start of this season, however, if we are able to secure a sponsor we will bring it back,” CBC spokesman Chris Ball wrote in an email to the Star.

“We didn’t have a sponsor on board at the start of last season and so the Punjabi broadcasts didn’t begin until a sponsor came on board in December.”

Ball didn’t have ratings available, but wrote “the Punjabi broadcasts had a relatively small, but loyal following both on air and online.”

“Broadcasting games in Punjabi was a great experience that the entire HNIC team was very proud of as each broadcast was another opportunity for us to all celebrate two of Canada’s strengths, our cultural diversity and our shared passion for hockey.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.21.2011
Sens pull out of nosedive

By Allen Panzeri, The Ottawa Citizen

October 21, 2011

OTTAWA — If the Ottawa Senators didn’t beat the Winnipeg Jets, who had played the night before in Toronto and were second-last in the Eastern Conference, there would have been a lot of disturbing questions about their character and commitment.

Even they knew it.

But give them credit: the Senators rebounded from an embarrassing 7-2 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, didn’t collapse when the Jets scored the first goal of the game and turned in a complete night of work for a 4-1 win over the Jets.

Once again, it’ll be something for them to build on. Whether they do is another question.

Milan Michalek had two goals — one on the power play and one into an open net — and one assist, while Jason Spezza and Daniel Alfredsson had one goal each. Spezza also had two assists, as did Colin Greening.

“We weren’t happy with how things have gone here,” said Spezza. “It was a gut-check for us. A lot of talking went on after the last game, and the guys wanted to make sure we backed that up and responded.”

“We did that (Thursday night).”

Dustin Byfuglien scored for the Jets, playing in Ottawa for the first time since November 1995.

Craig Anderson faced 36 shots while Ondrej Pavelec faced 30.

Even with lots of Winnipeg Jet sweaters in the building to bolster attendance, the game attracted the smallest crowd of the year, at 17,919, which was 1,234 below capacity.

There was one casualty for the Senators, and it could be costly. Peter Regin, who went off after being high-sticked in the face just 1:29 into the game, re-injured his left shoulder and was unable to return. Regin missed the first two games of the season after injuring that same shoulder in training camp.

With Bobby Butler on the injured-reserve list with a groin injury, this could be Nikita Filatov’s ticket back to the NHL, because the Senators are now down to 12 forwards.

Coach Paul MacLean said his team’s play was an “appropriate response” to the 7-2 loss to Philadelphia and the subsequent players-only meeting.

“Obviously, we looked at ourselves in the mirror and decided we wanted to play,” he said. “We needed to play harder and be more competitive, and I thought we did that (Thursday night) for the whole game.”

“I thought our team was a lot more determined in their effort and their competition level was way higher, and we need to continue to do that.”

Once again, the Senators gave up the first goal of the game when Byfuglien scored in the first.

But they rebounded in the second on goals by Michalek and Spezza for their first lead since they scored the game’s first goal against the Colorado Avalanche in their fourth game of the season.

“In the second intermission, we just told ourselves, ‘This is going to be a test, because we really haven’t played with a lead all year,’” said Greening.
Scanlan: Sens’ defensive problems not all about those on the blue-line

By Wayne Scanlan, The Ottawa CitizenOctober 20, 2011

OTTAWA — It was the early Soviet teams that taught us how defencemen and forwards don’t necessarily come from different planets.

While North American lineups spoke of defensive “pairings” and forward “lines” — still do — the Soviets changed lines, attacked, as five-man units, whirling, passing as a group, almost never dumping the puck and chasing it.

This comes to mind as we watch the young Ottawa Senators go through Hockey 101 sessions under new head coach Paul MacLean, forwards and defencemen trying to find cohesion without tripping over each other. Until the Winnipeg Jets arrived on Thursday with their own set of growth problems, the Senators have struggled with scoring, but especially defending.

As a hockey reporter and hockey parent, I’ve learned over the years that the blame for a goal against starts from the blue paint and works its way north. First, the goalie, then the defence, and only as an afterthought are the forwards considered culprits in the shame-filled, minus-world of goals against.

Usually, it’s not that simple. Mistakes happen all over the ice, leading to goals, for and against. Working together, talking through plays in the defensive zone can result in a clean breakout or a breakdown that can ignite a red light over the shoulder of a startled goaltender.

“I can’t do it by myself,” Senators goaltender Craig Anderson reminded us this week. His numbers concur.

Nobody around here knows the nuances of defensive zone hits and misses better than Chris Phillips, who is 48 games shy of 1,000 NHL games played, all of them in a Senators uniform. Phillips has evolved from a young, developing defenceman alongside Wade Redden to a shutdown guy with Anton Volchenkov, and now serves as mentor to a new wave of young defencemen, led by the freelwheeling Erik Karlsson.

The challenges only start with Ottawa’s green D, not to be confused with the soothing qualities of green tea. As if they didn’t have enough to worry about in their newbie NHL careers, the Senators’ D-corps also has to contend with raw, inexperienced centres who play an under-appreciated, but key role in controlling play in the defensive zone.

In years past, the Senators had veteran defensive-minded centres like Shaun Van Allen, Todd White, Antoine Vermette, Mike Fisher and Chris Kelly, each with hundreds of games of experience in the league.

And now? After top centre Jason Spezza, the games played reads like this from Thursday’s lineup: Peter Regin, 145 (but departed in the first period with a shoulder injury), Stéphane Da Costa, 10, Mika Zibanejad, six.

Defencemen count on a forward down low, usually the centre, helping to negotiate short, quick passes that ease the puck out of the zone.

“It always comes down to communication,” Phillips says. “And so you throw the goalie in there, too — it’s four guys down low, being each other’s eyes, letting them know what’s open and what play to make.

“Once you have the puck, then it’s everybody’s responsibility to want the puck. To get open. And that’s what makes the game easier. Lots of times you can make a great play, or maybe beat your guy, but if nobody gets open or is supporting then you’re kind of stuck on an island and feeling all that pressure again.”

The earlier and deeper the centre retreats, the better position he is in to rush up ice. Think Scott Gomez, picking up the puck behind his net.

Not that Ottawa’s defensive group doesn’t have issues based on personnel, but there are other factors, such as having puck possession and an offensive push, like the Senators had three or four years ago.

“It doesn’t matter who you have back there, you could have six all-star defencemen, if you are continually playing in your own end and there’s going to be mistakes, things are going to happen, and ultimately, the puck is probably going to end up in the back of the net,” Phillips says.

Something else to consider with a rebuilding club.

HE SAID IT

Big Dustin Byfuglien, who opened the scoring against Ottawa with a slap shot from the point, wanders so freely it’s hard to tell if he’s playing forward or defence, his chosen position.

“Byfuglien is a really special player, we don’t mind him roving if it’s a controlled rove,” said Jets head coach Claude Noel.

Controlled rove?

“He’s a smart player, has a high hockey IQ,” Noel says. “So we allow him to do that just as long as he’s productive. He can create a lot of turnovers.”

LONELY AT THE TOP

When Jets rookie Mark Scheifele scored his first career NHL goal against the Toronto Maple Leafs, he couldn’t find a teammate to hug. Both Evander Kane and Byfuglien were scrambling for the puck for posterity.

“It looked like I was celebrating on my own, because him (Kane) and Buff were both trying to get it,” Scheifele said. “I was just kind of sitting there alone.”

Like the Senators’ Zibanejad, also 18, Scheifele isn’t sure if he’ll survive the nine-game threshold, but that goal will soften his return to the Ontario Hockey League’s Barrie Colts if that’s how it plays out.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.21.2011
Sens notes: Zibanejad decision time draws near

By Allen Panzeri, The Ottawa Citizen
October 20, 2011

OTTAWA — Mika Zibanejad has two games left to play before the Ottawa Senators must decide whether to keep him and trigger the first year of his contract or send him back to Sweden and delay his NHL career.

Game No. 9 will be on Tuesday night in Raleigh, North Carolina, against the Hurricanes. Game No. 10 will be in Ottawa two nights later against the Florida Panthers.

Will he be in the lineup for that game? It looks like it’s going to be a close call.

On Thursday against the Winnipeg Jets, Zibanejad found himself back at centre and between two new linemates, Zack Smith and Chris Neil.

The hope was that he would feel more comfortable at centre instead of right wing, where he had been playing recently, and that Neil and Smith would create more space for him to use his offensive skills.

“I think he has played his best when he has been in the middle,” coach Paul MacLean said before the game. “Chris Neil has been one of our most consistent players, so we’re going to give Mika a certain comfort level with the people he’s playing with, to allow him to show his stuff.”

Neil was looking forward to playing with the 18-year-old.

“Mika’s a good, young player and he’s going to be a good NHL player for a long time,” said Neil. “Obviously he’s still feeling his way around, and hopefully putting him with me will give him more confidence out there, and more time and space with the puck.

“We’ve got to create room for him and he just has to play like he’s on the team. He’s a young guy, and sometimes you need a pickup.”

Zibanejad said he’s trying not to think about the nine-game deadline, but admits it’s a difficult thing to do. He’s also under a little extra pressure this week with his parents, Mehrdad and Ritva, in Ottawa along with some other relatives.

Zibanejad, with one assist in six games going into Thursday’s game, was diplomatic when asked if he thought he deserved to stay in the NHL.

“It’s hard to say,” he said. “We’ll see after the nine games. Then we can discuss how things have been going and what we think is best for me in the future.

“I’m just trying to play good every night. That’s what I’m focusing on right now.”

He’s only exchanged small talk with general manager Bryan Murray so far, and heard only words of encouragement.

Murray hasn’t yet offered his opinion on Zibanejad’s play, but he has a believer in MacLean.

MacLean said he wasn’t focusing on the nine games, but on the big picture — what he has seen from Zibanejad since the start of training camp.

And what he has seen has told him that Zibanejad should be staying.

“I think he’s an NHL player,” said MacLean. “Now, we’re going to make a decision based on what’s best for Mika, but I think he has played fine.”

JESSE RETURNS

Out since the start of training camp with a shoulder injury, Jesse Winchester finally made his return on Thursday. He was on the right wing with Erik Condra and Stéphane Da Costa.

His return bumped Zenon Konopka. Brian Lee was bumped on defence when Sergei Gonchar returned to the lineup.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.21.2011
Morning skate update: Winchester, Gonchar ready to return against Jets

Posted on 20 October 2011. By James Gordon

Morning skate update: Winchester, Gonchar ready to return against Jets

The Ottawa Senators will have Jesse Winchester and Sergei Gonchar back in the lineup when they face the reincarnated Winnipeg Jets at Scotiabank Place Thursday night.

Winchester suffered a shoulder injury during training camp and has yet to play a game this season. If the morning skate lines hold true, he’ll line up with Stephane Da Costa and Erik Condra on the fourth line tonight.

Winchester is slated to play the wing, but expect him to take some faceoffs.

Gonchar took a puck in the skate on Saturday and missed Tuesday’s game against Philadelphia, but is okay to go against the Jets.

Zenon Konopka and Brian Lee will be the healthy scratches.

Here’s how the rest of the lines looked this morning:

Colin Greening — Jason Spezza — Milan Michalek

Zack Smith — Mika Zibanejad — Chris Neil

Nick Foligno — Peter Regin — Daniel Alfredsson

Filip Kuba — Erik Karlsson

Jared Cowen — Sergei Gonchar

Chris Phillips — David Rundblad

Craig Anderson starts in goal for Ottawa, while Ondrej Pavelec will man the Winnipeg net.

There are currently fewer than 1,500 tickets available for tonight’s game.

Other news and notes from the morning skate:

— It’s getting really difficult to get a sense of whether or not Mika Zibanejad will still be with this team when it plays game No. 10 this season. Senators head coach Paul MacLean once again called Zibanejad “an NHL player,” but qualified it with the usual “we’ll do what’s best for Mika.” Sounds like the coach is pretty sure, but maybe management isn’t. The Jets are in the exact same position with the player they took one slot behind Ottawa at the draft, Mark Scheifele. Jets coach Claude Noel wasn’t giving any hints on Scheifele’s NHL status this season, though the kid helped himself with his first NHL goal against the Toronto Maple Leafs last night.

— Pavelec doesn’t have a sterling record against the Senators (4-3-0), but his save percentage (.925) indicates just how good he’s been in those games. Pavelec was in goal for the Jets’ shootout loss to Toronto.
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Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 10.21.2011
OTTAWA - The number of media in the Senators dressing room Thursday morning made it feel like the hours leading up to a Toronto-Ottawa game.

Among the crowd were ex-players who have found jobs in radio, TV or newspaper business. Todd White, Jason York, Brian Engblom, "Sheriff" Shane Hnidy, Enrico Ciccone, Denis Potvin ... the way the Senators had played their previous two home games, somebody should have given these guys jerseys.

As they milled, I chatted with Colin Greening, the big Senators left winger playing his first full year in the NHL. Greening is a smart guy — in his last year at Cornell University he was named the ECAC Hockey Student-Athlete of the Year. I asked him if he'd be interested in joining the media ranks one day. He laughed and said he's not thinking that far ahead, that he just hopes he'll get another contract from the Senators.

At 25, he'll likely sign a few more. Especially if he keeps progressing the way he has.

Against the Winnipeg Jets Thursday, Greening was exceptional. He played left wing on a newly formed first line, with Jason Spezza and Milan Michalek. He had two assists, and he could have had at least two goals. If he develops a finishing touch, Greening has all the tools to become the best power forward the Senators have had.

A great skater with size (6-foot-3, 212 lbs.) and work ethic, Greening is locked up for two more seasons after this one at an annual salary of $816,867. He's a great bargain for the Senators at that, but at the rate he's going he'll cost them some big bucks in the future.

STARTS AND STOPS

Craig Anderson made a number of huge stops at key times. The first-period goal that beat him, a Dustin Byfuglien slap from the point, deflected off the sticks of Greening and Erik Karlsson before finding mesh. As hard as big Buff can fire it, somebody should have been out trying to actually block the shot ... The Jets had 10 blocked shots in the first. The Senators had two. This is becoming a bit of an issue for Ottawa ... This just in from the Cheapsieats crackerjack research team — Filip Kuba was NOT the softest big man in the NHL last season. Kuba only had 23 hits in 64 games, but another defenceman who stands at least 6-foot-4, Calgary's Anton Babchuk, recorded just 19 in 82 games. Kuba is playing like a madman so far this season, with five hits through six games ... Kuba entered the night as the team leader in blocked shots with nine. Didn't Anton Volchenkov used to have that many in a period?

STUFF I THINK I THUNK

Daniel Alfredsson entered the game with the second-worst plus-minus (minus-7) rating on the team and would have had that get worse had Anderson not made a great save off Kyle Wellwood following a giveaway by the captain. Is Alfredsson's play on the decline? Maybe, but he also still has his flashes of greatness, like when he intercepted a Johnny Oduya pass and skated in to fire a perfect shot that gave the Senators a 3-1 lead. It was vintage Alfie, you might say ... There are few if any Senators who have done their particular job better than Zenon Konopka has his — most recently, he earned special mention from coach Paul MacLean after the Washington game and then, in 6:20 of ice time against Philadelphia, he had an assist, two fights and went 5-1 in the faceoff circles — yet Thursday, with friends in town to watch him play his 200th NHL game, Konopka was a healthy scratch. I get that a fourth-line centre is the obvious choice when another fourth-line centre (Jesse Winchester) is ready to make his return from injury, but hope that MacLean didn't think he was improving his team's chances for offence with the exchange. In 199 games, Konopka has eight goals. In 202, Winchester has nine ... It was close, but I think the Jets were given a more rousing welcome at the start of the night than the Senators were given by the 17,919 fans .... Don't remember Michalek playing right wing before. He handled the move well ...

BETWEEN PERIODS

Kirkland Lake's Claude Noel used his "Grade 6 French" to do pre-game interviews with the local francophone media. He clearly went to a better school than I did ... Noel, who played for the North Bay Trappers Tier II team, told Jets radio analyst Shane Hnidy that the guy who covered the Trappers for the Nugget was "one of the greatest men and greatest reporters of all-time." That was my dad. Go Jets ... The Senators didn't score on a first-period, four-minute power play, but they came close when Erik Karlsson rang a shot off the post. Jets goalie Ondrej Pavelec gave the pipe a thank you pat ... Jared Cowen entered the night with the sixth highest ice time average among Senators defenceman, at 17:08. This, despite the fact he's been Ottawa's most physical blue liner. He has 13 hits, seven of which he was credited with in Washington. "Some nights you get a goose egg and some nights you have more than you should," he said of the counts in different rinks. "Sometimes it's not always the way it should be, but that's fine. I'm not letting it get in my head or anything. I'm not necessarily counting, but sometimes at the end of the game I know I did more than usual." He does take pride in his hit totals, however. "It's a good one," he said of the category. "I think it's one the team needs for sure. We need a higher hit count for sure."

THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM ...

Skilled players are allowed to hit. David Rundblad's latest was a Volchenkov-like hit on Derek Meech in the second ... Brian Kilrea's favorite, Anne Murray, was in attendance. She looks like she's getting younger, Killer ... Love the in-house Wisers jokes, that disappointingly wasn't shown Thursday, featuring White, York, Shaun Van Allen and Shean Donovan. On an unrelated topic, York is claiming it was he, and not I, that gave Hnidy the "Sheriff" nickname that followed him through his career. I thought York was Wisers than that ... Chris Neil set Mika Zibanjad up for what would have been his first goal had he not been robbed by Pavelec.

LAST CHANGE

In his final practice day before being declared ready to return, Winchester had a very hard day's work. How does a hockey player replenish his system? In Winchester's case, it was a protein shake before a 3 p.m. lunch that included salad and penne, then dinner that included two salads, bread and more penne, then a late night protein shake and a "couple of chips." ... While he was out, Winchester got some things done around the house. "Set up my garage," he said. "It was kind of a chore. Recycling station, tools on the wall ...." Cowen hasn't been told he's here for the year yet. "I wish," he said. "Still in the hotel."

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
Winchester returns to face Jets

By BRUCE GARRIOCH, QMI Agency

OTTAWA - Jesse Winchester is ready to roll.

The Senators centre will return Thursday night as the reborn Winnipeg Jets make their debut at Scotiabank Place with Ottawa trying to halt a three-game losing streak.

With Winchester returning and defenceman Sergei Gonchar also back after missing one-game with an ankle injury, the Senators will sit centre Zenon Konopka and blueliner Brian Lee against the Jets.

"It feels good," said Winchester, who suffered the shoulder injury during camp. "It progressed pretty quickly in the last week or so. It’s been great."

Outscored 13-2 in the first period this season, the Senators know they need to have a strong start.

"We have to be better. We have to put ourselves in a better position to win games," said captain Daniel Alfredsson.

The Senators have spent the last 24 hours doing a lot of soul-searching after a 7-2 loss to the Flyers Tuesday.

The club held a “players only” meeting and the Senators have been outscored 14-2 on home ice in the last two games.

“The growing pains are there,” said coach Paul MacLean. “A lot of times, it’s not automatic yet.”

The Jets will start Ondrej Pavelec for the second straight game. He has a 4-3-0 lifetime record vs. Ottawa with a .925 save-percentage.

The Senators have shuffled the lines and defensive pairings as a result of Winchester’s return. Here’s the way it will look against Winnipeg:

Forwards
# Foligno-Regin-Alfredsson
# Greening-Spezza-Michalek
# Winchester-Da Costa-Condra
# Smith-Zibanejad-Neil

Defence
# Phillips-Rundblad
# Kuba-Karlsson
# Gonchar-Cowen

Goalies
# Anderson
# Auld

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
The Flyers put five goals in the net in their early-season showdown with the Washington Capitals Thursday night at the Wells Fargo Center. Unfortunately for the home team, three of them went into their own net. Three Washington shots deflected off Flyers and went past goalie Ilya Bryzgalov in the unbeaten Capitals' 5-2 victory.

"Just one of those nights," Bryzgalov said with a sigh. "It was hitting our players and their players and going into the net. . . . Just the nature of the game sometimes. You have to accept it and work hard again and move forward. Just forget as soon as possible."

The Flyers, who host St. Louis on Saturday, slipped to 4-1-1 despite outshooting the Capitals, 42-28.

The Caps scored three goals in the first 4 minutes, 48 seconds of the third period, pulling away from a 2-1 lead. "We were playing pretty good, and all of a sudden, three quick goals and you're not there anymore," Bryzgalov said.

Washington, 6-0 for the first time in franchise history, got a pair of goals from Alex Ovechkin, who had just one goal in his first five games. Tomas Vokoun (40 saves), the Capitals' new goalie, helped his team improve to 8-1-2 in its last 11 games at the Wells Fargo Center.

Washington was 1 for 6 on the power play.

"It ruined the flow of the bench," captain Chris Pronger said of the penalty kills.

Roman Hamrlik, Ovechkin, and Joel Ward scored goals early in the third period, turning a close, entertaining game into a rout. Hamrlik's goal deflected off defenseman Andreas Lilja, and Ovechkin's score appeared to carom off Max Talbot.

An earlier Washington goal deflected off the stick of Flyers defenseman Braydon Coburn.

Deflections "are part of the game. We just as easily could have had deflections, too," Pronger said. "I think at the end of the day, you look at the game. Turnovers and penalties killed us. They ruined the flow of the game. They ruined the bench."

Trailing 2-1, the Flyers dominated the second period. Most of the action was played in the Capitals' defensive end, but Vokoun didn't budge.

"We had a lot of offensive-zone time, but I think we can do a better job of getting to the net," coach Peter Laviolette said. "There were lots of shots, but we need to get in there and muck it up a little more in front of the goaltender."

Brayden Schenn, making his Flyers debut, played just 2 minutes, 48 seconds in the first period, but was much more involved in the second period. He centered Jakub Voracek and Scott Hartnell, and the line came close to scoring the equalizer on two great shifts toward the end of the period.

Schenn's arrival dropped Sean Couturier to the fourth line. Couturier played just 10:09 and scored the game's final goal.

The Flyers were having a nice, effective first period and seemed ready to go into the intermission with a lead, but then a Scott Hartnell's turnover led to a Mathieu Perreault goal. It was quickly followed by an Ovechkin score, giving the Caps a 2-1 lead.

The Flyers had taken a 1-0 lead when Claude Giroux scored on a breakaway while the teams were playing four on four. Giroux picked up a loose puck after Wayne Simmonds stripped it from Alexander Semin near the Flyers' defensive blue line. It was Giroux's fifth goal, and gave him goals in five of the six games.

That is a pace for 68 goals.

The Flyers had a slight territorial edge in the opening period, but it unraveled quickly as Hartnell, from along the right boards, tried to clear a puck out of his defensive zone toward the center of the ice.

Perreault intercepted, skated to the top of the right circle and fired a shot that deflected off the stick of Coburn and went just inside the right post, knotting the score at 1 with 1:20 left in the period.

With 12 seconds remaining in the period, Ovechkin scored on a juicy rebound to put the Caps ahead, 2-1.
Flyers Notes: Flyers' Schenn makes his debut against Capitals

"I've been looking forward to this day for a long time, ever since I got traded here," Schenn said before the game. "It's going to be a good test tonight" against Washington.

Schenn, 20, one of the players acquired in the June deal that sent captain Mike Richards to Los Angeles, started the night centering Scott Hartnell and Jakub Voracek on the third line.

With Adirondack of the AHL, Schenn had four goals and four assists in four games.

"Obviously everybody wants to be up here. But I tried not to get frustrated being down there," Schenn said. "I wanted to make it the shortest stint possible down there."

Schenn won 4 of 11 faceoffs Thursday and was minus-3 in 11 minutes, 3 seconds. Two of the three goals Washington scored while he was on the ice deflected off Flyers.

Schenn was recalled from Adirondack in time to face his brother, Luke, a defenseman who plays for Toronto. The Flyers will host the Maple Leafs on Monday.

Line changes

The addition of Schenn scrambled three of the four lines, and it affected two other rookies, Matt Read and Sean Couturier.

Read was promoted to the second line, which included center Danny Briere and winger Wayne Simmonds. Couturier dropped down to the fourth line, and he centered Max Talbot and Andreas Nodl.

The only line that remained intact was the top unit: Claude Giroux centering Jaromir Jagr and James van Riemsdyk.

Shelley sits

After serving a 10-game suspension, including the first five regular-season contests, Jody Shelley was eligible to play Thursday night but coach Peter Laviolette did not dress the Flyers enforcer.

Still, Shelley is just glad he is eligible to play.

"It's a lonely thing when you're here, but you know you're not playing," Shelley said. "... You're just kind of trying to stay in shape and stay sharp."

Feisty winger Zac Rinaldo, who was sent back to the Phantoms on Wednesday, did an admirable job as Shelley's replacement. But Rinaldo, at 5-foot-11, 185 pounds, can't challenge the heavyweights. Shelley (6-3, 230 pounds) can.

"He's a great skater," Shelley said of Rinaldo. "He stayed disciplined. He did his job perfect. He's got a bright future ahead of him."

Breakaways

Defenseman Andreas Lilja returned to the lineup after being replaced by Matt Walker in the last game. ... Entering the night, Chris Pronger had posted at least a point in each of the first five games. ... After five games, Kimmo Timonen (6:14), Talbot (6:04), and Pronger (5:59) were ranked Nos. 2-4, respectively, among NHL players in average time on ice in shorthanded situations. ... Jagr, a physical-fitness addict, has been having some informal late-night workouts with a handful of teammates at the SkateZone in Voorhees. ... HBO was at the game, doing work for the 24/7 series that will be shown prior to the Winter Classic.

- Sam Carchidi

Flyers game against Capitals is a Wash

By FRANK SERAVALLI
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ALEX OVECHKIN read the press clippings.

The headlines that said last year’s “average season” - in which he posted 85 points - was already carrying over to this year. The articles that pointed to his decreased ice time - down nearly 3 minutes from his career average - and claimed he doesn’t hold Capitals coach Bruce Boudreau’s trust.

The stories that said Ovechkin has lost his mojo.

He laughed them off. And his smile, sliding into the boards at the Wells Fargo Center and rattling taunting Flyers fans, was never bigger than when he scored with 11 seconds left in the first period last night.

Ovechkin loves Philadelphia.

And he single-handedly turned what was supposed to be another October test between two of the NHL’s three remaining teams without a regulation loss into a laughingstock. Ovechkin sent fans to an early exit into the October night with a 5-2 drubbing of the Flyers, thanks to a three-goal Washington explosion in the first 5 minutes of the third period.

With two tallies, Ovechkin now has 22 goals and 15 assists in 23 career regular-season matchups against the Flyers - the most of any Atlantic Division opponent.

"It's always nice to score goals," Ovechkin said. "We knew it was going to be a real battle. I had a couple chances in the last few games but I didn't score and it finally goes in."

The Flyers finished with a 42-28 shot advantage, a slight indication as to how the first two periods played out, when they were down just 2-1. It was the first time they had more than 40 shots in a game this season.

Washington scored three times in a span of 2 minutes and 25 seconds to suck the life out of the building.

"We were pretty sure we would win the game," goalie Ilya Bryzgalov said. "All of a sudden, you're not there anymore. It was 2-1 and then 5-1, it's pretty much [over]."

Two of Washington's goals came off deflections from the Flyers' own sticks. Michael Perrault bounced the first Caps goal off the stick of Braydon Coburn. Then, Andreas Lilja was victimized by Roman Hamrlik to start the third period.

Ovechkin muscled his second goal through at least four bodies and sticks to find the top of the twine over Bryzgalov's shoulder.

The hungry Flyers blocked 23 shots. But Bryzgalov told his defensemen in training camp to try and stay out of the way of shots - to let him see them cleanly - in order to get a clear picture of the puck's path.

A lot of times, that's easier said than done.

"They try and do their best; they're trying to help me," Bryzgalov said. "It was just one of those nights, it would hit our player, their players, go right in the net. It would hit the stick and go in the opposite direction. It's just the nature of the game sometimes. You've got to accept it."

In fact, the Flyers actually saw some value in the Caps' tactic.

"That is part of our game plan, too," said Scott Hartnell, who had a tough night as a minus-3. "I think we are definitely working on that [today in practice]. It seemed like a lot of the shots were coming in and [Caps goalie Tomas] Vokoun was seeing them."

Though just one of the Capitals' five goals came on the power play, the Flyers were never able to attack Washington's zone with any consistency. Their lines and ice time were chopped up after trying to kill off six different shorthanded opportunities.

Peter Laviolette has been barking about his team's careless infractions.

Last night, it finally caught up to them in a big way.

"Turnovers and penalties killed us. They ruin the flow of the game, they ruin the bench," captain Chris Pronger said. "At some point, it was going to come back and get us. Until we figure it out, we'll have back-and-forth nights like this."

Timonen hurt

Defenseman Kimmo Timonen slid to block a Mike Green howitzer in the second period, which forced him to hobble over to the Flyers bench grabbing his right arm. He played his next shift but left the game with 10:59 left and Washington firmly in front.

Timonen said the slap shot caught him in the right hand. He would not confirm whether he had an X-ray after the game.

"It's sore, I'll tell you that," he said. "I don't think it's anything serious . . . but it's part of the game. It happens. We'll see whether I'm ready to go on Saturday."

Slap shots

Sean Couturier played just 10:09, the lowest total ice time of his six-game NHL career by nearly 4 minutes, but still scored his second goal in as many games . . . Defenseman Andreas Lilja was swapped into the lineup for Matt Walker. The two had traded places for Tuesday's game and Lilja was the healthy scratch . . . The Flyers have outshot their opponent in five of six games this season. They were just 5-5-1 last year when posting 40 shots in a game.

BRAYDEN SCHENN joined the Flyers yesterday for the first time since training camp adjourned on Oct. 5, saying he didn't want to do "too much."

Last night's first period let him get his feet wet in his Flyers debut, playing just 2:48 out of 20 minutes because of the six penalties that were called against both sides.

"You want to make a good first impression," Schenn said before the game. "But just because I'm out there doesn't mean I'm going to try to be flashy or impressive."

Schenn wasn't flashy. Just impressive, in his own way, despite finishing as a minus-3 in the 5-2 loss to Washington.

"I thought he was strong," coach Peter Laviolette said. "I don't think the stats are a good reflection. I think on two of those goals, they were deflected off our own guy. The third one was a bad turnover. They weren't his fault."

Despite spending much of the first period on the bench, Schenn was on the ice to take a key, defensive-zone faceoff in the first period. He was lined up between stars Jaromir Jagr and Claude Giroux. Schenn won the draw and headed straight for the bench, to be swapped out for James van Riemsdyk, as Giroux raced in on the puck now in Washington's end.

It was a good indication of Laviolette's trust in the 20-year-old rookie, who played eight games with the Kings last season before being sent back to his junior team. He deserved to start this season with the Flyers, but salary-cap issues kept him from doing so. Schenn knows the NHL style, both from his own experience and what his older brother Luke, a captain in Toronto, has taught him.

Whatever confidence was lacking, Schenn said, was restored during his four-game trip to Adirondack, where he collected four goals and four assists for the Phantoms.

Last night, he was held off the scoresheet, limited to just one shot and four hits in 11:03 of ice time.

Schenn's biggest impact was on the lineup, which largely had been set in stone during the first five games. Jody Shelley, in his first game eligible since being suspended five games for a hit in the preseason, was a healthy scratch.

Laviolette had to juggle his lines to squeeze in Schenn, knowing that fourth-line minutes wouldn't suffice for a player of Schenn's caliber. Some thought Scott Hartnell might move to the fourth line.

Instead, Schenn - who skated with Hartnell and Jakub Voracek - bumped Sean Couturier to the bottom line. One game after scoring his first NHL goal on Tuesday in Ottawa, Couturier still received the bulk of his minutes on the penalty kill. Matt Read moved to play with Danny Briere and Wayne Simmonds, while Jagr's line with Giroux and van Riemsdyk remained unchanged.

Schenn looked comfortable, as he did during training camp. He made plays in front of the net and in traffic and isn't afraid to hang onto the puck for an extra second on the boards.

City rink upgrades

The weather is finally getting cooler in Philadelphia - which usually would signify the first opportunity for the city's open-air, public skating rinks to build ice for the winter. Starting today, it won't.

Flyers chairman Ed Snider will be touring Laura Sims Skatehouse (63rd and Walnut) to get the first glimpse of the reconstructed and now fully enclosed facility whose completion was because of his donation. With a city budget crunch, the rinks were targeted for closure.

The Ed Snider Youth Hockey Foundation contributed $6.5 million last year to match a grant from the commonwealth, which allows for five city rinks to be open 7 days a week, year-round. Each city rink will include new classrooms, learning labs, expanded public space and allow Snider Hockey to double the after-school program's current 3,000-child capacity.
The captain will right this ship

Phil Sheridan

The captain will right this ship

It wasn't so terrible for this beta version of the remade Flyers to get smacked down by the undefeated Washington Capitals. It is October, after all, and this game will be no more than a vague memory when the real hockey season arrives in April.

For the Flyers, the most significant aspect of Thursday's 5-2 loss was that it gave Chris Pronger his first opportunity to set a tone as team captain.

If you watched the game, you saw a pretty good Flyers effort turn sour on a series of plays as the puck took wild caroms off various sticks and skates. Goalie Ilya Bryzgalov looked like he was trying to follow the Golden Snitch around a quidditch pitch.

Pronger saw something else.

"We lost, 5-2," Pronger said. "[Deflections] are part of the game. We could have had some deflections."

Mike Richards, Pronger's predecessor, might have taken this approach. It's not impossible. But it was more his style to try to smooth things over, at least for public consumption. Richards would have acknowledged that the Flyers had taken too many penalties, maybe insinuated that the Caps had gotten away with a few, and put the whole thing off to one fluky night. It just wasn't his way to give the pesky media much to run with - certainly not much in the way of criticism.

Not Pronger. He sees a very young, still-jelling team. And here was an opportunity to go to the stick rather than dangle a carrot.

"Turnovers and penalties killed us," Pronger said. "At some point, it was going to come back and get us. You stop supporting the puck, start turning the puck over, you get caught on the wrong side a lot. You start reaching in with your stick, your stick comes up. We had a lot of high-sticking penalties."

This is all worth discussing because, frankly, the Flyers shouldn't be as good as the Capitals. Not yet, not after so much change. Coach Peter Laviolette has been changing lines, getting a feel for rookies such as Matt Read and Sean Couturier and, Thursday night, Brayden Schenn.

In a way, the Flyers are doing now what the Capitals did a half-dozen years ago. After giving up on their expensive misadventure with Jaromir Jagr - now mounting a comeback with the Flyers - the Caps brought in a group of young stars and let them grow together. Alex Ovechkin, Mike Green, Alexander Semin, Brooks Laich, Nicklas Backstrom - this core group has had several years to come together, and it shows.

The Flyers had plenty of shots on goal in this game. But their unfamiliarity with each other showed in the tentative way they approached the net. Over time, guys will have more of a feel for timing, shot selection, and where those rebounds are headed.

The Capitals already have that sixth sense with each other. They swarmed poor Bryzgalov at precisely the right moments, creating traffic that rerouted puck after puck.

Of course, this group also has faltered badly in the real hockey season, the playoffs. The Flyers jettisoned their cornerstone, Richards and Jeff Carter, even though they accomplished more in the playoffs over the same time period than Ovechkin and the Capitals. Imagine what the pressure would be like on Ovechkin and coach Bruce Boudreau if they'd had the same results in Philadelphia. There's no chance Boudreau would still be the coach here.

But the Caps stayed the course, added a few pieces, and they're off to a 6-0 start to the season. They have every chance to be the best team in the Eastern Conference again this year. They are one of the teams the Flyers will be measuring themselves against.

So 5-2, as Pronger saw it, was legit. The Flyers' youth was no excuse.

"I don't think that had anything to do with the plays that were made," he said. "At the end of the day, you have to be hard on your stick and hard on the puck."

And, in the captain's case, hard on his team.

That wasn't about this game. The Flyers will play the Capitals three more times, and each will be a mile marker in the long NHL season. In mid-December, the Flyers should be more cohesive than they looked in this game. By March, when these teams meet twice in three weeks, the playoffs will be looming. They are likely to be playing for seeding and maybe even in preparation for facing each other in the real hockey season.

That is when general manager Paul Holmgren's remodeling project can begin to be judged.

There is a lot to like here. Read is off to a wonderful start. Bryzgalov is as solid as they come. Wayne Simmonds is fun to watch. And then there is the continued blossoming of Claude Giroux into a superstar.

A rough loss in October is fine, especially if it leads to better things in April.

Flyers Longest Unbeaten Starts

Ilya Bryzgalov (shown at left after the Capitals’ fourth goal Thursday night) had allowed just eight goals in his first 260 minutes in the Flyers’ net this season. Then the Capitals torched him for five in the next six minutes and eight seconds.

Nonetheless, the Flyers did go unbeaten (without a regulation loss) the first five games on their season for the eighth time in their history:

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Posted by Bob Vetrone Jr.

Will Schenn’s promotion hurt Couturier’s growth?

Center Brayden Schenn, from all accounts, is going to be a quality NHL player.

But it’s fair to wonder if the Flyers promoted him too soon.

Not because of his ability, mind you. The 20-year-old center appears to be NHL-ready.

But I question the promotion if it means center Sean Couturier is only going to get about 10 minutes of ice time, as he did in Thursday’s 5-2 loss to undefeated Washington.

Schenn, recalled from Adirondack on Wednesday, was inserted onto the third line, between Jakub Voracek and Scott Hartnell.

That moved Couturier down from the third line to the fourth unit, where he centered Max Talbot and Andreas Nodl.

Couturier had been averaging nearly 15 minutes a game and had been one of the Flyers’ most pleasant surprises.

On Thursday, he played 10:09, including only 5:36 in even-strength situations.

Coach Peter Laviolette downplayed the development, attributing it to the fact the Flyers had to kill six power plays, which disrupted the rotation of their lines.

True, but the Flyers killed EIGHT power plays against the Kings last Saturday and Couturier still managed to play 14:13.

Any way you look at it, Couturier’s time will be greatly reduced if he stays on the fourth line. Is that good for the development of a fast-emerging 18-year-old?

Center is Couturier’s natural position, but the Flyers might be better-served putting Couturier__who scored a goal late in Thursday’s loss__at wing on the third line.

That might mean Scott Hartnell drops down to the fourth line. Yes, it’s an expensive spot for a $4.2 million winger, but Couturier’s development should be the priority.

Schenn was minus-3 on Thursday, but two of the goals Washington scored while he was on the ice were deflected off Flyers.

“I thought he had a strong game,” Laviolette said. “Sometimes the statistics are not a reflection of somebody’s game.”

You could argue that the Flyers would have been better-suited if they hadn’t recalled Schenn until (if) a top-nine forward was injured. Instead, they rolled the dice by scrambling three of their four lines.

Was it the right choice?

Defenseman Kimmo Timonen injured his right hand blocking a shot and said he didn’t know if he would play Saturday. More will be known Friday....Schenn’s line was minus-7......Schenn won four of 11 faceoffs...The Flyers have allowed five or more goals in five of their last nine meetings with the Caps; they are 1-3-1 in those games.....James van Riemsdyk had seven shots and Jaromir Jagr had five.....Matt Carle and Andrej Meszaros each blocked five shots.....The Flyers host St. Louis on Saturday night.

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Posted by Sam Carchidi

Schenn centers 3rd line; Shelley happy to be eligible

UPDATE: Here are the lines for the Flyers on Thursday: Claude Giroux centering Jaromir Jagr and JVR; Danny Briere centering Matt Read and Wayne Simmonds; Brayden Schenn centering Scott Hartnell and Jakub Voracek; and Sean Couturier centering Max Talbot and Andreas Nodl.

After serving a 10-game, NHL-imposed suspension — including the first five contests in the regular season — Flyers left winger/enforcer Jody Shelley is eager to return to the lineup.

"I'm excited. My time is served," Shelley said.

Coach Peter Laviolette, however, will probably use Andreas Nodl over Shelley in Thursday’s game against visiting Washington (5-0).

Still, Shelley is just glad he is now eligible to play.

"It's a lonely thing when you're here but you know you're not playing," Shelley said. "It's a definite and you're just kind of trying to stay in shape and stay sharp."

Added Shelley: "Like any punishment, even when I was five years old, you remember from it, you learn and you come back better."

Feisty winger Zac Rinaldo, who was sent back to the Phantoms on Wednesday, did an admirable job as Shelley's replacement. But Rinaldo, at 5-foot-11, 185 pounds, can't challenge the heavyweights. Shelley (6-3, 230 pounds) can.

"He's great. He's a great skater," Shelley said of Rinaldo. "He stayed disciplined. He did his job perfect. He's got a bright future ahead of him."

Shelley, 35, said enforcers have a fine line to walk.

"The game has changed three times since I started and you have to adapt," he said.

Shelley, one of the most respected players in the Flyers' locker room, conceded he never feels as if his position is secure.

"I always have to prove myself," he said. "That's how my career has been. Fourth-line left winger, there's always someone coming after to get your job and you have to prove yourself. The situation is how it is and today is today. That's all you worry about."

Breakaways. Look for defenseman Andreas Lilja to return to the lineup in place of penalty-prone Matt Walker. ... Shelley was suspended for his boarding hit on Toronto's Darryl Boyce in a preseason game.

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Posted by Sam Carchidi

Penalties, turnovers costly again in Flyers’ loss

By Wayne Fish Staff writer | Posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 11:04 pm

PHILADELPHIA — If it’s beginning to sound like a broken record, it’s because the Flyers really are still making the same mistakes over and over again.

“Bad penalties and turnovers,” Chris Pronger said after a 5-2 loss to the Washington Capitals on Thursday night at the Wells Fargo Center.

And Pronger should know. He took a penalty smack-dab in the middle of the Caps’ three-goal eruption early in the third period to turn a precarious 2-1 edge into a 5-1 laugher.

Someone else who should know about the subject is Scott Hartnell. His giveaway late in the first period led to Washington’s first goal and started the Flyers down the road to their first regulation-time loss of the season.

While deflections played a part in four of the Washington goals — three going off Flyer sticks — the main problem was poor decision-making and too much standing around.

“I had a bad turnover in that first period,” said Hartnell, who finished a minus-3 for the evening’s activities. “You eliminate my turnover and a couple bad breaks (and the outcome would have been better).”

As captain, Pronger has a pretty high stake in getting this penalty/turnover trend reversed.

“Turnovers and penalties killed us,” Pronger said. “They ruin the flow of the game, they ruin the bench. At some point, it was going to come back to get us and it did tonight.”

Disappointing to say the least, given the game’s build-up between two conference powers. The Caps, now 6-0, sent a little message to the 4-1-1 Flyers.

“The penalties, they come in waves on us right now,” coach Peter Laviolette said. “I’ve already told you about the (lack of) flow on the bench ... not being able to get the players on the ice because we’re killing (penalties) too much.

“We did turn the puck over a little too much through the neutral zone. They have a quick transition team, so they came back.”

Hartnell’s gaffe really hurt any momentum the Flyers had built.

“We made a mistake and had a little bit of a letdown just following that shift there,” Laviolette said.

Alexander Ovechkin scored a pair of goals to lead the Washington offense. The Caps put three pucks past Ilya Bryzgalov in the first 4:48 of the third period to break the game open.

Leading 2-1, the Caps got a goal from Roman Hamrlik on a long screen shot at 2:23. Then, with Pronger in the penalty box, Ovechkin fired a puck from the slot past Bryzgalov. Joel Ward ended the burst at 4:48 with a deflection around Bryzgalov.

Except for a brief lapse at the end of the first period, the Flyers played the Capitals pretty much to a standoff through the first 40 minutes.

Philadelphia opened the scoring on a goal from Giroux during a four-on-four situation. Wayne Simmonds freed a puck from Alexander Semin and sent Giroux in clear on a breakaway against Vokoun. Giroux scored at 14:25.

Then things started to unravel for the Flyers.

First, Hartnell attempted a blind outlet pass from his own zone. Mathieu Perreault intercepted and took a shot which deflected off Braydon Coburn’s stick past Bryzgalov at 18:40.

After that, Giroux let Nicklas Backstrom get away from a check in the corner. Backstrom drove to the net and Ovechkin finished up the play with a shot high into the net with just 12 seconds remaining on the clock.

So, it’s back to the drawing board to see if the Flyers can get through a game without an unreasonable amount of turnovers and penalties.

“We kind of lost our composure at the beginning of the third period,” Danny Briere said. “One thing we need to improve on is when we have a bad shift and the other team scores a goal, we have to come back strong the next shift, a little better than we did tonight.”

Timonen injured

Kimmo Timonen took a shot off his right hand early in the third period, went in for treatment and did not return. Timonen would not confirm if an X-ray had been taken or if he’s cleared to play in Saturday’s game vs. St. Louis.

Line shuffle

With Brayden Schenn making his debut, Laviolette shuffled his lines. He moved Matt Read to the Briere-Simmonds line and placed Schenn on a third line with Hartnell.

Burlington County Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Knuble calls Flyers’ offseason moves ‘bold’

Season series: First meeting

What to watch: Flyers haven’t lost at home to the Blues since Dec. 7, 2002. ... St. Louis has struggled out of the gate, going 2-4 in its first six games, getting outscored 20-15 in the process. ... Through five games, Flyers center Matt Read was tied for the NHL rookie scoring lead with six points.

Posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 7:23 pm | Updated: 2:00 am, Fri Oct 21, 2011.

Knuble calls Flyers’ offseason moves ‘bold’ By Wayne Fish Staff writer

Calkins Media, Inc. | 0 comments

PHILADELPHIA — Mike Knuble, a former right wing on the Flyers, is one of the NHL’s deeper thinkers and already considered TV analyst material.

Knuble is now in his third season with the Washington Capitals after four seasons in Philadelphia.

His final season here (2008-09) was when Mike Richards was just getting his feet wet as captain of the Flyers.

Knuble saw how the locker room operated then and since has been an interested observer from afar these past few years.

He watched his old club making some big changes over the summer and believes the moves were both timely and constructive.

“Your’re talking about changing the makeup,” Knuble said before Thursday night’s game at the Wells Fargo Center. “Two guys (Richards, Jeff Carter) were committed to major dollars and major terms.

“To shake it up like that was very bold. I don’t know what the final straw was (for making the trades) but (they’re) showing good returns with what they received in the players and the draft picks (including 2011 first-round pick Sean Couturier).”

Was it time for a change in the locker room? The Flyers now have a veteran captain in 37-year-old Chris Pronger and a pair of veteran alternates in Kimmo Timonen and Daniel Briere.

“I enjoyed playing for Mike when I was there,” Knuble said. “But Chris has been a captain before in the league and knows what he’s doing. It’s a natural thing for him to take control of the room.”

Schenn excited

Brayden Schenn, who made his debut with the Flyers on Thursday night against the Caps, said he’s already looking forward to Monday night’s home game against the Toronto Maple Leafs and a possible matchup against his older brother Luke.

Since Luke is a defenseman, there could be a couple one-on-one situations and that would be interesting. The two did play against each other in a preseason game last month.

“I’m looking forward to staying for a long time,” said Schenn, who wore No. 10 against the Caps. “I tried not to get frustrated (in Adirondack). I just tried to make it the shortest stint possible.”

Couturier among elite

Think it’s easy making the jump straight from junior hockey to the NHL? Think again.

Since 2005, only 24 of 1,286 drafted players have made it right out of the amateur ranks as teenagers.

Flyers freshman Couturier is joining the elite club.

Here’s the list, and it’s a pretty star-studded one:


2006: Jordan Staal, Pittsburgh; Phil Kessel, Toronto.

2007: Patrick Kane, Chicago; Sam Gagner, Edmonton; David Perron, St. Louis.
A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The Flyers had a chance to show something Thursday night … yes, even in October.
Instead, they showed that they are substantially behind the Washington Capitals in program development, a veteran presence … and on the scoreboard.
They lost 5-2, and though they complained about deflected shots and huffed about penalties, they were manhandled, even as they were outshooting Washington, 42-28.
They may be better later. They probably will be better later. But they were steamrolled in an Eastern Conference showdown Thursday.
And P.S.: It’s OK if Jaromir Jagr scores career goal 647.
Check out my column Friday in the Daily Times and as always on delcotimes.com
posted by Jack McCaffery
Delaware County Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
McCAFFERY: Flyers fail to meet first major test of season

By JACK McCAFFERY
jmccaffery@delcotimes.com

PHILADELPHIA — Peter Laviolette knows the difference between October hockey and May messages, between a developing team and a championship contender, between what he’d hoped for from the Flyers and what he saw from them Thursday in a 5-2 loss to the Capitals.

“The past history with Washington makes it automatic,” the head coach was saying before the game, “that there is a little more pep in your step.”

That was the expectation in a game between two teams without a loss in regulation. Instead, the Flyers showed a creak in their streak, a pause in their cause and mostly, a deflection in their direction.

That was their story, at least, and they weren’t budging. They knew they had out-shot the Caps, 42-28 but that it wasn’t the quality of the attempts that mattered but their nature. In fact, they were counting their breaks, bad and otherwise. Though three of the Washington goals seemed to pinball off sticks, Ilya Bryzgalov demanded precise accounting.

“Four,” the goaltender said.

So the Capitals scored four of their five goals on scenic-route shots. As for the Flyers, they scored one of their two when it mattered, the last coming with 15 seconds to play and 15,000 of the assembled 19,658 no longer there to see anything.

“Deflections are part of the game,” said Chris Pronger, unwilling to accept that the Flyers were beaten by fate. “We could have had deflections, too.”

They could have but they didn’t, because on a night when they had a chance to prove they were ready to win something they were overwhelmed by a team better built for now than later. They were fine early, then sagged. And by the time Alex Ovechkin decided to go to work, they were looking small, timid and unsure that their 4-0-1 record was anything more than an early-season tease.

“We lost, 5-2,” Pronger said. “I think at the end of the day, you look at the game. Turnovers and penalties killed us. At some point, it was going to come back to get us. And it did tonight.”

Claude Giroux scored in the first period, fluffing hopes, puffing out chests. But then the Flyers turned tense, holding onto the puck when they should have been shooting, shooting when they should have been setting up a play. Once that doubt was evident, Ovechkin took advantage of the weakness, his every possession becoming a potential game-changer.

“We did turn the puck over too much in the neutral zone,” Laviolette said. “And they have a quick transition team, so they came back. Then there were four redirects, three off of our sticks.”

The shots were redirected, and by definition, so was the Flyers’ image. At an early-season defining moment, they were either unprepared or unlucky. Does it really matter which?

“I like the start we’ve had,” Laviolette had said earlier. “It’s just a starting point. It’s the beginning of the year. And certainly I’d rather be in this position than where you could be, had the numbers been turned around. In saying that, I feel we have a lot of work to do still on the ice.”

They do, the veterans included. Scott Hartnell’s turnover helped the Caps force a 1-1 tie before Ovechkin scored 1:08 later. Deflections or not, Bryzgalov was ordinary. And it’s six games now. When is it OK to demand that Jaromir Jagr score his 647th career goal?

There will come a time, and he is not promising when, that Laviolette looks at his Flyers and nods. It may come after a long road trip. It may come after a stitch-count injury. It may come in the spring, in a postseason game, the Flyers down by a couple of goals and rallying to win, silencing a crowd in a road game.

It might have been Thursday night that he would feel it, as all coaches do — feel that, yes, he has a very good team.
Flyers unable to deflect Caps’ pressure in loss

By ANTHONY J. SANFILIPPO
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PHILADELPHIA — The refrain of that famous ’60s pop tune by the Shirelles went something like this:

“Mama said there’d be days like this, there’d be days like this my mama said.”

Too bad Mama wasn’t available to warn these young Flyers of what could happen against a very good Washington Capitals team if they weren’t careful to play within their game plan.

As such, the Flyers should have learned a valuable lesson Thursday — despite their fast start, maybe they’re not yet ready to play at that next level.

Alex Ovechkin scored twice as the Capitals out-everythinged the Flyers in a thorough and convincing wallop, 5-2, at Wells Fargo Center.

There wasn’t a thing to like about the game the Flyers played. They were sloppy. They turned the puck over with regularity. And most damming of all — the thing that sticks in coach Peter Laviolette’s craw most — is that they were outskated.

It’s one thing to lose a game when you bust your gut in the effort, it’s another to be lagging behind the play and taking too many penalties to ruin the flow of the game. That’s how it played out for the Flyers.

“The penalties are coming in waves at us right now,” Laviolette said. “There were some turnovers, and we need to limit those. We went to the box too much — at that was obvious and there were also some bad breaks out there tonight. When you put four goals into your own net off of re-directs, that’s tough. I’m not making excuses, it’s a loss and that’s not what we’re looking for.”

Certainly four of the five Washington goals were fluky, but they came on chances that were the result of mistakes elsewhere on the ice.

“There were some careless sticks — I had a couple of high ones,” said Scott Hartnell, whose turnover led to the Capitals first goal. “We have to stay out of the box. It seems like through the first few games here there’ve been a lot of penalties, and I know guys who don’t play special teams lose a little of that excitement sitting on the bench.”

Hartnell played with Jake Voracek and Brayden Schenn — who made his NHL debut — and the line was a combined minus-7, though all three goals allowed came off deflections.

Still bad breaks or not, it’s not a game that can be simply chalked up to bad luck.

‘(Deflections are) part of the game,” Chris Pronger said. “We just as easily could have had a deflection too. I think at the end of the day you look at the game. Turnovers and penalties killed us. They ruin the flow of the game. They ruin the bench and at some point they were going to come back and get us and it did tonight.”

Also part of the game are injuries, and there’s one mysterious one hanging over the Flyers.

Defenseman Kimmo Timonen blocked a shot in the second period that hit his right hand. He skated to the bench doubled over in pain but returned to the game.

However, in the third period, once the Capitals took a 5-1 lead as goals by Roman Hamrlik, Ovechkin and Joel Ward came in a span of 2:25, Timonen headed up the tunnel to have his hand looked at.

Afterward he said it was sore but wouldn’t confirm whether he had an X-ray or if he would be able to play Saturday.

“I don’t think it’s too bad,” was all he would say. “But we’ll see.”

The Flyers goals came courtesy of Sean Couturier and Claude Giroux, who remained red hot scoring for the fifth time this season on a breakaway following a nice strip by Wayne Simmonds of Alex Semin during 4-on-4 play in the first period.

It gave the Flyers a 1-0 lead, but it was all downhill from there.

A shot by Mathieu Perrault went off of Braydon Coburn’s stick and past Ilya Bryzgalov to tie the score at 18:40 of the first period. A little more than a minute later, Ovechkin cashed in after Andrej Meszaros failed to clear a loose puck from the side of the net to give Washington the lead heading into intermission.

“(We had a) decent start to the first, but the last five or six minutes weren’t pretty,” Pronger said. “Well again the penalties in the first ruined the flow, and then we did a pretty good job killing them, but again they ruin the flow of the bench.

“We turned the puck over in the last five minutes a number of times, and eventually the turnovers got to us and they scored a couple of goals on us. *(We had)* a decent second but still (there were) turnovers and that seems to be the word of the day. Turnovers and penalties — and I’m going to stick with it.”

Delaware County Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
A blocked shot. A close call. And a possible injury.

That's what happened in the second period of Thursday’s 5-2 blowout loss by the Flyers to the Washington Capitals when Kimmo Timonen caught a puck off his right hand during a Caps’ power play.

Though he returned to action, he also missed the end of the game and admitted he's not feeling well.

"What do you think? You tell me," Timonen replied when asked how bad he feels.

"I don't think it is anything serious. It's sore, I'll tell you that.

Timonen would not confirm he had an X-ray – it seems likely he did – but said he wasn’t sure about his status for Saturday’s game against St. Louis.

"We’ll see," he said.

This was Timonen's 900th career game. Not exactly something he’ll likely want to remember with fondness.

"Well, it's part of the game," Timonen said. "It happens and overall I thought we could have played better and they had a really good team. We have to learn. We have some young guys and we have to learn from this and move forward."

Flyers handed loss by Ovechkin, Capitals

Turnovers and penalties hurt the Flyers

Peter Laviolette and Chris Pronger talk about what led to the Flyers' demise as they lost to the Caps 5-2. 10/20/11

An early-season attention grabber for “Beast of the East” turned into a stunning, one-sided affair Thursday night.

The Washington Capitals will continue to reign over the Eastern Conference.

Bruce Boudreau’s club deserves the accolade after a humbling 5-2 blowout victory over the Flyers at Wells Fargo Center. It was the Flyers’ first loss in regulation.

Not exactly the way rookie Brayden Schenn (minus-3) envisioned his Flyer debut or how Kimmo Timonen would like to remember his 900th career game, either.

Given the advance billing for this one – the surging and surprising Flyers against the undefeated Caps – the final result was a shocking come-back-down-to-earth loss for Peter Laviolette's club.

There were four deflected goals, goalie Ilya Bryzgalov noted, but Flyer captain Chris Pronger harped on turnovers and penalties (six) as being just as decisive, especially at the end of the first period when the Caps stunned the Flyers for two goals.

“They're part of the game,” Pronger said of deflections. “We just as easily could have had a deflection, too. I think at the end of the day you look at the game. Turnovers and penalties killed us.”

The game lacked for pizzazz for 40 minutes, even though the Flyers owned most of those minutes.

“The second period we played hard, a lot of offensive zone time, but I think we can still do a better job getting to the net,” Laviolette said. “There’s lots of shots, but we need to get in there and muck it up a bit more in front of the goaltender.”

Washington led 2-1 to start the third, then iced it with two quick goals, beginning with a pop fly from the point by defenseman Roman Hamrlik that deflected off a Flyer stick.

The Caps then made a mockery of the game with a power-play goal from Alex Ovechkin, who doubled his season goal total (one), scoring twice in this game.

Ovie’s one-timer in the slot went off a Flyer, making it 4-1 at 3:54.

“One of those nights of ‘where is the puck’ as it hits one of our players or their players and goes right into the net,” Bryzgalov said.

That was followed with another deflected goal, this one, from Joe Ward.

“I think an accurate statement is while there were four redirects, three went off of our sticks,” Laviolette added.

Not since the Boston playoff series last spring have the Flyers been out of game with a full 16 minutes to play.

“We lost our composure in the third period for three, four or five minutes maybe,” Danny Briere said. “They kind of took control … One thing we need to improve is when we have a bad play or bad shift and they score a goal, we have to come back with a better shift than we did tonight.”

The Bryz caught flack from the fans, as well. They gave him derisive cheers for making a stop soon after Ward’s marker. Did they not see the deflections?

For the most part, it was plodding, penalty-filled hockey at the start of the game.

Maybe it had something to do with Laviolette changing up three of lines for an opponent, which is very unlike Laviolette.

Yet, the penalty parade and lack of rolling lines with stale players on the bench continues to taunt the Flyers.

The Flyers survived an early 4-on-3 Caps’ power play. Then, Braydon Coburn went to the box for a four-minute high-sticking call, but the Flyers got lucky on a gift interference call to Ovechkin.

At 4-on-4, Caps winger Alexander Semin was stripped of the puck in his end by Wayne Simmonds. The swipe sent the puck into neutral ice where Claude Giroux outraced everyone, then did a double move to fake out goalie Tomas Vokoun for his fifth goal of the season at 14:25.

That’s also the third time this season that Giroux has scored the first goal of the game.

Four minutes later, however, the Caps tied the game when Scott Hartnell (minus-3) turned the puck over and Mathieu Perreault redirected it.

“A minus-3 is pretty frustrating, but a lot of those goals were a backdoor tip. One went off our stick and I had a bad turnover that first period,” Hartnell said. “You eliminate my turnover and it’s a couple bad breaks.”

It got worse when Andrej Meszaros failed to control a puck behind his net, losing it to Nick Backstrom, who quickly fed it across the crease. Ovechkin buried it with 11.8 seconds left as the crowd boomed.

On the bench, you could see how unhappy Laviolette was losing a lead, then falling behind in the final 1:20.

“The two first goals give you a little breath and you feel good about how you play at the end of the period,” Ovechkin said.

The Flyers had a tough sequence of shots in the second period that Vokoun (40 saves) either stopped or had blocked as no less than four players all had opportunities to tie the game.

One thing that stood out in this game was how little time and space Jaromir Jagr had on the ice.

Unlike the previous five opponents, every time Jagr had the puck on his stick he was swarmed by at least one player. He had precious little time to think about what he might attempt, let alone actually do it.

Vokoun had several outstanding saves that period, including one on Briere, who again had two stick penalties which are piling up.

“I had one I would consider and the other I wouldn’t consider a penalty,” Briere said, adding that his attempt to a lift a stick and clipped a player was an obvious foul. “Honestly, I don’t think the penalties killed us. We couldn’t score.”

Laviolette didn’t entirely agree.

“Again, the penalties, they come in waves on us right now and I’ve already told you about the flow of the bench and everything else,” Laviolette said.

Jagr ready to play former team

October 20, 2011, 2:47 pm


Tonight is his first chance to play the Caps as a member of the Flyers.

“The part of me playing there I’d like to forget,” Jagr said in a serious tone. “I wasn’t very good.

“They’re a great team … great offensive players, goaltending. They look like they always find a way to win hockey games. If the goalie gives up a lot of goals, then find a way to win the hockey game. That’s the whole key to winning.”

What about Alex Ovechkin?

“It’s whole team,” Jagr said. “But he’s a big part of it. He’s very dangerous. You gotta be very careful. You cannot give him much room to operate.”

The general consensus around the National Hockey League is that among the Russian players, it's a tight-knit community.

"All the Russians are tight [as friends]," said Flyers goalie Ilya Bryzgalov.

That said, not all know each other as well as you'd imagine.

What does Bryzgalov know about the Caps' Alex Ovechkin?

A long pause.

"He's Russian," Bryzgalov replied with the straight face amid laughter. "He wears No. 8. He signed a contract with Gillette."

The Bryz said he hasn't studied Ovie much as a shooter, which is different.

Most goalies have books on the top players in the league. Where they like to shoot from on the ice. What kind of moves they make one-on-one. What to expect from them in a shootout, etc.

"I never studied him," Bryzgalov said. "I never had much experience to play against him. Only, I guess, two games. This whole [Eastern] conference is new to me."

Which means, as a shooter, Ovie should have the advantage in Thursday night's game against the Flyers.

"Why?" Bryzgalov asked.

No book on him.

"I don't think so because he doesn't know anything about me," Bryzgalov said.

He knows you're big. And a Russian.

"And I play for Philly, right?" Bryzgalov said laughing.

He did say he is friends with Ovie off the ice. They once had a barbecue together.

"Not hamburgers, but sometimes, ahh, borsch, and kabobs," he said.

You could not have asked for a better, early-season schedule to test the mettle of Peter Laviolette’s Flyers than what this team is going through right now.

Think about it.

Opening night in Boston against the Stanley Cup champs. Then at home against the Cup runner-up in Vancouver. That’s followed with a matchup against Western Conference contender Los Angeles.

Which brings us to Thursday night.

This is the big one. The Flyers against undefeated Washington (5-0-0).

Through five games, the Flyers have 9 points. That’s impressive given a lineup that now includes nine new faces with the addition of Brayden Schenn.

“We’ve played some really good teams so far - the Bruins, the Kings and Vancouver,” Danny Briere said. “But this is probably going to be the hardest. These guys are playing extremely well. They’re playing with a lot of confidence, they haven’t lost. It should be a good challenge to give them their first loss of the season.”

Whoda thunk? Flyers rookie Matt Read has more goals (2) and points (6) than the Caps’ Alex Ovechkin (1 goal, 3 points).

“It hasn’t really crossed my mind; I don’t really think about points or anything like that,” Read said. “I’ve got to make sure I’m showing up every night and playing the best hockey I can and just make the most of every opportunity I can get.”

Claude Giroux leads the Flyers with four goals and seven points. He treasures these kind of matchups against players the caliber of Ovechkin.

“You think about it,” he said. “It kind of makes you more excited for the game. It makes you want to compete a little bit more. Any time you play against top players in this league, you want to play your best hockey, see where you stand.”

The Flyers’ youth brigade led the way against Ottawa on Tuesday with Read, Sean Couturier, Harry Zolnierczyk and even tough guy Zac Rinaldo combining for a total of eight points.

Zolnierczyk and Rinaldo were sent back to the Phantoms on Wednesday to allow for Schenn, another rookie, to join the mix.

“They’ve responded really well,” Briere said of the Flyers’ young players. “It didn’t seem like it bothered them, which is a good thing. Just looking at the first game in Boston, raising the banner, the way they came out at us, the first 10 minutes of that period. I thought we responded well.

“So it’s definitely exciting to see guys play just as well, young guys on the road, at home, it doesn’t matter whether it’s a hostile environment or at home, everyone seems to be responding.”

Added Giroux: “They’ve been stepping up huge, Couts and Read, they’ve been playing very good for us. Any time you have players coming in and stepping up like that, with Richie [Mike Richards] and Cartsy [Jeff Carter] gone, there’s a lot of ice time to be taken and those guys have done a good job.”
No one expected the Coyotes to start the season like world beaters. More lows than highs were expected, at least until some areas of concern got smoothed out.

And after six games, it's safe to say that they are a work in progress. The question is how long that progression will take. Little things too often stymie them, and their big moments are few and far between.

The failure to elevate their game against elite teams is a disturbing trend but also a Catch 22: How do you accomplish that with a disparity in the talent level?

The Coyotes used various intangibles to do just that the past two seasons, and that's what they are desperately seeking again after Thursday night's 2-0 loss to the Los Angeles Kings in front of 7,128 at Jobing.com Arena.

Coach Dave Tippett said he saw a more-determined Coyotes team than the one that lost 5-2 to the Blackhawks 48 hours earlier.

"I'd like to see us execute a little better with the puck," he said. "There's some situations where we could be a little cleaner with the puck.

"I thought (goal tender) Mike Smith was excellent. I thought our compete and try was better, but the bottom line is you've got to find a way to win, and we didn't do that."

The Coyotes were aggressive and found the shooting lanes that eluded them in their loss Tuesday in which they were limited to a season-low 16 shots. Too many little battles went in favor of the Kings, who were able to capitalize on their scoring chances - and the Coyotes' chances were rare.

Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick (4-0-1) was at the top of his game and made 28 saves, getting his second consecutive shutout.

Meanwhile, Smith (1-2-1) was the best player on the ice for the Coyotes. After the Kings scored a power-play goal early in the second period, his teammates could not generate a rally.

Reversing a trend and finding success is the Coyotes' ultimate goal, and Tippett said getting a lead is a good way to do that.

"When we can get a lead . . . our team gets in a rhythm, and when we're chasing it, it's a little harder for us," he said. " . . . We're looking for a play or two to get made. We just got to keep pounding away at it."

The Coyotes opened the second period having to kill 1:44 of a penalty, resulting from a hooking call on Daymond Langkow late in the first.

The Kings came out strong, and Dustin Brown's goal at 19:04 gave his club a 1-0 lead.

With 7:59 to go in the second, the Coyotes faced another key moment after a slashing call against Rusty Klesla. The Coyotes stopped that one, but with 4:37 to go, Kyle Clifford punched one past Smith for a 2-0 lead.

Shane Doan credited Quick with making the key saves, including one with his glove as he was sliding away from the puck.

Quick also stymied the Coyotes twice on power plays in the third period.

"Our power play has to find a way to contribute," Doan said, adding that the Coyotes have to find a way to draw more penalties.

Inducing penalties, Tippett said, comes in large part from gaining control of the puck.

"Usually, you have to beat somebody one on one," he said. "And we just haven't had enough of that execution to beat people one on one that would draw those.

"That being said, there were probably a couple more that I thought could have been called, but that's the way it goes sometimes."
Phoenix Coyotes Dave Tippett: Focus is on teamwork
Coach seeks balance with aggressiveness

By Jim Gintonio and Sarah McLellan - Oct. 20, 2011 11:14 PM
The Arizona Republic | azcentral.com

The Coyotes' buzzwords are structure and aggressiveness. Too much of the latter, however, can lead to recklessness at times.
Coach Dave Tippett knows there is a fine line involved.

"We want to be a hard-working team, that goes without saying, but you've got to do it within a structure," he said. "If you're just out there running around like a chicken with your head cut off, there's not much gonna get done.

"This is a game where you have to play well as a group. If you do that, you skate hard to position, then once you're in position, you allow the other guys to have an impact with you. So individual skating around like crazy is probably not always the answer. We need five guys working together."

The Coyotes failed to accomplish most of their game plan in the 5-2 loss to Chicago on Tuesday. The Blackhawks, among the powers in the Western Conference, won most of the little battles and clogged the shooting lanes all night.
Tippett was asked whether there are times a team can respect an opponent too much.

"We have to concentrate on what we're doing, and the other night we didn't play well as a group," he said. "You have to recognize your opponent coming in, but we have to play as well as we can to give ourselves the best chance to win."

Quicker reaction
A hot start to the season is becoming characteristic for Kings netminder Jonathan Quick.

Last year, Quick went 10-1 to kick off the season and, entering Thursday's meeting with the Coyotes, he was 3-0-1.

But what has impressed Kings bench boss Terry Murray the most about Quick's play is what he's doing when he's not between the pipes.

"The one thing to me that I see a little sharper is his puck play outside of the net," Murray said. "He's getting it off his stick right away."

Chatter among the defensemen and the goaltender is key to not only protect the puck but to organize an attack up the ice. The more Quick is able to help his defensemen, the easier it is to start a transition out of the zone.

"They're the eyes; they're coming back," Murray said about his defensemen. "They've got to let the goalie know where they want the puck moved to - or left. Right now with (Quick), the communication is good, but he's getting the puck off his stick right away.

"He's not lingering behind the net, and that transitions the puck on breakouts. That's an improvement on that part of the game."

Tippett analysis
Here is how Tippett views three of his players after the first few games:
Ray Whitney: "He came in in great shape. Last year, he came to camp and hurt his groin early, kind of set him back for the first little bit, but that line (with Shane Doan and Daymond Langkow) has been pretty solid.

"They're generating some chances; the power play, other than last game, has been pretty good, and he's the catalyst in both of those. He's a good skill player for us, we need his skill to help the scoring end of it, and he's done that so far this year."

Boyd Gordon: "He's a real solid pro, a guy that recognizes what he has to do to help our group win. His face-offs (are) very good, his penalty killing has been very strong, has played pretty well for us the last few games. He's just a good solid pro that goes about his business and does a lot of little things well."

Raffi Torres: "He's been up and down a little bit. I think he's caught right now. I think when you're a new player, you want to come in and kind of give a contribution on the scoreboard, and he needs to have a little more rambunctious in him.

"He's a guy that seems like to me he's feeling his way a little bit; hopefully, there's still some room for growth there. He needs to have an impact in the physical side for him to be an effective player for us."

Arizona Republic LOADED: 10.21.2011
Phoenix Coyotes: Too early to panic?

By Sarah McLellan - Oct. 20, 2011 11:20 PM
The Arizona Republic | azcentral.com

There's a lack of execution, a choppy flow to their attack and an inability to galvanize and maintain momentum.

All of that's combined to equate a 2-3-1 start to the season for the Coyotes after they were defeated 2-0 on Thursday night at Jobing.com Arena by the Los Angeles Kings.

It's only been six games, but is it too early to panic?

"You sound like the reporters in Montreal," goaltender Mike Smith said.

With the Canadiens off to a 1-4-1 start, they're likely feeling the heat, too. But according to Smith, that pressure should be shelved.

"It's early in the season," he said. "We've done a lot of good things. It's too early to hit the panic button. It's a long year; there are a lot of games left."

"...It's the way the season plays out. We've just got to stick with it and not put our heads down and feel sorry for ourselves. We just gotta go get it."

Perhaps that's the mental approach the Coyotes need to take to get to .500 and then above it, but the tactical approach to getting back in the win column is a more complex recipe.

"I'd like to see us execute a little better with the puck," coach Dave Tippett said. "There are some situations where we could be a little cleaner with the puck."

Aside from puck possession and support, special teams continue to play a pivotal factor. The Kings scored the game-winner on a Dustin Brown power-play goal early in the second period while the Coyotes went 0-for-3. Getting a lead and building on it would go a long way for the Coyotes right now.

"It's an ongoing process, and we've gotta keep the pedal on the floor here and just keep improving every game and try and limit the mistakes and try and gain momentum," Smith said.

In fairness, the Kings are considered one of the most improved Western Conference teams and are a threat to take the Pacific Division title. These aren't the Kings circa 2008 when they were at the basement of the division; this is a skilled group from the front line to the goal line.

"It's not like they're all skill and no hustle," defenseman Keith Yandle said. "They work hard, and they bring it every night."

What's added another dynamic to the Kings is the off-season acquisition of Mike Richards from the Philadelphia Flyers. With two bona fide No. 1 centers in Richards and Anze Kopitar, teams are having a tough time defending that depth.

"It really means a lot to come back with that second line," Kings coach Terry Murray said after the game while Richards performed an agility drill nearby.

"It forces other teams to make a decision. (Richards is) a great player in the sense that he sees the ice. He makes plays. You look at the play he made on the power play goal, a strong, strong move to take it to the net.

"He brings a lot and then at the end of the game, you see he's out on the ice protecting the lead. So I'm gonna rely on him a lot."

So far, the Kings have set the standard in the division. They have talented centers, a top-tier defenseman in Drew Doughty and a blossoming goalie in Jonathan Quick. But the Coyotes will have more opportunities to prove they can keep pace.

"They're a tough team," Yandle said. "It's gonna be tough playing against them five more times."

Arizona Republic LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jonathan Quick, Kings beat Coyotes 2-0

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

PHOENIX (AP) — Jonathan Quick may be on pace to equal last season's start.

A year ago, the Los Angeles Kings won 12 of their first 15 games. At the beginning of the current season, the Kings are 4-1-1, and have allowed only nine goals in six games.

On Thursday night, Quick made 28 saves for his second straight shutout, leading the Kings to a 2-0 victory over the Phoenix Coyotes. Two nights earlier, Quick shut out St. Louis in the Kings' home opener.

"This team has great accountability," said Quick, who has 16 career shutouts. "We take pride in our defensive game, and have come to expect solid play on defense."

Dustin Brown and Kyle Clifford scored in the second period.

Phoenix dropped to 2-3-1 in front of an announced crowd of 7,128.

In recording his 100th NHL win, Quick became the first Los Angeles goalie to turn in back-to-back shutouts since Mathieu Garon on April 1-3, 2006.

Quick was required to make only a few difficult saves. Two came in the first period when the goalie stopped defenseman Rostislav Klesla in close, and then deflected Ray Whitney's 20-foot blast from the slot into the left corner.

Later, Raffi Torres, open in the slot, shot wide on a Phoenix power play 5 minutes into the final period, and late in the period with the Kings' Mike Richards off for tripping, the Coyotes pulled goalie Mike Smith for an extra attacker, but could not dent Quick.

"Each guy is doing his job and it's a total team effort," defenseman Rob Scuderi said. "We're playing a strong team game and when things are easy, they go your way."

The Kings entered the game as the fourth-best defensive team, and proceeded to shut down Phoenix. Though the Coyotes outshot Los Angeles in the opening period, the Kings tightened through the final two periods and held Phoenix to a combined 17 shots.

In the meantime, Los Angeles eliminated good Phoenix chances by essentially standing at the blue line, and prevented the Coyotes from penetrating into the offensive end. Plus, the Kings' solid puck movement through the neutral zone cut down on Phoenix's chances against Quick.

The Kings struck early in the second period, and made that goal stand up.
Brown banged in his own rebound on a power play less than a minute into the period, and that was all Quick needed.

"The bottom line is we have to find ways to win," Phoenix coach Dave Tippett said. "We need to be more determined and would like to see us execute better with the puck."

The Kings increased their lead when Clifford, crashing down the left wing, converted a pass from Kevin Westgarth into his first of the season at 15:23 of the second period.

Despite that the Kings opened with two games in Sweden, and five of their first six on the road, the 4-1-1 record is no mistake.

"When we saw the schedule, players began preparing for this stretch," Kings coach Terry Murray said. "We have great leadership, veteran players and each took it upon themselves to recognize what we faced in the opening two weeks of the season."

NOTES: Phoenix captain Shane Doan is a goal short of 300 for his 16-year NHL career. ... Kings defenseman Drew Doughty missed his second straight game after sustaining an upper-body injury in Philadelphia. ... The Kings return to Staples Center for games against Dallas and New Jersey. ... After a trip to Anaheim, the Coyotes are home for games against Dallas, New Jersey and the Kings.
By Josh Yohe, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Friday, October 21, 2011

The Penguins were more physically and defensively sound against Montreal in Thursday’s 3-1 victory at Consol Energy Center than they have been all season.

It wasn’t a coincidence.

Having the team’s vocal leader — who happens to specialize in physical and defensive play — back in the lineup might explain the Penguins’ performance.

Defenseman Brooks Orpik, who had been saddled with lingering pain from summer abdominal surgery, returned to action against the Canadiens.

"It was totally contagious having him back," said center Joe Vitale, who scored his first goal of the season.

"It was infectious having him on the bench. It gives us, as forwards, and the entire team more confidence knowing he’s there. It makes you play more physical."

The Penguins outhit Montreal, 26-15. Although Orpik, perhaps playing cautiously because it was his first game back, wasn’t credited with a hit, his mere presence was enough to propel the Penguins to a more physical style.

"And I thought he was great all night," said defenseman Ben Lovejoy, who played much of the game with Orpik. "He has that presence about him. (Being physical) definitely trickled down to all of us. And that’s what we wanted to do. Montreal’s a smaller, skilled team. We needed to be physical."

On a night when body checks were more prominent than scoring chances, a couple of the Penguins’ bruisers enjoyed big nights.

Right wing Arron Asham scored a goal in the third period to give the Penguins all the breathing room they’d need. Defenseman Deryk Engelland also was productive, producing two assists in the first multi-point game of his NHL career. He also dished a team-high six hits.

"You have to be physical against a team like that," Engelland said. "Some of their best players maybe don’t like getting hit."

Right winger James Neal scored his NHL co-leading seventh goal of the season to give the Penguins the lead in the first period, and Vitale made it a two-goal advantage early in the second, when he deflected Engelland’s shot past Montreal goalie Carey Price.

Asham put the Penguins ahead to stay in the third by whacking an Engelland rebound out of midair and past Price.

"We stuck to the system all night and played a solid game," Vitale said.

Goalie Marc-Andre Fleury lost a shootout late in regulation, when left wing Brian Gionta floated a shot from the right point that beat the goaltender. Fleury stopped 27 shots for his fourth victory.

"It would have been nice to get him that shootout," Lovejoy said. "He was our best player all night."

But maybe the most important player all night was Orpik, who was promised by general manager Ray Shero he’d play at least 82 games this season, even though he has already missed eight games of the 82-game schedule.

"I had a good laugh with Ray yesterday," Orpik said. "He said, ‘Believe me, you’ll play 82 games this year. It just won’t be 82 regular-season games.’"

Scoring breakdown

First period

Penguins, 1-0 (8:55): Left wing James Neal fired a puck from the left circle that hit the post, then bounced off Montreal goalie Carey Price and barely across the goal line. Center Richard Park and left wing Steve Sullivan picked up assists.

Second period

Penguins, 2-0 (2:38): Defenseman Deryk Engelland intercepted a clearing attempt and fired a shot from the blue line that was deflected by center Joe Vitale past Price.

Third period

Penguins, 3-0 (5:20): Right wing Arron Asham whacked a rebound of an Engelland shot from the point out of midair and past Price. The play was reviewed and stood.

Penguins, 3-1 (18:24): Left wing Brian Gionta fired a shot from the right point that soared over goalie Marc-Andre Fleury for Montreal’s only goal.

Tribune Review LOADED: 10.21.2011
Penguins, Neal are not talking extension yet

By Rob Rossi and Josh Yohe, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Friday, October 21, 2011

James Neal has scored a lot of goals early this NHL season, but Penguins general manager Ray Shero said there is no rush to begin talks about a contract extension.

Neal scored his team-best seventh goal, tied for the league lead, Thursday night for the Penguins in a 3-1 victory over the Montreal Canadiens at Consol Energy Center. He could become a restricted free agent July 1 and will be eligible for salary arbitration, but the Penguins would retain his rights.

“We'll likely wait a little bit,” Shero said of potential extension talks with Neal's agent, Pat Morris. "He has an agent I've dealt with well over the years. When the time comes, we'll get something done. There's no doubt in that.”

Morris confirmed there have been no talks regarding Neal, whose current salary-cap hit is $2,875,000.

Last week, the Penguins extended the contract of left wing Chris Kunitz, retaining him for the next two seasons at his current annual cap hit ($3,725,000).

Neal, 24, was acquired Feb. 21 along with defenseman Matt Niskanen from Dallas in exchange for defenseman Alex Goligoski.

Neal struggled after joining the Penguins last season, scoring only once in the regular season and adding a playoff goal. However, he has flourished this season after switching from left to right wing and despite the Penguins playing six of nine games without top centers Sidney Crosby (concussion) and Evgeni Malkin (right knee).

"Like any other player we've wanted to sign, we'll find a way to sign him,” Shero said of Neal. "And we'll find a way with James as well.”

Penguins center Dustin Jeffrey said he was close to returning to the lineup Thursday morning. Less than eight hours later, he backed up his words. Jeffrey, who hadn't played since tearing his ACL in March against the Flyers, returned to the lineup. The team's busy schedule has prevented Jeffrey from receiving much work in practice because, frankly, there hasn't been much time for practice. Jeffrey started on the fourth line with center Mark Letestu and right wing Craig Adams. With Jeffrey in the lineup, Left wing Steve MacIntyre was a healthy scratch.

Center Evgeni Malkin skated before the team's morning skate Thursday but is still suffering from knee soreness and did not play against Montreal.

Center Sidney Crosby skated again with the Penguins but remains uncertain when he will return to the lineup.

Right wing Tyler Kennedy has officially been diagnosed with a concussion by team doctors and did not play against Montreal.

Defenseman Brian Strait has a "hyper-extended elbow", according to coach Dan Bylsma, and is expected to miss at least two weeks.

Canadiens defenseman Hal Gill, who helped the Penguins win the Stanley Cup in 2009, played in his 1,000th career NHL game Thursday night.

General manager Ray Shero, Bylsma, center Jordan Staal, right wings James Neal, Arron Asham and Pascal Dupuis and defenseman Deryk Engelland delivered hot chocolate and pizza to fans waiting in last night's student rush line.

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October 20th, 2011

Some quick hits after the Penguins’ 3-1 victory over Montreal at Consol Energy Center on Thursday night:

= RW James Neal’s response to my telling him that I predicted him to score 17 goals this season: “That’s brutal. I’ve never scored less than 20.”

I attempted to fall on the sword, admit the error of my ways, and perhaps even take credit for providing him some inspiration — except that it was clear he hadn’t read the blog post of my annual goal predictions.

“Maybe I won’t talk to you anymore,” Neal said.

I sat down next to him, not sure how to take that comment. I offered to Neal that he could call me out upon scoring his 18th goal, which at this point might come before C Sidney Crosby returns (not really). I said he could say, No. 18 was for the jerk with long, graying hair!

“I might do that,” Neal said, smiling.

As I report in the Friday’s print edition, there are no talks on a contract extension between Neal’s agent, Pat Morris, and Penguins GM Ray Shero. That doesn’t mean Shero plans on letting Neal, an impending RFA, go anywhere.

“Like any other player we’ve wanted to sign we’ll find a way to sign him,” Shero said, “and we’ll find a way with James as well.”

= D Brooks Orpik, in his first game since April, and coming off a re-aggravation of an abdominal injury that required offseason surgery, played 4:24 on the PK against Montreal. He only played 17:54 overall, so that means about 25 percent of his ice time was on the PK. So much for the HE’S NOT REALLY READY, HE’S JUST PLAYING BECAUSE (D KRIS) LETANG IS OUT theory.

= RW Arron Asham said his fist-pump goal celebration is indeed tribute to Penguins legend Mario Lemieux.

“You didn’t notice that last year in the playoffs?” he said.

I shrugged then asked if he would pull out any other variations of Lemieux’s graceful goal celebrations.

“No, those other ones are his,” Asham said. “But I’ve been doing this one, and I hope he’s OK with it.”

Season is not a month old, but I’d say Asham and D Ben Lovejoy are neck-and-neck for this season’s “Good Guy” award.

= How to dominate a game without registering a shot: deliver a hit, recorded two apiece of takeaways and blocks, go 13-for-21 in the circle, and play 3:25 of your 21:30 shorthanded to help limit the Canadiens to six shots four man-advantages.

Me, beating a rented mule: C Jordan Staal is really, really good.

= Late Monday night, after a 2-1 loss at Winnipeg, a second straight regulation loss, the Penguins were without a handful of key players, facing a next-night game at Minnesota, with excuses ready at their disposal.

Now they are 5-2-2, and looking like a good bet to get through this treacherous October (13 games) in decent shape, with Crosby (concussion) and C Evgeni Malkin seemingly soon to return.

“First of all, I think the game against Winnipeg, our start, wasn’t indicative of our team and the way we want to play,” coach Dan Bylsma said. “The leadership of our group responded the next game – Staalsy, (LW Chris)
Defenseman Brooks Orpik and forward Dustin Jeffrey played in their first game -- preseason or regular season -- when the Penguins beat Montreal, 3-1, Thursday night at Consol Energy Center.

Orpik, a physical defenseman, was coming off of summer abdominal surgery on his right side after having the same procedure a year earlier on his left side.

His journey of discomfort, surgeries, rehabilitation and setbacks left him a bit tentative despite assurances he was not putting himself at risk by playing.

"I've just got to believe them and go with it," Orpik said.

A hectic schedule -- it was the Penguins' ninth game in the first 15 days -- made it tough for Orpik to get quality practices after he was cleared to be on the ice.

"I just tried to be patient with it," he said. "It's still a little achy here and there, but I think it's as good as it's going to [be]."

Jeffrey had ligament surgery on his right knee in March and was cleared for contact several days ago.

More injury updates

- Center Evgeni Malkin missed his fourth game in a row and sixth in the past seven games because of lingering soreness in his surgically repaired right knee. Malkin was on the ice before but not during the game-day skate.

- "There was not a setback," coach Dan Bylsma said, adding that Malkin is improving and his status is day-to-day.

- "It's just with the amount of games we're playing, if he were to play every day we would be dealing with him being sore and stiff. It needs to calm down, to get better."

- Bylsma confirmed that winger Tyler Kennedy has a concussion. He will have to be symptom-free to move forward. He missed his third game.

- Rookie defenseman Brian Strait, injured Tuesday in Minnesota, has a hyperextended left elbow and will be out for a number of weeks.

- Center and captain Sidney Crosby skated before and during the morning skate as he comes back from a concussion. He has been cleared for contact for more than a week but has had a difficult time getting hit in practice because of the team's schedule.

Crosby, Jeffrey, Orpik and Malkin stayed behind while the Penguins traveled to Winnipeg and Minnesota earlier this week and skated with conditioning coach Mike Kadar.

Crosby and Jeffrey indicated there was contact, but it was not the open-ice, jarring type.

"We battled," Jeffrey said. "We did some stuff along the boards. We had to fight through a check. Stuff like that. I wouldn't say it was skating at center ice trying to hit each other."

As a matter of paperwork, the Penguins took Orpik and Jeffrey off of injured reserve and placed Kennedy and Strait on IR.

Salute to Gill

Hal Gill, who broke into the NHL in 1997, played his 1,000th game Thursday night.

The timing could not have been more appropriate. The towering defenseman was part of the Penguins' 2009 Stanley Cup team.

"Someone was asking me what the highlights [of my career] were," Gill said. "I think there's only one. You play to win. You get one Cup, and you want more."

The Penguins had a brief tribute to Gill in the game.

"I love the fans here," he said. "They understand the game. They understand hard work. They appreciate that.

"And I think when I was here, I tried to do that, to work hard, and I think they appreciated that. I miss the fans here."

Tip-ins

Penguins defenseman Kris Letang served the second and final game of his NHL-imposed suspension. ... Penguins forward Craig Adams, in penalty-killing duties, took a puck to the nose at the morning skate but was able to play. ... Penguins winger and leading goal-scorer James Neal did not participate in the morning skate but was in the lineup.
Right on the Marc Fleury stops Canadiens, 3-1
Late goal denies him a shutout, but early saves set the stage for win vs. Montreal

By Dave Molinari, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 27 shots Thursday night and, yeah, he wishes it could have been 28.
Would have been nice to get the 20th shutout of his career and the first against the team based an hour or so from his hometown.
But the Brian Gionta slap shot that eluded him with 96 seconds left in regulation spoiled his shutout bid, not his evening.
He had played too well, contributed too much to the Penguins’ 3-1 victory against Montreal at Consol Energy Center, to agonize over a goal that damaged nothing except his personal stats.
"It happened," Fleury said. "At least, we got the win."
And the Penguins got it, in large part, because of some quality work Fleury did early in the game.
Like when he denied Erik Cole from in front of the net at 2:55 of the first period, Mathieu Darche on a shorthanded breakaway at 5:33 and Tomas Plekanec from the slot a few minutes later.
"It could have easily been 2-0," defenseman Brooks Orpik said, "and who knows where the game goes?"
Fleury made sure it ended up in the victory column, raising the Penguins record to 5-2-2, even though they were again without centers Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin -- remember them? -- as well as defenseman Kris Letang and forward Tyler Kennedy.
Of course, it helped that Orpik and forward Dustin Jeffrey made their 2011-12 debuts and, from coach Dan Bylsma's perspective, "both did really well."
Orpik took a fairly regular shift, logging 17 minutes and 54 seconds of ice time, including 4:24 while the Penguins were shorthanded.
"I probably felt like I could have played a little more," he said. "But it was probably good to get limited minutes and kind of gradually get back in."
Jeffrey, who did not know he would be in the lineup until after the pregame warmups, got significantly less work. He played seven minutes, 54 seconds and recorded three shots on goal.
"I thought he was real smart in his play," Bylsma said.
Montreal got left winger Mike Cammalleri -- one of the game’s most accomplished Penguins-killers in recent seasons -- back after he missed three games because of a skate cut on his leg, but Canadiens center Scott Gomez went off with an unspecified injury after taking four shifts and did not return. Didn’t much matter. The Penguins had the better of play much of the game, mostly because they fared so well in one-on-one battles, no matter who was on the ice for Montreal.
"They were dictating the pace of the game," Montreal defenseman Hal Gill said.
The Penguins got the only goal of the opening period, courtesy of -- who'd have guessed? -- James Neal.
He threw the puck toward the Montreal net from above the left dot, then watched it glance off Canadiens defenseman Josh Gorges, the left post and Montreal goalie Carey Price before wobbling across the goal line for Neal's seventh in nine games.
"I think he fanned on it or something," Price said. "It hit the post and hit the back of my pants and went in the net."
That's the kind of thing that happens for a guy when he is on the kind of roll Neal has been, with seven goals in the first nine games.
"If you keep shooting the puck on the net, good things are going to happen," Neal said.
Penguins control game defeat Canadiens, 3-1

By Shelly Anderson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Penguins were in control most of the game in a 3-1 win over the Montreal Canadiens tonight at Consol Energy Center. James Neal scored his team-leading seventh goal to give the Penguins a 1-0 lead. From the left circle he took a feed from behind the net by Steve Sullivan. His shot clanked off the near post, off the back of Montreal goaltender Carey Price and over the goal line at 8:55 of the first period.

The Penguins also got the only goal of the second period. Joe Vitale deflected a shot from the right point by Deryk Engelland past Price to make it 2-0 at 2:38.

Arron Asham, who was playing in his 700th NHL game, gave the Penguins a 3-0 lead at 5:20 of the third period when he batted the puck out of the air and past Price.

Engelland, who picked up his second assist, had shot the puck from the right extended goal line. The puck bounced off of Price. Asham was driving down the slot when he swiped at the puck and knocked it in.

The play was reviewed, but it was ruled Asham did not play the puck with a high stick.

Montreal ruined Penguins goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury's bid for his first shutout against his hometown team when Mathieu Darsche deflected in a shot by Brian Gionta with 1:36 left in regulation.

The Penguins play Saturday at home against New Jersey.
Orpik returns to Penguins tonight vs. Montreal

By Shelly Anderson, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Penguins defenseman Brooks Orpik will make his season debut tonight against Montreal at Consol Energy Center. He has not played any preseason or any of the team's eight regular-season games as he recovered from offseason abdominal surgery.

"It's been a long time waiting, that's for sure," Orpik said. "It's still a little achey here and there, but I think it's as good as it's going to get."

With defenseman Kris Letang serving the second and final game of an NHL-imposed suspension, Orpik will be paired with Deryk Engelland, although coach Dan Bylsma indicated that Orpik might not play his normal amount of minutes, and that he probably will focus on just being sound defensively rather than play his typical hard-hitting game.

In several other Penguins personnel matters:

• Center Evgeni Malkin will miss his fourth game in a row, sixth overall, because of lingering soreness in his surgically repaired right knee. He skated early today but not in the team's morning skate.

• Winger James Neal did not participate in the morning skate but is expected to play.

• Bylsma confirmed that winger Tyler Kennedy has a concussion. He will be out of commission until he is symptom-free.

• Forward Craig Adams took a puck to the nose in the morning skate but said he is fine to play.

• Rookie defenseman Brian Strait, injured Tuesday in Minnesota, has a hyperextended elbow.

• Forward Dustin Jeffrey, who had knee surgery in March, is so close to being ready to return that he said it is now up to the coaches rather than the trainers.

• Center Sidney Crosby, who a week ago was cleared for contact as he comes back from a concussion, continues to practice. He skated before and during the team's morning skate.

For Montreal, winger Mike Cammalleri said he will return tonight. He has missed three games after he got a deep leg cut from a teammate's skate.

Post Gazette LOADED: 10.21.2011
San Jose Sharks captain Joe Thornton will skate in 1,000th NHL game

By David Pollak
dpollak@mercurynews.com
Posted: 10/20/2011 08:52:22 PM PDT
Updated: 10/20/2011 11:40:30 PM PDT

Had Joe Thornton missed one more game over the past 14 years, his milestone 1,000th would have come Saturday where it all started in Boston, not Friday against the New Jersey Devils.

But Thornton dismissed any added significance that would have had for an event he's downplaying.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "Just one of those things."

The Sharks captain, who will play in his 468th game as a Shark after 532 with the Boston Bruins, says the sense of his accomplishment likely will mean more to him in the future.

"I know a lot of guys who played 900 and some odd games, and they always wished they played 1,000 games," he said. "You kind of realize after your career is done how big it was."

Coach Todd McLellan, however, treats it as a "remarkable milestone" now.

"It shows that you have the talent to play for that amount of time, you've been able to keep your game elite, you probably started at a very young age, you've taken care of yourself, remained healthy and contributed," McLellan said.

Thornton, the NHL's overall No. 1 pick in the 1997 draft, remembers his first game coming against the Phoenix Coyotes.

"I was just so, so nervous. That's all I can really remember," he said. "It was in Phoenix, and I played three or four minutes. That's how rookies broke in back then."

Thornton will become the 29th current NHL player to hit the 1,000 mark -- following another player who broke in with Boston in 1997, Montreal defenseman Hal Gill, by one day.

The Sharks will recognize Thornton's achievement Nov. 3 with a pregame ceremony.

San Jose Sharks at New Jersey Devils

By David Pollak
dpollak@mercurynews.com
Posted: 10/20/2011 08:24:42 PM PDT
Updated: 10/20/2011 10:45:39 PM PDT

SHARKS AT NEW JERSEY
Faceoff: 4 p.m. at Prudential Center, Newark, N.J.

TV/Radio: CSNCA; 98.5, 102.1

Devils update: The Devils will be without goalie Martin Brodeur, who is sidelined with a shoulder injury. But backup Johan Hedberg, who spent one season in the Sharks organization, has been perfect so far at 3-0 with a 1.41 goals against average and a .945 save percentage.

Sharks update: The special teams good news? San Jose’s power play picked up where it left off and, through Wednesday, ranked fourth in the NHL with a 27.8 percent success rate. The bad news? The penalty kill has dropped to 28th with a 73.3 percent success rate. ... The Sharks have not won in New Jersey since Nov. 14, 2000. ... Forward Benn Ferriero was recalled from Worcester.

Devils injuries: G Brodeur (shoulder) and C Travis Zajac (Achilles) are out.

Sharks injuries: G Antero Niittymaki (hip surgery) is out.

-- DAVID POLLAK

HITTING THAT 1,000 MILESTONE

Joe Thornton becomes the 12th player to reach the 1,000th game of his NHL career as a Shark. Here are the others:

1. Doug Wilson  Nov. 21, 1992
2. Gaetan Duchesne  Feb. 26, 1995
6. Vincent Damphousse  April 6, 1999
7. Ron Sutter  Oct. 16, 1999
10. Mike Ricci  Feb. 11, 2004
San Jose Sharks will begin their long road trip with Marty Havlat in lineup

By David Pollak
dpollak@mercurynews.com
Posted: 10/20/2011 03:29:50 PM PDT
Updated: 10/20/2011 11:40:28 PM PDT

Maybe the Sharks can draw inspiration from the fact their captain will be playing in his 1,000th NHL game. Or that right wing Marty Havlat will be making his teal debut.

San Jose is looking for anything that helps it snap a three-game losing streak and fix a multitude of problems Friday on the road against the New Jersey Devils. And neither Joe Thornton's major milestone nor the availability of Havlat, the injured forward being counted on for offensive production, can hurt the cause.

Their circuitous six-game, 13-day journey -- which begins in New Jersey, ends with two games in New York and includes stops in Boston, Nashville and Detroit -- may seem ill-timed.

But players are trying to make the most of it and take advantage of the team-bonding benefits.

"There's no distractions -- not that family and friends are a distraction," Torrey Mitchell said. "Whether you're talking hockey all the time is one thing, but you're at least with each other. And with eight or nine new guys, it's probably a blessing in disguise."

Coach Todd McLellan says it's also a matter of accountability.

"When you wake up in the morning and the first person you see is one of your teammates for 13 days straight, there's no hiding. You don't get to escape there. You're together. It'll be good for us."

McLellan is hoping the presence of Havlat in the lineup also will be good for the Sharks. While the team flew Wednesday to Newark, Havlat was in Cleveland having his surgically repaired shoulder re-examined.

Given medical clearance, Havlat practiced with the team Thursday in Newark. The forward, acquired from the Minnesota Wild in exchange for Dany Heatley, is expected to start on a line with Ryane Clowe and Logan Couture.

The Sharks' 1-3 record is far from the good start that McLellan had been stressing the need for since training camp began. And the players realize the hole they're already in.

"It's super-important, these games early on," said Mitchell, who has played on the second line in Havlat's absence. "You don't want to be playing catch-up. There are teams that are 4-1 and 5-0 and 5-1. At 1-3, it could already take 10 games to catch up to those guys. This road trip is huge for us."

Beyond the erratic route of the trip, the timing of the games also presents a challenge. Ideally, players would like to establish the rhythm that comes with playing every other day.

That hasn't happened this season and won't until the final two games of the trip, Oct. 29 against the New York Islanders and Oct. 31 against the New York Rangers. Until then, they face two back-to-backs and twice have two days off between games.

"We don't complain about it. We just play," Thornton said. "You really worry about things you have somewhat control of, and you don't worry about what you can't."

Among the things the Sharks can worry about: the fact their problems have been at both ends of the ice -- missed opportunities in the offensive zone, critical turnovers in the defensive.

McLellan says he sees the giveaways as the bigger problem and that the offense eventually will take care of itself.

For that to happen, his top line of Thornton, Patrick Marleau and Joe Pavelski -- as well as Couture and Clowe -- will have to show they can score at even strength. In that group, only Pavelski and Clowe have found the back of the net, and their three goals have come on the power play.

"We're getting the chances," McLellan said.

The scoring?

"That will come."

San Jose Sharks acquisition Marty Havlat to play in first game Friday

By David Pollak
dpollak@mercurynews.com
Posted: 10/20/2011 12:54:57 PM PDT
Updated: 10/20/2011 12:57:04 PM PDT

Sharks right wing Marty Havlat has been given clearance to play and will be in the lineup Friday night when the Sharks face the New Jersey Devils. Havlat, who has been recovering from shoulder surgery last May, met with his doctor in Cleveland on Wednesday and got the green light. He is expected to play on a line with Logan Couture and Ryane Clowe.

The Sharks obtained Havlat in July from the Minnesota Wild in exchange for Dany Heatley, both for his speed and offensive skills.

Chris and Anthony Stewart were planning to use extra caution after leaving the Ice Zone in Hazelwood on Thursday.

Their teams, the Blues and the Carolina Hurricanes, had back-to-back practices there in the afternoon and the brothers were planning to have dinner together for the second straight night. But after hanging out downtown Wednesday and watching the Cardinals’ World Series game on TV, their goal was to make Thursday night uneventful.

Now on the third attempt, the Stewarts didn’t want anything to prevent them from facing each other for the first time in the NHL. The first time they were scheduled to meet, Anthony was a last-minute healthy scratch; and last year Chris broke his hand in a fight the game before their anticipated matchup.

“Hopefully nothing happens to one of us,” Chris said, smiling.

“Knock on wood,” said Anthony, who despite being three years older looks and sounds nearly identical to Chris.

Perhaps more unlikely than the circumstances of Chris and Anthony not facing each other twice before is the fact that they’re both in the NHL. Their father, Norman, immigrated to Montreal from Jamaica in the late 1970s, and his infatuation with the Canadiens led to the family’s future interest in hockey. But even then, growing up poor and in rough neighborhoods, playing the sport professionally was only a dream.

It didn’t become a reality until 2003 when the Florida Panthers drafted Anthony 25th overall, followed in 2006 when the Colorado Avalanche selected Chris 18th overall.

Chris, who will turn 24 on Oct. 30, has 69 goals and 138 points in 198 NHL games. Anthony, 26, has 20 goals and 53 points in 191 games with Florida, Atlanta and now Carolina. But while Chris has had more statistical success in the NHL, including 17 goals and 26 points in 36 games since his trade to the Blues from Colorado, he’s always modeled his game after Anthony’s.

“If it weren’t for him, I wouldn’t be where I am today,” Chris said. “He ... set the bar high. Just watching him growing up and learning that power forward game firsthand, he’s the one I learned it from.”

After facing each other in the minor leagues, the brothers had hoped to match up in the NHL a couple of years ago, but Anthony, who was then playing for Florida, was a healthy scratch that night.

“It’s always a big letdown when something like that happens, but that’s part of the game,” Chris said.

Anthony signed in Atlanta last year and the brotherly rivalry was scheduled for Nov. 30, 2010. But on Nov. 27, Chris was involved in a fight with Minnesota Kyle Brodziak and broke his left hand, putting him on the shelf indefinitely.

“My sister was at the game; she texted me and told me ... it stunk,” Anthony said. “The hockey gods didn’t want us playing against each other.”

But tonight, fingers crossed, it’s finally expected to happen.

On Thursday, the brothers were expecting a pregame showdown on Twitter. To monitor that potential bout, follow Chris (@Cstew25) and Anthony (@EhStew13).

“I’m sure he’ll spark something up on Twitter, but that’s not me,” Chris said.

“Maybe a little Twitter battle; we’ll see where it goes,” Anthony said.

Then when the puck drops, the communication will change from tweets to body checks.

“I’ll take his head off,” Chris said. “It’s no joke with concussions going on and stuff like that, but there’s not going to be any lost feelings.”
Perron takes impromptu skate with Blues at practice

By JEREMY RUTHERFORD • jrutherford@post-dispatch.com > 314-444-7135 | Posted: Friday, October 21, 2011 12:05 am

When he woke up Thursday morning, David Perron wasn’t scheduled to practice with the Blues. But when he finished his prepractice session, the winger decided it wouldn’t hurt to ask to stick around and skate with the team.

Perron got the OK from team officials, but for only one drill, which lasted about 15-20 minutes. It didn’t last long, but considering it was his first team practice since suffering a concussion 11 months ago, he wasn’t complaining.

"It felt good," said Perron, who reported no ill effects afterwards. "I wanted to try it out with guys moving around me. It was just one drill. I had the chance to score a goal."

Teammate T.J. Oshie found himself lined up with Perron on the drill, with both headed toward the net.

"I made sure that I was shooting for a rebound, so (Perron) could slam it home," Oshie said. "You could see when he threw it in the net, all the guys were screaming for him. It was pretty good. It's great to see him out there. It's a tough time for the team right now after our trip, but it put a little smile on our face seeing him out there with the boys."

When Perron will be back full-time with the boys is still undetermined. Just as there were no plans for him to skate with the team Thursday, there are no plans for his next practice.

"It's just another step," said Perron, who rejoined the Blues in September. "It's impossible to say what's next after tomorrow. Hopefully, I keep practicing with the team and increase my progression from there. The good part is if I keep increasing, it means that I felt good enough to do that and that's basically the positive you have to take out of that."

While a return to the ice Thursday might suggest Perron is close to returning to game action, he was quick to point out the concussion case of Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby.

"You look at the Crosby situation, he's been practicing for a month and half now with the team and still isn't playing," Perron said. "Who knows how long it's going to take. (But) it's a good thing to follow. It's not like we have no idea what's going to happen."

HALAK OR ELLIOTT?

Blues coach Davis Payne said he had made up his mind which goaltender — Jaroslav Halak or Brian Elliott — would play tonight against Carolina, but he would not reveal his decision until today's morning skate.

Elliott has the Blues' only victory in their last four games, a 4-2 win over San Jose on Tuesday. Halak is 0-3 in his past three starts.

COLAIACOVO READY

Defender Carlo Colaiacovo, who has missed five games since suffering a concussion in the season opener, skated Thursday and could be in the lineup tonight.

"For the first five, six days, the (headaches) were really intense," Colaiacovo said. "Once they started to settle down and go away, I was able to pick up my normal routine and get back into the gym. I haven't had any setbacks, so it's been good."

BLUE NOTES

The Blues altered their forward combinations Thursday, putting Vladimir Sobotka, David Backes and Chris Stewart on a line together and matching Chris Porter, Patrik Berglund and Oshie. ... Barret Jackman didn’t practice Thursday; he and wife Jenny celebrated the birth of their second child, Makena Paige.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.21.2011
Matchup: St. Louis Blues vs. Carolina Hurricanes

Jeremy Rutherford | Posted: Friday, October 21, 2011 12:00 am

When — Tonight at 7
Where — Scottrade Center
TV, radio — FSM, KMOX (1120 AM)

Blues — Returning home for one game following a 1-3 trip, the Blues are 1-1 at Scottrade Center after losing their opener to Nashville 4-2 and beating Calgary 5-2. After tonight’s game, the team will fly to Philadelphia for the start of four consecutive road games.

Hurricanes — Carolina lost its first three games in a span of four days, but it has rebounded with three consecutive victories — a win over Buffalo and a pair of wins over Boston. Goaltender Cam Ward has stopped 98 of 104 shots in the winning streak.

What to watch — The Blues might start goaltender Brian Elliott after Jaroslav Halak struggled on the recent trip. Elliott is 1-0, with a 4-2 win over San Jose in which he made a game-saving stop on Dan Boyle late in the third period.

Injuries — Blues — D Carlo Colaiacovo (concussion), probable; LW Andy McDonald (concussion), RW B.J. Crombeen (shoulder) and LW David Perron (concussion), out. Hurricanes — LW Zac Dalpe (lower body), out.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.21.2011
Perron practices with Blues for first time

By JEREMY RUTHERFORD | Posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 3:57 pm

Blues winger David Perron skated alone early Thursday morning and then decided that it was time. He wanted to join the team in practice after his own session.

Perron got the OK from team officials and participated in one drill, which lasted about 15-20 minutes, before leaving the ice. That was pre-planned, so no one should take his quick exit as a bad sign.

"It felt good," Perron said. "I wanted to try it out with guys moving around me. It was just one drill. I had the chance to score a goal."

Teammate T.J. Oshie found himself lined up with Perron on the drill, with both headed to the net. Oshie knew that nobody cared if he scored.

"I made sure that I was shooting for a rebound, so (Perron) could slam it home," Oshie said. "You could see when he threw it in the net, all the guys were screaming for him. It was pretty good.

"It's great to see him out there. It's a tough time for the team right now after our road trip, but it put a little smile on our face seeing him out there with the boys."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 10.21.2011
Perron is allowed to be more active in practice

ST. LOUIS -- There was a familiar face wearing a bright red noncontact jersey at St. Louis Blues practice Thursday morning.

It was Blues winger David Perron, whose much documented battle to return from post-concussion syndrome may finally be taking a positive turn.

Perron skated on his own Thursday before practice, then was given clearance to join the team for a drill that lasted about 20 minutes.

"I felt good and I wanted to try it out with guys moving around me," Perron said after his first practice with the Blues since last season. "It was good, it went well. The positive part is I'm still progressing, so that means I'm doing better."

Teammate T.J. Oshie nearly set him up for a goal on a rebound chance and his teammates seemed glad to see Perron be more active on the ice.

While he left the ice after that, it was anything but a setback for Perron.

"It was good to be on the ice with the guys today and I think they were happy for me, too," Perron said.

He has not played since Nov. 4 when he suffered a concussion after being blindsided by San Jose's Joe Thornton.

"It's definitely something that was good, it was to follow the guys on the ice and not have to stay in the gym while they're practicing," Perron said. "It's just one step, there's many more to go. But it's good, it felt good."

Blues coach Davis Payne said the plan was to have Perron work through one drill.

"There's a lot of conditioning, a lot of strengthening, a lot of timing that has to go on," Payne said. "He's been doing a lot of stuff on his own. ... There are certain things you want to expose the guy to as he continues to get better."

Perron began doing light workouts and some skating on his own in August. His progress has been slow, but in his mind any progress is something exciting at this point.

"So far we've been doing more repetitions with lighter weights," Perron said when asked about his off-ice conditioning. "I'm in my fourth week of doing that and it's been going good. It's just getting back into it, (but) it's not going to be possible to get the strength I would get in a summer program.

"I'll keep increasing my weights and changing the program as we go."

Perron said he hoped to feel well enough to participate in the morning skate today before the Blues-Hurricanes game at Scottrade Center.

"It's impossible to say what's next after tomorrow, but hopefully I keep practicing with the team and increase my progression from there," he said.

Blues defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo, out with a head injury suffered against Calgary on Oct. 10, put in a full practice Thursday and could be in the lineup tonight.

"It was a tough couple weeks there for me and I'm just happy to be a hockey player again," Colaiacovo said. "Thankfully it was something I was able to overcome quickly and get back out there. I've been working real hard for the last week and skating every day since Monday.

"I had a real good skate today and felt great out there."

Colaiacovo said he experienced concussion-like symptoms, but was able to overcome them fairly quickly.

"The biggest thing for me was just trying to get rid of my headaches," he said. "The first five or six days they were really intense. Once they started to settle down and go away I was able to pick up my normal routine and get back into the gym. I haven't had any setbacks."

Blues line juggling

With the Blues limping along following a 1-3 road trip, Payne altered the look of his lines considerably at practice Thursday.

One of the most significant changes was having David Backes center a line that included Chris Stewart and Vladimir Sobotka.

"Sobotka and Backes are two guys that really work the game and compete in the battles," Payne said. "We'll see if we can't give Stewie an opportunity to follow along and play in some of the tougher areas."

Former University of North Dakota standouts Oshie and Chris Porter were on a line centered by Patrik Berglund, with Jason Arnott centering Alex Steen and Jamie Langenbrunner.

Wingers Matt D'Agostini, Evgeny Grachev and Ryan Reaves all saw time on the checking line with center Scott Nichol.

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 10.21.2011
ST. LOUIS -- After considering a career in football or maybe even track, Chris Stewart followed brother Anthony Stewart's advice and gave hockey one more shot.

Already a solid player for the Ontario Hockey League's Kingston Frontenacs in 2004, Anthony Stewart convinced them to give his brother a tryout.

That tryout led to a solid rookie season by Chris Stewart --and an eventual spot in the NHL for both brothers.

"If it wasn't for him pulling me aside, telling me to give my head a shake and really giving me that opportunity in Kingston, I wouldn't be here today," said Chris Stewart, now one of the top forwards for the St. Louis Blues.

"He obviously set the bar high and I had the footsteps to follow in the family. Just watching him growing up and learning first-hand that power forward game ... he's the one I learned it from."

The brothers will face each other on the ice for the first time in their NHL careers tonight at Scottrade Center when the Blues play host to the Carolina Hurricanes.

Their paths to opposite dressing rooms tonight were anything but ordinary.

They are two of seven children born to parents Norman Stewart, a Jamaican immigrant and former star cricket player living in Toronto, and Sue Stewart, their Canadian-born mother.

It's hard for anyone to have an NHL career, let alone two brothers of mixed heritage growing up poor among seven children in a Toronto suburb.

These aren't ordinary brothers.

Chris Stewart, 23, was the 18th overall pick in the 2006 draft by the Colorado Avalanche. Anthony Stewart, 25, was the 25th overall pick in the 2003 draft by the Florida Panthers.

Chris Stewart is one of the league's top young power forwards with 69 goals and 138 points in 198 games with the Blues and Avalanche.

Anthony Stewart is on his third NHL team and has 20 goals and 53 points in 191 games. He's hopeful of carving out a solid role with the Hurricanes.

Visa problems have prevented Norman Stewart from ever seeing his sons play outside of Canada, something Chris Stewart said he hopes is remedied in time for a game at Carolina later this season.

"Any Canadian game we play, he's there," Chris Stewart said. "Once he gets here he might not leave. He loves the game, he watches every game -- and I'm sure he'll feel like a kid on Christmas watching tomorrow."

Chris Stewart admitted both brothers would like their dad at the game tonight.

"If you know my dad, he's comfortable at home in front of the TV," Chris Stewart said. "It's going to feel good either way, (but) I'm sure he'd rather be here in person."

The brothers did have dinner together Wednesday night and again Thursday in St. Louis, happy to soak in some atmosphere from the St. Louis Cardinals' World Series games against the Texas Rangers.

"We went down and caught the end of it down there," Chris Stewart said. "It was a good atmosphere, it was just a little cold for me."

Once the Blues-Hurricanes game begins tonight, don't expect either brother to back down from a chance to punish the other.

"I'll take his head off," joked Chris Stewart. "I'm sure he'll spark something up on Twitter, but that's not me."

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 10.21.2011
Tampa Bay Lightning

Brewer checks out OK, back in lineup

By TBO.COM

Published: October 21, 2011

TAMPA --

After missing practice Wednesday, Lightning D Eric Brewer returned to the ice Thursday.

Brewer, who had back surgery earlier in his career, said he had something crop up on him Tuesday and wanted to make sure nothing new was bothering him.

"It's just the day-to-day of the season and everybody is going to have something at some point and I just felt that I needed to address it," Brewer said. "I could have practiced (Wednesday). I just wanted to throw a few questions by some people and carry on; I felt fine out there (on the ice Thursday) morning."

Brewer did not address whether the situation was related to his back or if he took any kind of an injection to alleviate what Lightning coach Guy Boucher referred to as "some swelling" that Brewer experienced.

"I don't feel any worse than I have and I actually feel a little better," Brewer said. "It's not anything I'm scared of or worried about, it's just how the season goes. You are busy at the start of the season and everybody has a different routine in the fall and I just have to tweak mine a little bit. Once the days start to roll, roll, roll, you just have to get in that."

Tampa Bay is already without veteran D Mattias Ohlund, who had arthroscopic surgery on his knees last week and could be out until December.

Not striking

The new Tesla coils that will shoot live lightning bolts when Tampa Bay scores a goal were not ready for use during Thursday's game and it's not clear when they will be ready for use. City representatives have been working with team officials as the coils continue to be tested.

"We appreciate the patience of our fans while we work in partnership with the City of Tampa on this signature element of our game presentation," Lightning CEO Tod Leiweke said in a statement. "Like our new West Entry, ticket office and renovated restaurant, these are still works in progress. We are excited to unveil all of these new elements, and we want to get them exactly right for the fans ... so we are taking the time to make sure we do."

In and out

Boucher indicated last week that rotating forwards in and out of the lineup was not going to be a long-term situation. But with the team 0-3-2 in its previous five games, the experimentation continued to find out what works and who plays well together.

Mattias Ritola and Ryan Shannon sat Thursday as Blair Jones and Tom Pyatt played against the Islanders. Tampa Bay continues to carry 14 forwards on the active roster.

"We have a lot of experiments since the beginning of the year, and soon the experiments will end, but if it's something we need to go through. Whether it brings us wins or losses, we need to go through these experiments," Boucher said. "We have new guys coming in and some new chemistry, so we need to find that chemistry and every game, every practice, we find out more about our guys."

Shannon was scratched for the second time in three games, but it has nothing to do with his play, according to Boucher.

"Last game, he played really well and he doesn't deserve to be taken out," Boucher said. "I only have 12 forwards to put on there and that's the experiment. We need to know about some other players and we'll only know if we put them in. So, (Shannon) is kind of paying for it, but he played really well last game."

Over the air

For the first time in franchise history, all 82 regular-season games will be televised locally after CW, Channel 44, agreed to pick up the three remaining games not scheduled to be broadcast — Oct. 29 vs. Winnipeg, Nov. 19 vs. New Jersey and April 7 at Winnipeg.

The three games on CW, Channel 44, are in addition to the 68 games televised on Sun Sports and 11 on either Versus or the NHL Network.

Second addition

Lightning captain Vinny Lecavalier and wife Caroline welcomed their second child on Tuesday, son Gabriel Vincent Lecavalier, who was born at 7:52 p.m. and checked in at 7 pounds, 5 ounces and 19 1/2 inches.

The Lecavaliers also have a daughter, Victoria, who was born May 3, 2010.

Nuts and Bolts

Thursday was the 15th anniversary of the first game played at the Ice Palace, a 5-2 Tampa Bay victory against the New York Rangers. ... D Marc-Andre Bergeron extended his scoring streak to five games.

Erik Erlandsson

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning return to form against Islanders

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune
Published: October 20, 2011
Updated: October 20, 2011 - 10:30 PM

TAMPA --

For the better part of two weeks, the Lightning looked lost. Instead of resembling a team that came tantalizingly close to reaching the Stanley Cup finals last season, Tampa Bay was a team that couldn't get out of its own way.

In the midst of knocking off the New York Islanders 4-1, and ending a five-game winless stretch Thursday, the Lightning looked more like, well, the Lightning team many expected to see.

Sure, Steven Stamkos, Vinny Lecavalier and Ryan Malone provided the scoring — that certainly looks familiar — but it was the way Tampa Bay went about its game for the full 60 minutes in front of goaltender Mathieu Garon, who stopped 16 shots for his first victory in a Lightning uniform.

Absent were costly turnovers, bad penalties (Tampa Bay had to kill only two power plays), porous penalty kills and punchless power plays. Present was the relentless attitude and structure head coach Guy Boucher wants to see as the Lightning held New York to 17 shots, marking the first time this season Tampa Bay held an opponent to fewer than 33.

"I call this a standard game, not because it's a normal game, but because its up to our standards — we were below 20 shots (against), above 30 shots (for) and we suffocated the opponent," Boucher said. "That is our standard right there, so out of that comes offense and not the opposite."

Throughout the game, the Lightning stayed structured and worked their way up the ice as a unit instead of looking for long passes. Not only did that cut down on turnovers, but it also allowed for a better transition game up the ice, which led to puck possession, which led to sustained pressure in the offensive zone.

"We hadn't been playing like a team," said Lightning captain Vinny Lecavalier, who celebrated the birth of son Gabriel with a goal and an assist. "Tonight we had a pack mentality, we worked as a group of five skaters and that's tough to play against."

And that's the type of team the Lightning looked like in the second half of last season and into the postseason, a team that stood its ground, controlled the neutral zone and pounced on opportunities when presented. And they did it in bunches, with everybody on board sharing the same mentality.

"That's obviously the best we have played as a unit of five on the ice, and as you can see in the results, we held them to under 20 shots, and that's the way we are used to playing," said Malone, who scored his 150th career goal to open the scoring. "Everyone just kind of bought in a little more, and sometimes the forwards get stretched out a little bit more and get a little too excited to get going. So I think everybody just kind of slowed down to help each other out. The (defense) played great and Garon was there for the big saves he had to make."

After Malone's power-play goal at 16:32 gave Tampa Bay the lead, the Lightning started to suffocate the Islanders attack. From the end of the first period and into the second, the Islanders were held without a shot on goal for a span of 15 minutes, 16 seconds, a stretch that lasted until 12:43 into the second. Just after that, Lecavalier gave Tampa Bay a 2-0 lead that was stretched to three goals when Stamkos scored his third in the past four games at 5:25 of the third.

Though Michael Grabner spoiled the shutout bid at 7:55 of the third, Brett Clark regained the three-goal lead with his second of the season with 3:01 left.

"This was our best game of the year with how we have to play in order to be successful," Stamkos said. "The way we played last year to be so successful, this was the type of game. And I said before this was going to be our best game, guys were focused and we realized we can't let the
Forum's Tesla coils not in operation Thursday night

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune
Published: October 20, 2011

TAMPA --

Fans hoping to get a look at the Tampa Bay Lightning's new Tesla coils in action will have to wait a little longer.

The coils, which will shoot out live lightning bolts during pregame ceremonies and when the team scores a goal, continue to undergo testing while the team works with city officials to ensure everything is in proper working order before unveiling the new effect. The coils will not be used during Thursday night's game against the New York Islanders and may not be ready when Tampa Bay closes out a three-game homestand on Saturday against the Buffalo Sabres.

"We appreciate the patience of our fans while we work in partnership with the City of Tampa on this signature element of our game presentation," Lightning CEO Tod Leiweke said in a statement. "Like our new West Entry, ticket office and renovated restaurant, these are still works in progress. We are excited to unveil all of these new elements, and we want to get them exactly right for the fans ... so we are taking the time to make sure we do."

The Tesla coils are part of a $40 million renovation project at The Forum that also includes a new pipe organ with the "Coors Light Between the Pipes" bar, brand new cushioned seats throughout the building, the Bud Light Party Deck on the upper concourse overlooking downtown Tampa, new flooring on the upper and lower concourses, completely renovated suites and open areas in each of the four corners of the lower concourse that overlook the ice.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Bolts notes: Brewer expected to play against Islanders

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune
Published: October 20, 2011

TAMPA --

After missing practice on Wednesday, Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Eric Brewer is expected to be in the lineup Thursday night when Tampa Bay hosts the New York Islanders.

Brewer, who had back surgery earlier in his career, said he had something crop up on him Tuesday and wanted to make sure nothing new was bothering him.

"It's just the day-to-day of the season and everybody is going to have something at some point and I just felt that I needed to address," Brewer said. "I could have practiced (Wednesday), I just wanted to throw a few questions by some people and carry on; I felt fine out there (on the ice Thursday) morning."

Brewer did not address whether the situation was related to his back or if he took any kind of an injection to alleviate what Lightning coach Guy Boucher referred to as "some swelling" that Brewer experienced.

"I don't feel any worse than I have and I actually feel a little better," Brewer said. "It's not anything I'm scared of or worried about, it's just how the season goes. You are busy at the start of the season and everybody has a different routine in the fall and I just have to tweak mine a little bit. Once the days start to roll, roll, roll, you just have to get in that."

Tampa Bay is already without veteran defenseman Mattias Ohlund, who had arthroscopic surgery on his knees last week and could be out until December.

In and out

Boucher indicated last week that rotating forwards in and out of the lineup was not going to be a long term situation. But with the team 0-3-2 in their past five games, some experimentation continues to find out what works and who plays well together.

That means Mattias Ritola and Ryan Shannon will sit Thursday tonight while Blair Jones and Tom Pyatt play against the Islanders.

"We have a lot of experiments since the beginning of the year, and soon the experiments will end, but it's something we need to go through whether it brings us wins or loss, we need to go through these experiments," Boucher said. "We have new guys coming in and some new chemistry, so we need to find that chemistry and every game, every practice we find out more about our guys."

Shannon will be scratched for the second time in three games, but it has nothing to do with his play, according to Boucher.

"Last game, he played really well and he doesn't deserve to be taken out," Boucher said of Shannon. "I only have 12 forwards to put on there and that's the experiment. We need to know about some other players and we'll only know if we put them in. So, (Shannon) is kind of paying for it, but he played really well it last game."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 10.21.2011
Tampa Bay Lightning beats New York Islanders 4-1

By Damian Cristodero, Times Staff Writer

In Print: Friday, October 21, 2011

TAMPA — When Lightning coach Guy Boucher looks at game video, he wants to see what he calls a "five-man picture."

That is, he wants five players in such a tight, structured defensive posture, they all fit onto the screen.

"It's a pack mentality," Boucher said. "It's all about support everywhere" and "suffocating the opponent."

Assume, then, Boucher will be pleased when he screens Thursday night's 4-1 victory over the Islanders at the St. Pete Times Forum.

Tampa Bay (2-3-2) stifled New York with defensemen who narrowed the gaps on the opponent, slowing them through the neutral zone and allowing backchecking forwards to harass and disrupt.

The result: the end of a five-game losing streak and a season-low 17 shots allowed, 21 fewer than Tampa Bay's average in its previous six games.

At one point, New York went 15 minutes, 16 seconds without a shot, making it a relatively easy game for Lightning goaltender Mathieu Garon, who stood in for struggling Dwayne Roloson.

Ryan Malone, Vinny Lecavalier, Steven Stamkos and Brett Clark scored. Teddy Purcell had two assists, and defenseman Marc-Andre Bergeron's assist extended his points streak to five games with two goals and eight points.

"This was kind of a statement game for ourselves, not for anyone else," Stamkos said. "Just to prove that when we stick together and stay disciplined and stay to the structure, we give ourselves a chance to win against the best teams in the league."

It helped that Tampa Bay, which entered with a league-worst 36 times shorthanded, gave the Islanders only two power plays. That allowed it to build rhythm five-on-five. That led to better control of the offensive zone and 30 shots on goal.

Getting the game's first goal — Malone's power-play tally with 3:28 left in the first period — was a luxury enjoyed in only one previous game. And until Thursday, Tampa Bay had not led heading into the second period.

But the key was defense, and defenseman Eric Brewer led with four blocked shots and four hits. The line of center Nate Thompson, Adam Hall and Tom Pyatt stood out as well.

"We felt we had been creating opportunities for the other teams," Brewer said of Tampa Bay's skid. "We played teams that played very well. At the same token, we fed some of their plays. We left a lot for them, and they took it. We reined a lot of that in. That makes a big difference."

"And out of that comes offense," Boucher said.

And a much better viewing experience.

Lightning 1 1 2 4
Islanders 0 0 1 1
Lightning 1 1 2 4
Islanders 0 0 1 1

First Period—1, Tampa Bay, Malone 2 (Lecavalier, Bergeron), 16:32 (pp). Penalties—Pandolfo, NYI (interference), 10:08; Connolly, TB (holding), 11:13; Staios, NYI (hooking), 15:17.

Second Period—2, Tampa Bay, Lecavalier 3 (St. Louis), 15:14. Penalties—None.

Third Period—3, Tampa Bay, Stamkos 3 (Purcell), 5:25. 4, N.Y. Islanders, Grabner 2 (Streit, Rolston), 7:55. 5, Tampa Bay, Clark 2 (Purcell), 16:59. Penalties—Reasoner, NYI (interference), 12:05; Downie, TB (hooking).
TAMPA — Why, hello, Lightning.

And where have you been all season?

It was as simple as a puck in a net and as fast as a heart that is beating again. Just like that, you could recognize the Tampa Bay Lightning all over again. From its energy to its urgency, this was finally the team you cheered a season ago. From its speed to its efficiency, this is the team that had gotten lost along the way.

And, guys?

Good to see you again.

This is who they are, and this is how they play. Somehow, all that had gotten lost with the start of a new season. They had lacked focus, and they had lacked defense, and somehow they had gotten the idea that the penalty box was a new resort to be visited again and again.

And then Vinny Lecavalier wound up and took a shot.

And there they were. Finally.

"That was our team," said Lightning center Steven Stamkos after Thursday's 4-1 win over the Islanders. "There are still some things to work on, but that was as close as to where we were last year as we have been. If we play that game, we're giving ourselves a chance to win 100 percent of the time. We may not win, but we'll give ourselves a chance." For the Lightning, this might have been one of those turnaround games. Or not. A wayward team's search for rediscovery always starts in the smallest of moments — just the right guy scoring the right goal in the right game. It is only later that you can measure its impact.

So yes, it might turn out it meant very little when Lecavalier snapped a puck into the netting behind Al Montoya in the second period for a 2-0 lead. Perhaps it was not a spark. Perhaps it was not a key player signaling a turnaround. Perhaps it was not a step into the future by a team that has been looking too much to the past. Perhaps it was only a goal.

On the other hand, it felt like more. It felt as if the Lightning had finally returned to being the Lightning.

For a team in desperate search of itself, Lecavalier's goal was something, and something is better than most of the things that have fallen on the Lightning so far this season.

Was this it? Finally? Was this the goal that brings back the urgency? Was this the spark that helps a team recapture its self-image? Was this the moment that finally allows this team to look forward instead of over its shoulder?

And if not, isn't it about time for one?

Give the Lightning this: This was its best game of the year. It finally had energy. It finally had focus. It finally discovered that the penalty box is not, in fact, a resort.

Perhaps it finally realized it is no longer in last season's playoffs.

It can be a troublesome thing when a team has to continue beyond its success. For the Lightning, last season was far too memorable to forget. There were so many moments, so many ovations, the feeling was bound to linger.

"I could see it coming," coach Guy Boucher said at Thursday's morning skate. "Even if we had won another game or two, we were going to have a rocky start. We haven't had the same urgency. It's human nature."

Last year? Last year, urgency came easily. There had been such chaos before, and the players spent the first month skating as if they had been freed from dysfunction. There was a new owner and a new general manager and a new coach, and every shift was a chance to impress somebody. They won their first three, and they were 7-2-1 through their first 10.

This year? You cannot speak the problems in one breath. The defense has been awful, and the scorers haven't been dynamic, and the penalty box has been overcrowded, and the goaltending hasn't been crisp and the starts have been too slow and the finishes have been too weak. And so forth.

Marty St. Louis will tell you bluntly that the big players have to be better. Simple as that.

"I have to be better," he said. "I'm sure 'Stammer' would tell you he has to be better. Vinny, too."

That's true. Average players don't lead a team back to contention. That's why it was a welcome sight when Lecavalier scored, and when Stamkos added another, it looked like a sunset. Add a more efficient defense and a solid game by backup goalie Mathieu Garon and staying away from the penalty box and cycling the puck, and you have a promising night. If the Lightning is to be successful, this is how it must play.

Oh, there are still flaws. Those won't go away with a single victory. But winning is better than losing, and moving forward is better than the alternative.

"How do you eat an elephant?" Boucher said. "A bit at a time. If you look at an elephant, it's too big. And any big problem, you have to break it down."

"It's like we have been patching a leaking hole in the ceiling and suddenly another hole opened down there. So we go down there, and well, the previous one is leaking. We've got to make sure we patch solidly before we start moving onto other leaks."

For a night, the dripping stopped. The backsliding, too. For a night, the Lightning was urgent enough, talented enough, disciplined enough.

Enough nights such as this, enough bites of the elephant, and who knows? The team might find out that the league plans playoffs for this year, too.

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Mattias Ohlund could be out longer than expected after knee surgery

By Damian Cristodero, Times Staff Writer

In Print: Friday, October 21, 2011

TAMPA — Lightning D Mattias Ohlund might be out six weeks or more, GM Steve Yzerman said Thursday.

That's bad news for a struggling defense, and it makes the uncertainty about D Eric Brewer's mystery injury more acute.

Ohlund, off skates since Sept. 30 after arthroscopic surgery on both knees to clean out "loose bodies," originally was to be sidelined four to six weeks.

"But in light of having been 'scoped and talking with the doctors, we're thinking more likely six weeks and potentially a little longer," Yzerman said.

Brewer, whose MRI exam Wednesday and absence from practice sparked all kinds of intrigue, played against the Islanders and was named first star with four blocked shots and four hits.

Before the game, coach Guy Boucher said the defenseman "had to take care of some swelling" and "he's going to be okay."

Brewer said his condition "may or may not be associated with surgeries he had in December 2008 and April 2009 for a herniated disc. He said last season that he still felt the effects.

"I could have practiced (Wednesday)," said Brewer, who declined to say if he had treatment. "I just wanted to throw a few questions by some people."

Asked for specifics, Boucher said, "It's a low body (injury), high body or whatever. It's just part of his body."

"I don't really feel any worse than I have," said Brewer, 32. "I just think I can feel a little better. I'm not scared of anything or worried about anything. Just you just have to stay on top of things."

SITTING: LW Ryan Shannon played "really well" Monday against the Panthers, Boucher said. Even so, Shannon, with RW Mattias Ritola, was scratched Thursday as part of a continuing rotation of 14 forwards.

"He doesn't deserve to be taken out," Boucher said of Shannon. "I only (can use) 12 forwards. That's the experiment. We need to know about some players, and we're only going to know if we put them in, so he's kind of paying for it."

Rookie RW Brett Connolly played his seventh game. He can play two more before it must be decided whether to send him back to juniors or allow the clock to start on his three-year, $2.7 million contract.

Forwards Tom Pyatt and Blair Jones also played after sitting out Monday.

"Whether it brings wins or losses, we have to go through the experiment," Boucher said.

SWITCH: Boucher put wings Teddy Purcell and Ryan Malone with Steven Stamkos instead of Vinny Lecavalier, and Marty St. Louis and Connolly with Lecavalier instead of Stamkos.

The lines combined for three goals and seven points.

"If you want things to happen, you have to make it happen," Boucher said. "We waited long enough with the lines and the chemistry we were trying to get."

ODDS AND ENDS: Ch. 44 will broadcast three games — Oct. 29 and April 7 against the Jets and Nov. 19 against the Devils — meaning all 82 regular-season games will be televised. … D Scott Jackson (knee) is on waivers so he can be sent to AHL Norfolk. … Thursday was the 15th anniversary of the first game at the St. Pete Times Forum, a 5-2 win over the Rangers. … The Times Forum's Tesla coils, which are to shoot "lightning" about 20 feet to celebrate goals, still are not working. … D Bruno Gervais was also scratched.

St. Petersburg Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Lightning has deal with Ch. 44 to broadcast 3 games

The Lightning on Wednesday announced a deal with Ch. 44 in St. Petersburg to broadcast three games, meaning for the first time in team history all 82 regular-season games will be televised.

The three games that will be on Ch. 44 are:

Oct. 29 versus the Jets
Nov. 19 versus the Devils
April 7 at Winnipeg

Posted by Damian Cristodero
St. Petersburg Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Coach Guy Boucher's prayers answered; Tampa Bay Lightning D Eric Brewer to play tonight

On Wednesday, with uncertainty swirling about the health of Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Eric Brewer, coach Guy Boucher said he was going to head to church and light a few candles. Well, those prayers apparently were answered as Brewer skated Wednesday morning and said he will play tonight against the Islanders.

"It's just the day-to-day of the season," Brewer said. "There's always something. Everybody is going to have something at some point. It's something I needed to address and stay on top of."

That Brewer is expected to play is good news for a team that is struggling on defense and now believes defenseman Mattias Ohlund, who hasn't skated since Sept. 30 and had arthroscopic surgery on both knees, could be out longer than the four-to-six weeks first anticipated. General manager Steve Yzerman said Ohlund could now be out up to two months.

Brewer said he could have practiced Tuesday (though he didn't) and said he does not anticipate any restrictions ("I sure hope not"), but he did not elaborate on what is bothering him. Brewer had back surgeries in December 2008 and April 2009 to deal with a herniated disc and he said last season he still feels the effects.

Asked if his current problem has to do with his back, Brewer said, "It may or may not, I'm not sure." Asked if he needed any kind of shot or treatment, he again said he wasn't sure.

"It's a low body, high body or whatever," Boucher said. "It's just part of his body. He experienced something that was swelling up and we took care of the swelling. He's going to be okay."

"I don't really feel any worse than I have," Brewer said. "I just think I can feel a little better. I'm not scared of anything or worried about anything. You know how the season goes, you start, it's busy, you have to get your groove and what's going to fit. Everybody has a different program and schedule to follow. I just have to tweak mine a little bit. Once we get back on the road next week and the days start to roll, roll, roll, you have to stay on top of things. ... It's just a matter of chipping away at what works or what hasn't worked or can possibly be changed. Right now I'm not changing anything."

Other stuff from the morning skate: As expected, Mathieu Garon gets the start in net. ... Changes from Monday's lineup include Ryan Shannon and Mattias Ritola being scratched and Blair Jones and Tom Pyatt going in. ... Interesting that Boucher said Shannon did not play badly during Monday's loss to the Panthers, but with 14 forwards on the roster, the coach is continuing the rotation to give everybody playing time and to get as much information as possible before rookie Brett Connolly plays his ninth game and the team has to decide to keep him on the roster or send him back to juniors. "There's too many things right now that we need to find out about," Boucher said. "That rotation needs to be. I'm going to keep doing it until we get our answers." ... That explanation is little consolation to Shannon, whom Boucher said has played better. "He doesn't deserve to be taken out, but I only have 12 forwards to put in there," Boucher said. "That's the experiment." ... One reason the Lightning special teams are struggling is lack of puck possession. The team has won just 44.3 percent of faceoffs while shorthanded and just 40.5 percent of faceoffs while on the power play. ... The team leads the league with 104 blocked shots. ... Minor-league defenseman Scott Jackson, who has been rehabbing a surgically repaired knee, is on waivers in order to send him to AHL Norfolk.

Posted by Damian Cristodero

St. Petersburg Times LOADED: 10.21.2011
Bruins humble Leafs

By HOWARD ULMAN

Stanley Cup champions unleash offence in 6-2 rout of Toronto

Zdeno Chara, Milan Lucic and Tyler Seguin had a goal and two assists each and the Boston Bruins handed the Toronto Maple Leafs their first regulation loss, 6-2 on Thursday night.

The Stanley Cup champions scored two power-play goals, matching their total in the first six games of the season, and won for the second time in five games. It was just the second time in 41 regular-season games that they scored twice with a man advantage.

David Steckel gave Toronto (4-1-1) the lead 7:29 into the game before the Bruins (3-4) scored three times in less than 8 minutes to take a 3-1 lead after the first period. Nathan Horton and Chara scored on power plays and Chris Kelly connected with 2:11 left in the period. Lucic, Patrice Bergeron and Seguin scored in the third.

Toronto’s Mikhail Grabovski finished the scoring

The Bruins, who had 11 goals in their first six games, rebounded from an undisciplined performance in a 4-1 loss to Carolina on Tuesday night. Rich Peverley’s goal with 9:01 left had cut Carolina’s lead to 2-1 before Boston lost its momentum by taking several ill-advised penalties.

Toronto played one night after a 4-3 shootout victory over the Winnipeg Jets in which Phil Kessel, a former Bruin, had a goal and two assists to increase his NHL-leading totals to seven goals and 12 points. He was scoreless Thursday.

Seguin was taken with the second pick of last year’s draft obtained in the trade for Kessel.

Steckel started the scoring with his first goal of the season on a 30-foot shot from the slot that deflected off the left leg of goalie Tim Thomas as he lay on his back.

 Barely 3 minutes later, at 10:32 of the first period, the Bruins tied it on Horton’s second goal after backup goalie Jonas Gustavsson, playing for the first time this season, stopped Chara’s 50-foot shot but left the rebound for Horton to put in the net on a power play.

Chara scored his first goal on another power play, at 18:05, on a pass from the blue line from defenseman Andrew Ference, who tied his career high with three assists.

Less than 2 minutes later, at 17:49, Ference assisted on Kelly's second goal, starting the play with a pass to Lucic, who skated up the left side and across the goal line. He then passed it in front of the net where it bounced before Kelly lifted a backhander over Gustavsson.

Toronto had the best scoring chance of the second period when Grabovski, coming out of the penalty box, got the puck at the red line and broke in alone. But Thomas made the save at 8:43.

The Bruins made it 4-1 at 2:08 of the third period when Seguin passed from the right circle across the slot to Lucic, who shot into the open side of the net for his first goal. Patrice Bergeron got his first goal and Seguin scored his second before Grabovski beat Thomas at 12:33 of the third period.

Notes: The Bruins were 2 for 24 on the power play before Thursday. ... C David Krejci returned after missing four games with what the Bruins called a core injury. ... Thomas broke a four-game losing streak against Toronto. ... Dion Phaneuf got his sixth assist for Toronto.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.21.2011
Nazem Kadri won't start the season in the American Hockey League after all.

The Toronto Maple Leafs recalled the 21-year-old forward Thursday following an injury to Colby Armstrong.

Armstrong is out indefinitely after suffering a left ankle sprain during his first shift in Wednesday's 4-3 victory over Winnipeg.

Kadri was expected to start his year with the AHL Marlies following a knee injury in training camp. He had been assigned to the farm team on Wednesday.

In 29 NHL games last season, Kadri had three goals and 12 points.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.21.2011
Leaf links: That was fun

By DARREN YOURK

Regular season games don't often linger in the memory, but last night's midweek tilt between the Leafs and Jets had some pretty entertaining moments that made it one to remember: Joffrey Lupul destroying the net cam after a great pass from Phil Kessel; Jets 18-year-old rookie Mark Scheifele scoring his first NHL goal; Alex Burmistrov's flash of brilliance as he made Luke Schenn look silly; Kessel and captain Dion Phaneuf's awkward flying man hug after the Leafs tied the game and rookie Matt Frattin winning the game for the Leafs in a shootout.

The blue and white now take the show on the road, opening a four-game trip in Boston against the defending Stanley Cup champions (7 p.m., TSN). Apparently Nazem Kadri has been called back up [http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/story/?id=378514] and will be in the lineup against the Bruins.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 10.21.2011
Dave Steckel didn’t have time to worry about a bizarre topsy-turvy evening that left him, for a time at least, as the new first-line centre of the Maple Leafs.

He was too worried about navigating his way to Lester B. Pearson Airport for the first time in his five-game-old career as a Leaf. He’d never been there and was nervous he’d get lost en route to the team plane.

Such misapprehensions and oddities, statistical and otherwise, were very much part of the story Wednesday night in what was both the fourth victory of the season for the red-hot Leafs and the strangest.

They won 4-3 in a shootout over the Winnipeg Jets, giving them nine of a possible 10 points this season.

And they were also loudly and justifiably booed off the ice after two dreadful periods in which they fell behind by two goals. No sir, that wasn’t “Looooooookkkkk” for blueliner Luke Schenn. Not even close.

Veterans were benched, forwards went up the lineup and down, players who hadn’t even played the previous gameizzled like stars, and the clinching marker was scored by a rookie Leaf who will still be looking for his first NHL goal Thursday night in Boston.

Oh yes, and Nazem Kadri could be on his way back to the Leafs after being demoted in the hours before game time on Wednesday.

Just another evening at the office right?

Not at all. In fact, the game had so many minor and major developments that the team that should really be designated as “Kessel/Lupul” in the NHL standings will still be feeling the reverberations heading into a contest with the reigning Stanley Cup champs.

For starters, Jonas Gustavsson is expected to give No. 1 goalie James Reimer a night off. But given with how coach Ron Wilson shortened his bench down to only 13 skaters against the Jets, the rest of the lineup is anyone’s guess.

Freshman defenceman Jake Gardiner, you can bet, will be there. Given two games off to get Cody Franson involved, the 21-year-old Gardiner returned to active duty and smoothly skated 25 minutes and nine seconds of mostly sparkling and poised hockey.

Gardiner was particularly needed in the latter stages when both Schenn and Mike Komisarek found themselves nailed to the bench.

Up front, with Colby Armstrong and Clarke MacArthur both hobbled, the lines were really jumbled by the end.

This is a club being carried offensively by two players, Phil Kessel and Joffrey Lupul. The team has 16 goals and that tandem has accounted for 11 of them, including seven by an outrageously prolific Kessel, now three points clear of the field as the NHL’s leading scorer in the early going.

How peculiar then is the fact the two wingers really don’t have a centre, because Tim Connolly is hurt and once again Tyler Bozak appears unready to do the job? That yawning chasm left the 6-foot-5 Steckel, a career checker and faceoff artist, in between Lupul and Kessel by the third period against the Jets. The big fella, as well as being 16-2 in the faceoff circle after an off-night 48 hours earlier against Colorado, accounted himself reasonably well.

Frattin, meanwhile, took over for MacArthur on the struggling line with Mikhail Grabovski and Nik Kulemin and was the surprise choice to take the third Toronto shootout attempt with a chance to ice the game.

Frattin didn’t miss, blowing a shot past Jets goalie Ondrej Pavelec.

It won’t count as his first NHL goal. Just his first big Leaf moment.

“It gives me confidence” he said. “(Wilson) sees me as a goal-scorer and now I’ve got to do it in a game.”

Almost certainly he’ll get to try and get that first goal against the Bruins with Grabovski and Kulemin. MacArthur made the trip but is iffy and indications were the Leafs are seriously contemplating recalling Kadri for the Bruins game after sending him to the AHL Marlies earlier on Wednesday.

The 2-4 Bruins are likely to be in an ornery mood, the product of a slow start and a loss to Carolina on Tuesday in which they lost their composure as a team and saw coach Claude Julien ejected.

Uneasy, apparently, sits the crown.

So muscle may be on order by Wilson for this one, with Jay Rosehill or Colton Orr candidates to draw in. Armstrong for sure won’t be able to play.

So lots to chew on before game time in Boston. The strangest game of a very young season left few stones untumbled in its quest to create volumes of social media chatter for Leaf Nation and beyond.

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.21.2011
starting and the weather’s turning, Phil Kessel must be bringing crowds to their feet with the hottest of sticks.

He’s hockey’s Mr. October. Leaf fans can only hope that this season the moniker doesn’t equate to a back-handed praise.

Not that anyone’s quibbling with this month’s spectacular production. The Wisconsin-bred winger exited Wednesday’s 4-3 shootout win against the Winnipeg Jets, wherein he piled a goal atop two assists, leading the NHL with seven goals and 12 points in five games. His shooting percentage, a torrid .333, could double as a Cooperstown-bound batting average.

Certainly it’s a stellar beginning to his sixth NHL campaign, and it’s got plenty to do with Toronto’s four wins in five games. As great as he’s been, though, history suggests this early dominance is simply a prelude to a letdown later in the season. Kessel, after all, has scored more career goals in October than in any other month; he has come out of the gate so impressively, both this season and in past ones, that you could have been convinced he was a threat to, say, break Rick Vaive’s single-season franchise record of 54 goals.

A year ago he had 7 goals in his first 8 games — 71-goal pace — only to score 3 in his next 20. Two years ago, when November subbed for October as his first month of the season, Kessel scored 10 goals in his first 15 games — precisely 54-goal pace. In the following 28 games, he scored all of 5 goals. Currently, he’s on 114-goal pace. So, what’s to come?

Anything’s possible. Maybe he is, at age 24, rounding into his prime. But if you look at Kessel’s career goal production by month, the outlook isn’t brilliant. In October, he has scored at a rate that, projected over a full season, would make him a 48-goal man. In October, in other words, he’s been Rocket Richard. If you combine all the NHL goals he has scored in January and February and March, meanwhile, you get a picture of a less impressive comparable. In those three months, Kessel has scored at a rate that, extrapolated over 82 games, would give him 22 goals. In the season’s dog days, in other words, he’s a relative dog. It helps explain why, for all this greatness in the season’s first month, he has never scored more than 36 goals in a single campaign.

Why the fall-off? Kessel’s commitment to conditioning has often been questioned, and a lack of fitness would help explain the drop in his production as previous seasons have worn on. Maybe he hasn’t had sufficiently skilled linemates to sustain excellence. Perhaps the fall-winter disparity is simply to be expected of a streak scorer. Then again, Kessel has scored at a 38-goals-a-season pace in April. And back when Kessel was employed by a playoff team, he put up nine goals and 15 points in 15 post-season starts. He has also, at lower moments, been a post-season healthy scratch.

Still, there are those who see a change in Kessel that bodes well for this season.

“"I think he’s getting into better shooting areas this year so far. He’s in closer and in better ranges than he was in last year,” Wendel Clark, 44, the former Leaf who once scored 46 goals in a season, said before the game. “As the season goes on, he just has to keep going into traffic to shoot pucks, and good things will happen. When you stay to the outside, where teams want to keep guys like Phil, you make it easier on the goalies.”

"said Marcel Dionne, the fourth-most prolific scorer in NHL history: “Right now he’s in a zone. When that happens, he can fan on a wrist shot and know it’s going in. . . . The Leafs have got to protect him. He’s their bread and butter.”

The 60-year-old Dionne, along with scoring the fourth-most goals in NHL history, took the second-most shots. He fired some 5,366 pucks at the net during his hall of fame career, about four a game. Kessel came into Wednesday’s game averaging about four shots a game off the blade of his kevlar-infused composite stick, an Easton S19. With the help of a high-tech material sometimes used to stop bullets, Kessel’s been firing in quantity.

“If you look at the stats, the guys who score a lot, shoot a lot,” Mikhail Grabovski, Kessel’s teammate, said. “I should shoot more. But if people know you shoot all the time, you can make a play, because they expect you to shoot.”

Kessel was taking some advantage of the defence’s expectations on Wednesday night, setting up the Leafs’ first goal, which tied it 1-1, after he pondered a shot and fed Joffrey Lupul for a zinger that pinged off the in-net video camera. Kessel’s goal, a one-timed power-play marker, tied it 3-3. Five games in, it couldn’t be going much better.

Will Fall Phil have the juice to become a winter wonder? Will he suffer his usual New Year’s slump? On a club relying heavily on his touch, the answers to those questions will likely explain the mood in Leafs Nation come spring.

“How do you know?” Ron Wilson, the Leafs coach said of Kessel. “He’s always been a streaky player. Only time will tell if he finds a way to be more consistent . . . But I don’t see any holes in his game right now.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 10.21.2011
Leafs lose agitator Armstrong 0

By Lance Hornby ,Toronto Sun
First posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 07:18 PM EDT | Updated: Thursday, October 20, 2011 07:25 PM EDT

BOSTON -
If the Maple Leafs could just find a way to keep winger Colby Armstrong in the lineup for 82 games, they might get enough points to be a playoff threat.
Armstrong’s presence usually equates to success on the scoreboard, with the Leafs hovering at or above .500 when he’s active. But as of Thursday, he’s back on injured reserve with a sprained left ankle and no return date yet determined.
Armstrong wasn’t having a great season in terms of personal production, with no points in five games and a minus three. But he’s got some size, loves to chirp and is annoying to play against, as well as being a lucky charm. Toronto was 4-0-1 this year when he started a game, 4-1-1 last season when the first of his many medical problems began.
To date in his Leaf career, Armstrong has been plagued by two broken feet, injuries to both hands, bleeding in his eye and now twisting his ankle on an innocent looking play on Wednesday against Winnipeg. He’s missed 33 of 87 games and will be gone at least the balance of this four-game road trip.

With Clarke MacArthur also sore from an undisclosed injury on Wednesday, which knocked out Toronto’s entire Lloydminster platoon on both sides of the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, there was a lineup scramble Thursday at TD Garden. Nazem Kadri was recalled from the Marlies before ever setting foot in Ricoh Coliseum after his Wednesday morning demotion. He was put on a morning plane to Boston.
Colton Orr and Jay Rosehill came out of the pressbox with the forecast for rising temperatures at TD Garden, with Cody Franson replacing Mike Komisarek.

Boston had lost three of four at home and that’s done nothing to improve sales of Cup-themed merchandise the team hoped to flood the market with leading to Christmas.

Toronto takes on the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday, when MacArthur hopes to get back. He had missed the first two games under league suspension and that might have played a role in the ongoing difficulties that he and linemates Mikhail Grabovski and Nikolai Kulemin have had in the early going.

Kadri made a faster than expected recovery from an MCL injury, but had been directed to the farm to get in game shape, in part because rookie Matt Frattin’s play had warranted keeping the latter on the main roster.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
Leaves Locker: Got Bruins’ attention

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

First posted: Thursday, October 20, 2011 07:03 PM EDT | Updated: Thursday, October 20, 2011 07:13 PM EDT

Boston coach Claude Julien noted the Leafs have become a deeper team the past couple of years, which will not make recovery in the Northeast Division any better for him and the Bruins.

“The Leafs take a lot of heat, but they are a legit team,” Julien insisted. “I watched last night (a 4-3 comeback shootout win over Winnipeg). They have speed and skill, the goaltending is solid, so I don’t know why anyone would take them lightly.”

Julien spent the previous couple of days working on some line juggling, counting on it to snap the Bs out of a post-Cup slumber.

“It’s not panic,” Julien said of his moves. “It’s about finding solutions. Panic is not a word I’d use.”

CHOWDERHEADS RULE

Those New England accents around the Leafs sounded right at home for Thursday’s game. Boston-area-born assistant coaches Scott Gordon and Greg Cronin were at TD Garden for the first time in their new positions.

Gordon was born in Easton, Mass., played goal for Boston College and was a Hockey East all-star in 1986, as a prelude to a brief NHL stop with the Quebec Nordiques. He also coached the Bruins’ farm team in Providence R.I., for five years.

Cronin is from Boston and was head coach of the Northeastern University Huskies the past six seasons. Northeastern is a slap shot from Fenway Park.

CURSE OF STANLEY?

Toronto players would love to have the Bruins’ current problems, how to get excited about the regular season again after winning the Stanley Cup.

“We’re not where we want to be,” centre Chris Kelly said before the game. “Everyone (around us) uses that excuse — they won the Stanley Cup — but that’s just a challenge for us. Other (teams) quickly forget you won the Cup, they just want to come out hard and win. We have to answer the bell a little better.”

Kelly was traded from Ottawa to Boston in mid-February, a deal made a couple of hours after the Leafs won 4-3 at TD Garden.

“This is a character locker room and I was fortunate to come into it,” Kelly said. “They continue to show that. At some points, there is frustration (with their early slump), but we’ve also done some things right. I wouldn’t say we’ve hit rock bottom, we’re six games in and you play 82 for a reason.”

LOOSE LEAFS

Though Boston benefitted from the picks in the Phil Kessel deal, the Leafs are sitting on three former first rounders from Beantown — Kessel, Joe Colborne and Matt Lashoff … Brad Marchand of the Bruins, a native of Halifax, says he didn’t bump into any Leafs this past summer and thus didn’t have to answer for that mock golf swing he did in front of their bench in the season’s final meeting. Toronto rallied to win that game and Marchand immediately apologized, though Julien gave the rookie an earful that night, too … Face Off, the hockey love story movie starring Art Hindle and Trudy Young, with cameos by several Leafs, is being re-released in a special 40-year anniversary DVD on Nov. 15. During his brief tenure as Leaf coach, George Armstrong bumped into actor John Vernon (later gaining fame as Dean Wormer from Animal House), who played the icy Toronto coach trying to tame Hindle’s headstrong Billy Duke.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
Leafs have their 'Ducks' in a row 0
Gardiner, Lupul key to Buds' early success

By Steve Simmons, Toronto Sun

For almost two months last season, Brian Burke and Bob Murray or Dave Nonis and Murray kicked around the notion of how they were going to make a trade that would satisfy the needs of two teams apparently spinning their wheels.

Murray’s Anaheim Ducks wanted a veteran defenceman.

The Leafs wanted a defensive prospect from the Ducks.

That was the beginning of the talks that landed Jake Gardiner and what seemed to be a financial throw-in, Joffrey Lupul, in Toronto in a deal for Francois Beauchemin — a trade that has helped both teams grow.

“It was one of those deals that took longer than usual to put together,” said Nonis, the Leafs vice-president of hockey operations. “We were looking to move a defenceman with a salary. We were looking to get younger. We targeted Anaheim because they have a lot of depth in young defencemen. Because of the money involved, because of the some of the other concerns, it took a long time to get this done. But we kept coming back to them, they kept coming back to us. I guess you’d call it an ongoing conversation.

“It picked up a lot of steam at the world juniors in Buffalo.” And still, it took another month before it became official.

It didn’t necessarily seem that important a deal then. It seems rather significant right now.

Gardiner has been an absolute shock of a defenceman through the first few weeks of his rookie season, exceeding all expectations, including the Leafs’. Everybody in hockey keeps waiting for the fall, but he’s already shown a resilience beyond his age and experience.

That he would play somewhere down the road was expected, although not everybody in hockey believed Gardiner was a great prospect. The other surprise in the deal, short term, has been the quality of work put in by Lupul, who once was ticketed for stardom before injuries and illness took hold of his career. The truth on Lupul: The Leafs probably would have preferred to deal without acquiring his onerous contract.

But if Anaheim was bringing in the well paid Beauchemin, they had to remove some salary from their roster. That salary belonged to Lupul and the reason the trade was made on Feb. 9 instead of earlier in January was that the longer the season went, the less the Leafs had to pay for Lupul that year.

“We had to figure out how the money fits,” said Nonis. “There was some risk with Lupul. We knew he had significant injuries, back injuries, blood infection. That’s another reason we waited. We wanted to see if he would get healthy and stay healthy. We weren’t as worried about his back as we were about the blood infection.

“I said to Bob, ‘Is there any issue health wise that I’m going to be mad at you later about?’ He said no. He told me he’s not going to fit into our top six forwards here. If he fits into your top six, it makes some sense.”

The first young defenceman the Leafs went after wasn’t necessarily Gardiner. While it can’t be confirmed, the Leafs might have had more interest in Justin Schultz, same age as Gardiner, who is still at Wisconsin and considered a candidate for the Hobey Baker Award, which goes to the top player in U.S. college hockey.

“They had a surplus of young defenceman,” said Nonis. “We wanted one back. We were comfortable with Jake.”

Against the Winnipeg Jets Wednesday night, Gardiner played 25 minutes and might have been the best player on the ice. By comparison, Luke Schenn, taken in the same draft, played half that time and the veteran Mike Komisarek just a little more than half.

“There’s no doubt he’s done a very good job,” said Nonis. “I’d love to tell you we knew this was going to happen but I’d be lying to you. It may not
BOSTON -

Nazem Kadri didn't catch a bus to the Marlies, he grabbed an early morning plane to the Bay State instead.

With Colby Armstrong suffering a nasty left ankle sprain, a four-game road trip just starting and the team shy of skill forwards, the Maple Leafs cancelled Kadri’s ticket to the minors issued on Wednesday and sent him to re-join the parent team. Kadri, who had made a faster-than-expected recovery from an MCL injury, had been directed to the farm to get in game shape, in part because rookie Matt Frattin’s play had warranted keeping him on the main roster.

But now the Leafs are scrambling both their forward lines and defensive pairings in light of the injury to Armstrong and the need to get some muscle in the lineup Thursday against what’s expected to be a belligerent Bruins team.

Armstrong was placed on the injured reserve list Thursday and will be out “indefinitely” the club stated in an afternoon press release.

Toronto scrubbed its morning skate at TD Garden, but it’s expected that one of Colton Orr or Jay Rosehill will be added to the lineup along with third-liner Kadri.

David Steckel’s addition to the power play as a faceoff specialist ahead of Tyler Bozak might also be repeated. Big Cody Franson could be returning to the blueline in place of Jake Gardiner and the ice time for all six will be interesting to chart in light of Luke Schenn’s sudden decline in quality minutes.

In goal, the Leafs are giving Jonas Gustavsson his first NHL start since Jan. 19, while Boston, trying to straighten itself after a wobbly start of 2-4-0, goes back to Stanley Cup hero Tim Thomas after Tuukka Rask played Tuesday’s 4-1 loss to Carolina. Coach Claude Julien altered his first line at the end of that game and indicated third-liner Chris Kelly would be taking the No. 1 role with Milan Lucic and Tyler Seguin, while the ailing David Krejci remains a game-time decision.

All three top Boston lines were juggled the past couple of games.

"It’s not panic," Julien said of his moves. "It’s about finding solutions. Panic is not a word I’d use."

Julien’s team will have its hands full with Phil Kessel and Toronto’s No. 1 line, which is doing the bulk of scoring and keeping the Leafs undefeated in regulation (4-0-1).

"The Leafs take a lot of heat, but they are a legit team," Julien said. "I watched last night (a 4-3 comeback shootout win over Winnipeg). They have speed and skill, the goaltending is solid, so I don’t know why anyone would take them lightly. They’re a team on the rise."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
Game Within a Game: Canucks 5, Predators 1

By ELLIOTT PAP, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 20, 2011

THREE STARS
1. Daniel Sedin, Canucks. One goal, two assists, five shots and plus-1 for Hank's little bro.
2. Sami Salo, Canucks. One assists, plus-2, two takeaways, two blocked shots – and getting better with age.

PIVOTAL POINT – With the Canucks up 3-1 in the first period, Marco Sturm had a goal nullified on the ice – and then confirmed at NHL headquarters on review – for a kick-in that wasn’t really a kick-in but rather a direct-in. But just 23 seconds later, Chris Higgins scored to give the Canucks their rightful 4-1 lead, which they nursed home.

By THE NUMBERS – Canuck captain Henrik Sedin moved into third place on the Canucks' all-time franchise scoring list with his two points Thursday, breaking a tie with Stan Smyl. Now at 675 points, Henrik trails only franchise icons Markus Naslund (756) and Trevor Linden (733)... Daniel's first-period goal, his career 252nd, leaves him just two behind Pavel Bure for fourth all-time in Canucks goal scoring... Sami Salo appeared in 699th career game. Assuming he doesn't walk under a ladder or have a black cat cross his tail, the veteran Finn will play game No. 700 Saturday against the Minnesota Wild.

DRAW PARDNER – The Canucks won the game easily but barely won the faceoff battle, out-drawing the Preds by a 32-30 margin. Manny Malhotra was 8-for-14 and Cody Hodgson 4-for-6 to lead the way for Vancouver. Preds’ centre Nick Spaling was the top faceoff man on either side, going 9-for-13.

DID YOU NOTICE? – With Mikael Samuelsson out of the lineup, Canuck coach Alain Vigneault required a right winger to skate with the twins after Alex Burrows killed a first-period penalty to Dan Hamhuis. Coach Vee tapped Dale Weise on the shoulder, an obvious reward for his goal five minutes earlier.

HITS OF THE NIGHT – Nashville shift disturber Jordin Tootoo crushed Canuck defenceman Alex Edler in first period and nailed Manny Malhotra in the second. Dale Weise blew up Predator defenceman Kevin Klein in the first.

FIGHT OF THE NIGHT – After Tootoo's two massive (and clean) hits, Canuck fourth-liner Aaron Volpatti appeared to invite Tootoo for a dance late in the second period. Tootoo manned up, accepted the challenge and promptly won the scrap. Tootoo then resisted the urge to taunt the Canucks' bench and went straight to the dressing room in a Don Cherry 'he's-my-kind-of-guy' moment.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
VANCOUVER — They scored early and they scored often.

The Vancouver Canucks hadn't done much of either in the early days of this National Hockey League season, but Thursday night against the Nashville Predators they showed promising signs that perhaps they are emerging from their October slumber.

The Canucks chased Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne with four first-period goals and won 5-1 in a game they controlled pretty much from start to finish. That hasn't happened much this season, either.

"It was just a complete effort," said defenceman Kevin Bieksa. "We put a lot of pucks on net, we got a lot of chances, we did everything. We blocked shots, we fought when we had to. It was a total team effort."

The win improved the Canucks' record to 3-3-1.

When these teams met in the second round of the playoffs last spring, the Canucks managed to score four goals in just one of the six games. That they scored four in one period against Rinne and the tight-checking Preds is impressive.

Winger Chris Higgins suggested the Canucks played a more meat-and-potatoes style game against the Predators.

"We kept it more simple," Higgins said. "I think there was more of a commitment to maybe not make so many plays in the neutral zone and just getting it in their end and letting their work ethic and our skill take over after that.

"Once we get the puck in the offensive end, we've got plenty of skill to make make opportunities happen. I think sometimes we get a little too cute in the neutral zone. Tonight we simplified it and it worked to our advantage."

As good as they were offensively, the Canucks -- who had 40 shots for the second straight game -- were also much more sound defensively. Goalie Roberto Luongo was also better, allowing just one goal on 25 shots. The Preds were limited to just six shots in the third period.

"I don't think they had an odd-man rush the whole game," Luongo said. "The guys played tight and played within the system, took care of business in the first and just took over from there."

For just the second time this season, the Canucks scored first. Daniel Sedin opened scoring a 2:11 of the first when he banked a shot from behind the goal off Rinne into net.

That lead didn't even last two minutes. Nashville winger Matt Halischuk took advantage of a fortuitous bounce off the end boards and put a shot past a surprised Roberto Luongo at 4:01.

But it was all Canucks after that.

Henrik Sedin gave the Canucks the lead for good at 5:56 on a Vancouver power play when his shot from near the right point bounced in off Predators' defenceman Kevin Klein. Dale Weise, with his first NHL goal, made it 3-1 at 12:02. He tipped a soft shot from defenceman Alex Edler past Rinne.

"That is what we have been working on, just getting pucks to the net and creating scums and getting bodies to the net," Weise said. "I kind of got a good tip on it and got him going the other way."

"If anyone asks and they didn't see the replay I'm just going to say I went top shelf," Weise added with a smile.

Higgins gave Vancouver a 4-1 lead at 13:28 of the first. He tried to find Cody Hodgson with a pass off the rush, but the puck bounced off the stick of Preds defenceman Jonathan Blum and right back to Higgins. He buried a shot past Rinne from the left circle.

Rinne was replaced by Anders Lindback after the first period.
Vancouver Canucks out with post-surgery soreness

Notebook: Veteran winger 'getting a maintenance day'

By ELLIOTT PAP, VANCOUVER SUN OCTOBER 20, 2011

VANCOUVER — It turns out that Vancouver Canuck forward Mikael Samuelsson had more than sore feelings over his mediocre start to the new NHL season. The veteran Swede, who underwent sports hernia/adductor surgery last spring, was too sore to play Thursday against the Nashville Predators.

The issue is a bit of a surprise because Samuelsson, who turns 35 in two months, participated fully in Vancouver's practice on Wednesday and took numerous reps with the first-unit power play.

'Mikael is getting a maintenance day,' explained Canuck head coach Alain Vigneault prior to the Canucks' 5-1 triumph over the Preds at Rogers Arena. "He was 100 per cent during training camp and for the first couple of days but lately he's been feeling just a little bit stiff. So we're going to keep him off."

Samuelsson went down during the second round of the playoffs after labouring for much of last season. Marco Sturm took Samuelsson's spot in the lineup and finished a minus-1 with one shot and one goal waved off on a kick-in ruling.

MASKED MAN: Canuck netminder Roberto Luongo started against the Preds on Thursday sporting a new-look mask. It has mountains on the back, a Johnny Canuck lumberjack figure on top (wearing a checkered shirt) and the words 'Vancouver' and 'Canucks' along the jaw lines.

"It's a couple of weeks late, just like my game," Luongo quipped before stopping 25 of 26 shots against Nashville in his best outing of the season, so far. "I wanted to bring a bit of everything I've had since I've been here. So I've got the Johnny Canuck back on top. I still wanted to have a bit of that vintage look. My brother-in-law gave me a good idea to have it without gloss to make it look older."

Daniel Sedin, asked for a statement on Luongo's fashion sense, was reluctant to get involved.

"I have a tough time with fashion, just look at me," winked Daniel, pointing to his rumpled blue jeans, grey golf shirt and black running shoes. "I saw the mask yesterday. It's nice. It looks pretty good."

EYE IN THE SKY: Prior to meeting the Canucks on Thursday, the Predators hadn't played since losing Monday in Edmonton. This enabled their coaching staff to personally scout the Canucks -- a 4-0 loss Tuesday to the Rangers -- from the Rogers Arena press box. It also enabled Preds' coach Barry Trotz to figure out why reporters think they are experts.

"The game is really easy watching it from up top, or on film," noted Trotz, 49 and in his 13th season behind the Nashville bench. "You see everything from up top. But when you're on the ice and you have people going like this in front of you, and you're feeling pressure, and a guy is trying to take your head off, and pucks are in your feet, I mean, the game is totally different down there.

"Sometimes I'm saying things when we're doing film work and what-have-you but, trust me, it isn't easy. What the great players can do is sort that out on the ice. They have that great ability to calculate what's happening."

Trotz wasn't implying that people shouldn't watch hockey from on high, only that it lends a somewhat false sense of what's truly happening.

"I always tell people if you're going to start learning the game, go up there and learn a little bit of the natural patterns," he explained. "It's very generic from up there."

QUOTABLE: "Put it this way: I'm going to have a 6-5, or taller, blond Scandinavian goaltender in net against the Canucks... and in every other game this year." -- Predators coach Barry Trotz on his goaltending tandem of 6-5 Finnish starter Pekka Rinne and 6-6 Swedish backup Anders Lindback. He used both in the 5-1 Vancouver.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
VANCOUVER — The Vancouver Canucks and Nashville Predators are two teams trending downward but, in the no-ties-anymore NHL, somebody will have to prevail tonight at Rogers Arena (7 p.m., Sportsnet Vancouver, Team 1040) and arrest their slide.

Vancouver is 2-3-1 on the season and has lost three of its last four, two by shutout. Nashville is 2-2-1 and has lost three straight, most recently to the Edmonton Oilers when it squandered a 1-0 third-period lead while managing just 12 shots on goal.

The Canucks will have one significant lineup change tonight as winger Mikael Samuelsson can't go due to soreness stemming from his sports hernia and adductor muscle surgery of last spring. Samuelsson will be replaced by Marco Sturm on the third line and by Sami Salo on the first-unit power play.

"Mikael is getting a maintenance day today," explained Canucks head coach Alain Vigneault following Vancouver's optional morning skate. "He was 100 per cent during training camp and for the first couple of days and lately he's been feeling just a little bit stiff. So we're going to keep him off today."

This will give the struggling Sturm — no points, two shots, minus-4 in five games — another chance to make an impression.

"Marco is a new player to our team and obviously he's trying to get adjusted," Vigneault said. "He's got to bring what he brings. From our scouting staff, we were told he's a guy who had a real good skill level and real good speed and could chip in both offensively and defensively. So he's going to get another opportunity tonight and, hopefully, he'll be able to do that for us."

Otherwise, Canucks netminder Roberto Luongo will be sporting a new mask tonight as he attempts to improve on his grotesque early-season numbers — 3.70 goals against average and .856 save percentage. The mask has mountains in the back, a Johnny Canuck figure on top and the words "Vancouver" and "Canucks" along the jaw lines.

"It's a couple of weeks late, just like my game," quipped Bobby Lou, who's been able to maintain a sense of humour amid the catcalls over his performance.

As for the pressure of turning things around, he said he has faced far more pressure than the seventh game of the regular season.

"I think I've played in the Stanley Cup finals," he noted. "There have been more games that have been more intense that tonight. I'm just focused on my game. I want to get back to where I am."

Meanwhile, the Preds have been idle since Monday so they had a good look at the Canucks' 4-0 loss Tuesday to the New York Rangers. Vancouver outshot the Rangers by a 40-19 margin, something that didn't escape the watchful eye of Preds captain Shea Weber.

"You know what?" Weber responded when asked if he thought his team would be facing a frustrated Canucks group. "I think they'll play the same way. They did a lot of things well against the Rangers. They had a lot of chances but they couldn't find a way to score. Obviously if a team does that kind of stuff consistently, it's going to work out for the better, rather than worst."

Canucks forward Alex Burrows, who has 26 shots on goal (third best in the league), expects Nashville to throw a Ranger-type game plan against his team.

"Probably they will," Burrows said. "That's how they normally play. They have a great structure and make you earn everything you get. And they have a great goalie."

Pekka Rinne (2.37, .926) will start in nets for the Preds in a battle of Vezina Trophy finalists from last season.
Mikael Samuelsson out of Canucks lineup, puts Sami Salo in power-play frame

By IAIN MACINTYRE, VANCOUVER SUN COLUMNIST OCTOBER 20, 2011

VANCOUVER — Sami Salo is going to the point on the first-unit power play, and Mikael Samuelsson is going to the press box.

Vancouver Canucks coach Alain Vigneault said Samuelsson is feeling "stiff" after undergoing abdominal surgery last May and will rest tonight against the Nashville Predators (7 p.m., Sportsnet Vancouver, Team 1040). Samuelsson's health, which Vigneault said was 100 per cent during the pre-season, must be at least a bit of a concern to a Canucks team that missed the veteran's size and experience in the Stanley Cup final.

Marco Sturm, the free-agent acquisition who played his way out of the lineup after only five games, returns tonight and is expected to play on the third line alongside Manny Malhotra and Jannik Hansen.

The more impactful change could be Salo's return to the top power play. With the summer departure of Christian Ehrhoff, Samuelsson had been handling point duties on the first unit. But he hasn't the cannon shot that Salo possesses, which made the power play more dependent on its down-low play.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Welcome back, Kes - we missed ya: Canucks

By TONY GALLAGHER, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011 11:04 PM

Finally there can be an official welcome back Ryan Kesler celebration in Vancouver even though he returned to the lineup in Tuesday night's disappointing loss to the New York Rangers.

And while the easy win over the Nashville Predators might also be filed under the 'Roxy effect' folder given the days the visitors spent in this berg, getting Kesler back in the middle of the second line makes this team purr the way they did in the first two periods Tuesday. In this one however, they finished enough chances to put it away after one period, Kesler's first goal of the season in the third nothing more than power play window dressing when the Preds started getting goofy.

This team is designed around outstanding goaltending, an excellent mobile attacking defence and the dual threats of the Sedins with Kesler flying between whomever happens to be occupying the second line wing spots. That's the formula that carried them to seven games in the Cup final last season and the same formula is once again being called upon to work the same magic this season. If they play like they did Thursday night, there's every possibility such good things could happen again.

Kesler's affect on this team is enormous because he does so many good things. He's central to the penalty kill with his faceoff prowess and defensive skills, he makes the second line go and the first unit of the power play complete. He and Mason Raymond remake this group with respect to team speed when they're both in this lineup, and to be fair you could probably build a case outlining the value of the Sedins or the myriad of stars on the back end in the same way.

Take away one of these components, and all the other pistons which drive this team just don't fire as well and that was the case with Kesler rehabbing his hip. That's over now and the light is green for this team to start getting back to winning on a regular basis.

Kesler and Henrik Sedin played a staggering 8:36 of power play time each in this one as the Predators frustration at falling down so early took hold, so given he's coming back from a significant injury the coach let him cool down after the mid-way mark of the third period.

"He sat Danny and Henrik's line and our line in the third period," said Kesler after finishing at 18:09 on the game, "and that was fine because I was a little sore the other night. It's a little different putting in that much time if you get more on the penalty kill but I feel really good and I think I'm ready for what comes along."

Statistically, suffice it to say since Kesler's return, the team has generated 18 power play opportunities and 80 shots.

"Obviously he's a lot better with his clothes on than off," said a smiling Kevin Bieksa, whom we believe is a friend although the increasing number of references to the nude photo shoot may be tweaking that relationship. "I could sit here and pump his tires all night long if you like but we all know in here what he means to this team."

Linemate Chris Higgins certainly has a pretty good idea of what he brings.

"He plays in every scenario there is and he's an elite player in every one of those scenarios. His effect on this team is obvious and it's a lot of fun to play with a guy like that."

Kesler's style of play which is to say, very hard, is both a great blessing and a cause for concern with this team which would so desperately like to get him to the end of their playoff run in top condition for a change. The last three years his body has taken such a pounding he hasn't been able to get to his top form at the end, even though he tried for all he was worth to give everything he had left in the final last year.

Suffice it to say the coaching staff will be looking for more opportunities to back off on the ice time of the top two lines as the season progresses, with Kesler's name at the top of that list of players they'd like to ease up on.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Canucks goaltending controversy put to bed - for at least one night

By JASON BOTCHFORD, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011 11:04 PM

On the seventh game, Vancouver’s billowing goalie controversy was put to rest.

At least it was on the ice. At least it was for one night.

Roberto Luongo was quietly solid Thursday. The Nashville Predators were just quiet.

The Canucks got four first-period goals and their most complete defensive performance of the season. Luongo got what he needed most, and that was some room to breathe.

“I was relaxed and that’s a good thing,” Luongo said. “Sometimes when you’re over aggressive, things can go against you. You have to have that good balance of aggressiveness mixed with being laid back. You can make some good reads off of that.”

Luongo made one mistake. He was beat once on 26 shots when he overplayed a puck which got behind him and careened off the end boards. By the time it redirected in front of the net, Luongo was out of position as Matt Halischuk scored.

“I think I was too aggressive on the first shot,” he admitted. “I wasn’t as laid back as I was the rest of the game. These things tend to happen when you’re over aggressive.

“It was a rush and he wound up for a slap shot and missed the net. I don’t think he did that on purpose.”

Luongo’s chill performance was in stark contrast to what has been going on around him. Off the ice, the goalie issue comically raged on. Radio shows obsessed about it. The Vancouver Province even published an editorial advocating a Luongo-for-Vincent Lecavalier trade. General Manager Mike Gillis weighed in on Sportsnet, defending his star while warning the media that if this becomes “mean-spirited” the Canucks are going to “act upon it.”

Again, Thursday was Game 7. Just wait until Game 87.

Aside from a couple of deflections, Luongo didn’t have to handle many premium scoring chances. This is a good thing. He swallowed up enough pucks where he wasn’t surrendering big rebounds. And there wasn’t a odd-man rush the entire night.

Maybe this could buy him a game or two without people focusing on his mistakes. Keep looking long enough, and that’s all you will see.

“That defensive effort a good thing for our team. I never saw an odd-man rush,” Luongo said. “We shut them down pretty good. Even the power plays they had the shots were from outside or the point.”

On Sportsnet at the first intermission, Gillis said the organization believes in Luongo while he chose not to directly address the fans who have been quarterbacking this goalie controversy.

“It isn’t that I don’t care about what the media might say or do,” Gillis said. “I do care when it becomes mean spirited and malicious.

“If that happens, we’re going to act upon it.

“I think the world of him. He’s a great goalie.”

He is again today. We’ll see what happens Saturday.

The game was as encouraging for Luongo as it was for the Canucks blueline. The defencemen had a brilliant 50 minutes against the New York Rangers Tuesday before imploding.

On Thursday, they put together a full 60-minute game. Their best work was in the third period when they didn’t give up a shot for the first nine minutes.

Head coach Alain Vigneault continued with his adjusted defensive pairings. The most impressive blueliner was probably Keith Ballard, who had one of his better games as a Canuck.
Best question

Best hit
Dale Weise’s blast on Kevin Klein which set the tone for the fourth line’s best game of the season. They had a goal, four shots, two fights, hit one cross bar and nine hits.

“Sometimes those hits aren’t there every night,” said Aaron Volpatti, Weise’s linemate. “The last few games, they haven’t been there. We fed off it. We got pumped up and said ‘Look what he’s doing, we have to keep it going’.”

Best analysis
Volpatti on his fight with Jordin Tootoo: “A few guys weren’t happy with how he was running around. He’s tougher to fight. He’s smaller and slipped out of my grip. I hit him right off the start. I thought I caught him. I have been fighting bigger guys, so I’ve been trying to get in tight. I may have to do the opposite.

Best "Joel Quenneville not happy Canucks had top unit out 5-on-3 with a 4-1 lead (Trotz probably not digging it either)."

twitter.com/@patersonjeff

Best fail
The guy with the “Occupy Luongo” sign. What does it even mean?

Best stat
The Predators too 30 minutes in penalties. This after Barry Trotz called the Canucks power play “awesome.”

Best news
Sami Salo: six shots. The Canucks need more of that from Salo.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Total team effort gets Canucks back on track

By BEN KUZMA, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011 10:59 PM

They knew it was best the faithful remove sharp objects from their pockets and step away from the ledge. The sky was not falling. The skill set had not seized up, Roberto Luongo would turn the jeers into cheers and the season was not lost.

By preaching patience and executing persistence, the Vancouver Canucks brought their fans back from the edge Thursday by proving that luck is really about preparation meeting opportunity. Their four first-period goals were all sprinkled with some magic scoring dust, but there was also a good measure of substance in a convincing 5-1 victory over the Nashville Predators at Rogers Arena. But first there was some good fortune.

There was a Daniel Sedin bank shot off the back of Pekka Rinne, a Henrik Sedin power-play effort that deflected off Kevin Klein and a nifty Dale Weise tip of a bouncing Alex Edler shot for the grinder's first NHL career goal. Then Chris Higgins saw his cross-ice pass to Cody Hodgson come right back off Jonathan Blum's stick so he could easily find the short side.

"It was kind of a must-win for us tonight to get rolling at home and from top to bottom we played well," said Weise, who had three shots, three hits and was named the third star. "On my goal, I was the high man on the forecheck and I don't even know who rimmed it and Eddie just kind of put it on net. I don't know if it was his hardest shot and I just outmuscled my guy and got a tip.

"It was kind of slow motion when I watched it go in, but it felt pretty good. It was top shelf, so I guess I'll take it."

The Canucks nearly took a five-goal bulge in the first period had Marco Sturm had been rewarded with his first goal of the season. After a puck went off his skate while being checked into the net by Shea Weber, a video review ruled a kicking motion but it didn't matter. The Canucks did the kicking where it mattered most — on the scoreboard. For the second-straight game, they fired 40 shots.

"We had more net presence and were on loose pucks better and that was key to sustaining pressure in their end," said Higgins. "My goal, I got a break but it shows the way we played in their end. We played more simple, more of a commitment in not making so many plays in the neutral zone and just getting it in and letting our work ethic and our skill take over.

"Some times we get a little too cute in the neutral zone."

The level of frustration was so evident by the third period that Ryan Suter and Weber gave the Canucks their second two-man advantage of the night. Ryan Kesler then ripped the rust off his shot in wiring a Daniel Sedin cross-ice feed home to make it 5-1. And even though the Predators called a time-out after digging a 4-1 hole and gave Rinne a mercy hook to start the second period in being replaced by Anders Lindback, it didn't make a difference. On a night where the fourth line showed up on the scorecard and the fight card — Maxim Lapierre hit two posts and beat up Colin Wilson while Aaron Volpatti gamely battled Jordin Tootoo — this was total dominance.

"They're forming good chemistry," said Canucks coach Alain Vigneault. "I liked the whole line with the speed element and they're able to make plays."

If the Canucks are supposedly suffering from a Stanley Cup hangover, then you wonder if the Roxy Effect struck the Predators. David Legwand brought eight points into the game but didn't muster a shot. And Sergei Kostitsyn was riding a five-game points streak but had but one shot. By comparison, a three-point night for Daniel Sedin has him tied for second in the scoring race with 10 points. Henrik Sedin is one back after his two-point game.

The Predators gave the Canucks a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:33 of the middle frame when Teemu Laakso tripped Kesler and Weber cross-checked Edler. If anything, the Canucks were guilty of trying to execute the perfect pass. That's as picky as you can get on a night when so much went right.

As expected, the early focus was on Luongo. After being booted Tuesday during a 4-0 loss to the New York Rangers, the populace was again polarized by the starter's familiar slow start to another season. And when Luongo didn't properly adjust to a shot off the endboards by Wilson, it allowed Matt Halischuk to flip the puck over the goaltender to briefly make it 1-1 early in the first period. But any cause for alarm soon dissipated because the Canucks soon grabbed the lead.

The Canucks wisely rested Mikael Samuelsson who's still sore from offseason adductor and sports hernia surgeries. They gave Sturm a chance to redeem himself and he was much more visible. More than the Predators.
Canucks problems abound as they meet up with defence-minded Predators

By BEN KUZMA, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011

VANCOUVER — Mikael Samuelsson's medical situation is symbolic of what ails the Vancouver Canucks.

The veteran right winger won't play Thursday night against the Nashville Predators because he's still not feeling right following adductor and sports hernia surgeries in May. He'll be replaced by the struggling Marco Sturm on the third line against the Nashville Predators; if anything, it might take the spotlight off Roberto Luongo as the President's Trophy winners try to avoid losing their first three home games to start a season since the short reign of Bill LaForge in 1984-85.

"Yeah, it's a little bit harder than I thought it would be," said Samuelsson, who has three points in six games. "I still feel it, I do. That's frustrating because I thought I would feel better. The power play doesn't bother me, but it's other stuff in my game."

That stuff includes puck battles and a stride that's not quite there and hindered the Swede all of last season. It means Sami Salo will man the point on the first power-play unit with Alex Edler, and Kevin Bieksa will join Dan Hamhuis on the second unit. It also means Sturm will get another chance to prove that no points, one shot and a minus-4 rating in five games are more about adapting to a new system than an indicator that two knee surgeries in the past three years have the free-agent acquisition more than a step behind the play.

"Mikael is getting a maintenance day," said Canucks coach Alain Vigneault. "He was 100 per cent during training camp and the first couple of days and lately he's been feeling a little bit stiff, so we're going to keep him off today. Marco is new to our team and trying to get adjusted, and we were told by our scouting staff that he has a real good skill level and speed and could chip in offensively and defensively.

"He's going to get another opportunity and hopefully he'll be able to do that."

The Predators have a Vezina Trophy finalist in Pekka Rinne. David Legwand and Sergei Kostitsyn are off to encouraging starts and the memory of two playoff victories in Rogers Arena last spring should provide needed incentive. But the league's youngest team has lost three straight and managed just a dozen shots in a 3-1 loss to Edmonton on Monday.

Mention all this to the Canucks and it doesn't really register, because it's not about the opposition. It's about the struggling Roberto Luongo. It's about the powerless power play. It's about anything in their game that is amiss and needs to be tweaked to turn around a 2-3-1 start. If the Canucks could score a power-play goal — they went 0-for-8 on Tuesday against the New York Rangers and are 0-for-11 on home-ice this season — then the spotlight might shift from Luongo. That's doubtful. Win or lose he will draw attention because of the position he plays, the salary he earns and the market he plays in. And who knows, maybe donning a new mask will spook the Preds and rally the crowd.

"I brought the Johnny Canuck back on the top and still wanted to have a bit of that vintage look," Luongo said of his new lid. "I've played in more games that have been intense than tonight and I'm just focused on getting back to where I need to be. I can only control the effort I put in, and when you're seeing the puck well, you make the saves. I'm not exactly where I want to be, but I'm not worried about it. Like any other year, I'm going to get it back and get back on top and when I look back down the road, I'll be laughing."

Right now, Luongo is 1-2-1 with a bloated 3.70 goals-against average and .866 saves percentage. It's a far cry from the career 2.11 GAA and .928 saves percentage he posted last season — and the 1.77 GAA and .929 saves percentage he managed in the season series against the Predators — and the public outcry was evident against the Rangers when the starter was booed.

"It doesn't matter what the score is, I've got to make the save," added Luongo. "It's on lateral plays that I end up falling forward and it's about patience at that point and reading the play. When you're patient, you're not reaching out and in good position to make the play.

"Pitch a shutout tonight, be the first star and you get a standing ovation. That's how it goes."

The Canucks won't find it easy to cure their scoring concerns. The Predators win by being good defensively first and being opportunistic offensively. Still, Legwand has eight points (2-6) through five games and Kostitsyn is on a five-game streak with a goal and four assists. Rinne is 2-2-1 with a 2.37 GAA and .926 saves percentage, and threw up a 1.26 GAA and .926 percentage in the season series and was outstanding in the postseason.

"They play good defence and trust their goalie," said Canucks winger Daniel Sedin. "We've got to get some dirty goals and get the lead, and we're obviously a better team when we have it and we're tougher to play against. And it goes with any goalie in this league, we've got to get bodies in front of Rinne and we'll have more chances. Blocking his vision is the No. 1 thing."

Ryan Kesler had a memorable playoff series against the Predators, figuring in 11 of 14 goals with five goals and six assists in a prime shutdown role.

"You feel like nothing can stop you and you don't get tired and can do anything out there," reeled Kesler. "I don't expect a drop and I'm ready to improve on my last performance. Our problem is we haven't played a full 60 and try to put together a game."

OF NOTE — The Canucks have placed defenceman Nolan Baumgartner on waivers. He was on injured reserve and needs to clear to join the AHL affiliate Chicago Wolves.

LINEUPS

Canucks:
D. Sedin - H.Sedin - Burrows
Higgins - Kesler - Hodgson
Sturm - Malhotra - Hansen
Volpatti - Lapierre - Weise
Bieksa - Ballard
Edler - Hamhuis
Alberts - Salo
Goal: Luongo

Predators:
Halischuk - Legwand - Wilson
Kostitsyn - Spaling - Smith
McGrattan - O'Reilly - Bergfors
Smithson - Geoffrion - Tootoo
Suter - Weber
Blum - Klein
Hillen - Ekholm
Goal: Rinne

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Toothless Canucks needs power-play bite

Shots and chances aplenty but Vancouver having trouble finding net

By BEN KUZMA, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011

First, the good news. After six games, Alex Burrows had the third-highest shot total in the NHL and with better timing, finish and luck the Vancouver Canucks winger might be leading the league in scoring.

Despite going 0-0-8 on the power play in a 4-0 loss to the New York Rangers on Tuesday, the Canucks fired 40 shots at Henrik Lundqvist. Another 23 were blocked and 19 missed the mark.

Despite missing training camp, preseason and the first five games with offseason hip surgery, Ryan Kesler has more of an issue with timing than with torque or tenacity.

And just to show the Canucks are not alone in stumbling out of the gate, the final four NHL teams from last spring are a combined 6-13-3.

Now, the disturbing news. After topping the NHL last season in goals scored, the power play and fewest goals surrendered, the President's Trophy winners are 22-nd, 15th and 24th in those categories, respectively, after six outings. And a penalty kill that ranked third last season is currently 26th.

There's a predictability to the power play, a curiosity about Mikael Samuelsson manning the point and the winger's admission that he's not quite right after two offseason surgeries.

Most importantly, there has yet to be a 60-minute performance because the 42-minute effort against the Rangers didn't cut it and you wonder if frustration is starting to seep in.

"I don't feel it," said Burrows, who had a game-high six shots against the Rangers.

"If we score on the power play, it's a different game. I thought our entries were fine, it was just a matter of putting them away. We're not happy about it. We know we can be better but we've got to turn it on sooner or later."

And there's the rub. It would be different if they weren't generating opportunities, but being 0-for-11 on the power play at home raises eyebrows.

To a man, the Canucks have expressed how crucial special teams are, especially early in the season when 5-on-5 rust is often evident.

"As much as I liked a lot of things about our power play and the quality chances, we didn't score," Canucks coach Alain Vigneault lamented of the Rangers loss.

"We're working on execution and getting more pucks to net with more people there and things that have always enabled the power play to be effective."

The presence of Kesler will certainly help in that regard.

He did the expected Tuesday. He went hard to the net and set screens while taking his share of hacks and whacks in looking for deflections and rebounds that Lundqvist refused to surrender. Kesler was sore after the game but more sore at the outcome.

"Our power play was actually really good and moving well, but their goalie stood on his head and you're going to run into goalies like that," said Kesler.

"I thought our net presence was pretty good. (Lundqvist) was playing tight and nothing was getting through him. I haven't seen a goalie play like that in a while. He was in a zone and nothing was getting by him."

It could be the same story Thursday in an expected showdown against the Nashville Predators and Vezina Trophy finalist Pekka Rinne. He had a 1.26 goals-against average and .926 save percentage going 2-2 against the Canucks last season, but also saw Kesler figure in 11 of 14 playoff goals in a second-round series victory.

Meanwhile, Vigneault has maintained that Samuelsson is the right fit on the first power play with Alex Edler, and that Sami Salo is better suited to the second unit with Dan Hamhuis.

It goes against the theory of loading up the top unit but may play into better special-teams balance, something that was missing last season. And Vigneault keeps pointing to statistics that showed the best percentage came when Samuelsson was paired with Christian Ehrhoff. But Samuelsson doesn't possess Salo's cannon and usually opts for wrist shots that don't intimidate from the point.

"Mikael sees the ice and is a real good shooter," countered Vigneault.

"We've got to give it some time here to work on things."

For his part, Samuelsson said he's feeling discomfort after adductor and sports hernia surgeries in May. The winger maintains they haven't hampered him on the power play, but he hasn't been as effective in puck battles or backchecking.

"Yeah, it's a little bit harder than I thought it would be," said Samuelsson, who has one goal this season.

"I still feel it. I do. That's frustrating because I thought I would feel better. The power play doesn't bother me, but it's other stuff in my game. I think we're OK with the power play. Maybe it's a mental game to refocus and really remember what got you to the top."

Maybe Burrows put it best about his bevy of chances that have him at just a 7.7 per cent scoring efficiency and two goals. But 26 shots after six games say something.

"That's a good sign," said Burrows, who scored on 17.1 per cent of his chances last season.

"As long as I'm around the net and creating scoring chances, sooner or later they're going to start going in, and in bunches."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Game Day: Canucks vs. Predators

By GORD MCINTYRE, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 20, 2011

The Setup
The Canuck: They haven't won at home yet and the Predators are 2-1-0 on the road. To the surprise of some, Roberto Luongo gets the start again against a team the Canucks usually have trouble scoring against.

The Predators: Nashville won two of three at Rogers Arena last spring and have been 1-1 in Vancouver in each of the past six seasons, a maximum of three goals being good enough for victory in those six wins.

Three things to watch
1. Revenge: Pekka Rinne says the past is the past, but admits there's still a bad taste after bowing out to the Canucks last season. "Both teams played hard, it was maybe the most fun series I've ever been part of. It was disappointing, but it was a fair outcome. Vancouver was just a little bit better than us."

2. Groundhog Day: "It feels like we were just here," Ryan Suter said, "everything went so fast and coming back nothing's changed. We've got a lot of young guys ... we have to be a hard-working team to have success." Now that is Groundhog Day, that's Nashville hockey as it's always been under Barry Trotz.

3. Reclamation project: Sergei Kostitsyn is 1-4-5 this season, the first Predator to open a season with a five-game points streak since Dan Hamhuis did it (1-5-6) to open the 2007-08 season when he was playing on the Predators blueline.

By the numbers
8: Barry Trotz on his observations from the press box on the Canucks' 4-0 loss to the Rangers: "You look and say 0-for-8 on the power play, but they could have been 8-for-8 on the power play, they were really good, awesome."

Leaderboard
Canucks
Goals 2 5Players
Assists 5 H/D Sedin
Points 7 H/D Sedin
PIM 23 Burrows
In Net Luongo 1-2-1
3.70 GAA/SV% .856
Predators
Goals 2 4Players
Assists 6 Legwand
Points 8 Legwand
PIM 7 Stortini
In Net Rinne 2-2-1
2.37 GAA/SV% .926

Injuries
Canucks: LW Mason Raymond (back surgery), out indefinitely; D Aaron Rome (broken hand), 2-4 weeks.
Predators: RW Martin Erat (shoulder), injured reserve; C Mike Fisher (concussion), injured reserve; RW Patric Hornqvist (right foot), day-to-day; C Cal O'Reilly (undisclosed), day-to-day; D Francis Bouillon (upper body), injured reserve; D Roman Josi (upper body), injured reserve.
Young Pred still has to prove himself

By GORDON McINTYRE, THE PROVINCE OCTOBER 19, 2011

Consider a tale of two centres.

Colin Wilson, taken seventh overall in the 2008 NHL draft, had 120 NHL regular-season and playoff games under his belt heading into this season; Cody Hodgson, taken three spots later in ’08, had 20.

Yet Hodgson got 12 of his NHL games in last season’s playoffs, while Wilson, who had dressed for all 82 regular-season games, was a healthy scratch in the playoffs until the final three games against the Canucks in Round 2.

There’s no right or wrong way to bring along a talented youngster.

But there is a learning curve for those who, once they make it, think they’ve, um, made it.

Watching from the press box didn’t sit well with the 21-year-old Wilson and he let folks know it.

“He wasn’t too happy that he didn’t play,” Predators coach Barry Trotz said on Wednesday. “He was a guy who wasn’t playing well the last part of the season.

“That happens sometimes with young guys, they get a little comfortable and don’t see it coming.”

You might say the same thing about former Vancouver Giant Jon Blum as he struggles early this season, or Chris Tanev of the Canucks, who has been sent down to the minors after dressing for Game 7 in June.

“Young guys who get over that hump tend to take their foot off the gas,” said Trotz. “I said to Jon, make sure you regain that urgency.

“One of the discussions you have about the growth of young guys is, you know, ‘Everythings great, I made it.’

“Well, it’s not always that way. ‘Be sure you see the bus coming before it hits you,’ is what I say to all young guys.”

This is interesting because, despite the Predators having the most successful playoffs in franchise history, they’re in a youth movement.

After the departures of Steve Sullivan, J-P Dumont, Joel Ward and Marcel Groc (toss in injuries to veterans Martin Erat and Mike Fisher), the Preds have six Calder-eligible players in the lineup.

Or put it this way: Shea Weber gets $7.5 million this season then is a restricted free agent again; Ryan Suter and Pekka Rinne are unrestricted at season’s end — the Press are walking the fine line between creating salary space and scaring off their three franchise players by going with unproven, if gifted, youngsters.

“We’ve got a lot of young guys, we know it’s going to be harder,” workhorse Suter said. “Me personally, I haven’t seen some of these guys play before. You don’t really know what to expect and we’re just sort of starting to get a feel for our team.”

Wilson says what you can expect from him is a new commitment.

In nature, it’s summed up thus: Live and learn or don’t live long.

“It’s a privilege to be in the lineup and I think I was taking that for granted at times,” Wilson said. “Now I realize I could be on the first line or I could be out of the lineup, it all depends on how I want to play.

“I’m young. I was younger last year. You don’t want to get scratched, but it’s whether you take a positive from it. If I get scratched again, obviously I didn’t learn anything.

“It’s up to me.”

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 10.21.2011
Capitals vs. Flyers: Washington flurry delivers 6-0 record to start season

By Katie Carrera,

PHILADELPHIA — If there’s one thing the Washington Capitals have shown in the first six games of the season it’s their collective ability to endure lapses in play and find a way to reinvigorate themselves. Against the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday night, they did precisely that.

After relying heavily on Tomas Vokoun throughout the second period, Washington blitzed the Flyers with three goals in a span of 2 minutes 25 seconds early in the third to fuel a 5-2 win and remain perfect on the year at 6-0-0. The outburst, with goals that all came with traffic in front of the net, silenced the 19,658 at Wells Fargo Center and sent many fans streaming to the exits early.

Afterward, Coach Bruce Boudreau acknowledged the Capitals benefited from at least two goals from deflections off opposing defenders and other bounces that came at the right time.

"It wasn’t a 5-2 game. Obviously, we got the breaks when we needed to get the breaks and we capitalized," said Boudreau, who admitted that after three of the team’s first five wins coming by a one-goal margin, he didn’t predict Washington’s first game with a large lead would come in Philadelphia.

"I’m not used to it yet," he said. "I’ll breathe a sigh of relief when I get on the plane. It was good and it was totally unexpected against this team but when you get a couple deflection goals like that and the goalie’s playing like he’s been playing, it’s pretty good."

Vokoun finished with 40 saves, the most he has been required to make as a Capital, while Alex Ovechkin posted two goals and Mathieu Perreault, Roman Hamrlik and Joel Ward each added their first tally of the season.

The offense kicked into overdrive with just 2:23 elapsed in the third period, which the Capitals entered leading 2-1. Hamrlik took a shot from the top of the circles that went off Flyers defenseman Andreas Lilja and past Ilya Bryzgalov (19 saves).

On the second shift after that tally, Ovechkin fought off Max Talbot to get off a shot that knuckled its way toward the net to make it 4-1. Less than a minute later, Ward deflected Jeff Schultz’s point shot and to complete the barrage.

It was a nice change of pace for Vokoun, who was bombarded with 17 shots from the Flyers in the third period alone.

"It’s easier for the goalie mentally after that," Vokoun said. "You don’t have to worry about one mistake costing you the game. You still want to stop everything, it’s just you’re not under so much pressure. So it’s nice when you have a lead like that."

Philadelphia made it 5-2 on a meaningless goal by Andreas Nodl with 14.7 seconds remaining but all in all it was another positive outing for the Czech netminder. Vokoun, 35, holds a 1.95 goals against average and .939 save percentage.

Washington’s flurry came after a second period in which its control of the game never seemed certain despite holding a lead. The Capitals played on their heels and sloppily in their own end, hemmed in for multiple shifts in succession as Philadelphia surged in an attempt to tie the contest.

On back-to-back shifts over a two-minute stretch beginning with nine minutes gone in the period, the Capitals’ top two lines turned the puck over repeatedly and yielded seven attempted shots, four on net, including one that required a diving stick save by Vokoun.

"The first, probably 14 minutes in the second period, they were dominating but Vokoun play unbelievable and he keep us in the game," Ovechkin said. "And keep the lead and in the third period we use our chances and score goals."

Despite the lopsided play, the Flyers weren’t able to finish any of their opportunities and it was the Capitals that came closest to scoring a goal in the second.

An apparent goal by Backstrom with 1:59 remaining in the second was waved off because Ovechkin had barreled over Bryzgalov as he drove the net for a shot that then bounced out to the high slot and his Swedish linemate. The two had connected previously in the contest, though, in Washington’s first offensive spurt late in the first.

After falling behind on a breakaway goal by Claude Giroux at 14:25 of the first, Washington found a little luck with less than two minutes remaining as a wrister from Mathieu Perreault deflected off Flyers defenseman Braydon Coburn’s stick to even the score. The Capitals kept pushing as time dwindled toward intermission, and Ovechkin buried the puck into a wide-open net after Backstrom’s stuff attempt slid through the crease to the star left wing. Ovechkin’s tally put Washington up 2-1 with 11.8 seconds to go in the first.

Capitals notes: Jay Beagle missed a third consecutive game since being knocked out by Pittsburgh’s Arron Asham on Oct. 13. Asked if Beagle has a concussion, Boudreau said "You can infer whatever you want to infer. We’re just saying it’s day to day.

Michal Neuvirth missed a fourth straight game with a bruised right foot. Jeff Halpern suffered a cut over his left eye after a hit against the Flyers. He received stitches but finished the game.

Troy Brouwer looks for a breakout game against Flyers

By Katie Carrera

After he scored his first goal as a Capital against Tampa Bay in the second game regular season, Troy Brouwer thought that this year wouldn’t be like those in the past. But five games in, the gritty winger has only that point and is a plus 1.

“I feel like I’m playing solid. I’m not wowing anyone right now,” Brouwer said. “I’ve only got one goal, one point in the first five games, and on a personal note that’s a little unacceptable for me, especially with the players who I’m playing with.”

(Charles Dharapak - AP) Slow starts aren’t entirely new to Brouwer, who signed a two-year deal worth $4.7 million this offseason after the Capitals traded their 2011 first-round pick for his negotiating rights.

In the first 10 games of last season, Brouwer recorded six points but didn’t score a goal until his 13th game of the year. In 2009-10, the first 10 games saw him record three points, and it took until the eighth contest for him to get a goal. The first 10 games of his rookie year? Brouwer had four points and scored a goal in his sixth appearance.

“I don’t want to say I’m a notorious slow starter — I was hoping to change that when I got that goal this year,” Brouwer said. “I need to be better, whether it’s the start of the season or not. I know I’m finishing my checks but there’s more to my game than just that. I expect to be able to score goals for myself and for my team, and create goals as well.”

Playing with Alex Ovechkin and Nick Backstrom on the top line, Brouwer puts additional pressure on himself to produce in order to help lessen the pressure that his linemates receive, or at least counter the impact of opponents shutting them down.

Through five games, Ovechkin has one goal, three points and is a minus 2 while Backstrom leads the Capitals’ with six points (one goal) but he’s also a minus 2.

“With Ovi only having one goal, I take a lot of onus on myself because with how much he gets covered right now he needs linemates to help him out and that will make him more successful as well,” Brouwer said.

If there’s ever a setting for Brouwer to flourish it may be Thursday night in Philadelphia. The Capitals sought Brouwer’s physical, grinding style of play to face foes like the Flyers, who play a playoff-style of game all season long. Brouwer also has plenty of experience against the Flyers from the 2010 Stanley Cup final series that the Blackhawks played and won against them.

“The team’s changed a little bit, but there’s a lot of guys still around that I played against in my series against them,” Brouwer said. “I know the players very well, I know how they play and it’s a good type of hockey for me. I like that type of bumping and grinding hockey. So it gets you into the game for a player like me, battle in the corners, do what makes me successful.”

Capitals pick up win, some cuts along the way against Flyers

By Katie Carrera

The Capitals earned their sixth straight victory after an offensive barrage in the third period helped push them past a sloppy second period for a 5-2 win over the Flyers on Thursday night.

In order to attain that win, though, Washington players picked up a few nicks, bumps and bruises along the way.

“That’s what happens when you win,” Coach Bruce Boudreau said. “The guys that win, they’ve got cuts and they’ve paid the price and that’s what they talk about. I’m a big believer in that.”

Brooks Laich was high-sticked twice on the left side of his nose, each causing him to bleed. The first time earned the Capitals four minutes in power-play time that were partially negated by an interference call on Alex Ovechkin. When Laich was cut again, it was only a two-minute minor.

“It’s the same area,” Boudreau said. The referees “didn’t know if it was just the same cut reopened. It’s a hard decisions for those two to make at that time.”

Meanwhile, Jeff Halpern suffered a cut above his left eye following a hit. He required stitches and missed the fourth line’s first shift at the start of the third period but returned and finished the game.

“Halpern got a pretty good pressure cut on his eye,” Boudreau said. “I don’t know how many stitches he took.”

All nothing more than a flesh wound, though, particularly when Washington will return with two points.

PHILADELPHIA — Jay Beagle was injured a week ago in Pittsburgh as a result of his fight with Arron Asham. The Capitals forward hasn’t skated since.

On Thursday, coach Bruce Boudreau was asked if Beagle had a concussion. He did not confirm or deny.

“You can infer whatever you want to infer,” Boudreau said. “We’re just saying it’s day-to-day.”

There is no timetable for Beagle to return to practice.

Last Friday, Boudreau said Beagle was fine “other than a fat lip,” and that he did not have any concussion symptoms. That may have changed since.

Team, not star power, impresses Boudreau
Coach likes collective approach

By Stephen Whyno
The Washington Times
Thursday, October 20, 2011

PHILADELPHIA — Around the league, the Washington Capitals are considered a star-studded team, especially with Alex Ovechkin a headliner when he comes to town. His fellow “Young Guns” — center Nicklas Backstrom, forward Alexander Semin and defenseman Mike Green — only add to that reputation.

But maybe it’s a rep the Capitals are trying to shake. Asked a basic question after Tuesday night’s game about Semin’s game, coach Bruce Boudreau made a point to emphasize how well the team is playing.

“It’s not about individuals,” Boudreau said. “I think we’ve spent way too much time worrying about individuals in the years here. And now it’s worrying about let’s see how the team does. It’s all about the group as far as I’m concerned.”

With all the talk about Boudreau setting a new, more “serious” tone this season, shying away from individual praise is another example of a sharpened focus on winning together at all costs — something that has been successful so far.

No one will admit if ex-Capital Matt Bradley’s criticism this summer of Semin had any effect on Washington’s changes or harder practices, and Bradley - who has since apologized — didn’t want to take credit. What players will say is there is an emphasis on team this time around.

“It is something that we have talked about and something that’s pretty obvious to have success it’s got to be done by committee, not just one guy,” defenseman Karl Alzner said. “We’re winning games, so it doesn’t really matter about one individual right now.”

Going into Thursday night’s game against the Philadelphia Flyers, 10 different Capitals had scored goals — including left wing Jason Chimera with four. As much as top players haven’t put up big numbers, the supporting cast has chipped in.

That’s good preparation for springtime.

“You ever know what happens come playoff time — a couple guys might go cold and you need everybody else to pick it up,” Alzner said.

Balanced scoring is not a coincidence, either. Boudreau’s self-described “rant” is put into practice as he has rolled all four lines pretty consistently and counted on contributions up and down the lineup.

That’s a bit of a change, right wing Mike Knuble said, but not a bad one because it means not taxing top players.

“Bruce is really spreading out key moments and time and giving different key moments in a game to different players,” Knuble said. “As a player you’ve got be ready, it might not be you every night. Sometimes if you knew you had that role, it was going to be that every night.”

Naturally the Capitals still want the likes of Ovechkin and Backstrom to lead the charge, and the captain said the team needs to improve all-around.

“I think … everybody wants to have higher numbers than they have right now,” Ovechkin said. “We try to be better.”

A perfect way to start for Capitals

By: Brian McNally | 10/20/11 8:05 PM

PHILADELPHIA -- The Capitals passed their toughest test yet of this young NHL season.

On the road at Wells Fargo Center against Eastern Conference rival Philadelphia, Washington scored three goals in a span of 2:25 early in the third period to break open a tight game en route to a 5-2 victory.

Alex Ovechkin scored two goals, including a power-play tally early in the third period, Mathieu Perreault registered a goal and an assist and Nicklas Backstrom had two assists as the Caps shook off a shaky second period to remain perfect on the season.

Washington improved to 6-0-0 with 12 standings points, continuing the best start to a campaign in the franchise’s 37 years. The Caps remain unbeaten heading into Saturday's showdown with the Detroit Red Wings at Verizon Center. Detroit (4-0-0) is the only other NHL team without a loss.

"[The Flyers] are a good team. Teams like that are going to make plays, and they're going to pinch you in their zone," goalie Tomas Vokoun said. "I give them credit. We had our [good] shifts. They had theirs. Sometimes it comes down to who scores that extra goal. We had a couple lucky bounces and opened the game wide open. Except for that it was a pretty close game."

And close games are nothing new for these two teams. They played four times last season, and each went to overtime or a shootout. Each team came away with two wins as they split the season series. Not this time, however.

An uneven first period saw both sides leave power-play chances on the board. Ovechkin took a needless interference call just 39 seconds into a 4-on-3 power play. Washington was 0-for-3 with the man advantage.

The Flyers took the lead at 14:25 when Alexander Semin tried to dangle at the blueline and Wayne Simmonds swept the puck out of the zone and right to teammate Claude Giroux. He deked Vokoun (40 saves) on the breakaway for a pretty goal and a 1-0 lead.

Washington answered late in the period, however. With 80 seconds left, Scott Hartnell turned the puck over in the Flyers’ defensive zone. Perreault knocked the puck down and fired a low, hard shot that deflected off Philadelphia defenseman Braydon Coburn's stick and went in. With just 11.8 seconds left the Flyers got sloppy again. Backstrom had a late stuff attempt that deflected across Ilya Bryzgalov’s crease, where a waiting Ovechkin slammed the puck home for a 2-1 lead.

The Flyers controlled play in the second period with 14 shots on goal, and they generated several quality scoring chances against Vokoun. But it was Washington that thought it had a 3-1 lead until Backstrom's backhand goal was wiped out by referee Tim Peel, who ruled Ovechkin and possibly teammate Troy Brouwer made incidental contact with Bryzgalov.

But the Caps got their insurance goal early in the third period at 2:23 when Roman Hamrlik’s point shot snuck by Bryzgalov for a 3-1 advantage. Just 91 seconds later Ovechkin earned his second of the night, somehow ripping a power-play shot from the slot even with Flyers forward Max Talbot all over him. Then just 54 seconds later, Joel Ward tipped home a shot by defenseman Jeff Schultz to put the contest away.

"You try to get [Bryzgalov] to move around and search for pucks," Ward said. "A little bit of traffic, any goalie will tell you it's not the best to have guys in front of you. That's what we've been trying to do -- those types of goals, not just the pretty ones."

Playing the wrong way
Not making the right plays costs Jets dearly again

By: Ed Tait

OTTAWA -- The offence is a concern and the repeated turnovers a recurring nightmare. Two thirds of what was once the top line has yet to score, the penalty kill is struggling and the power play is more miss than hit.

But here is an even bigger cause for concern for Claude Noel and the Winnipeg Jets, now 1-4-1 after an ugly, mistake-prone 4-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators in front of 17,919 at Scotiabank Place in the nation's capital: It's not even Halloween yet and the head coach is running out of buttons to push, though it could be said the panic button must now be awfully tempting.

Asked afterward what the team's No. 1 problem might be right now, Noel said: "Well... I'll let you decide that."

Pressed further, the boss added this take, which might perfectly sum up the Jets' sorry state: "Finding ways to win games is the No. 1 problem. How you do that? If you're going to win it 1-0 or 2-1 or whatever, you've got to create something. You have a roster that has produced in the past and in some areas they have to do a better job."

The Jets actually led this game 1-0 after the first period as Dustin Byfuglian scored his first of the season. But the Sens replied on goals by Milan Michalek and Jason Spezza in the second, with Daniel Alfredsson gobbling up a turnover to make it 3-1 in the third. Michalek scored into an empty net as Noel actually pulled goaltender Ondrej Pavelec a couple of times in the final five minutes, the first coming with the Jets on a power play, in an effort to find a spark for his team.

This on a night in which the head coach also juggled his lines again, moving Andrew Ladd onto a line with Nik Antropov and Alex Burmistrov.

"You're trying to get people untracked," Noel said. "It's pretty clear, you can skate and do your work and you can be happy in terms of effort, but at the end of the day you have to be accountable to yourself about producing. And producing is about winning games and if you're a scorer, score and if you're a checker, check."

The Senators were 1-for-4 on the power play and, coupled with Wednesday's third-period collapse in Toronto, the Jets have now surrendered three PP goals in the last four periods. As well, the Jets were 0-for-4 on the power play.

But it's about more than just the special teams. Right now it's about want-to for the Jets. And against the Sens they were occasionally woefully short in that department.

"It's about us in here right now," said Jets winger Tanner Glass afterward. "Give Ottawa credit, but it's about taking care of the puck and making the right plays when they're there. There's a Trevor Linden quote I like to think back to -- 'There's one way to play and it's the right way.' Sometimes the right play isn't a fancy one, it's getting it out, or getting it in deep and getting in on the forecheck.

"It's a challenge for us in here now. The veteran guys who have been through these battles before have to step up and get this going in the right direction. It's about attitude and how we approach each period."

The Jets, for a second straight night, struggled mightily when the momentum shifted in the second and fell into a long funk that cost them.

"It's extremely frustrating," said defenceman Mark Stuart. "I think if you asked every guy in here they would say that... I hope they would say that. It's no fun losing."

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more nhl coverage on c2, 3, 6

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Burimstrov best thing about Jets, so far
Slick centreman, 19, playing with poise of wily veteran

By: Gary Lawless

OTTAWA -- Another night and another point for Alexander Burimstrov, one of the few bright lights in the Winnipeg Jets lineup right now.

The second-year pro picked up an assist in Winnipeg's 4-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators Thursday and now leads the Jets in points with one goal and four assists through six games.

The argument can be made that he's been Winnipeg's best player to date and at age 19 there's endless upside with the young Russian centre.

"He's been our best forward since the season started. A 19-year-old player is our best player," said Jets coach Claude Noel.

"He's the one guy I'm happy with. Every time he's on the ice he's dangerous and he creates stuff. You certainly can't fault what he's brought to the table."

Burimstrov spent last season in Atlanta, scoring six goals and 14 assists in 74 games in a mostly defensive role.

But he's blossomed into an offensive threat and midway through Thursday's game, when Noel moved Kyle Wellwood off Burimstrov's line and replaced him with Andrew Ladd, became the team's No. 1 centre.

Burimstrov, who has had fellow Russian Nikol Antropov on his wing since the season's outset, wasn't interested in platitudes following the loss.

"Right now it's more important for me to win the game. I don't really care about my points. We need to win the game," said Burimstrov, who played one year of major junior in Canada with the Barrie Colts in 2009-10, scoring 22 goals and 43 assists in 62 games.

A swift skater with excellent puck-handling skills, Burimstrov has high hockey intellect and sees the ice better than most.

"He's been one of our best forwards. He gets around the ice well, he's shifty and he's been doing a good job of going forward with the puck," said defenceman Mark Stuart.

"He's been doing a better job of moving forward and when he does turn up, he finds people. He sees the ice real well and when the puck is on his stick it seems like it's on a string."

Burimstrov looks like a high schooler with wispy facial hair and a slight frame, standing 6-1 and 180 pounds.

"For a little body, he does a pretty good job of protecting the puck and taking hits because guys are taking runs at him," said Stuart. "It was big for him to play here last year. He's a young kid and he's matured pretty fast. He's got a ways to go but he's definitely ahead of the curve."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
HIGHLIGHT REEL Sens 4 / Jets 1

By: Staff Writer
Posted: 10/21/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 0

Big picture
If it's best to describe these reborn Winnipeg Jets as a 'work in progress' then let it be said that progress is slow and the work to do aplenty.

The Jets rolled into Ottawa to face a team that had lost three straight and which had been roughed up repeatedly in their own zone, having surrendered 30 goals in six games. By game's end the Sens looked like the 1976-77 Montreal Canadiens. There's little time to sulk, however, especially with their next 10 games against Eastern Conference opponents including home dates Saturday and Monday. It's true a playoff spot isn't earned in October, but one can certainly begin sliding away this early.

Little picture
An all-too-common theme for these Jets, who are looking more and more like the Thrasher side that struggled for stretches last year, not the crew that led the division into November. If Claude Noel was a man trying to stop a dam from leaking, he'd have run out of fingers and toes now with everything that is ailing his team. His issue might not be what to fix, but where to start with the repairs.

Game-breaker
The Jets trail 2-1 in the third when Johnny Oduya turns the puck over -- and we've seen that movie before -- to Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson who then beats Ondrej Pavelec with a low wrister stick side. And with that went any notion of a Jets' comeback.

Free Press 'O'Ö'
1122233-- Tait
SUMMARY
First Period
1. Winnipeg, Byfuglien 1 (Burmistrov, Antropov) 14:39
Penalties -- Burmistrov Wpg (double high-sticking) 1:29, Karlsson Ott (holding) 7:01.

Second Period
2. Ottawa, Michalek 4 (Greening, Spezza) 4:48 (pp)
3. Ottawa, Spezza 3 (Greening, Michalek) 13:20

Third Period
4. Ottawa, Alfredsson 3, 9:15
5. Ottawa, Michalek 5 (Smith, Spezza) 19:20 (en)
Penalties -- Enstrom Wpg (holding) 8:16, Neil Ott (high-sticking) 8:16, Karlsson Ott (holding) 11:54, Alfredsson Ott (tripping) 14:02.

Shots on goal by
Winnipeg 13 9 14 -- 36
Ottawa 12 12 6 -- 30

Goal -- Winnipeg: Pavelec (L,1-3-1); Ottawa: Anderson (W,2-2-0).

Power plays (goals-chances) -- Winnipeg: 0-4; Ottawa: 1-4.


Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets should emerge as contender, eventually

By: Gary Lawless

Posted: 10/21/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 0 (including replies)

OTTAWA — They’re calling it the Fail for Nail around here with the Senators, Winnipeg Jets and Columbus Blue Jackets considered the front-runners.

Nail Yakupov is the consensus No. 1 pick for next summer’s NHL entry draft and the Russian winger has teams wondering whether finishing 30th in the league isn’t the worst thing that could happen.

Yakupov scored 49 goals and 52 assists with the OHL’s Sarnia Sting last season and already has eight goals and 18 assists in 11 games this season.

USA Today’s first NHL power poll of the season was released on Thursday with the Jets ranked 28th in the league, just ahead of the Sens at 29 and the Columbus Blue Jackets in dead last. Thursday night’s 4-1 loss to Ottawa might make those rankings out of date already.

The Jets have a long way to go and many holes to fill before they can call themselves a contender.

Senators GM Brian Murray says patience is the key to transforming into a competitor.

"It's hard. There's no doubt about it," said Murray, who has overseen rebuild jobs in Anaheim and Florida and is now embarking on one in Ottawa. "We were lucky in Anaheim in that we were able to draft (Ryan) Getzlaf and Corey Perry in the same year. Then we got Bobby Ryan and all of a sudden your franchise is competitive."

Murray is credited with building the foundation in Anaheim that Brian Burke later put some finishing touches on that resulted in a Stanley Cup.

"It's frustrating for fans and management and players and you hope it's worth it," said Murray. "You have to decide for your organization if it's better to finish just out of the playoffs or near the bottom. Last year we thought we would be better and we signed a few free agents and then it didn't pan out. So then the approach was, do we want to pick 10th or near the top.

Sometimes it's worth it, to get the top gem in the draft is worth paying the price for. But finishing out of the playoffs is no fun."

Jets fans want to see their team win, but it's obvious this team is not a contender. Management is unlikely to spend money or make moves for today, but will instead look to stock draft picks as part of a long-range plan.

"Patience is important. The good thing about the Winnipeg franchise is that they already have a few good young players coming," said Murray. "The last couple of years in Atlanta they were down a bit and they have a group of players that are going to grow and be competitive."

Murray says winning isn't easy in the NHL and fans have to buy into a rebuild project.

"Eventually, and hopefully that eventually isn't too long, you'll be a competitor," he said.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets eyeing outdoor game

Have interest in Heritage Classic, NHL confirms

By: Gary Lawless
Posted: 10/21/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 0 (including replies)

OTTAWA -- A league source has confirmed to the Free Press that the Winnipeg Jets have expressed interest in hosting the next Heritage Classic, which is expected to be played in 2014.

The NHL is expected to study and consider the viability of hosting the outdoor game in Winnipeg.

Jean Levac / postmedia news Fans of the Winnipeg Jets have fun during first-period NHL action in Ottawa Thursday.

Enlarge Image

Jean Levac / postmedia news Fans of the Winnipeg Jets have fun during first-period NHL action in Ottawa Thursday. (POSTMEDIA OTTAWA CITIZEN)

"Winnipeg will have the benefit of having a suitable outdoor facility," said an NHL source, referring to the new football stadium being built on the University of Manitoba campus and expected to be ready for next summer's CFL season.

The NHL has developed the Winter Classic into a yearly franchise in the U.S. in an attempt to sell the game, but uses the Canadian version known as the Heritage Classic much more sparingly.

The Jets had no comment on the potential of hosting an outdoor game.

Another tribute

For the second night in a row a Canadian NHL city honoured the Jets with a video tribute and welcomed the franchise back to the league. The Senators played some old Jets footage and the Ottawa fans gave it some nice applause, but nowhere near the standing ovation Leafs fans gave the franchise on Wednesday night in Toronto.

Friendly confines

By our count, Thursday night's game in Ottawa was the second-best attended road game by Jets fans. Last Sunday in Phoenix there were a about 2,000 fans in Jets gear; there were a few hundred in Toronto on Wednesday and close to 1,000 at Ottawa's Scotiabank Place.

Media horde

Senators veteran Jason Spezza looked up in the Senators dressing room on Thursday morning and marvelled at the big media crowd. "Boy, it's like the playoffs. The Winnipeg Jets draw a crowd. Haven't seen this much media here in a long time. Pretty cool."

Big building

Scotiabank Place has a fluctuating capacity, but the biggest crowd of the year this season was 19,455 in the building. The rink has more than 100 luxury suites, but many are unsold and there is talk the facility is a little large for the city of Ottawa. When the Senators were winners and playoff regulars, the seats were an easy sale. That's not the case at the present and there were many empty seats on Thursday night.

Old friends

The Senators honoured three former Jets in the building, saying hello to Norm Beaudoin, Jim Kyte and Laurie Boschman.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
The man behind the moustache

Coach of struggling Senators squad excited about NHL’s return to Winnipeg

By: Ed Tait

OTTAWA -- Paul MacLean's trademark moustache is much greyer now, not that anyone on the planet hasn't aged since his days patrolling the wing for the Winnipeg Jets in the 1980s.

But the thing remains as prodigious as ever -- so much so that when the Ottawa Senators head coach walks into a room, it's estimated the bushy growth above his upper lip has a 10-second head start.

Paul MacLean

Enlarge Image

Paul MacLean

Now, not surprisingly, one of the first questions the 53-year-old was hit with Thursday in advance of the Jets-Senators tilt at Scotiabank Place was about coaching against his, sort of, old team. (Different franchise, different owners, different history, but they are called the 'Jets').

"It is special," said MacLean. "It's where I started -- I didn't play my first NHL game with the Jets (he suited up for one contest with the St. Louis Blues before being traded), but I had seven years with the Winnipeg Jets and they were great. I'm really excited they're back in the league and the city has hockey again. The fans were tremendous to me.

"I'm a little more focused on my team at this point in time and not who we are playing as much, but it's great they're back in the league and it's evident by the crowds they have at the rink and the buzz in the city of Winnipeg. It's obviously good for the league."

Yes, while his answer was thoughtful and measured it's clear the man has bigger things on his mind these days.

Although it was widely predicted the Senators -- in the first year under MacLean in their current rebuild -- could be one of the NHL's worst sides this season, no one figured they'd be as bad as they've been to open the campaign.

Entering Thursday's action, Ottawa was 1-5 and had given up 30 goals in six contests, the most recent a 7-2 home shellacking by the Philadelphia Flyers. Given his squad's woes, Thursday morning might not have been the best time to prod MacLean for his memories of his days as a Jet.

So, we'll relive them a bit for him. Originally drafted by the St. Louis Blues in 1978, MacLean was acquired by the Jets in 1981 and in seven years, mostly on the wing with Dale Hawerchuk, he averaged 35 goals a season.

Born in France but raised in Canada, MacLean bounced around from bench to bench as a coach, working with Peoria and Kansas City in the IHL, Quad City in the UHL and as an assistant in Phoenix, Anaheim and Detroit.

The Sens came calling in June, offering him the chance to be one of the main architects of the team's rebuild. And while the results may not show it, MacLean's tenure in the NHL, as a player and coach has his troops believing his blueprint will work -- given time.

"He's been great," said Senators veteran Jason Spezza. "He's given us a great plan. We haven't executed it yet, but he's a real personable guy who has some edge to him. He's not shy to bark at you and let us know when he's not happy, but he's also been a good teacher and run a good ship so far.

"Our record isn't reflective of how he's been. He's come in and he's brought a real good attitude and fresh outlook to our team. It's just unfortunate the start we've gotten off to."

Yes, rebuild or not, losing doesn't sit well with MacLean. He'll have to preach patience while being short of it himself.

"The growing pains are there. I think a lot of times we look like we're learning and when you hesitate and are not sure with what you're doing and it's not automatic, that's when you get the hesitation and pause in our game and we end up making mistakes that end up in our net.

"The No. 1 thing we want to see right now is them playing with confidence and try to dictate the game as opposed to waiting for something disastrous to happen."

Paul MacLean: THE JET YEARS

HE wore Jet colours for seven years (1981-82 to 1987-88) before being traded to Detroit for Brent Ashton.

MacLean's years in Winnipeg were very productive -- he still ranks among the Jets 1.0 franchise's career leaders in a number of categories.

Among them:

Ninth in career games played, 528 (first overall: Shane Doan, 1,124)

Fifth in goals, 248 (Dale Hawerchuk, 379)

Sixth in assists, 270 (Thomas Steen, 553)

Sixth in points, 518 (Hawerchuk, 929)

Ninth in penalty minutes, 726 (Keith Tkachuk, 1,508)

Third in power-play goals, 97 (Hawerchuk, 122)

Seventh in game-winning goals, 24 (Doan, 54)

Fourth in hat tricks, 7 (Hawerchuk, 12)

-- Tait

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Senators catch Jets napping, win game 4-1

By: Ed Tait

OTTAWA — The offence is a concern and the repeated turnovers a recurring nightmare. Two thirds of what was once the top line has yet to score, the penalty kill is struggling and the power-play is much more miss than hit.

But here is an even bigger cause for concern for Claude Noel and the Winnipeg Jets, now 1-4-1 after an ugly, mistake-prone 4-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators in front of 17,919 at Scotiabank Place in the nation’s capital:

Pressed further, the boss added this take, which might just perfectly sum up the Jets’ sorry state right now:

"Finding ways to win games is the No. 1 problem. How do you do that? If you’re going to win it 1-0 or 2-1 or whatever, you’ve got to create something. You have a roster that has produced in the past and in some areas they have to do a better job."

The Jets actually led this game 1-0 after the first period as Dustin Byfuglien scored his first of the season. But the Sens replied on goals by Milan Michalek and Jason Spezza in the second, with Daniel Alfredsson gobbling up a turnover to make it 3-1 in the third. Michalek scored into an empty net as Noel actually pulled Ondrej Pavelec a couple of times in the final five minutes, the first coming with the Jets on a power play, in an effort to find a spark for his team.

This on a night in which the head coach also juggled his lines again, moving Andrew Ladd onto a line with Nik Antropov and Alex Burmistrov.

"You’re trying to get people untracked," Noel said. "It’s pretty clear, you can skate and do your work and you can be happy in terms of effort but at the end of the day you have to be accountable to yourself about producing. And producing is about winning games and if you’re a scorer, score and if you’re a checker, check."

The Senators were 1 for 4 on the power-play and, coupled with Wednesday’s third-period collapse in Toronto, the Jets have now surrendered three PP goals in the last four periods. As well, the Jets struggled again themselves with the man advantage, going 0-for-4.

But it’s about more than just the special teams. Right now it’s about want-to for the Jets. And against the Sens they were occasionally woefully short in that department.

"It’s about us in here right now," said Jets winger Tanner Glass afterward. "Give Ottawa credit, but it’s about taking care of the puck and making the right plays when they’re there. There’s a a Trevor Linden quote I like to think back to — ‘There’s one way to play and it’s the right way.’ Sometimes the right play isn’t a fancy one, it’s getting it out, or getting it in deep and getting in on the forecheck.

"It’s challenge for us in here now. The veteran guys who have been through these battles before have to step up and get this going in the right direction. It’s about attitude and how we approach each period."

The Jets, for a second straight night, struggled mightily when the momentum shifted in the second and fell into a long funk that cost them.

"It’s extremely frustrating," said defenceman Mark Stuart. "I think if you asked every guy in here they would say that... I hope they would say that. It’s no fun losing. But, on the other hand, that’s the easy thing to do: get frustrated and start pointing fingers. We are doing some things well. We just need to take those and do more of them."

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets keen to host Heritage Classic

By: Gary Lawless
Posted: 10/20/2011 6:43 PM | Comments:

OTTAWA - A league source has confirmed to the Free Press the Winnipeg Jets have expressed interest in hosting the next Heritage Classic expected to be played in 2014.

The NHL is expected to study and consider the viability of hosting an outdoor game in Winnipeg.

"Winnipeg will have the benefit of having a suitable outdoor facility," said an NHL source, referring to the new football stadium being built on the University of Manitoba campus and expected to be ready for next summer's CFL season.

The NHL has developed the Winter Classic into a yearly franchise in the U.S. in an attempt to sell the game but uses the Canadian version known as the Heritage Classic much more sparingly.

The Jets had no comment on the potential of hosting an outdoor game.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets hope to break through Ottawa’s defence

By: Ed Tait

OTTAWA — Something’s got to give tonight when the occasionally offensive-challenged Winnipeg Jets meet the defensively spotty Ottawa Senators in the nation’s capital.

The Jets arrived here after Wednesday’s shoot-out loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs having scored just 10 goals in five games. And the Sens, who held a players’-only meeting earlier this week, have surrendered an astonishing 30 goals in their six games, five of them losses.

"It’s been frustrating to start the year off like this," said Senators’ forward Jason Spezza. "The positive thing is we’ve got a lot of hockey left to make up for the mistakes we’ve made and if we don’t make up for those mistakes it’s going to be a long year.

"We have to get our game in order here in quick time."

The Jets did show some positive signs in the loss to the Leafs, scoring for the first time on the power play as Tobias Enstrom, Mark Scheifele and Alex Burmistrov all hit the scoresheet for their first goals of the season. But a bad stretch in the third period cost them, as the Leafs rallied with power-play goals less than 30 seconds apart to erase a 3-1 deficit before winning in the shoot out.

"They’re a team that has some speed," said Ottawa head coach Paul MacLean in describing the Jets. "(Rookie Mark) Scheifele’s a good little player and their power-play hasn’t been great, but it’s been effective.

"(Dustin) Byfuglien is a big player and a big-time shooter who uses his size and (Tobias) Enstrom is really a good player... I think they both logged 30 minutes last night. Their first line with (Blake) Wheeler, (Bryan) Little and (Andrew) Ladd is going to be a handful for us and Evander Kane is a good young player with good speed who isn’t afraid to go to the net and (Jim) Slater’s line gives them some good physicality.

"They’re going to be every bit a handful as everybody has been to this point for us.”

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets Snapshots: Not enough offence to win
Digging themselves into early hole

By TED WYMAN, QMI Agency

It’s never a good sign when you lose to a team that is considered among the worst in the league.

The Winnipeg Jets were on the road, playing for the second night in a row and for the third time in four nights, but there’s no excuse for the fact that they can’t score with any regularity and can’t hold leads.

The Jets scored first for the fourth time in six games, but are 1-2-1 when that happens. They lost 4-1 to the Senators Thursday night, leaving them with a disappointing 1-4-1 record on the season.

The Jets are simply not generating enough offence to win games.

Bryan Little, Evander Kane and Blake Wheeler were all expected to challenge for 20 goals, if not 30, this season, but have combined for a big goose egg so far. Captain Andrew Ladd has just one goal.

This team desperately needs some production from its top-six forwards.

This is a huge week for the Jets and it started well with a win over Pittsburgh and a hard-fought shootout loss in Toronto.

Thursday was a bit of a step back, as the special teams faltered once again, bad turnovers played a key role and the Jets’ only goal came off the stick of defenceman Dustin Byfuglien.

A win Saturday at home against Carolina would salvage the week, but the Jets are digging a hole that’s going to be very tough to climb out of when they go on the road for a seven-game trip next week.

Aggressive call by Claude Noel, pulling the goaltender for an extra attacker during a power play with five minutes left in the game and sticking with the strategy until Milan Michalek finally scored into the empty net with about a minute left. The extra attacker sure didn’t help much though, as the Jets are having all kinds of trouble finishing off good scoring chances … Craig Anderson has been the worst goalie in the NHL to this point in the season, but he sure didn’t look bad against the Jets, making some big saves when it counted to preserve the win for Ottawa … Johnny Oduya with another terrible turnover across the middle gave Daniel Alfredsson a great chance and he made no mistake to make it 3-1 for Ottawa … Considering how bad the Jets have been on faceoffs this season, it was not good news when their best faceoff man, Jim Slater, was scratched with the flu. Ten minutes into the game, the Jets still had not won a single faceoff and they were dominated for much of the night.

For the second straight night the Jets took consecutive penalties while protecting a lead and eventually Ottawa got the goal to tie it up in the second period. Jets coach Noel preaches discipline but his team has taken far too many inopportune penalties already this season. And it doesn’t help that they’ve given up power play goals in every game and most of them have been very damaging … Not surprisingly, Byfuglien’s best games as a Winnipeg Jet have come when he’s paired with Toby Enstrom on defence. Byfuglien and Enstrom ate up huge minutes in Wednesday’s game at Toronto and were strong again Thursday night. Enstrom scored against the Leafs and Byfuglien got into the act Thursday with a blast from the point for his first of the season. The number one reason for pairing Enstrom with Byfuglien: He’s a great skater and can cover for his roving partner when Byfuglien takes off on one of his regular offensive forays. When Byfuglien and Enstrom are on the ice, it’s a five-man cycle for the Jets … It’s looking like people are going to have to re-adjust their expectations for Alex Burmistrov. He’s a much better player than people expected him to be and is scoring at nearly a point-per-game rate. Burmistrov, who turns 20 today, has just six goals and 20 points last season in Atlanta but already has a goal and four assists in six games this season … The Jets have been outscores 8-1 in third periods so far this season.

Just like they did with Phil Kessel on Wednesday, the Jets allowed one of Ottawa’s most dangerous players, Jason Spezza, to sneak into the slot unmarked to score a goal to make it 2-1. That’s a player you can’t lose track of in an even-strength situation … Hard not to pull for former Jets winger Paul MacLean, who is off to a tough start in Ottawa so far, but has paid his dues for a long time. Could be a long season in his first as head coach, but hopefully MacLean gets a chance to build something with the Senators … Evander Kane is playing with more intensity, is showing a lot of grit in the corners and behind the net, but he really needs to get a goal so he can get going offensively. It doesn’t look like goals are going to come easy for Kane this year … It’s impressive how many Winnipeg fans have been at each of the Jets road games so far. The love for this reborn team is widespread, it would appear. Unfortunately, the Jets are 0-3-1 away from MTS Centre … Noel’s decision to put Ondrej Pavelec back in the net for the second straight night shows how important this game against the Senators was. Every game against an Eastern Conference opponent is huge and the Jets coach knows it well.
Noel: Jets, Sens desperate
Should make for an exciting game

By KIRK PENTON, QMI Agency

OTTAWA - The Winnipeg Jets plan to go with the same lineup on Thursday night against the Ottawa Senators.

The only thing that could alter that is the flu bug currently trying to take control of centre Jim Slater’s body. If Slater can’t go, Tim Stapleton would replace him.

Ondrej Pavelec will make his third consecutive start between the pipes for the Jets (1-3-1), who are still looking for their first road win of the season and who fell 4-3 in a shootout to the Toronto Maple Leafs on Wednesday night.

“Pavelec will play,” head coach Claude Noel said. “It’ll help him get in a rhythm. We haven’t played enough games, and he’s been good the last couple games.”

Mark Scheifele was still basking in the glow of his first NHL goal he scored Wednesday in Toronto, and Noel will be watching closely to see how the rookie performs at Scotiabank Place.

“This will be good for him tonight,” Noel said. “We’ll see a little bit more from him and his line tonight, so it should be interesting to see if he can play back-to-back hard games.”

The Senators (1-5) have lost three in a row by a combined score of 16-4, with their only win coming via the shootout. They held a players-only meeting after Tuesday’s 7-2 home loss to the Philadelphia Flyers.

“It’s a big test of our character, how we come out tonight and play,” centre Jason Spezza said. “We were a pretty frustrated group after the last one. We’re disappointed in how we’ve played so far.”

Noel figures since the teams have two victories between them, those who watch the contest could end up being the winners.

“Both teams will be desperate to win,” he said. “I think it has the makings of a good game.”

Craig Anderson will get the start in goal for the Senators. Defenceman Sergei Gonchar will return to Ottawa’s lineup after missing one game with a bruised foot, while winger Jesse Winchester will make his season debut after injuring his shoulder on the first day of training camp.

Rookie Ottawa head coach Paul MacLean, who spent seven seasons with the original Jets, is “really excited” that Winnipeg is back in the league. Other than that, all he’s thinking about right now is how to turn the Senators around.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED: 10.21.2011
Jets Snapshots: Playing with fire

By TED WYMAN, QMI Agency

Whatever Claude Noel said after the listless Winnipeg Jets lost their third straight game in Phoenix Saturday, it lit an instant fire under his young team.

The Jets look completely different after Noel’s meeting of the minds with six of the team leaders earlier this week. They are skating with purpose, shooting pucks with authority, handling themselves physically, making the big saves and clearing the rebounds.

But even playing at a much higher level is not enough sometimes as evidenced by the Jets 4-3 shootout loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs Wednesday night.

The Jets should have earned two points, but undisciplined play while protecting a two-goal lead in the third period came back to haunt them. Back-to-back penalties to Zach Bogosian and Derek Meech contributed to the Leafs scoring two power-play goals in 27 seconds to even the score.

The Jets are obviously still learning how to play with a lead on the road, because that’s twice they’ve had two-goal leads erased quickly. They need to be more methodical about grinding for the win. Instead they got scrambling and started coughing up pucks.

Still, it was a good hockey game and the Jets played well for most of it.

Bottom line is James Reimer had a slightly better night overall than Ondrej Pavelec and was much better in the shootout.

Pavelec has a lousy record at shootouts and his performance Wednesday did nothing to change that. The Jets don’t look like they are going to be very successful in the shootouts this season. They didn’t score in a pre-season shootout, or against Toronto and Nik Antropov missed on the only penalty shot of the year so far ... The Jets finally broke the 0-for-17 power-play streak, with Tobias Enstrom’s first-period goal, assisted by Bryan Little and Dustin Byfuglien. Getting the power play going, along with all three of the aforementioned players, will be a key to the Jets success going forward ... The Jets defence backed in and let Phil Kessel walk into the slot and feed Joffrey Lupul for the 1-1 goal. Kessel’s the hottest player in the NHL right now and the Jets can’t give him that kind of room ... Lupul likely cost the folks at TSN a penny or two when his shot to the middle of the cage smashed the net camera ... The Jets have a tendency to chase the puck in their own zone and it makes opposing forwards hungry for turnovers ... Byfuglien had a good game in the offensive zone, but what was he doing in his own end in the third? He was soft on the puck a couple of times, allowing Toronto to create gift turnovers.

The Jets are one of only 14 NHL teams that have played to capacity crowds in every home game this season. The majority of teams have been playing to at least some empty seats and the Dallas Stars have averaged just 51% capacity so far through four home games. The Stars are averaging just 9,461, which puts them dead last in the league, while the Columbus Blue Jackets have the second worst attendance at an average of 11,394. With a capacity of just 15,004 at MTS Centre, the Jets have the smallest building in the NHL and yet their average attendance is better than eight teams so far ... The Boston Bruins won the Stanley Cup last year and they have the fourth lowest average home attendance in the NHL through four games.

The Bruins are averaging just 13,173. And people call it a great hockey city? ... Memo to Blake Wheeler: Thanks for finally showing up ... The Jets best forwards so far, in order, have been: Burmistrov, Antropov, Kyle Wellwood, Andrew Ladd, Jim Slater ... Jets players were a little awed by the attention Wednesday in Toronto, where 40 or 50 media types crowded into their dressing room at the Air Canada Centre. Suffice it to say when the Atlanta Thrashers went on the road, they didn’t get that kind of attention. In some cases, they didn’t get any attention at all.

Jets prospect Mark Scheifele, who could well be heading back to the OHL’s Barrie Colts in the near future, is at least enjoying one part of his NHL stint so far. When asked by a CTY reporter from Barrie, Ont., how it felt to get an NHL paycheque, he replied: “I think I had $7 in my bank account in the summer so, yeah, it’s a nice jump” ... Posed this question on Twitter the other day: Should the Jets move Byfuglien from defence to forward. Huge majority of responders (25 for, 11 against) said they should. I say they should at least use him in front of the net on the power play. The PP has been poor and Buff up front could only help ... Posed this question on Twitter Wednesday: Should the Jets keep Scheifele or send him down? Almost everyone who responded said they should send him down. Only a couple of people said to keep him, while others said at least give him the full nine games before his entry-level NHL contract kicks in. I agree with the latter, especially after Scheifele’s stronger showing and first NHL goal Wednesday night ... Burmistrov turns 20 years old on Friday. The way he’s playing, he looks like a seasoned veteran. He has clicked nicely with veteran Antropov and the two generated a sweet goal by Burmistrov Wednesday.

TSN’s Chris Cuthbert on the excitement surrounding the return of the Jets Wednesday: “Seems to be a prevailing feeling around the National Hockey League that they’re everybody’s second favourite team.” That was supported when a Return of the Jets video shown at ACC got a standing ovation and when a loud cheer went up for the Jets first goal ... Heard the atmosphere inside the ACC described as “morgue-like.” Guess Toronto’s not getting overly excited about a good start to the season by the Leafs ... TSN’s Darren Dreger says there likely won’t be an outdoor NHL game in Canada until the 2013-14 season at the earliest, but he did indicate that Winnipeg would likely be the front-runner to host it.

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It was supposed to be a marquee matchup in Philly with the Flyers and Capitals. Instead, it was the Alex Ovechkin “welcome to the season” party.

Ovechkin scored two goals, including one on the power play, giving him three on the season as the Caps blew the game open in the third beating Philadelphia 5-2.

While Ilya Bryzgalov said he didn’t have a book on how to defend Ovechkin, he might want to study up a little more for their next meeting. Ovechkin doing what he does is the sort of thing that helped the Caps break out in a big way.

Tomas Vokoun didn’t do so bad either in his showdown with Bryzgalov stopping 40 shots and effectively destroying any further discussion about whether there should be a goalie controversy in Washington. Bryzgalov was perfectly mediocre stopping 23 shots.

In a game that came with a ton of buzz about it as a showdown between two of the East’s early top teams, it was the Capitals that flexed their muscles the most and made the Flyers hot start to the season seem fluke-ish with how bad they looked tonight. After all, the Flyers were able to help the Caps’ power play snap out of it for a night.

The Caps’ win now sets them up for a potential clash of the unbeatens on Saturday night when they’ll take on Detroit from Verizon Center.

Check out the ripper from Ovechkin tonight to beat Bryzgalov.
It was flipping gorgeous. Los Angeles Kings center Anze Kopitar skated the puck up to his own blue line, lobbed it over the heads of a couple St. Louis Blues and put it where only teammate Simon Gagne could collect it in the offensive zone. Gagne finished the play with a goal, an exclamation point at the end of a 5-0 victory Tuesday night.

But it didn’t illustrate why Kopitar might be the most underrated player in the NHL. This wasn’t the first time he had gone deep like that — he connected with Dustin Brown similarly last season, like a QB showing off his touch and arm strength — and even East Coastiers who don’t stay up late to watch West Coast games should appreciate Kopitar’s offensive skill. Any hockey fan can type his name into the search bar on YouTube. Everyone should.

What YouTube won’t show you, though, is how Kopitar has developed into an elite two-way player. Brown said Kopitar has become just as good defensively as he has been offensively and is approaching the level of the Detroit Red Wings’ Pavel Datsyuk, a three-time winner of the Selke Trophy as the NHL’s best defensive forward. Kings coach Terry Murray said Kopitar belongs in the same group as Datsyuk; the Vancouver Canucks’ Ryan Kesler, last season’s Selke winner; and, Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews, last season’s Selke runner-up.

“He plays the game 200 feet,” Murray said. “I think in the last couple of years, he’s bought in totally on the checking part of the game. He’s such an intelligent player, in terms of what’s going on without the puck. He’s the guy that I trust in all key situations — on PK, on 5-on-5 late in games. His game has really evolved.”

The ability was always there. The Wings’ Henrik Zetterberg, another top two-way player, who considers Kopitar one of his personal favorites, said Kopitar showed it in Sweden before he arrived in the NHL. “I don’t think just because he came over here he got worse,” Zetterberg said.

But while Kopitar ranged between 20 to 32 goals and 61 to 77 points in his first three NHL seasons, his plus/minus rating came in at minus-12, minus-15 and minus-17. Murray emphasized defense when he arrived in 2008-09, and Kopitar said he focused on not “swinging and sweeping.” He stopped anticipating the breakout and starting participating in it.

“A couple years ago, you’d go into the corner and you’d battle,” Brown said. “But now he comes into the corner, takes the puck, and he’s gone. That’s probably the biggest difference I’ve noticed in his game. It’s probably something from a fan standpoint you probably don’t notice.”

Getting the puck on his stick sooner helps Kopitar transition to offense sooner, allowing him to make plays like those deep lob passes. He was plus-6 in 2009-10, while putting up 34 goals and 81 points in 82 games. He was plus-25 last season, while putting up 25 goals and 73 points in 75 games. He is plus-5 so far this season, with four goals and nine points in five games. He ranks second in the NHL in scoring.

“It’s just a process of learning and just getting it done,” Kopitar said. “I’m proud of what I’ve become so far, but there’s still room for improvement. I’m definitely still driven.”

Now that Kopitar has come so far and the Kings have added Mike Richards — a two-time 30-goal scorer and one-time Selke runner-up — they are as strong at center as anyone in the West. They can go toe-to-toe with the Wings (Datsyuk and Zetterberg), Canucks (Henrik Sedin and Kesler), Blackhawks (Toews and Patrick Kane), San Jose Sharks (Joe Thornton and Logan Couture) and Anaheim Ducks (Ryan Getzlaf and Sakko Koivu). That should make it more difficult to match up against them and, they hope, more difficult to eliminate them from the playoffs.

“We want to go deep,” Kopitar said.

He wasn’t talking about a lob pass.

**FIRST PERIOD**

Sleeper pick to make the playoffs: the New York Islanders. They’ve finally got Evgeni Nabokov in goal. They’ve got a new top defensive pair in Mark Streit and Steve Staisos. And they’ve got an intriguing mix of youth and experience up front, led by red-hot John Tavares.

The 21-year-old has eight points in his past two games — five goals, three assists — and the Isles have won three in a row.

“I think it’s time for us to kind of move past that stage of inexperience,” said Tavares, the first overall pick of the 2009 draft, who signed a six-year, $33 million contract extension before the season. “Yeah, we’re young, but we were able to play at a really young age, a lot of us, and it’s time to really take our game to the next level, find that consistency. I don’t think we have that yet, and this would be a great year for us to really make our mark that way and find our way into the playoffs.”

**SECOND PERIOD**

The Red Wings lead the NHL in goals against. They have allowed only five goals in four games. That might not seem surprising, considering they have Datsyuk, Zetterberg and Nicklas Lidstrom, who just won his seventh Norris Trophy as the NHL’s best defenseman. But they ranked only 23rd in goals against last season, and that’s a big reason why coach Mike Babcock brought in two new assistants: Jeff Blashill and Bill Peters. Entering his seventh season in Detroit, he wanted fresh ideas — or at least a fresh emphasis on some old ones.

“I wanted to bring about change,” Babcock said. “I was looking for as many different ideas as I could get. We talked about doing what we’re doing now in the past, and we just didn’t do it.”

What the Wings are doing now is pressuring the puck more aggressively. When they get it, they don’t give it back easily because of their puck-possession style. They allowed only 14 shots in their last game, a 3-2 victory over the Minnesota Wild on Saturday night.

“We have to rely on all five guys,” Lidstrom said. “You can’t be spread out when you’re defending. You have to kind of move as a group of five, and I think we’ve been able to do that.”

**THIRD PERIOD**

In Kesler’s return from hip surgery Tuesday night, the Canucks lost to the New York Rangers 4-0. Even so, you could see how much they need him. The Selke winner was one of only three Canucks with an even rating. He was minus-10 of 17 faceoffs. He was back on the top penalty-kill and power-play units.

The Canucks need his speed and two-way play. They also need his grit and leadership as they try to bounce back from last season’s disappointment — falling one win short of the Stanley Cup.

“We want to win every game, and we know that we don’t win every game because of our skills or what we did in the past,” Kesler said. “We win games by outworking the opposition.”

**POWER RANKINGS**

**TOP 6**

1. Washington Capitals: Who would have thought the Caps would start 5-0-0 for the first time ever and Jason Chimera would have four times as many goals as Alex Ovechkin? Two great games up next: at Philadelphia on Thursday night, at home against the Red Wings on Saturday night.

2. Philadelphia Flyers: Sean Couturier made the team, Brayden Schenn is already up from the minors and the Flyers’ best rookie is Matt Read — a 25-year-old with two goals, six points and a plus-4 rating in five games.

3. Detroit Red Wings: It’s a good sign when coach Mike Babcock praises Jiri Hudler’s work ethic, saying Hudler practiced as hard as ever Wednesday and that must mean his conditioning has improved.

4. Colorado Avalanche: After finishing second-to-last in the league last season, the Avs opened with a home loss to Detroit. They have won a club-record five straight road games since — at Boston, Columbus, Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. Wow.

5. Dallas Stars: Another big surprise. The Stars have done it with great goal-tending from Kari Lehtonen and a 4-0-0 home record.

6. Toronto Maple Leafs: The Leafs are 4-0-1, so they’re headed to the playoffs! Phil Kessel has seven goals, so he’s going to score 50! Calm down. The Leafs started 4-0-1 last season, too, and Kessel is as streaky as they come. Got to keep it up.

**BOTTOM 6**
25: San Jose Sharks: Call it "The Hangover, Part II." While last year’s Stanley Cup finalists have struggled – the Boston Bruins 2-4-0, the Vancouver Canucks 2-3-1 – last year’s Western Conference runners-up have struggled even worse. The Sharks’ issue has been offense – a combined four goals in three straight losses.

26. Tampa Bay Lightning: The Bolts’ issue has been defense. They have allowed 25 goals in their past five games, going 0-3-2. Giving up five power-play goals to the Florida Panthers seems like a fluke. But when goalie Dwayne Roloson is this leaky, you wonder if he’s creaky at 42.

27: Montreal Canadiens: One assist and a minus-5 rating for P.K. Subban. Not good, especially with the defense decimated by injuries – Chris Campoli (hamstring), Andrei Markov (knee), Jaroslav Spacek (ribs).

28: Winnipeg Jets: Though Mark Scheifele scored his first NHL goal Wednesday night at Toronto, the 18-year-old hasn’t looked like an NHLer thus far and might be better off going back to junior – especially because the Jets lack offensive punch. Too much pressure too soon.

29. Ottawa Senators: The good: Erik Karlsson has eight points, tying him for third in the NHL. The bad: He’s still a 21-year-old defenseman who’s minus-5. The ugly: Have you seen the Sens?

30. Columbus Blue Jackets: According to Babcock, "Columbus is on the verge of breaking out." But is that because the Blue Jackets outshot the Stars, 40-18, in Tuesday night’s 3-2 loss? Or is it because Babcock’s Wings have been off all week and face the Jackets on Friday night, and he doesn’t want them overlooking an 0-5-1 team missing Jeff Carter (foot) and James Wisniewski (suspension)?

PLUS/MINUS

Plus: Good to see NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan isn’t afraid to slap a star player with a suspension. He gave two games to Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman Kris Letang for boarding Winnipeg Jets winger Alex Burmistrov on Monday night, and I disagree that it was a ticky-tack Shanahan. Letang saw Burmistrov’s back and finished his check through the numbers anyway. It wasn’t catastrophic, but it could have been.

Minus: Not only is goaltender Jaroslaw Halak struggling, the St. Louis Blues are having trouble on special teams. They rank 29th overall on both the power play and penalty kill.

Plus: Six overtime goals have been scored so far, and four have been scored by defensemen. The Kings’ Jack Johnson has two. The Capitals’ Mike Green and Dennis Wideman have one each.

Minus: The Bruins have been brutal. Just when I thought they would make me look bad for writing about their hangover, beating the Chicago Blackhawks 3-2 on Saturday night, here came a gong-show 4-1 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night. But forget coach Claude Julien’s ejection, captain Zdeno Chara’s awkward attempt to fire up the team and all the penalties. When are they going to start scoring? Milan Lucic has only one assist in six games.

Plus: From the players’ perspective, it’s a plus that their union is challenging the league’s accounting of hockey-related revenue, holding up escrow checks to players and revenue-sharing payments to teams. Some think it’s a bad sign ahead of labor negotiations. It may be. Regardless, the union is supposed to do things like this – aggressively look after the players’ interests – and seems better positioned to do so under new executive director Don Fehr.

Minus: As Puck Daddy has pointed out, the early returns have not been good on the six-year, $27 million contract the Buffalo Sabres gave Ville Leino. One goal in five games. Benched in the third period Tuesday night at Montreal. This is down side of spending big: buyer’s remorse.

@COTSONIKA "Weird feeling the Winnipeg Jets get their first win tonight. Coach is ticked. Back at home. No big ceremony. No Sid or Geno for Penguins."

Tweeted that on Monday, and the Jets actually won that night, 2-1, rebounding from an 0-3-0 start and giving Winnipeg its first NHL victory in 15 years. Hey, every now and then, I’m right – though, as a few followers pointed out, the Penguins were missing Dustin Jeffrey, Tyler Kennedy and Brooks Orpik as well as Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

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