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Slumping Ducks hold team meeting

The Ducks, who have won once in 10 games, talk about what isn’t working. Coach Randy Carlyle says he got some surprising feedback.

By Lisa Dillman
9:18 PM PST, November 10, 2011

The practice rink was empty for more than an hour at Anaheim Ice but there was work being done elsewhere, the heavy lifting taking place behind closed doors Thursday.

Not surprisingly, the Ducks held a prolonged team meeting the day after their winless streak hit six games. "Today was good. A lot of guys were talking and giving their opinions how they feel why it doesn't work, really," Teemu Selanne said. "A lot of times coaches are talking and nobody says a word and you go to the ice and say, 'Well, I don't think that's work[ing]."

"It's important that the players can give their input also about the situation. It was really good. It was really honest conversations. I think it was a huge step forward."

Said Duck Coach Randy Carlyle: "You have to eliminate any confusion, any doubt before you can take the next step forward."

They've won once in 10 games, and Carlyle, referring to the loss to Nashville on Wednesday, said he could not remember a time when the team gave up three two-on-ones and two breakaways in a period.

He was asked if any of the feedback surprised him and admitted some did, although he declined to be specific. "You spend 45 minutes with a group talking to them, there's always some things that are going to come back," Carlyle said. "You have to understand their perception is their reality. Sometimes if they perceive something, that catches you off-guard."

LA Times: LOADED: 11.11.2011
ANAHEIM – Throughout his postgame media session Wednesday after another loss, Ducks coach Randy Carlyle often looked skyward as if the answers to his team’s troubles might come from the heavens.

As he answered the final question posed, Carlyle tapped on his chest.

"It's got to come from here," he said. "It's got to come from the heart."

A day later, Carlyle and the Ducks had a heart to heart for nearly an hour in the dressing room at Anaheim Ice as they sought to find the solution to a bad stretch that has seen them go winless in their past six games and nine of their past 10.

While there were few specifics divulged on what the conversation was particularly about, the overall feeling is that Carlyle and his players traded ideas and voiced their opinions on how to get everyone playing within the system and believing in it.

"You have to eliminate any confusion, any doubt before you can take the next step forward," Carlyle said. "If there's any doubt on what we're doing or what we should be doing in this situation or that situation that they're presented with, then you try to deal with that right away.

"And that's what you always do when you're in those. You clarify, and try to focus again on moving forward."

Watching themselves and the mistakes in their 4-2 home loss to Nashville on video was part of the Ducks' clear-the-air session, to which Carlyle said:

"It's always healthy."

Teemu Selanne said he thought it was a good time for everyone to get a chance to have their voice heard.

"I think it's important to get input from so many different guys, forwards, defensemen, centers, wingers, about the system," Selanne said.

"A lot of guys were talking and giving their opinions about how they feel about this and why it doesn't work, really."

"A lot of times the coach is talking and nobody says a word and then you go on the ice and you think, 'Well, I don't know if it's working.'"

"So everybody has to buy into the system. It's important that the players can give their inputs about the situation.

"It was good. It was really honest conversations. I think that (it) was a huge step forward."

The Ducks have fallen to the depths of the Pacific Division after a 4-1 start that was the best since the 2006-07 Stanley Cup season.

Their offense is at the bottom of the league and they have gotten inconsistent play from nearly everyone but Selanne, their leading scorer with 14 points. A power play that was third in the NHL last season is muddling at a 12.1 percent conversion rate.

Carlyle said sleep has been tougher to come by these days after games and that days that often start at 3:30 a.m. "have been happening for a while."

"Those are things that happen," he added with a wry smile. "Stress-related. Job-related. That's all part of the business."

Right now, it's about getting the Ducks to eliminate the mistakes in their games, such as the many odd-man rushes and breakaways they allowed the Predators to have and continually ask for goalie Jonas Hiller to come up with do-or-die saves.

Or the goals at the start of periods that put them in an early hole or kill any momentum the have built. Or ...

"As I always said, we don't want to dwell on the negatives, but it is a negative when you lose," Carlyle said. "There's no other way than that to face it head on and accept what's going on and how we're going to change it.

"We're about making us better, not what is keeping us down in mindsets (where) we can't ever climb out of this. This is an achievable goal. We've set to get this hockey club playing to a higher level,"
Marchand helps Bruins stretch win streak to 4

By Fluto Shinzawa
Globe Staff / November 11, 2011

The 3-7-0 ditch the Bruins had dug themselves has been filled. After their fourth straight win last night, a 6-3 victory over Edmonton before 17,565 at TD Garden, the 7-7-0 Bruins are back to .500.

The way they’re playing, that ditch should become a hill.

The Bruins weren’t perfect. Goalie Tuukka Rask, making back-to-back starts for the first time this season, wasn’t sharp at the beginning. The Boston penalty kill, on a 13-for-13 streak entering the game, allowed a third-period power-play goal. In the first period, the Bruins saw the Oilers wipe out a two-goal deficit by scoring twice in 29 seconds.

But the Bruins did far more good than bad, which was almost always the reverse last month. They put pucks on net. They cycled in the offensive zone. They converted twice on the power play. Such accomplishments are often the result of attention to detail.

“We’re playing better as a five-man unit on the ice,” said Milan Lucic, who scored a power-play goal in the third. “We’re supporting each other well all over the ice. We’re coming up together. We’re backchecking a lot harder. We’re getting into lanes and causing turnovers. We’re going to the net harder.

“Just those little things are causing us to play like the way we know how to play.”

Leading the charge were Brad Marchand and Joe Corvo. They entered the night with two of the cooler sticks on the team. Marchand hadn’t found the back of the net in nine straight games. Corvo hadn’t scored all season. The former Carolina defenseman, a power-play specialist for the Hurricanes, had recorded only two man-advantage assists in 13 games.

Both busted through last night. Marchand scored twice. Corvo led the offensive outburst with three assists, including two on the power play.

“Sometimes guys try and do too much,” said coach Claude Julien. “They try and get a little too fancy. It doesn’t suit their game. That’s Brad in a nutshell. He just has to play hard, use his speed to take pucks to the net, and shoot it.”

In the second period, Marchand basted a 2-2 tie. With Oilers defenseman Jeff Petry in the box for hooking, the Bruins set up on the power play. Corvo walked the puck to the middle, then fired a snap shot on goal. Marchand, who had been stationed in front, tipped the puck past goalie Devan Dubnyk (22 saves) at 3:50 to give the Bruins a 3-2 lead.

Corvo was involved in the winning goal as well. Corvo recognized that the Oilers were making a line change while he had the puck in the defensive zone. If he could get rid of the puck quickly, he knew the Bruins would have numbers going the other way.

“Any time the other team tries to dump it, they all go for changes, and they whiff on it, you know there’s going to be a couple guys on the far side of the ice,” Corvo said. “As soon as it got on my stick, I knew Seggy [Tyler Seguin] was going. Just get it in the forwards’ hands and let them do the hard work.”

Seguin took Corvo’s pass, backed up the Oilers with speed, and flung a shot on goal. The puck went wide and glanced off the end boards. It then hit Dubnyk, bounced off defenseman Corey Potter, and skimmed off Tom Gilbert before crossing the goal line at 6:24. Seguin was credited with his team-leading ninth goal.

Corvo struck again in the third period. On the power play, he jumped up to support the attack. Because of how far Corvo had come toward the net, he was in good position to spot Lucic open in front. With a sharp cross-ice pass, Corvo connected with Lucic, and the left wing hit the back of the net at 17:13.

“That’s what I’ve been trying to do a lot more - get involved with the play and jump up,” Corvo said. “Be right behind the forwards for anything that might turn over - rebounds, passes, anything. I feel that gets me more into the game and thinking more offensively. I think I play better that way.”

At the other end, Rask shook off a sputtering start to earn his second straight win.

In the first minute, Oilers left wing Ryan Smyth rattled a wrister off the left post.

At 12:02, Smyth tipped a Theo Peckham shot past Rask to cut into Boston’s 2-0 lead. At 12:31, after taking a return pass from Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins beat Rask clean with a slot shot to tie the game at 2-2.

But Rask stood tall for the rest of the first. He stopped five shots in the second. In the third, aside from a close-range Smyth power-play goal, Rask kicked out 12 shots.

Rask will most likely back up Tim Thomas against Buffalo tomorrow.

“It’s hard for a goaltender to play every 10 days,” Julien said. “Every once in a while, you’ve got to allow him to get on a roll a little bit.

“You probably know who’s going to be in nets the next game. But the bottom line is that we’ve got a lot of games coming up. I wanted to get him an opportunity to get closer to being at the best he can be. The only way we felt we could do that was by giving him some consecutive games.”

The Bruins are back to even ground. For a team that was once dead last in the Eastern Conference, .500 never sounded sweeter.

Boston Globe LOADED: 11.11.2011
Injured center Marc Savard showed off his psychic abilities via Twitter from his Peterborough, Ontario, home, by predicting a Bruins hot streak prior to the team’s 6-2 win over the Islanders Monday.

Before last night’s 6-3 win over Edmonton extended the Bruins’ win streak to four games, coach Claude Julien borrowed Savard’s crystal ball and predicted Brad Marchand’s nine-game goalless streak would soon come to an end.

Julien was right on the mark, as Marchand netted a pair of goals, his first since Oct. 12.

“A little bit like last year, it took him awhile to get himself going in the goal department,” Julien said after the morning skate. “When he starts scoring goals, they’re going to start coming a lot more frequently than they have since the start of the season.”

Marchand not only snapped his streak, he doubled his goal output for the season. It was his longest goalless streak since a 12-gamer last March.

“It was nice to get the monkey off my back,” Marchand said. “It was definitely getting frustrating. I’ve been missing a lot of opportunities, so it was nice to get a couple.”

Julien talked yesterday morning about the need for Marchand to play a simple, grinding game alongside skilled linemates Tyler Seguin and Patrice Bergeron. Both of Marchand’s goals came from a simplified game plan.

Marchand’s first tally, at 5:30 of the second period, was his first power-play score since opening night against Philadelphia.

The 5-foot-9-inch winger posted himself against 6-3, 210-pound defenseman Ladislav Smid in the slot while Seguin and Joe Corvo worked the puck on the perimeter.

Corvo took a pass from Seguin at center point and wristed a waist-high saucer into Marchand’s screen. Marchand got solid wood on the shot, rerouting the puck from high on goalie Devan Dubnyk’s glove side to the lower stick side.

Marchand’s second tally, the Bruins’ last, drew the most praise from Julien. Marchand picked off an errant Edmonton pass in the neutral zone, circled to the left boards, and drove toward the cage.

As Marchand approached the left faceoff dot, Chris Kelly positioned himself just beyond the right post, tempting Marchand’s inner playmaker to try for a fancy assist.

But Marchand followed the advice Julien had given to him earlier in the week: shoot the puck. Marchand did just that, sniping the puck over Dubnyk’s right shoulder.

Marchand’s multigoal game was his first since Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. It also extended Marchand’s point streak to four games, which is, not coincidentally, also the length of Boston’s winning streak.

“The big thing is to keep it a little more simple. Get the puck to the net,” Marchand said. “I was getting lots of opportunities. They just weren’t going in. If you keep pushing, keeping getting opportunities, something’s going to go in. That’s what happened today.”

Julien’s glowing words yesterday weren’t the same he’d used in private with the player who had 21 goals last season. The coach challenged the 23-year-old this week, telling him, “It’s looking like it’s going to be a tough year to get 20 [goals],” according to Marchand.

Marchand called the talk “a kick in the butt.” Last night, Julien’s boot was just as effective as his crystal ball.

“Sometimes guys try and do a little too much and they try to get a little fancy, and it doesn’t suit their game,” Julien said. “That’s Brad in a nutshell.
Hamill avoids the middle man
He’s taken flight since shift to wing

By Fluto Shinzawa
Globe Staff / November 11, 2011

In September, for the fourth time, Zach Hamill failed to make the Bruins out of training camp. The No. 8 overall pick in the 2007 draft was assigned to Providence, which was no surprise given his so-so performance and the team’s depth at center.

But where it was his fourth time being assigned out of camp, this most recent transaction led to a different landing spot. Hamill has been a center his entire pro and amateur career. But this time, he started out the AHL season on right wing.

It seems to have taken.

Hamill was recalled by the Bruins on Wednesday on an emergency basis because of injuries to Rich Peverley (undioclosed) and Daniel Paille (nose). Hamill was deserving because he has been arguably Providence’s best player. Last night against the Oilers, Hamill played in place of Peverley on the third line. Peverley skated yesterday morning but missed his second straight game.

In the first period, Hamill set up the Bruins’ second goal. He intercepted a Ben Eager pass in the offensive zone, then considered his options. Hamill could put the puck on net or slide it to Jordan Caron, his former Providence linemate. Hamill chose the latter, and Caron scored his first goal of the season at 8:05, giving the Bruins a 2-0 lead.

“Just having the confidence to hold onto the puck, be patient, and find Jordan in the slot,” Hamill said. “It’s creating chances. All I can ask for and all I can do.”

In 9:27 of ice time, Hamill landed two shots and recorded one assist. He even got some power-play time at the point late in the first period.

“I was really impressed with his game tonight,” said coach Claude Julien. “Not because of the plays. He’s a skilled player. He can make plays. That’s something we already knew. But of how smart he was all over the ice, the decisions he made, where he was positionally, all that stuff, he played like a veteran tonight.”

In 14 games in Providence, Hamill has five goals and five assists while riding on the first line alongside rookie Carter Camper and left wing Lane MacDermid. As a pro, Hamill’s career high for goals is 14 in 75 games in 2009-10.

“T’ve been shooting the puck more and going to the net more,” Hamill said. “Those are two things I wanted to key on. I’ve been doing that. I think I’m first or second on the team in shots. It’s definitely something I look at. At the same time, I’m trying to get pucks to the net. Not try and make fancy plays. Just take it to the net.”

This summer, first-year Providence coach Bruce Cassidy hinted that a position change might be coming. Peverley, David Krejci, Patrice Bergeron, Tyler Seguin, Chris Kelly, and Gregory Campbell are ahead of Hamill on the depth chart at center.

On the right wing, Hamill is playing an up-and-down game. He’s working in the danger areas. He’s becoming stronger on the puck. It may very well be his future NHL position.

“I think I’ve played less than five shifts at center,” Hamill said. “I’m playing right wing pretty much the whole time. It’s been pretty good.”

Hamill will be sent back to Providence once the Bruins get healthy. But in case of injuries or if another team is interested in a trade, Hamill may draw interest because of his improved play.

Paille improving

Paille didn’t play last night after undergoing surgery at Massachusetts General Hospital on Wednesday. He is considered day-to-day.

“He’s already much better today,” Julien said. “I don’t know how well he’s going to be tomorrow, whether he’s able to skate with us or not, or whether he’s going to take a few more days.”

With Paille unavailable, Benoit Pouliot skated on the left side on the fourth line alongside Campbell and Shawn Thornton.

Ference injured

Andrew Ference departed in the second period because of a lower-body injury and didn’t return. Julien said he didn’t know the severity of Ference’s injury. Ference skated only 1:58 in the second, and 9:22 total. He has had knee and groin injuries in the past . . . Krejci had 3:08 of ice time on the penalty kill, second-most among forwards behind Kelly (4:37). Krejci has killed penalties regularly the last two games because of Peverley’s absence . . . Johnny Boychuk led all players with five blocked shots . . . On Wednesday night, Julien watched Tampa Bay roll out its 1-3-1 formation against Philadelphia. He then watched the Flyers play keepaway, reducing the game to a standstill, until the Lightning reluctantly started to forecheck. Julien didn’t care to disclose whether he stood behind Tampa Bay coach Guy Boucher or Philadelphia counterpart Peter Laviolette. “I don’t think there’s any one person to blame,” Julien said. “I think we just have to take a look at it. It certainly wasn’t fun to watch. But do you blame the team that had the puck? Or do you blame the team that was defending? I don’t have an answer or comment on that.”

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BOSTON—The Boston Bruins are playing like Stanley Cup champions again.

Brad Marchand scored twice and Tyler Seguin had a goal and an assist as the Bruins increased their season-high winning streak to four with a 6-3 victory over the Edmonton Oilers on Thursday night.

Boston (7-7) has scored 24 goals during the streak and is back at .500 for the first time since a 1-1 start.

"We didn't seem to have the same determination in our game," said Marchand, who doubled his season goal total by scoring in the second and third periods. "Right now it just seems like everyone's buying into the system and what we have to do. Because we're working a little harder, we're getting some bounces, as well."

Joe Corvo had three assists, and backup goalie Tuukka Rask won in his second straight start, getting a lot of help from his teammates in front of him.

"Scoring six goals gives your team a good chance to win," said Rask, who made 27 saves. "It's a good thing to see us scoring goals because everybody was talking about it earlier in the season, and you can't take it for granted."

The Bruins opened the game by outshooting Edmonton 10-3 and controlled most of the first two periods. Edmonton came on in the third, and Ryan Smyth's second goal of the game cut Boston's lead to 4-3 with 4:42 left. But Milan Lucic and Marchand scored 34 seconds apart to seal the victory for the Bruins.

"We've started to build that confidence. We are playing better as a five-man unit and supporting each other all over the ice," said Lucic, who has scored in five straight games. "We've learned a lot from the things we have gone through in the past and we don't get down anymore."

Ales Hemsky had two assists for Edmonton, which called its timeout after falling behind 2-0 on goals by Johnny Boychuk and Jordan Caron. The Oilers responded with goals from Smyth and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins 29 seconds apart to tie it, but Edmonton's speed couldn't overcome Boston's physical play in the second period.

"Maybe we sat back and gave them too much respect off the start," Smyth said. "We can respect them, but we can't fear them. After the timeout, we showed some character but it's difficult to play catch-up against the Stanley Cup champs."

Devan Dubnyk stopped 22 shots for Edmonton, which had won seven of eight.

The Bruins took a 4-2 lead with two quick goals in the second. Marchand tipped in Corvo's wrist shot from the blue line for a power-play goal at 3:50, and Seguin tapped in his own rebound at 6:24.

Seguin led the rush and got the puck on net. Dubnyk couldn't handle it, and defenseman Tom Gilbert tried to keep it from crossing the goal line. But his sweep attempt gave the puck right back to Seguin in the slot, and he scored his ninth goal of the season.

Boston coach Claude Julien said he felt Rask played well in consecutive wins over the Islanders and Oilers, but Vezina and Conn Smythe winner Tim Thomas will most likely be back in goal for the Bruins when they host Buffalo on Saturday.

"We've got a lot of games coming up and I wanted to get him an opportunity to get closer to being at the best he can be," Julien said. "One way we felt we could do that was giving him consecutive games."

NOTES: Boston is 4-0 in November. ... Lucic has scored in seven of eight. ... The Oilers haven't won in Boston since 1996. ... The Bruins have scored two goals in less than a minute eight times this season. ... Edmonton (9-4-2) had a chance to tie Dallas for the most points in the NHL, but remained behind the idle Stars (22) and Pittsburgh Penguins (21) with 20.
Tyler Seguin, Taylor Hall forever connected

Unavoidable comparison

By Stephen Harris / Bruins Beat | Friday, November 11, 2011 | http://www.bostonherald.com | Boston Bruins

We are still far too early in the whole Taylor-Tyler thing to say with any certainty how it’s going to turn out. Who will be the better player, Taylor Hall or Tyler Seguin?

In the months before Hall and Seguin were selected 1-2, respectively, in the 2010 NHL draft, most knowledgeable talent evaluators looked at the teenagers and concluded two things:

- These were two can’t-miss kids, destined for stardom.
- Hall might be the better player in the early days of their NHL careers, but in the long run Seguin would be the better player.

Early in Year 2 for the two former OHL rivals, that sure seems to be where we’re headed.

In the second pro matchup between the two players, Hall was good, with one nice assist and plenty of dangerous shifts on the Edmonton’s highly skilled Prodigy Line of the 19-year-old Hall, 18-year-old Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and 21-year-old Jordan Eberle.

But Seguin was just a little better, continuing his scoring streak with a goal and an assist, plus two penalties-drawn, in the streaking Bruins’ 6-3 win over the Oilers.

"It was fun," said Seguin, who has six goals and two assists for eight points in his ongoing five-game scoring streak. "I don’t know if this is my third or fourth year playing against Taylor. He’s been a great player for as long as I can remember. When I stepped into the OHL, he was one of the best players there. He was in his second year, my first. I must have played him probably 20-30 times now. In the end, we’re just two hockey players competing out there. It’s always fun.

"We didn’t talk, nothing on the ice, but I have the utmost respect for the guy. I think he’s an incredible hockey player."

To assess the progress of Hall and Seguin, here are the numbers: In 79 career games, Hall is 25-26-51 and a minus-7; Seguin, in 88 games, is 20-19-39 and a plus-7.

One veteran pro scout at last night’s game made a comparison: "For me, Seguin is more creative with the puck. I actually wrote in one of my reports that Seguin, if he doesn’t have a shot, he’s got enough poise to make a play to a teammate. I don’t know if Hall has that ability. Hall is going to beat you north-south with his speed and quickness down low. Seguin’s got a little more dimension to his game from a creativity standpoint."

Before the game, Hall talked about how he and Seguin have been compared so often during the last few years, particularly before the 2010 draft, when it was a tossup who would go No. 1.

"I haven’t really had a chance to watch him play," said Hall. "But I’ve seen his stat line and the way he’s playing. You’ve got to give him credit. He’s had a great season. We were always compared for a long time. I wish him all the best."

Afterward, Hall attempted to downplay the Taylor-Tyler competition.

"I just try to play my game," said Hall. "I think if you get too caught up in that stuff, and worrying about if you’re playing better than one guy on another team, then you’re probably not doing your job very well. So whenever these matchups come about, you just try to play the best you can for your team."

He said he is aware of Seguin’s goals, but no more than any other player.

"I don’t watch all his goals and send him fan mail," said Hall.

The comparisons, inevitably, are going to go on for many years to come. Already, the league acknowledges these two guys, as predicted, are something special.
By Steve Conroy  |  Friday, November 11, 2011  
http://www.bostonherald.com  |  Boston Bruins

Another game, another six-pack for the Bruins.

The B’s pulled themselves back to .500 last night with their fourth straight victory, a 6-3 decision over the talented Edmonton Oilers at TD Garden.

In those four games, the Bruins have scored a stunning 24 goals. Last night, Brad Marchand had a pair, while Johnny Boychuk, Jordan Caron, Tyler Seguin and Milan Lucic also tallied.

But it was a little closer than the final score indicated. The B’s took a 4-2 lead into the third period, and the Oilers made it 4-3 late with Patrice Bergeron in the box for high sticking. After keeping the puck in the offensive zone for nearly the entire power play, Ryan Smyth scored his second of the game with 4:42 left when he redirected Eric Belanger’s pass behind Tuukka Rask.

But after Cam Barker hauled down Seguin to go to the box, Lucic made it 5-3 when he tipped home a great Joe Corvo pass (three assists) with 2:47 left. And 44 seconds later, Marchand scored his second when he beat goalie Devan Dubnyk shortside with a wrist shot.

While the Bruins have been displaying their instant-offense attack, both teams showed they can hit you hard and quickly.

The B’s took a 2-0 lead in a span of 1:44 of the first period. Boychuk got things going with his second goal of the year. He took a feed from David Krejci, and blasted a shot from the right point that, with the help of a Lucic screen, beat Dubnyk at 7:11.

Then Zach Hamill, brought up from Providence for the ailing Rich Peverley, made his presence felt. Pouncing on a giveaway by Ben Eager in the Oilers zone, he cut to the inside of the right circle and zipped a terrific pass to Caron, who nudged the puck past defensemen Ladislav Smid’s stick and Dubnyk’s pad for his first goal of the season.

Edmonton coach Tom Renney had seen enough and called a timeout. It worked. Less than four minutes later, it was tied up.

First, Smyth halved the lead when he deflected a Theo Peckham shot from the left point past Rask at 12:02. Then 29 seconds later, the Oilers’ talented line of youngsters — Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Jordan Eberle — tied it up.

The Bruins turned it over high in the offensive zone and Edmonton took off on the rush. Hall took the puck down the left wing and fed it back to the middle for Nugent-Hopkins, and the rookie snapped his seventh goal of the season past Rask between the pads to even it up at 2.

The B’s held a 13-12 shot advantage in the first.

The Bruins got their two-goal bulge back early in the second, thanks in great part to Seguin. After Seguin drew a hooking penalty on Jeff Petry, Marchand scored his first goal in nine games when he deflected Corvo’s wrist shot from the blue line past Dubnyk at 3:50.

Then Seguin made it 4-2 at 6:24 on a goal that defined what means to be hot. Seguin took a terrific diagonal pass from Corvo, gained the blue line and pulled up for a shot. He rifled it just wide, but the puck bounced off the boards, hit the back of Dubnyk’s leg and it was headed into the net before Edmonton defenseman Tom Gilbert cleared it. Unfortunately, it hit defense partner Corey Potter and went into the net, giving Seguin his ninth goal of the season.

Through two periods, the B’s had a 22-17 shot advantage.

Boston Herald LOADED: 11.11.2011
Zach Hamill gets major lift via minor improvements

By Steve Conroy / Bruins Notebook | Friday, November 11, 2011 | http://www.bostonherald.com | Boston Bruins

It is safe to say that Zach Hamill is not where he expected to be at this point in his career, nor did the Bruins organization think he’d still be a minor leaguer four years after being selected eighth overall in the amateur draft.

But give credit to Hamill for at least one thing. After being sent down to Providence again in training camp in September, he did not mope. In fact, he’s off to the best start of his professional career.

After having been moved from center to right wing, Hamill leads the Baby Bruins with 5-5-10 totals in 14 games. His play made Hamill the big club’s first call-up from the farm with Rich Peverley still on the shelf with an undisclosed injury. Hamill was in the lineup last night against the Oilers.

“Obviously, I’m a professional hockey player and I’m a competitive guy. Being sent down obviously is frustrating, but I’m a competitive guy. And when that happens I, for the lack of a better term, I kind of got (ticked) off, almost at myself,” said Hamill yesterday morning.

Well, it looked like he kept that chip on his shoulder last night. Looking as comfortable as he has in any of his previous call-ups, Hamill notched a pretty assist on Jordan Caron’s first goal of the season and drew a couple of penalties while logging 9:27 of ice time — primarily on a line with center Chris Kelly and Caron on left wing.

“I think it was about just having that confidence to hold on to the puck and be patient and find Jordan in the slot,” said Hamill. “It’s creating chances, and it’s all I can ask for and all I wanted to do.”

Hamill, who has been switched from center to right wing this year, gave a lot a credit for his improved play in Providence to coach Bruce Cassidy.

“I’ve been playing a lot of minutes, power play, penalty kill, 5-on-5. I’m playing all situations. If I’m not out there scoring, then I’m killing penalties and blocking shots and doing the little things that help us win games,” said Hamill. “It’s been pretty good and obviously Butch (Cassidy) has shown confidence in me, I appreciate that and I’m just trying to work hard.”

B’s coach Claude Julien watched Hamill a couple of weeks ago in Providence and liked what he saw then. His opinion didn’t change much last night.

“I was really impressed with his game (last night), not because of the plays,” said Julien. “He’s a skilled player; he can make plays. That’s something we already knew, but how smart he was all over the ice, and the decisions he made, where he was positionally and all that stuff. To me, he played like a veteran.”

Whether Hamill is back in Providence this weekend remains to be seen. Julien said it was a tough decision to keep Peverley out of the lineup, but added the medical staff advised not playing him just yet.

Blue-line bruise

The B’s lost defenseman Andrew Ference with a lower body injury after his second shift in the second period.

“I don’t know the severity of it, so that’s all I can give you,” said Julien. “David Krejci was 15-0-22 in the faceoff circle, while Patrice Bergeron had a rare sub-.500 night (9-for-20). Bergeron had his seven-game point streak snapped. .?.

The B’s have now scored power-play goals in four straight games, clicking on 5-for-15 power plays over that span.

Paille update

Daniel Paille, who suffered a broken nose and facial lacerations when he blocked a shot with his face on Monday, did not skate yesterday morning or play last night.

He is officially day-to-day and Julien said he was feeling better when he saw him yesterday, but the coach wasn’t sure if Paille would be back for practice today or not.

In Paille’s place on the fourth line was Benoit Pouliot, skating with Shawn Thornton and Gregory Campbell.

Boston Herald LOADED: 11.11.2011
Alfredsson set to return for Ottawa

By John Vogl
News Sports Reporter

Published: November 11, 2011, 1:10 AM

Lindy Ruff didn't feel well Thursday, his voice gravelly as the Sabres' coach struggled through a bug of some sort. As much of a nuisance as the illness was, it's nothing compared to the suffering Daniel Alfredsson has inflicted on him.

The Ottawa captain is a legendary Sabre killer. He has 41 goals and 81 points in 80 career games against Buffalo. He's celebrated hat tricks and victories since coming into the NHL in 1995.

"He's been a real pain to us over the years," Ruff said in First Niagara Center. "He's a good player, and I still think he's a good player. If they get him back, they're getting a good piece back."

They're getting him back. Alfredsson is set to return to the Senators' lineup tonight in Buffalo, his first appearance since suffering a concussion Oct. 29.

"I'm expecting myself to be back and ready to go," Alfredsson told reporters in Ottawa. "I'm not going to be cautious. You've got to be aware at all times on the ice. I've said that before and it's the same. If you don't feel you're ready, then you shouldn't start playing again. I feel confident in my reaction time and whatnot, so I'll just try to play as normal."

The Senators could use the boost from their 38-year-old star, who has four goals and seven points in 10 games. They're 0-3-1 in their last four, including Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at home to the Sabres. It's just the latest streak for the Sens, who followed a 1-5 start with six straight victories.

"We're just not sharp enough to get the wins," said center Jason Spezza, who has 13 goals and 26 points in his last 12 games in Buffalo. "We're not going to change what we're doing. It's not like early in the year when we felt like we had to rediscover what type of team we are. We know what type of team we are, but we just have to be a little bit better and execute a little bit better."

....

The Sabres practiced with a full roster as Tyler Myers returned. The defenseman left Wednesday's session early after getting banged up during Tuesday night's 6-5 overtime victory over Winnipeg.

"It was a little maintenance, and it's calmed down a lot," Myers said. "I'm not worried about it at all."

Sabres left wing Tyler Ennis, who has been out since suffering a sprained ankle Oct. 22, also returned to the ice. He joined Jochen Hecht (concussion) prior to practice.

"They both skated for about 30 minutes," Ruff said. "In Tyler's case, no agility stuff, just basically lap skating."

The Senators, meanwhile, will be without agitator Chris Neil. The forward sprained his ankle during a 3-2 loss to the New York Rangers on Wednesday.

The NHL has released the ballot for this season's All-Star Game, and four Sabres made the cut. Ryan Miller is among the 18 goaltenders nominated. Left wing Thomas Vanek and right wing Jason Pominville are on the list of 73 forwards. Myers is nominated along with 35 other defensemen.

Voting begins Monday at NHL.com/vote, and fans can also submit their selections by texting a player's last name to 81812. The All-Star Game will be held Jan. 29 in Ottawa.

Buffalo News LOADED: 11.11.2011
Jordan Leopold was among the hundreds of thousands of fans who tuned into a nationally televised game Wednesday night expecting to see hockey. Instead, he saw a chess match break out — a really, really boring chess match.

The Sabres' defenseman was among the countless people who spent Thursday wondering what effect the Tampa Bay-Philadelphia mess will have on the sport.

"We're a form of entertainment," Leopold said after preparing for tonight's game against Ottawa in First Niagara Center. "People pay money to come watch their favorite players score goals. I don't think the fans really want to watch 10 guys standing still."

That's exactly what folks saw in Tampa, though. Just 30 seconds into the game, Philadelphia defenseman Chris Pronger got the puck at the left faceoff circle in the Flyers' zone. With the Lightning employing their 1-3-1 system — which features one player at the blue line, three at the red line and another at the far blue line — Pronger stood at the dot and waited for a forechecker.

And waited. And waited. And waited.

After 30 seconds, no one moved. As the fans booed, the refs blew the play dead, dropped the puck ... and watched the scenario repeat itself a few times.

"They have a set forecheck in the neutral zone, so we have a set breakout," Flyers coach Peter Laviolette said in his team's defense. "As soon as we get some pressure, we'll get into our outs. If they don't want us to stand there, they should come after us. Why are they going to just stand there?"

Penalties and power plays finally broke the stalemate during the second period, but by then many fans had switched channels, including Leopold.

"As a hockey fan, I was sitting there in a little bit of shock," he said. "To this point, hockey's been a pretty fluid game, except for that first period. [Wednesday] night. You've got to go out and play hockey. Whatever strategies you use, that's called a game plan and you've got to stick to it. Of course, you don't like to see 10 people standing still."

Both teams stood their ground Thursday — "When we attack, we attack," Tampa coach Guy Boucher said. "When we defend, we defend" — while others took sides.

"It's not a lot of fun playing against them," said left wing Ville Leino, whose team has played the Lightning twice. "There's not much they're going to give, and there's not much they're going to do.

"We should be playing hockey, not just playing a system. Good players make plays and they do stuff. I think it's honorable to try and play hockey, and not just play the system."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff condoned the Lightning's approach, with a caveat.

"It's more pronounced than other teams, but there's probably 15 teams that play 1-3-1," Ruff said. "We play it on occasion. We like a couple different looks, though. That's his right to play whatever system he wants.

"But I think somewhere in there, there's an obligation to go get the puck if the other team has it. I believe that. ... What happened [Wednesday] night wasn't good for the game."

When the Senators visit tonight, the Sabres will indeed employ trap-style zone coverage. They practiced their 1-2-2 on Thursday, and the 1-3-1 will show up should they get a lead.

It will be different, however. While the Lightning had their "forechecking" forward stand at the blue line, the Sabres' first defender will pressure the puck carrier. He'll try to force a pass between the defenseman, then he'll try to trap the blue-liner who gets the pass in an attempt to create a turnover.

"It's a matter of are you going to pursue the puck or not," Leopold said. "That clearly wasn't the case, as you see watching the game. I was almost stunned to see that happen.

"The system they play, they just sit back and wait for you to make mistakes. It works out really well for them because there can be five guys steaming with speed, and you turn the puck over, they're going the other way on a short-handed break. That's the style of hockey they play, and you have to respect that. You have to play a chess game with them ... and I've used that term before playing against them. It is a chess game, and you have to figure out how to get checkmate.

"[Wednesday] night in the first period was a pretty unique checkmate."

Buffalo News LOADED: 11.11.2011
By Scott Cruickshank, Calgary Herald November 11, 2011 12:05 AM

The coach needing to have a word with you in the hotel lobby? It could be about anything. Curfew update. Restaurant recommendation. Fashion faux pas. Power-play meeting.

So when Abbotsford Heat skipper Troy Ward stopped T.J. Brodie on the way to breakfast at their Houston lodging, the young defenceman had no clue what was coming.

He listened and got good news — the Calgary Flames were requesting his immediate presence.

Because Anton Babchuk is sidelined indefinitely — his left hand had been fractured blocking a first-period shot Tuesday against the Minnesota Wild — Brodie is back in the National Hockey League.

“It’s like a good shock,” Brodie said after Thursday’s morning practice with the Flames at the Scotiabank Saddledome. “Something you don’t really expect . . . but definitely a good shock.”

Brodie, after a superb 2010-11 camp, had cracked the Flames’ opening-day lineup. This season, the wait was a little longer.

“It’s definitely nice,” said Brodie. “I’ve been working to get this opportunity since last year. It’s nice to be back. It’s definitely exciting to be here.”

Meanwhile, Ward wasn’t done uttering those oh-so welcome words.

This time a day later to centre Paul Byron, who joins the team to take the place of Brendan Morrison. The 36-year-old pivot is back on the injured-reserve list due to “inadequate rehabilitation of ACL knee surgery,” according to the team’s press release.

Byron will meet up with the team in Chicago.

No word on his participation tonight against the Blackhawks, but Flames coach Brent Sutter hinted that Brodie — wearing the No. 7 sweater (instead of that attention-getting No. 66) — would suit up.

“It’s certainly the way I’m leaning,” said Sutter. “I just want him to be a good player. He’s been playing really well in Abby. He’s coming here for a reason. He’s a skilled player with tremendous instincts for the game. He can skate. I want him to use his strengths to his advantage — and to our advantage.”

Byron, part of the return from the Buffalo Sabres in the Robyn Regehr deal, has earned rave reviews, despite counting only four points in nine outings.

Brodie, a mobile defenceman in his second year of pro hockey, has recorded three points in a dozen contests. His plus-four rating ties him with Joe Piskula for team-best.

“I want to play well,” said the 21-year-old. “I don’t want to disappoint anyone.”

In the hockey world, there are few straight lines.

Tuesday, Brodie — and the rest of the Heat squad — flew from Vancouver to Houston.

Wednesday, he jetted from Houston to Calgary.

Thursday, he and his new best friends chartered to Chicago.

“Lots of travelling,” said Brodie, “but most of it is just getting used to the time zones.”

And the weather.

Brodie’s suitcase had been crammed with garb suited for the Heat’s seven-game gallop through Texas and Oklahoma — not the windy and Mile High cities.
Game Day: Flames at Blackhawks

Keep your eye on Backlund and Kane

By John Down, Calgary Herald November 11, 2011 12:06 AM

Calgary Flames at Chicago Blackhawks
Chicago United Center
Friday, 6:30 p.m., FAN 960 Radio; Sportsnet West

FLAMES
Player to watch: Mikael Backlund
The young centre has been waiting since last summer for this moment, finally able to rejoin No. 1 line wingers Jarome Iginla and Alex Tanguay after coming off a broken finger that delayed his seasonal debut.

THE LINEUP
Forwards
J. Iginla M. Backlund A. Tanguay
C. Glencross O. Jokinen R. Bourque
M. Stajan R. Horak L. Stempniak
T. Kostopoulos D. Moos T. Jackman

Defence
C. Butler J. Bouwmeester
M. Giordano S. Hannan
T.J. Brodie D. Smith/C. Sarich

Goalies
Miikka Kiprusoff
Henrik Karlsson

INJURIES
D Brett Carson (back, IR), D Anton Babchuk (hand, IR), C Brendan Morrison (knee, IR).

BLACKHAWKS
Player to watch: Patrick Kane
After establishing himself as one of the league’s top right wingers during the past four seasons, he has moved to centre the No. 2 line and is doing a bang up job, averaging a point-per-game and carrying a plus-8.

THE LINEUP
Forwards
P. Sharp J. Toews M. Frolik
D. Carcillo P. Kane M. Hossa
A. Brunette D. Bolland R. Olesz
V. Stalberg M. Kruger J. Mayers

Defence
D. Keith B. Seabrook
N. Leddy N. Hjalmarsson
S. Montador J. Scott

Goalies
Corey Crawford
Ray Emery

INJURIES
C Phillip Paradis (undisclosed, IR).

NOTABLES: D Jay Bouwmeester, whose league-leading iron man streak is at 520 games, needs one assist to hit the 200 milestone. Fellow blueliner Anton Babchuk, meanwhile, needs one point to mark his 100th . . . Should C Mikael Backlund draw into the lineup, he’d be starting his first game of the season and 98th of his career . . . Veteran winger Alex Tanguay is streaking towards 700 career points, needing just three more . . . While the Flames are bemoaning the league’s worst power-play on home ice, the Hawks have the worst power-play period, scoring at 8.8 per cent of the time.

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Lee Stempniak had been watching highlights of the previous night’s games.
Or, at least, he thought he was watching highlights.

But that, right there — is that a still photograph?

No. Because, as it turns out, Stempniak was being treated to video of
“action” between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Philadelphia Flyers.

By now, most everyone has had a peek at Wednesday’s standoff between
the Bolts, practitioners of an infuriatingly passive 1-3-1 forecheck, and the
Flyers, who, setting up shop in their own zone, stubbornly refused to
advance the puck.

“The game was on national television in the U.S. — so probably not the
best way to sell the game,” said Stempniak, winger of the Calgary Flames.
“Especially a team like Philly, a high-flying team . . . I’m sure that’s not what
the fans were expecting when they showed up. I’ve never seen anything
like it, but it seems like an isolated incident right now.”

Added Matt Stajan: “You don’t want to see that in a game. Obviously, a
waste of two minutes. Fans pay a lot of money to see that. It was funny, but
not good for the game, for sure.”

A bizarre scene, to say the least.

Brent Sutter got a kick out of it.

“I thought it was kind of funny,” said the Flames coach, chuckling. “You can
look at it two ways. Neither team is wrong in what they’re doing — I can
understand where Philly is coming from, I can understand where Tampa is
coming from. But you don’t want to see it in a game either.

“When I first saw it . . . it was pretty funny. But you know what? Same thing
happened last year and no one talked about it. So let’s move on.”

Sutter was then asked if he plans to implement that strategy next month
when his team visits Tampa.

“Let’s move on,” he replied with a smirk.

Alex Tanguay, however, applauded the Flyers’ stance.

Nothing wrong with a protest. Nothing wrong with making a point.

“People want to see hockey, people pay to see a show,” said Tanguay.
“People pay to see skating and skills. I guess it’s working for (the Lightning).
But as far as I’m concerned, if I was a fan paying, I would much rather see
a team that’s aggressive and skating than a team that’s waiting for . . . I’m
not sure what.

“Those people in the stands, they’re the ones making our livelihood, making
us what we are. We have to respect them.”

Trust Olli Jokinen to stand apart.

He declared that he is OK with the tactics, that he cannot find fault in the
strategy of either side. In fact, according to Jokinen, it serves a snapshot of
picture-perfect adherence to a game plan.

“At the end of the day, it’s about winning, about believing in your system,
doing what the coach told you to do,” he said. “I think it’s a good example of
why those teams are top teams in the Eastern Conference. Especially
Tampa. They have all these high-skilled players, but they do what their
coach tells them to do. That makes them a good team. Very impressive on
their part. Can you blame Philly for having a game plan? No. Just smart
coaching on both sides.

“Obviously, it was a hot topic this morning — guys were talking about it.”

None of the players, however, seemed too anxious to weigh in on potential
solutions.
Backlund like a kid at Christmas

By John Down, Calgary Herald November 10, 2011 11:42 PM

Mikael Backlund has been waiting for this day since the Calgary Flames packed up their bags and headed for the hills last summer.

At that time, GM Jay Feaster and coach Brent Sutter promised the young Swede that he’d launch this season on the No. 1 line with Jarome Iginla and Alex Tanguay, a couple of wingers with whom he’d developed some chemistry during the latter part of last season.

So it felt a little like Christmas following Thursday morning’s skate at the Scotiabank Saddledome when it was announced that the 22-year-old would finally get the green light to rejoin the team tonight at Chicago after missing the first 14 games with a broken pinky finger.

“It’s been a long time. I’m real excited. It’s going to feel great going out to play . . . almost like Christmas. Just real excited and pumped to go on this trip,” Backlund said, rattling off his words in typical machine-gun fashion.

“I’ve been working hard for a lot of weeks now . . . practising with the guys this week. It feels good. I feel fresh and ready to go.”

Sutter, who shuffled his lines considerably for the pre-flight practice, admitted the team has missed their No. 1 draft choice of 2007.

“He adds a lot to our centre ice position,” said the coach. “Backs, also understands the fact he hasn’t played a regular season game yet, but also understands the fact he’s a good player, a solid two-way player and, hopefully, in time he can form some chemistry with Tangs and Jarome.

“I thought it was a good line for us last year when they were together. We have missed him being out of the lineup.”

Tanguay, however, says the trio is going to have to click sooner rather than later as the team strives to climb back to .500 and beyond.

“We don’t have a lot of time, so we have to make it work,” said the team’s leading scorer. “Just like Jarome and Brendan (Morrison) at the start of the year. Both of them didn’t get to play much in training camp, so there’s a transition period and certainly for Mikael there’s going to be that.”

“But compared to the other two, he’s been able to move, able to skate, so the things that are a lot harder when you can’t do the things at full speed to get back into rhythm,” Tanguay continued.

“It’s unfortunate what happened to him to start the season but he’s been working extremely hard. He’s been skating the whole time so I think he’s going to be in good physical shape.

“There’s going to be some timing issues but he’s an important part of our team . . . we’re going to need him to play the way he’s capable of to help us move forward and play better.

“Hopefully we can find some success.”

Backlund will officially be activated this morning when the 24-hour waiver period ends for veteran winger Niklas Hagman.

The Finn was put on waivers Thursday morning to clear room for Backlund on the 23-man active roster. Hagman also went on waivers last year and went unclaimed.

Iginla admitted he too was happy to see Backlund fit to play.

“I know he’s worked very hard,” said the captain. “We see him before we go out all the time, see him in the weight room. He’s been chomping at the bit to go . . . he has speed, he’s a creative guy. I think it’ll definitely be a nice boost for our lineup.”

While Backlund returns fit as a fiddle, he isn’t quite sure how he’ll perform on faceoffs. The finger doesn’t bother his shooting but he’s uncertain how it’ll hold up in serious puck drops. About the only real feel for it has been with injured defenceman Brett Carson.

“I did a little bit yesterday and the day before with the team and the finger’s fine with it but it always helps having Tangs and Iggy ‘cause they can take faceoffs if I start to feel uncomfortable or if I’m losing at it or whatever,” he said, smiling.

“This is a big opportunity for me. Two great players, top players in the league for a long time. Experienced players. It’s going to be a lot of fun. I just have to work hard, play my game and try and help those guys produce more.

“I’m going to try to stay calm, not get too nervous, take it as another game.”

With Backlund moving in with Iginla and Tanguay, Sutter shuffled the remaining three lines. Olli Jokinen practised with regular left winger Curtis Glencross and new addition Rene Bourque. David Moss moved off the right side of that line to centre Tom Kostopoulos and Tim Jackman, while rookie pivot Roman Horak wound up with usual centre Matt Stajan on his left side and Lee Stempniak on his right.

The spare forwards were Brendan Morrison and Pierre-Luc Letourneau-Leblond. Morrison was later placed on injury reserve, the club saying it feels the veteran centre needs more recuperative time from off-season knee surgery.

Following tonight’s game against the Blackhaws, the Flames wrap up this quick road trip Saturday night at Denver against Colorado Avalanche.

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Flames take new look to Chicago; Hagman on waivers

November 10, 2011. 12:48 pm • Section: Flames Insider

One hand in, one hand out and one hand on waivers.

That's the short version of what happened with the Calgary Flames on Thursday, prior to their departure for Chicago and the opening of a back-to-back road trip with the Blackhawks (Friday) and Colorado (Saturday).

To explain it:

One hand in — Centre Mikael Backlund, who has yet to play a regular season game because of a broken pinky finger on his left hand, will be activated Friday morning and rejoin No. 1 line wingers Jarome Iginla and Alex Tanguay.

One hand out — Defenceman Anton Babchuk suffered an injury to his left hand during Tuesday's 3-0 loss to the Minnesota and was placed on injury reserve on Wednesday, allowing the team to recall D T.J. Brodie from Abbotsford. He may or may not play on Friday.

One hand on waivers — Winger Niklas Hagman was placed on waivers Thursday morning at 10. His fate won't be determined until he either clears or is picked up by another team during the 24-hour period. Hagman also was on waivers last season and cleared.

That out of the way, Flames coach Brent Sutter used the first 23 minutes of the 40-minute skate at the Saddledome to work on the biggest thorn of all right now — a sagging power-play. Well, sagging at home with an 0-for-7 performance against Minnesota to tumble to a little more than 5 per cent on home ice. On the road, No. 2 at 33 per cent.

The return of Backlund, which will be made official once Hagman clears waivers to open a roster spot, also allowed Sutter to shuffle his lines. Considerably.

Besides the No. 1 trio, which played well together down the stretch last season, the No. 2 unit will now see Olli Jokinen centering regular left wing Curtis Glencross and right wing Rene Bourque. The No. 3 gang, or maybe it’s the No. 4, sees rookie C Roman Horak with usual centre Matt Stajan and Lee Stempniak, while David Moss moves off the wing of the Jokinen line to centre Tom Kostopoulos and Tim Jackman.

Brendan Morrison and Pierre-Luc Letourneau-Leblond were the extra forwards. Morrison, who had off-season knee surgery, has been a scratch of late as he tries to pick up his quickness. It's only surprising that the team hasn't put him back on the wing, where he was effective in a few games at that position last season.

Brodie, said Sutter, will be a decision after Friday's skate. As far as that goes, you have to wonder if veteran Cory Sarich will draw back in on the blueline.

Goaltending? Miikka Kiprusoff probably gets the green light at Chicago and then Sutter will decide whether he comes back Saturday or whether Henrik Karlsson gets the nod.

Calgary Herald: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Jarome Iginla loves the NHL’s post-lockout decision for every game to have a winner and a loser.

However, Iginla would like a change in the point standings, but not the normal one.

The Calgary Flames captain believes every game should mean two points for a win and zero for a loss, even in extra time.

“It would be a little more stressful when you’re in a shootout, but be more fun. You’d have more riding on each game,” Iginla said. “I’m sure I’m in a minority in that, but it would be exciting.

‘I like sports so much it’s because it’s unpredictable and so much is riding on it. It would add more.’

The NHL’s point system which allows losing teams a point if they make it past regulation time has it’s share of detractors. Mainly because some games are worth three points but many have two points handed out.

It’s doubtful the league will change the system since it keeps the standings tighter and usually provides a more exciting playoff chase, but there are players who would prefer something different.

Flames defenceman Mark Giordano is a proponent of a 3-2-1-0 system, which gives teams three points for a regulation-time win and two for winning in extra time or a shootout.

“I don’t think teams get rewarded enough for a regulation win,” Giordano said. “It’s not the same winning in a shootout as it is winning in regulation.”

But just like the various ideas banded about for realignment, there are many theories which system the league should use.

“Players, we play, try to win every game. Whatever the point system is, that’s the way it is,” Flames centre Olli Jokinen said. “We don’t look and say, ‘That team has 15 extra points because they have shootout losses.’ Some guys may, but I don’t have time to do it.”

FLAMING C-NOTES

Who would have bet former Flame Eric Nystrom would have as many goals, four, as Iginla at this point? Nystrom, who was traded to the surprising Dallas Stars by the Minnesota Wild after going through waivers, has tallied in three straight games ... Hopefully, the Flames never again have 14 forwards on one-way contracts heading into training camp. To their credit, the Flames found a way to get Roman Horak on the roster when he earned it, but it would have been worth getting Sven Baertschi and Max Reinhart a couple of regular-season games before going to the minors.

HOCKEY TALKY

The New York Islanders are unveiling a new third jersey next week. Wonder if they’ll bring back the Captain Highliner model? ... It will be uplifting to see Vancouver Canucks forward Mason Raymond back in action after such a horrible back injury in last season’s playoffs. Here’s to hoping it happens soon, along with a return by Penguins star Sidney Crosby ... Interesting stat dug up by Jesse Spector of The Sporting News regarding Corey Perry’s breakout 50-goal 2010-11 season: Perry scored with 17.2% of his shots last season but is now closer to the 12% shooting rate he’s had over his career and in line to a 30-goal season ... Wackiest tradition we’ve heard about this week: The Nashville Predators are playing Lionel Richie’s All Night Long in their dressing room to celebrate victories. “Half these guys don’t know who he is. They think he’s a new artist,” head coach Barry Trotz told The Tennessean ...

Please be sure to take a moment to remember all those for whom we have Remembrance Day. As somebody who visited the Vimy Memorial and several other sites from the world wars, it’s a small gesture to those who did so much.

YOU DON’T SAY

“Now it’s like an ex-girlfriend. You really don’t want her to get the white-picket fence and the great job. It’s like a good country song.”
Flames' Backlund to play Friday

By RANDY SPORTAK, QMI Agency

As he watched the media horde head to dressing room stall in the far corner, Alex Tanguay couldn’t resist.

"Mikael Backlund won’t be unavailable for comments. You can follow him on Twitter," the Calgary Flames winger said with uproarious laughter.

Backlund, who's known for chatting through the social media outlet, let it be known in the morning he was going with the team on its road trip to Chicago.

He’s finally been cleared for action from the broken finger he suffered during a practice prior to the season opener.

He was then on the ice for practice between Tanguay and Jarome Iginla, the spot he was pencilled to be prior to suffering the injury.

"It’s almost like Christmas for me," Backlund said. "It’s gonna be great to play.

"It’s been a long time. I’m pumped to be on the trip and back on the ice."

Backlund tried to play it cool as to whether he’d play Friday’s game against the Blackhawks. However, head coach Brent Sutter said he fully expects to see the 22-year-old centre in action.

"He’s a good player — a good, solid, two-way player — and hopefully, he can form some chemistry with Tangs and Jarome," Sutter said. "We have missed him with him being out of the lineup."

Certainly, Iginla and Tanguay have had their share of struggles.

That sounds like heady talk for a player who netted 10 goals and 25 points in 73 games during his rookie season, but Backlund did collect four points in the last two games of the 2010-11 campaign on that line.

"He is a quick guy and creative with that offensive instinct. I think he’ll be a good boost for our team," Iginla said. "Last year, we were able to find some good chemistry as a line and — if we’re playing together — hopefully, we will be able to keep going where we left off."

To make room for Backlund on the roster, which won’t be effective until Friday morning, the Flames put left winger Niklas Hagman on waivers. If Hagman goes unclaimed, he and his US$3-million salary will likely be sent to the AHL Abbotsford Heat.

Backlund hasn’t played since the pre-season, but he spent the last six weeks recovering from the injury, which required a pair of surgeries.

It’s likely he’ll need time to get up to pace of the NHL’s regular season, but everybody is hoping his enthusiasm will help overcome any issues.

"We built some chemistry last year. He knows what to expect," Tanguay said. "There will be a bit of an adjustment period for him, but it’s not like he’s a guy who’s got a foot injury and hasn’t been skating. He’s been skating the whole time and will have great form."

Backlund, who has been skating for about a month, said he is raring for action after spending so many weeks skating with other injured players.

"I feel ready. Feels good, and I’m fresh and ready to go," he said. "It’s a big opportunity for me. It’s two great players, top players in the league for a long time. It’ll be fun to play with them, if that’s the case."

As for what he’ll be saying to his followers on Twitter, Backlund said likely not much.

"Probably nothing because we’re flying," he said. "I did tweet this morning I was going on the trip. I was excited, and fans like things like that."

Calgary Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Boychuk gets chance on Staal line again

By Chip Alexander - calexander@newsobserver.com

New York -- Canes coach Paul Maurice said there would be line changes, and line changes there were today.

Eric Staal was at center with Alexei Ponikarovsky and Zach Boychuk at the Canes' practice at Chelsea Piers. No more Staal, Jeff Skinner and Chad LaRose.

With Jussi Jokinen ready to return to the lineup, Maurice has reunited Skinner and Tuomo Ruutu with Jokinen. The 'Finns & Skins' line is back together.

Brandon Sutter had LaRose and Jiri Tlusty on his wings, and the fourth line had Tim Brent at center with Zac Dalpe and Anthony Stewart. Pat Dwyer was ill and did not practice today, but Maurice said he expected Dwyer to be available for tomorrow's game against the Rangers.

Boychuk and Ponikarovsky were the wings on Ruutu's line Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils and was the Canes' most consistent, Maurice said.

Of giving Boychuk a chance to play with Staal, Maurice said, "Probably his best game for us last year was in New York on (Staal's) line. He had a heck of a first period the other night and then I thought that line and his game in New Jersey was in the top two or three performances up front in terms of what we're trying to do.

"With a young guy you've got to deliver something, you've got to show something first to get that opportunity and he'll get that opportunity. He's just playing one game and that's all he's got to focus on. He doesn't have to try to win the job for the season in 60 minutes of hockey. It's a good chance for him."

Needless to say, Boychuk, who began the season in Charlotte with the Checkers (AHL), is pretty pumped about the opportunity.

"I've been playing with Poni the last couple of games and we've had some chemistry," Boychuk said. "We spent a lot of time in the other team's end, so that's a positive. Then to add someone like Eric Staal, who's an amazing player...

"(Maurice) came up to me and said, 'Keep playing the same way, keep playing energetically.' I'm really looking forward to it."

Boychuk said he played with Staal and Erik Cole in last year's game at the Garden.

"I had a solid game and we won in overtime," he said. "It was good. I'm glad to be back. It doesn't usually happen for a callup to move up to that line so quickly, and I'll do everything I can to make an impression."

Maurice would not say which forward would be scratched if Dwyer plays. He also did not say which of the seven defensemen would be a healthy scratch for the Rangers.

News Observer LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Rangers offense has been his, there's no question about that. He's a leader, there's no question about that. He's a big, strong man," Maurice said. "This isn't a guy who's hiding in the corner. He'll answer your questions."

"I think if it had been a bad hit it might have affected him more. I think they had delivered the same kind of hits on each other every single time they'd played each other."

Eric again said the situation with Marc is not affecting his play or his slow start this season, saying firmly, "It has nothing to do with it." But he did concede it has been hard on the Staal family.

"(Marc) has a passion and a love for the game and he can't play right now," Staal said. "It's tough for him, it's tough for me and it's tough for everybody in the family ... They feel for Marc and they feel for me, being put in that spot.

"But he'll recover fully. He'll be back playing like himself."

Eric hopes to be doing the same soon. Try as he might, the Canes captain hasn't been able to make things happen.

He isn't scoring goals. He isn't being a big difference in games. He isn't leading his team to victories, which bothers him most.

"I haven't been able to find a groove offensively yet," he said. "I've had a lot of looks, a lot of opportunities and chances around the net and just haven't been hitting the back of the net.

"I take a lot of responsibility. I feel I'm a big part of this team and a big part of this organization. I've been here a long time and take pride in this group. I know I'm a leader on this team and I need to be better."

The right formula

Maurice tried Jeff Skinner on a wing with Staal, teaming the Canes' two best offensive players. Maurice went away from that combination, then back to it, and said Wednesday he would change the line again.

With Jussi Jokinen expected back from a leg injury that has sidelined the forward the past three games - all Canes losses - Maurice said he likely would have Skinner play the left wing with Jokinen at center and Tuomo Ruutu on the right side.

Of having Staal play with Skinner and Chad LaRose, Maurice said, "I didn't see enough offense out of that line and I saw a whole lot of bad defense. It was the same thing at the start of the year. You'd like to do it to get it going, but I don't think it works."

Through 15 games, Staal has three goals - all on power plays - and two assists. He has a team-high 55 shots to Skinner's 51, but Skinner leads the Canes in goals (six) and assists (eight).

"Every player goes through tough times," Skinner said. "Guys go through scoring droughts and guys get in slumps, and you can't just judge a player just on that. Especially Eric, who sort of dominates games for us.

"He does so much more than put points up for us. He logs huge minutes on the team's top line against the top (defensive) pairs. He wins big faceoffs. He's physical. It's those things he's bringing to the game. He's in a little bit of a slump but I think that's what makes him a good leader."

News Observer LOADED: 11.11.2011
Hurricanes' new investor reveals identity

By CHIP ALEXANDER - calexander@newsobserver.com

When the Carolina Hurricanes’ 10 investment partners were announced last week, team owner Peter Karmanos Jr., said only one was based outside the state of North Carolina.

Bob Taubman initially preferred to remain a silent investor, but has agreed to have his name released.

Taubman is the chairman, president and chief executive officer of Taubman Centers, Inc., a real estate investment trust based in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., that owns, develops and operates regional shopping centers nationally. He was named president and CEO in 1990, and chairman in 2001.

Taubman is a member of the board of directors of Comerica Incorporated and Sotheby’s Holdings, Inc. He serves as a director of the Real Estate Roundtable in Washington, D.C., as a trustee of the Urban Land Institute and on the Board of Governors of the National Association of Real Estate Investment Trusts.

Taubman serves as a member of the board of directors of Business Leaders for Michigan, Beaumont Hospitals, and as a trustee of The Skillman Foundation. He is a member of the board of directors of Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments and is a past chairman of the Michigan campaign drive for the United Negro College Fund.

News Observer LOADED: 11.11.2011
Another day and line changes on the way for Canes

By Chip Alexander - Staff writer

NEW YORK -- Having lost a game in New Jersey, the Canes have moved on to New York. New day, new city.

Canes coach Paul Maurice, very somber after the 3-2 loss Tuesday against the Devils in Newark, was more upbeat today in Manhattan. But some changes, he said, will be made before the Canes face the Rangers on Friday at Madison Square Garden.

Eric Staal's line, to name one. If Jussi Jokinen is ready to play, Maurice indicated he likely would have Jokinen back at center with wingers Jeff Skinner and Tuomo Ruutu on the "Finns and Skins" line.

"We could go back to the way we were when we were winning hockey games," Maurice said. "Before (Jokinen's) injury we were playing well. So that would be my first inclination. My second is more drastic but I think I will hold on to that one."

Maurice put Skinner and LaRose with Staal in hopes of getting more offensive production -- chiefly from Staal. But he has not liked when he has seen as the Canes dropped their last three games.

"I didn't see enough offense out of that line and I saw a whole lot of bad defense," Maurice said. "It was the same thing at the start of the year. You'd like to do it to get it going, but I don't think it works."

Maurice did not say who he would put with Staal, saying he would first wait to see if Jokinen -- out the last three games with a leg injury -- could play. While there was not a full team practice today, Jokinen skated along with Tim Brent, Zac Dalpe, Anthony Stewart and Derek Joslin at Chelsea Piers.

"If he's not going to play, then I'm going to move a bunch of guys around twice before we even hit the ice (Friday)," he said.

Any decisions on the back end also will be made at tomorrow's practice. Jamie McBain replaced Joslin in the lineup against the Devils. Paired with Joini Pitkanen, McBain played more than 19 minutes and had an assist on Jokinen's third-period goal that tied the score 2-2.

Cam Ward will start in goal against the Rangers, Maurice said. The Canes face the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday in Raleigh in the back-to-back set, and Maurice hinted Ward might play both.

"We need to win here now for the confidence of the group," he said.

In reviewing the loss to the Devils, Maurice said, "We wanted to play a good, solid defensive game and have an attack, and we were better at that really up until they scored their first goal. After that, we got out of the comfort zone and were trying to do things offensively that didn't generate enough for it to make sense.

"I thought we were in the fight, and good battles and all the things we've talked about. But as soon as that game went to 1-1 it was like 'We've got to get it back.' That's a great mentality as long as you're not giving anything up to do it and come out of what you do. ... We have to generate our offense in a certain way and it's a hard way to do it because it's not going to be a free-flowing, snap-it-around offense."

Despite the problems, Maurice noted it was 2-2 late in the third. What concerned him as much as the Devils getting the go-ahead goal from Adam Henrique was that defensemen Tim Gleason and Bryan Allen were on the ice when Henrique scored and how it might affect them moving forward.

"It's how they react to it, because they've played so very well for us," he said. "You talking about two guys who are just feeling that goal, and now we've got to get them back and feeling good."

Defenceman Jay Harrison said the Canes can't allow frustration to set in.

"It's difficult," he said. "Everyone's feeling it. Everyone wants to win. Everyone feels the effort and when it doesn't come you feel the pinch, you feel the squeeze. You have to prepare to win and put your best effort forward to have a chance to win."

News Observer LOADED: 11.11.2011
Friday's matchup: Flames at Blackhawks

November 11, 2011

TV/radio: 7:30 p.m. Friday; CSN, WGN-AM 720.
Series: First meeting.
Last meeting: Hawks won 6-4 on March 2 at the United Center.
Probable goalies rec, gaa
Cal, M. Kiprusoff 6-5-0, 2.18
Hawks, Ray Emery 2-0-1, 3.26

Team comparison
FLAMES (6-7-1) CATEGORY BLACKHAWKS (9-4-3)
2.14 (28) Goals for 2.93 (9)
2.50 (11) Goals against 2.87 (20)
15.4 (19) Power-play % 8.8 (30)
81.2 (19) Penalty-kill % 78.3 (21)

Averages (NHL rank) through Wednesday
Storyline: The Hawks are playing the second of back-to-back games after
beating the Blue Jackets in Columbus on Thursday. So far, they are 2-0-1
in second of those games. Alex Tanguay leads Flames in scoring with three
goals and eight assists. Flames have lost two of last three overall and are
3-3-0 on the road this season.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
O'Donnell knows he can't play every game
Hawks veteran accepts sitting better at this stage of career

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter
9:10 PM CST, November 10, 2011

COLUMBUS, Ohio — After 1,185 games over 17-plus NHL seasons, the Blackhawks' Sean O'Donnell doesn't take it personally these days when he's a healthy scratch.

"I trust that Joel (Quenneville) and the coaching staff know what they're doing," O'Donnell, 40, said before the Hawks' 6-3 victory over the Blue Jackets on Thursday night at Nationwide Arena. "It's a little different for me. Some guys who are in their 20's and are looking to play five, 10, 15 more years, sitting out kind of hurts their career."

O'Donnell has been a regular player throughout his career but as he nears the end of it, he has been used less often. O'Donnell was scratched for the second consecutive game Thursday and fourth this season.

"We all want to play," said O'Donnell, who signed a one-year deal with the Hawks on July 1. "(But) I knew coming here that 82 games was not going to happen."

Rock the vote: Six Hawks are on the ballot for the 2012 NHL All-Star Game, tied for most in the NHL — defensemen Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook and forwards Marian Hossa, Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and Patrick Sharp.

Voting is digital and will run Nov. 14 to Jan. 4 on NHL.com. The top six vote-getters by position — three forwards, two defensemen and a goaltender — will be selected by fans for the Jan. 29 game in Ottawa.

Helping out: The Hawks will wear camouflage jerseys during warmups before Friday's Veterans Day game against the Flames at the United Center in support of the USO of Illinois and those who serve or have served in the military. The jerseys will be autographed by each player and auctioned online at chicagoblackhawks.com with all proceeds benefiting the USO of Illinois.

One-timer: Center Dave Bolland was sidelined against the Blue Jackets with a right foot injury suffered Tuesday night against the Blues. The center is questionable for the Flames.
Blue Jackets cure for what was ailing Hawks
Club clicks in all phases of 6-3 rout — including power play

By Chris Kuc, Chicago Tribune reporter
10:29 PM CST, November 10, 2011

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The cure for what was ailing the Blackhawks — including a power play that was fading fast — came in the form of the hapless Blue Jackets.

The Hawks took advantage of a struggling squad to steamroll their way to a 6-3 victory Thursday night at Nationwide Arena and snap a three-game losing skid.

Coming off arguably their two worst performances of the season, the Hawks used a defense that stepped into the offensive attack and a power play that scored two goals in a game for the first time this season.

Jonathan Toews had two goals and an assist, Steve Montador a goal and an assist and Andrew Brunette, Marian Hossa and Patrick Kane also scored as the Hawks improved to 9-4-3. The Blue Jackets dropped to a league-worst 2-12-1, managing two goals by Grant Clitsome and another by Mark Letestu.

"We wanted to stop sliding like we were," said Montador, who helped jump-start the power play when he converted a pass from Duncan Keith during a run of five consecutive Hawks goals. "We realized that our success comes from what we put into a game so we wanted to keep it simple in the defensive zone.

"Everyone has been talking about the power play and we worked on that (Thursday night). It was a good team win. A couple of lapses but that's just hockey. We should be happy with this."

Hawks defensemen combined for eight points, aided by Montador's big night and two-assist games from Nick Leddy and Brent Seabrook, to help spark an offense that was coming off a shutout loss to the Blues on Tuesday night.

"Top to bottom, everyone was skating a little bit better," said Toews, who scored the Hawks' first two goals. "It's one thing for the 'D' to carry it up the ice and be more active but as forwards we knew we had to be more active to get open for them in the neutral zone. We gave them options and it makes their job easier to bring the puck up. It was everyone helping each other a little bit more.

Added Keith, who in addition to his assist, finished with a plus-3 plus-minus rating: "It was important that we had a good whole 60 minutes. We weren't happy with the last few games and I think it showed in our game (Thursday night) from the start."

Perhaps most encouraging for the Hawks was the success of their power play, which entered the game with a league-worst 8.8 percent success rate but got scores from Brunette and Montador to break out.

"We had a real good first period and when you get the power play going all of a sudden you get some excitement in the team game," coach Joel Quenneville said. "It was nice to see a couple of nice plays and nice finishes around the net."

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Blackhawks land six on All-Star Game ballot

By Chris Kuc
Tribune reporter
3:41 PM CST, November 10, 2011

COLUMBUS -- The Chicago Blackhawks have six players on the 2012 NHL All-Star Game ballot, which was released Thursday by the league.

The Hawks were tied for the most players on the ballot with the Ducks, Flyers, Bruins and Penguins. The six Hawks are defensemen Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook and forwards Marian Hossa, Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews and the MVP of the 2011 contest, Patrick Sharp.

Voting is entirely digital and will begin Nov. 14 on NHL.com and conclude Jan. 4. The top six vote-getters by position -- three forwards, two defensemen and a goaltender -- will be selected by fans to participate in the Jan. 29 game in Ottawa. The NHL will select the reserves.

Sharp, Kane, Toews and Keith were all-stars last year in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Sharp, who was not on the ballot on 2011 but was selected by the league, skated off with MVP honors after recording a goal and two assists as Team Lidstrom defeated Team Staal 11-10.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Hawks' Bolland sidelined for game vs. Blue Jackets

By Chris Kuc
Tribune reporter
12:00 PM CST, November 10, 2011

COLUMBUS -- The Chicago Blackhawks won't have the services of top defensive center Dave Bolland when they take on the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday night at Nationwide Arena.

Bolland was injured when he took a shot from the St. Louis Blues' Ian Cole off his right foot during Tuesday night's game. Bolland finished that game but did not practice Wednesday and coach Joel Quenneville ruled him out for Thursday. In his absence, rookie Marcus Kruger will have more responsibilities, centering a line with Bryan Bickell and Michael Frolik.

"You use Bolland in all situations so there's a quality of ice time," Quenneville said following Thursday's morning skate at Nationwide Arena. "Kruger is going to move up and he's going to probably pick up some of that and maybe get some power play time too. He'll be the one guy who gets a lot more."

Quenneville said "we'll see" regarding Bolland's status for Friday night's game against the Calgary Flames at the United Center.

Corey Crawford will be in goal for the Hawks and will be opposed by Steve Mason for the Blue Jackets. Expected scratches for the Hawks are defensemen Sami Lepisto and Sean O'Donnell.

Chicago Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
COLUMBUS, Ohio — Victories against the lowly Columbus Blue Jackets are nothing to gloat about or rest your laurels on these days. But for the Blackhaws, who had fallen in a little rut, one right now could be a good anecdote in helping them -return to form.

The Hawks did what they're supposed to do and then some against the Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Thursday. Nearly everyone got involved, whether it was on the rush or on the power play, in a 6-3 rout of Columbus.

Jonathan Toews scored twice and had an assist, Patrick Kane converted on a partial breakaway and Marian Hossa banged in a loose puck, while Steve Montador and Andrew Brunette also got into the mix, adding long overdue power-play goals.

"Both teams were hungry to get back on the horse," Toews said. "We knew it wasn't about what they do as a team. It was more about us getting back to the way we play. It was an important win for us, so we'll use the confidence that it brings you and keep building on it."

The Hawks' defense made a concerted effort to be more offensive and it showed as the blue line combined for eight points. It also helped the Hawks' success on the power play.

"You get the power play going and all of sudden we get some excitement in our team game as well," coach Joel Quenneville said.

Leave it to a somewhat unusual grouping of players on the second power-play unit to finally produce for the Hawks, who saw their rating with the man advantage plummet to the bottom of the league after falling to the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday.

Defensemen Duncan Keith (assist, plus-3) and Nick Leddy (two assists) were at the points. Rookie Marcus Kruger was at center with Dave Bolland out with a foot injury. Brunette was at wing and Montador was set up in the slot.

It worked twice.

Montador had a goal and an assist, while Brunette ended a 12-game goal drought with a rebound score. The two power-play goals were the most in a game for the Hawks this season.

"It doesn't matter who scores the goals or how," Toews said. "Just the fact that one of your units can go out there and make a couple of plays and something happen, that's what you're looking for."

If there was one sour aspect of the victory, it was that the Hawks' penalty kill showed some holes again, allowing the Blue Jackets to convert two of three power plays. Grant Clitsome scored twice and Mark Letestu also had a power-play goal to lead Columbus. Steve Mason allowed six goals on 36 shots.

Still, the Hawks were in full control from the start against the Blue Jackets, who fell to a league-worst 2-12-1. Corey Crawford made 27 saves for the victory, while Keith, Toews, Hossa and Viktor Stalberg all finished with plus-3 ratings. Brent Seabrook was a plus-2 with two assists.

"Obviously, we wanted to stop sliding like we were," said Montador, who also had a first-period fight for the "Gordie Howe Hat Trick" Thursday. "We realized that our success comes from what we put into a game.

"We should be happy with this. But we certainly need to bounce back and get ready for another one [against the Calgary Flames Friday]."
Steve Montador rings up a ‘Howe Hat Trick’

By ADAM L. JAHNS
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Last Modified: Nov 11, 2011 02:26AM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A fight. An assist. And, a goal.

NHL legend Gordie Howe made the combination famous, and Blackhawks
defenseman Steve Montador tallied that “hat trick” in a 6-3 victory against
the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday night.

“It’s definitely exciting to be contributing to the success,” Montador said.
“Sometimes you get on the scoresheet, sometimes you don’t. Tonight I did
and I was happy about it.”

Montador was acquired partially because of his willingness to scrap and
that side showed up early on as he fought Blue Jackets winger Derek
Dorsett after he took a run at center Marcus Kruger. It was Montador’s first
fight as a Hawk.

“He probably would have done the same,” Montador said. “It happened right
in front of me. I wasn’t too happy with that.”

With the Hawks’ power play struggling, Montador was put in the slot on the
second unit, which was successful in Columbus. He assisted on Andrew
Brunette’s power-play goal at 1:25 in the second. Montador then fired in a
Duncan Keith feed during another power play for his first goal of the
season.

It was the Hawks’ first “Gordie Howe Hat Trick” since Brent Seabrook did it
on March 27, 2009 against the New Jersey Devils.

Cast your votes

Last year, forward Patrick Sharp was a notable snub from the NHL’s All-
Star ballot. Now, it’s goalie Corey Crawford.

Sharp, Patrick Kane, Jonathan Toews, Marian Hossa, Keith and Seabrook
are on the ballot, which came out Thursday.

Sharp (MVP), Toews, Kane and Keith were All-Stars last season. Voting
begins Nov. 14

While Crawford’s stats are expected to improve, there were 18 other
goalies on the ballot, including the St. Louis Blues’ Jaroslav Halak (two wins
as of Thursday) and the Toronto Maple Leafs’ James Reimer (injured).

Chicago Sun Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Brent Seabrook gives Blackhawks’ attack a big boost

By Adam L. Jahns
ajahns@suntimes.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The sight of defenseman Brent Seabrook streaking down the wing with the puck and shooting with Viktor Stalberg around the Columbus Blue Jackets goal was one coach Joel Quenneville certainly likes.

It’s exactly what he wants really, and it got the Blackhawks off to a good start in their 6-3 victory Thursday night.

“We need our ‘D’ to be part of the offense,” Quenneville said.

That type of activity from the Hawks defense was lacking the last two games. Seabrook’s play resulted in a first-period goal for Jonathan Toews. Nick Leddy also led a rush later in the first which resulted in another goal for Toews.

“Sometimes you relieve puck pressure just by being an option or an outlet,” Quenneville said. “But we want these guys to get involved off the attack and in zone. There has got to more sightings offensively of our ‘D’ being in there.”

Thursday’s victory was a big day for the Hawks’ blue line as Seabrook (two assists), Leddy (two assists), Steve Montador (goal, assist), Duncan Keith (assist, plus-3) and Niklas Hjalmarsson (assist) all showed up.

“Some of the plays develop differently with some teams,” said Leddy, who leads the blue line with two goals and 10 points. “You just try to create as many chances as you can.”
Hawks take advantage of hapless Blue Jackets

By Tim Sassone

The Blackhawks did what they were supposed to do Thursday night — kick a bad team while it’s down.

Playing the worst team in the NHL, the Hawks jumped on the Columbus Blue Jackets early and never took their foot off the gas in a 6-3 win at Nationwide Arena.

There was a lot to like about what the Hawks did, even if it came against the now 2-12-1 Blue Jackets.

Jonathan Toews scored twice, Andrew Brunette and Steve Montador each scored power-play goals and the defense was more active in the offense that in any game this season.

“All our defense was better at that tonight,” said Duncan Keith, who was plus-3 with an assist. “We have some (defensemen) who can skate and carry the puck. It’s one of the strengths of our team.”

Both goals by Toews in the first period resulted from rushes up the ice by defensemen — Brent Seabrook on the first and Nick Leddy on the second.

“I thought our defense was very noticeable tonight coming out of our zone,” coach Joel Quenneville said. “It led to some goals because our defense was activated. Our lines had better rotation, but our defense spearheaded the attack.”

It was the power-play goals by Brunette and Montador, coming back-to-back early, in the second period that broke the game open, giving the Hawks a 4-1 lead.

The power play came into the night ranked last in the league thanks to a 1-for-30 stretch over the previous eight games.

“You get your power play going and all of a sudden you get some excitement in your team game,” Quenneville said.

Brunette’s goal was his third of the season, all on the power play. It wasn’t pretty as he dug out a rebound and flipped it over goalie Steve Mason with Montador and Marcus Kruger creating traffic.

Montador’s goal came from in front. Quenneville decided to try the defenseman there for Thursday’s game to shake things up and it paid off.

“I wanted to have success,” Montador said. “I didn’t picture this exactly, but I definitely wanted to be part of it.”

Montador was engaged much of the night in his best game with the Hawks. He also had a fight in the first period, giving him the so-called Gordie Howe hat trick, which consists of a goal, an assist and a fight.

“It’s good to see,” Keith said, “because he’s a great guy to have and a great guy in the locker room.”

The Blue Jackets didn’t start badly, but Toews’ second goal from a bad angle was one Mason should have stopped.

“That wasn’t a very good goal,” said Columbus coach Scott Arniel, who could be in his final days behind the bench.

Mason’s play has been poor all season and a big reason for the Blue Jackets’ nightmarish start.

Columbus has lost three straight and been outscored 19-6. The Blue Jackets were coming off a 9-2 loss at Philadelphia last Saturday.

“We looked like a group that is very fragile,” Arniel said.

The Hawks snapped their three-game winless streak without center Dave Bolland, who sat with an injury to his right foot. Bolland also is questionable for Friday’s game against Calgary at the United Center.

Daily Herald Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Blackhawks looked at their meeting with Columbus as an opportunity to turn things around after a three-game skid. For the downtrodden Blue Jackets, it was just more of the same. Jonathan Toews had two goals and an assist, and the Blackhawks' struggling power play scored twice in a 6-3 victory over the stumbling Columbus on Thursday night. Andrew Brunette, Steve Montador, Patrick Kane and Marian Hossa also had goals for Chicago, which lost 3-0 at St. Louis on Tuesday. Nick Leddy and Brent Seabrook both had two assists in the Blackhawks' highest-scoring game of the season. Corey Crawford made 27 saves. "Obviously, we wanted to stop sliding like we were," said Montador, who also had an assist. "We realize our success comes from what we put into a game. We wanted to keep it simple." Chicago entered last in the NHL on the power play, converting just 5 of 57 opportunities. But the Blackhawks scored on two of their three advantages to get out of their rut against the Blue Jackets, among the worst in the league on the penalty kill. "We had a real good first period and then all of a sudden we get the power play going and we get some excitement in our team, as well," Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said. "It was nice to see a couple nice plays, a couple nice finishes around the net." Toews scored twice in the first period, the second on the Blackhawks' first power play. Toews sent a soft shot from the left circle on net that somehow eluded goalie Steve Mason for a 2-1 Chicago lead. "We just wanted to try and wear them down and discourage them a little bit," Toews said of the Blue Jackets, who are an NHL-worst 2-12-1. "We knew it wasn't about what they do as a team, it was more about us being prepared and getting back to the way we play." Brunette opened the second period with another power-play goal. Montador then converted Duncan Keith's pass from the corner while unchecked in the slot. Kane made it 5-1 when he took an errant pass from Columbus' Vinny Prospal, skated in alone on Mason, deked and scored on the backhand. Hossa scored over a sprawling Mason 32 seconds into the third period. The Blue Jackets have been outscored 19-6 in a three-game losing streak. Rumors have swirled recently that the jobs of Blue Jackets second-year coach Scott Amel and general manager Scott Howson were in jeopardy, or that Columbus would pull off a big trade to shake up the team. An announced crowd of 15,048 — that appeared to be closer to half of that — booted loudly when the Blackhawks pulled away in the second period. "We look like a group that's very fragile," Amel said. "I mean, we got off to a very slow, fragile start. Then they scored a couple of power-play goals and it was obviously wide open after that." Grant Clitsome had a career-best two goals, and newly acquired Mark Letestu also scored for the Blue Jackets. Rick Nash earned his 500th NHL point by assisting on Letestu's goal. Fedor Tyutin had two assists. "Same old story, it seems like," Clitsome said. "It's frustrating." Defenseman James Wisniewski said it was up to the players to regain their confidence. "Any mistake we (make) it just ends up in the back of the net," he said. "A lot of guys are hanging their heads, which we have to get over. We just have to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and start playing some hockey." NOTES: Columbus activated F Jared Boll (broken thumb) before the game. He hadn't played yet this season. ... Chicago hadn't scored more than one power-play goal — nor more than five goals — in a game this season. ... The Blue Jackets acquired Letestu from the Pittsburgh Penguins earlier this week for a fourth-round pick in the 2012 draft. ... The Blackhawks are 35-23-7 against Columbus, including 18-12-4 on the road.
Blackhawks power play finds a cure in Columbus

November 10, 2011, 8:31 pm

COLUMBUS, Ohio – Ugly losses against Vancouver and St. Louis had the Blackhawks stewing, and they needed to put that angst back in their game.

So on Thursday they took their frustrations out on the Blue Jackets.

Jonathan Toews scored two goals and Steve Montador recorded a Gordie Howe hat trick in the Blackhawks’ 6-3 victory over Columbus at Nationwide Arena. The Blackhawks, who were without center Dave Bolland, stopped their two-game losing streak clicking twice on the power play and re-igniting their offense.

And it started – and sometimes ended – with the Blackhawks defensemen, who combined for eight points on Thursday night. Brent Seabrook and Nick Leddy each had two assists.

“I think that makes a big difference when we’re part of the attack,” said Duncan Keith. “It alleviates some of the pressure on our forwards, as far as giving them some room. All of the defensemen were better at that tonight.”

That includes Montador, who got his goal – his first of the season – and his assist on his first night on the Blackhawks’ power play. As Toews said, “he made a good argument to be out there.” That, coupled with his first-period fight with former Blackhawks defenseman James Wisniewski, earned him the Howe trick.

He’s the first Blackhawks player to have one since March 27, 2009, when Seabrook did it in a 3-2 overtime victory over the New Jersey Devils.

“I wanted to have success. I didn’t picture this exactly but it’s definitely exciting to be part of contributing to the success,” he said. “Sometimes you get on the score sheet, sometimes you don’t. It’s just about being in front of the net, so it’s pretty familiar. You have to be an outlet for someone.”

Andrew Brunette scored his third power-play goal of the season. Patrick Kane and Marian Hossa also scored; Corey Crawford stopped 27 of 30 for the victory.

The Blackhawks wanted to get going quick on Thursday night and, for the most part, did that. Scoring five straight goals – from Toews’ late first-period score to Hossa’s early third-period one – didn’t hurt their cause, either. Neither did scoring on that much-maligned power play.

“We’re not talking about (power-play) rank this or that; we’re just going to stick with it,” Toews said with a grin. “It doesn’t matter who scores the goals or how. It’s just the fact that one of our units can go out there and make something happen. That’s what you’re looking for.”

The Blackhawks’ defensive core is deep and experienced. On Thursday, they were also the team’s biggest catalysts for breaking out of the mini-slump.

“I thought our D was very noticeable tonight,” coach Joel Quenneville said. “We create so much off that and our team game really picks up. It seemed like we had better rotation (on the forward lines), but I thought the D was spearheading the attack.”

Kane-like goal?

Jonathan Toews’ second goal on Blue Jackets goaltender Steve Mason was from a deep angle, one very similar to the one Patrick Kane had on his Stanley Cup-winning goal two seasons ago.

“I don’t think Kaner would admit he was shooting for a rebound there,” said Toews, who added that’s what he was trying to do. “I think it just fooled him. It was a tricky shot and it happened to sneak through. I don’t think you’re going to get that same statement out of (Kane).”

Bolland out

Dave Bolland was out of Thursday night’s game. Bolland, who blocked a shot off his right foot against the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday, was seen wearing a walking boot on Thursday. His status for Friday’s game against the Calgary Flames is unknown.

Briefly

Daniel Carcillo took an unknown number of stitches in his upper and bottom lip after taking a puck to the mouth. He returned to finish the game, assisting on Kane’s breakaway goal.

In honor of Veterans Day, the Blackhawks will sport their camouflage jerseys in warmups when they host the Flames on Friday night.

Nick Leddy’s eight assists are the most among Blackhawks defensemen.

Marian Hossa’s goal was his team-leading eighth. Jonathan Toews is next with seven.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
What did Blackhawks solve in win over Jackets?

By Chris Boden
CSNChicago.com

The Blackhawks are asking the same question 28 others teams are: Can we play Columbus every night?

Every team goes through bumps in the six-month regular season, and this win hasn't necessarily solved anything. But it has re-instilled some overall confidence, if, in fact, it was lacking from the three-game losing streak.

Scoring a couple of power play goals to end a 1-for-31 stretch will do that. The leaders stepped up after a quiet two games. Jonathan Toews with two goals and an assist. Patrick Kane and Marian Hossa also had goals while Viktor Stalberg and Nick Leddy each had a pair of assists.

The one unit that's done a "180" of late's been the penalty-kill after allowing the league's No. 29 power play two goals in their first four chances. That won't fly Friday night against a Calgary team that owns the NHL's second-best road power play.

But the energy was back, the execution returned. The record's still an impressive 9-4-3. We'll find out in these next two home games before the Circus Trip whether the arrow's indeed pointing upward again. Look for Ray Emery to get his fourth start in net on Friday.

Montador gets Gordie Howe hat trick

Garbage time in Columbus, which allegedly went through a "training camp" atmosphere after their 9-2 loss in Philadelphia last weekend and now find themselves in a 6-2 hole midway thru the third.

The concerns? The Jackets' 29th-ranked power play has gone 2-for-4 against the Blackhawks' slumping penalty kill. That as the Hawks' power play has snapped out of its 1-for-30 funk by connecting on 2-for-3.

Steve Montador has the Gordie Howe Hat Trick, scoring one of those power play goals. Jonathan Toews scored the Hawks' first two goals even-strength and added an assist on Marian Hossa's goal that made it 6-1 early in the final frame.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Six Blackhawks on All-Star ballot

By Tracey Myers
CSNChicago.com

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Marian Hossa and Patrick Kane are among two of the six Chicago Blackhawks named to the 2012 NHL All-Star Fan Ballot, which was released this afternoon.

Patrick Sharp and Jonathan Toews are also among the ballot's forwards. Blackhawks defensemen Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook round out the Blackhawks' league-tying six selections.

Hossa has a team-leading seven goals while Kane leads the Blackhawks with 15 points.

Goaltender Corey Crawford, who has six victories this season, was not listed on the ballot.

Voting opens on Nov. 14 online at NHL.com/vote and via mobile devices. Voting results will be posted on NHL.com every Tuesday, beginning Nov. 22.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Hossa moved to Toews line; Bolland out

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Dave Bolland is out tonight and Corey Crawford gets the start in net when the Chicago Blackhawks take on the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena.

Bolland took a puck off his right foot against the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday night. His status for Friday night's game against the Calgary Flames is uncertain. In Bolland's absence, Marcus Kruger will center the checking line with Bryan Bickell and Michael Frolik.

The Blackhawks, who have dropped two in a row, will switch lines up again tonight. Marian Hossa will be with Jonathan Toews and Viktor Stalberg on the top line while Patrick Sharp will join Patrick Kane and Daniel Carcillo on the second line.

Toews and Hossa have played together plenty in the past; this is the first time this season they've been together.

"We'll just try to find a little more chemistry than we've had the past couple games," Toews said. "Most of all, as a team and as individuals, we just want to play hard, play better. Our game plan, whether it's 5 on 5 or other things, will fall into place if every guy steps up his game. We need to be better so we'll concentrate on that tonight."

For Hossa, Kane and Toews are interchangeable.

"Jonathan is one of those players like Patrick. He can take the puck by himself and just try to get open," Hossa said. "He's a fast skater so basically we're going to play high tempo and keep things simple."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Avalanche: First-period "fight" pits old Friends

The Denver Post
Posted: 11/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

Tough guys Ryan Wilson of the Avalanche and Matt Martin of the Islanders were penalized for fighting late in the first period of Thursday's game at the Pepsi Center.

In truth, it might have been more of an act.

Wilson and Martin grew up together in Windsor, Ontario, and were teammates with the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League as teenagers. They are good friends.

Yet, they were simultaneously sent to their respective penalty boxes after both dropped their gloves, but neither threw a punch, and were easily separated by the linesmen.

In addition to fighting majors, Martin was assessed a instigating minor and Wilson a two-minute cross-check.

Martin was sticking up for linemate John Tavares, who had just traded glove-punches with Wilson in the corner.

Scratched.

Avalanche left wing Peter Mueller, who has been hampered by postconcussion symptoms, missed his 13th consecutive game after being scratched following the morning skate.

"He's not ready yet," Avs coach Joe Sacco said.

Mueller, 23, went through first contact practice in more than three weeks Wednesday and said he felt good afterward. He was practicing on the Matt Duchene-centered line with David Jones and was expected to play against the Islanders. He might play Saturday night against the visiting Calgary Flames.

Veteran center Jay McClement was a healthy scratch and missed his first game of the season. Defenseman Matt Hunwick, who made his season debut Tuesday at Detroit, also didn't play.

Footnotes.

The revolving door that is the Islanders' goaltending had Al Montoya starting against the Avs, with Rick DiPietro the backup on the bench and Evgeni Nabokov a healthy scratch.

DiPietro was scratched in the Islanders previous game. . . .

The Avs' Cody McLeod absorbed a gash on his nose from being high-sticked by New York defenseman Andrew McDonald in the first period. McDonald's double-minor erased a Shane O'Brien slashing minor and put the Avs on the power play.

Denver Post: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Avalanche's battered credibility

By Mark Kiszla
The Denver Post
Posted: 11/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

The Avalanche looked into the abyss where hockey teams go to die and failed coaches are thrown away.

Somehow, some way, a young hockey team survived.

The Avs saved more than their season Thursday night by overcoming a three-goal deficit. Colorado might have also saved the credibility of coach Joe Sacco with a 4-3 victory against the New York Islanders.

Sound like an exaggeration? Not if you ask veteran goalie Jean-Sebastien Giguere.

"That was a must-win game for us. We had to win this game," said Giguere, who challenged his teammates with uncommon urgency after only 15 games in a season that the Avalanche already felt slipping away.

He was sick and tired of Colorado's lifeless and inept performances on home ice.

"It's unacceptable in this league. Losing at home will kill you," Giguere said. "We needed to make a statement.

"If you want any chance to make the playoffs, you need to be good at home."

The free-falling Avs had put Sacco on the clock. In the cold, cruel world of the NHL, it was not too early to ask: Was he the right coach for this team?

Yes, there can be such a thing as a make-or-break NHL game before Thanksgiving.

Discouraged by losing five of its six games on home ice, Colorado teammates knew it had to stop. Avalanche players engaged in face-to-face, heart-to-heart conversations during the 24 hours prior to facing the Islanders, who came to town as the worst team in the Eastern Conference.

"We had a lot of meetings. It was the first time we went man-on-man and held each other accountable," said defenseman Kyle Quincey, who completed a head-shaking, roof-raising comeback by scoring the game-winning goal at 2 minutes, 39 seconds into overtime.

You know the truth: Team meetings are usually for losers.

Worse, it looked very, very bad for the Avs at the beginning.

The Islanders got all the bounces early in the game. After going all-in emotionlly, Colorado was in grave danger of going emotionally bankrupt.

To be blunt, a young team without a captain might not have recovered.

The Avs fell behind 3-0 in the second period. They were being dominated by an Islanders squad not confused with those dominant Mike Bossy and Billy Smith teams of the 1980s.

The Pepsi Center was flatter than a can of soda left open on a kitchen counter for a week. It was often so quiet in the building you could hear the tap, tap, tapping of disappointed ticket-buyers texting their displeasure to friends.

"We needed a kick in the pants," Quincey said.

A power-play goal by Paul Stastny just before the second intermission gave the Avs a life.

But here's what you might have missed: Defenseman Shane O'Brien took it upon himself to call a timeout to make it clear that losing wasn't an option. Now that's the very definition of stepping up.

"If you think you're beat, you're beat. I think that the first time all year we had the feeling in the room we were going to do it," Quincey said.

The game against the Islanders began a stretch in which Colorado is scheduled to play 10 of 12 games on home ice.

If the Avs fail to move back into serious playoff contention during the coming weeks, then the reason to watch them will be over before Broncos headliner Tim Tebow is done playing quarterback for the winter.

You could hear the clock ticking for Sacco, with the dreaded vote of confidence around the corner.

"We all knew that we needed to win. And I think it showed in our desperation," Giguere said. "We never quit."

Know what?
A refusal to surrender is the only referendum on a coach that really matters.

It sounds crazy.

But, on a night when they could have folded, credit the Avs with a save of Sacco's job.
Quincey comes through

The Colorado defenseman caps a comeback by scoring game-winner in OT.

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 11/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

It took about 10 minutes after the final buzzer Thursday night to determine who scored the biggest goal of the season for the Avalanche.

But there was no debate about how important it was, because comebacks don't get any more rewarding.

"Turning point of the season," Avs defenseman Kyle Quincey said.

Quincey got the overtime power-play goal that completed Colorado's remarkable 4-3 victory after trailing the New York Islanders 3-0 at the Pepsi Center. Facing what would have been another humiliating loss at home, the Avs rallied for three goals in the final 21 minutes of regulation and took advantage of far better goal-tending — physically and mentally — to snap a four-game losing streak and improve to 2-5 at home.

"We dug in deep. It was gut-check time and we found a way," Avs coach Joe Sacco said.

The Avs went on the power play with 3:07 left in OT, after Islanders goalie Al Montoya but-ended David Jones in the face while the forward was skating atop the crease. Jones made him pay, screening Montoya while Quincey fired a wrist shot from the point.

The puck found its way behind the self-destructive New York goalie, who faced 51 shots, with 2:21 remaining.

"Jonesy did a good job in front," Quincey said. "If (Montoya) sees that shot, he probably saves it. Jonesy did all the work there. Huge win for the boys."

Jones didn't know what he did to deserve Montoya's stick in the face, but the goalie had just previously tussled in the crease with Milan Hejduk.

"Obviously, it wasn't a very smart play by their goalie to take that penalty, but we'll take it," Jones said. "(The puck) found a hole, I managed to get in front of the 'tendy,' and I don't think he even saw it."

Veteran goalie Jean-Sebastien Giguere (30 saves) was excellent after his teammates let him down early. Giguere made several outstanding saves during the penalty kill after Daniel Winnik took an interference minor with 1:43 remaining in regulation. The penalty carried over into OT.

"Great kill by us," Giguere said. "You're just trying to hang on and at least get a point."

Paul Stastny scored a 5-on-3 power-play goal in the final minute of the second period to make it 3-1, and Hejduk and Jan Hejda scored at 6:07 and 10:35 to tie it up. The latter two goals were considered soft and perhaps began to unravel Montoya — who is one of three goalies on New York's 23-man roster.

Most teams, if not all others, carry two goalies.

"It really tests us, this game. It's a process. It's all about 60 minutes," Quincey said. "It was looking pretty bleak, and halfway through the second we're like, 'Here we go again. But we stuck with it and showed our character.'"

Said Sacco: "You don't want to be down 3-0 at any point, or 3-1 going into the third, but maybe this is something, hopefully, that we can build on, especially at home."

The Islanders, who fell to 0-4-1 on the road, got goals from Josh Bailey, Brian Rolston and Michael Grabner.

"There is no excuse," Bailey said. "We were dominating them for 40 minutes, and at one point it felt like it should have been a no-doubter two-point win."
Avalanche wing Peter Mueller won't play vs. Islanders

By Mike Chambers
The Denver Post
Posted: 11/10/2011 12:10:45 PM MST
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Avalanche left wing Peter Mueller will miss his 13th consecutive game tonight when Colorado hosts the New York Islanders at the Pepsi Center.

Mueller, who has been hampered by post-concussion symptoms, participated in this morning's skate but was not made available to reporters.

"We thought there would be a chance he might play, but after the morning skate, he's not ready yet," Avs coach Joe Sacco said. "He's day-to-day."

Mueller, 23, went through his first contact practice in more than three weeks Wednesday and said he felt good afterward. He was practicing on the Matt Duchene-centered line with David Jones.

Sacco said he wasn't sure who he will put with Duchene and Jones when the Avs try to snap a four-game losing streak and improve on a 1-5 record at home.

Veteran center Jay McClement will be a healthy scratch and miss his first game of the season, Sacco said. Forwards TJ Galiardi and Kevin Porter will be in the lineup.

Mueller was hoping to play his 19th game with the Avs since being acquired on March 3, 2010.

"I feel more for him," Sacco said of Mueller. "It's a situation where he wants to get back into the lineup. He's obviously frustrated by it, at times too. All we can do is stay patient with him. He's working hard."

Denver Post: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Avalanche dig out of deep hole, beat Islanders in OT

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — For nearly 40 minutes, the Colorado Avalanche resembled the team that has been horrific at home this season.

And then they suddenly transformed into the squad they expected to be all along, seizing a game that looked to have all but slipped away.

Kyle Quincey scored a power-play goal 2:39 into overtime and Jean-Sebastien Giguere made 30 saves, helping the Avalanche rally from a three-goal deficit and beat the slumping New York Islanders 4-3 on Thursday night.

"It was looking pretty bleak," Quincey said. "Halfway through the second, it was like, 'Here go again.' But we stuck with it.

"I think this is a turning point in our season. We've got to build on this momentum and keep going."

With the Avalanche on the advantage following a high-sticking penalty against goalie Al Montoya, Quincey sent a shot in from near the blue line. Just like that, he lifted the Avalanche's sagging spirits by snapping a four-game losing streak (0-3-1).

"It definitely wasn't our best hockey the first two periods. But sometimes that is the way it goes," forward David Jones said. "Put pucks to the net and find a way to win, especially at home."

Josh Bailey, Brian Rolston and Michael Grabner scored for the Islanders, who led 3-0 until the final minute of the second period.

Then, the momentum shifted.

Montoya was sensational early, turning in one sprawling save after another. But he surrendered a goal to Paul Stastny with 21 seconds left in the second on a 5-on-3 power play and another to Milian Hejduk that trickled through his legs with nearly 14 minutes remaining in regulation.

Jan Hejda tied it at 3 when his shot caught Montoya by surprise, sneaking into the net under Montoya's arm.

In overtime, Montoya made a more costly mistake by taking a penalty that set the stage for the winning power play goal.

"I don't blame him," coach Jack Capuano said of the Islanders, who are 1-6-2 in their last nine games. "They got to the paint there, one tried to stop and ran into him."

Giguere settled in after allowing three early goals in his first home start for the Avalanche. But nothing shook him late, not even Grabner running into him and sending his mask flying, and knocking the net off its pegs.

The Islanders were on the power play for the final 1:43 of regulation after Daniel Winnik was called for goaltender interference after colliding with Montoya. But the Avalanche killed off the penalty to get the game into overtime.

"We had some good chances, but when games are like that and the momentum turns, you have to play with confidence and make the right plays," Rolston said.

To break out of their funk at home, the Avalanche changed some things against the Islanders.

Colorado coach Joe Sacco started Giguere in net and benched center Jay McClement, who had played every game this season but has just one goal.

The team also called a players' only meeting — not to point fingers but to emphasize the importance of finishing games at home, where the Avs won for just the second time this season.

"We've got to stop the bleeding right now," Giguere said at the morning skate. "Enough talking, it's time to have some action."

Giguere gave high marks for the way his team responded.

"We showed a lot of leadership. Guys were speaking up on the bench and we weren't accepting being down," Giguere said. "It wasn't pretty in the second period, but we found a way to get our energy and get our legs under us. When we scored that big goal it gave us a lot of energy."

The Islanders demonstrated they have more weapons on offense than just John Tavares, who entered with eight of New York's 25 goals (32 percent), the highest percentage in the NHL.

On a night when Tavares was held in check, his teammates picked up the slack.

Grabner gave the Islanders a seemingly comfortable three-goal lead when he scored off a pass from Matt Moulson midway through the second.

That was after Rolston fired a shot past Giguere just 34 seconds into the second. It was the Islanders' fastest goal to start a period this season.

Bailey scored his first of the season when he redirected a shot from defenseman Mark Streit past Giguere.

Avalanche forward Peter Mueller missed another game because of a head injury.

Mueller took part in the morning skate, but Sacco said he wasn't ready to play. Mueller has been in only three games for the Avs this season after sitting out all of last season with post-concussion symptoms.

"All we can do is stay patient with him," Sacco said. "He'll get back in that lineup pretty soon."

NOTES

Avs F Cody McLeod took a stick to the face in the opening period that cut open the side of his nose. He sat on the bench as the trainers fixed him up. ... The Avs had over 50 shots on net for the first time since Nov. 12, 2002, against Columbus. ... Islanders G Evgeni Nabokov was scratched, as Rick DiPietro served as Montoya's backup.

Colorado Springs Gazette: LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Blue Jackets slightly altered their DNA earlier this week. Gone was any hope of being a puck-possession club that swarms on the forecheck to get it back. In came new hopes of clogging the middle and making life easier on struggling goaltender Steve Mason.

But tonight was yet further proof that all of the Blue Jackets’ well-crafted excuses — injuries, suspensions, bad luck, bad hair days, etc. — don’t get the nuts and bolts of the club’s atrocious start this season.

The new system had nothing to do with the Blue Jackets’ 6-3 loss to Chicago tonight before 15,048 in Nationwide Arena. For two periods, the Jackets couldn’t get out of their own zone long enough to run their system against the Blackhawks.

“We were just trying to hold on,” defenseman James Wisniewski said.

The Blue Jackets trailed 5-1 after two periods and 6-1 early in the third. At one point, they were being outshot 27-7 by a Chicago club that had lost three straight.

“All of their chances came in our (defensive) zone and we didn’t (make any changes) to our d-zone,” Blue Jackets coach Scott Amiel said. “We got chasin’ pucks.

“We turned the puck over eight times in the first period in our end of the rink. That’s the Chicago Blackhawks. You turn the puck over eight times, you’re going to spend a lot of time in there.”

The Blue Jackets are 2-12-1, the worst start in franchise history. They have been outscored 19-6 in the past three games, and five of the six goals the Jackets have scored have come in the third period — also known as garbage-time during such lopsided losses.

“It’s the same old story,” said defenseman Grant Clitsome, who scored two of the Blue Jackets’ three goals. “It’s frustrating.

“We had a very good week of practice. We had our systems down, knew what we needed to do. And then we came out a little slow. They outshot us pretty good the first two periods. Just a rough, rough night.”

The Blue Jackets pulled to 1-1 on a power play goal by Clitsome at 9:47 of the first period.

For most of the first, Mason kept the Blue Jackets in the game despite facing a flurry or shots and prime scoring chances.

But Mason left in a soft goal to Chicago’s Jonathan Toews — odd-angle, from low in the left circle, through the five-hole — that put the Blackhawks ahead 2-1 with 2:51 left in the first.

“It was a very good goal,” Amiel said. “The ones after that, there wasn’t a lot he could do.”

The Blackhawks scored only 85 seconds in the second to make it 3-1. Then went up 4-1 midway through the second and 5-1 late in the second, as boos cascaded down to the ice.

The Blue Jackets’ body language was almost as poor as their play.

Mason was demonstrative in his frustration after the 2-1 goal — typically a no-no within the fraternity — and there were lots of hanging heads during the evening.

“Any mistake, it goes in the back of the net,” Wisniewski said. “When you have a fragile team, as we are right now, a lot of guys are hanging their heads. We have to get over that. Just stop feeling sorry for ourselves and start playing some hockey.”

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
Stars-Penguins trade update shows both have benefited

By MIKE HEIKA
Staff Writer
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PITTSBURGH — What could be on display on the ice Friday at Consol Energy Center — and for years to come — is the rare NHL trade that has helped both teams.

When the Stars last season were in need of a puck-moving defenseman, they targeted Alex Goligoski, a young skater who was buried on a deep Pittsburgh blue line. But to pry Goligoski away, Stars GM Joe Nieuwendyk had to give up something pretty good — winger James Neal and defenseman Matt Niskanen.

And now, a year later, both sides seem to be pretty happy.

Neal is tied for fifth in the NHL with nine goals and leads the Penguins with 14 points in 15 games. Niskanen has four points and is plus-3. And while Goligoski has just six points and is minus-3, the Stars believe they have added a 26-year-old who could help their defense for the next decade.

“Yo u hope it works for everyone,” Goligoski said. “Pittsburgh is doing great, and I don’t wish them to do poorly. Hopefully, it works out for both teams.”

It will certainly be a strange night for all three players. Each was drafted by his initial team, each was developed by his initial team, each bled for his initial team. So when the trade was announced Feb. 21, days before the trade deadline, all three were stunned.

“It was really weird, obviously a big shock,” Neal said. “You go to practice like it’s a normal day, and then you’re gone within a few hours. It was crazy.”

But time seems to heal wounds. Niskanen actually needed the trade to get out from under the pressure created by some poor performances and appears to be in a better place. Goligoski fills a huge need on the Stars for a puck-moving defenseman, while Neal fills a massive vacancy on the center-heavy Penguins.

“It has been a good change,” Neal said. “You couldn’t ask for a better team to be on. I’m happy to be a Penguin.”

And the Penguins are happy to have him. Meanwhile, Goligoski is a solid fit in Glen Gulutzan’s system.

“We just see him as an elite defenseman; offensively, defensively, a well-rounded guy,” Gulutzan said. “He cares as much about defending as he does the points, and that’s rare with some guys. He’s an invaluable guy for us.”

Goligoski won a Stanley Cup with the Penguins in 2009, so his memories are deep. He played a half season at the new Consol Energy Center, so practice Thursday wasn’t that odd, he said. However, looking across the ice and seeing his former teammates Friday night will be a challenge.

“I’m sure it’ll be weird,” he said. “It’s not too weird coming to the building, but playing against the guys will be strange after being with them for so long. It’s kind of like I know what they’re going to do before they do it, and they probably think they know what I’m going to do before I do it. It might be a little weird for a few shifts there.”

And then it’s just hockey, just the best team in the West (Dallas at 11-3-0) playing the best team in the East (Pittsburgh at 9-3-3) in a huge interconference game. Maybe that’s why both teams think this trade is working.

“You look at them and they’re doing great, you look at us and we’re doing great,” Neal said. “It all seems to be working out right now.”

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 11.11.2011
Stars will not face Sidney Crosby; Penguins sitting him Friday

Associated Press
Published: 10 November 2011 12:15 PM

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby is feeling good these days. Still, the Pittsburgh Penguins superstar isn’t sure when he’ll return to the ice.

Coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday afternoon Crosby will not play Friday or Saturday and that his status remains uncertain. Crosby hasn’t played since being diagnosed with concussion-like symptoms in early January.

Crosby has practiced with the team since the start of training camp two months ago and was cleared for contact last month.

There has been speculation a six-day layoff between last Saturday’s shootout win in Los Angeles and Friday’s home game against Dallas would provide a window for the 2007 NHL MVP to be cleared to play. Instead the wait continues. The next possible return date is Tuesday against Colorado.

Dallas Morning News LOADED: 11.11.2011
GameDay: Stars at Penguins

Posted Thursday, Nov. 10, 2011

Stars at Pittsburgh
6 tonight, CONSOL Energy Center
TV: Fox Sports Southwest. Radio: KTCK/1310 AM
Records: Stars 11-3, 22 points; Penguins 9-3-3, 21 points.

Notable: The Stars lead the NHL in wins and are among the league leaders with 45 goals. The Stars, winners of four straight and three in a row on the road, conclude their four-game road trip Saturday against Detroit. Pittsburgh's Marc-Andre Fleury is 5-0-1 with a 1.44 goals-against average in his past six games and 4-0-0 with a 1.96 GAA lifetime against Dallas. Sidney Crosby (concussion) will not play. Dallas' Jamie Benn has three goals and eight assists during a six-game point streak.

Star-Telegram LOADED: 11.11.2011
NHL: Dallas Stars have five players on All-Star ballot

Posted Thursday, Nov. 10, 2011

Fan ballot released: Five Dallas Stars -- left wing Jamie Benn, left wing Loui Eriksson, goaltender Kari Lehtonen, center Mike Ribeiro and defenseman Sheldon Souray -- are on the fan ballot for the NHL's 2012 All-Star Game on Jan. 29 in Ottawa. Fans will be able to vote online at NHL.com/vote until Jan. 4, with the top six vote-getters by position -- three forwards, two defensemen and goalie -- set to take part in the 2012 Tim Hortons NHL All-Star Game.

Crosby still out: Coach Dan Bylsma said Sidney Crosby will not play today or Saturday and that his status remains uncertain. Crosby hasn't played since being diagnosed with concussion-like symptoms in early January. -- Online, wire

Star-Telegram LOADED: 11.11.2011
Edmonton, tonight's opponent for Red Wings, playing with lots of confidence

By HELENE ST. JAMES

DETROIT

The best defense in the NHL, a solid offense, a good power play and a better penalty kill? Hello, resurgent Edmonton Oilers.

The Red Wings kick off a back-to-back stretch tonight by hosting the Oilers, who've dominated the Western Conference along with the Dallas Stars, whom the Wings host Saturday. The Oilers haven't made the playoffs since 2006, when they rode a first-round upset of Detroit all the way to the finals, but are off to a fantastic start this season.

Much of the credit goes to Nikolai Khabibulin and backup Devin Dubnyk, who'd combined for a 1.47 goals-against average heading into Thursday's game at Boston, There's also an excellent No. 1 line of veterans Ryan Smyth, Shawn Horcoff and Ales Hemsky, and a youthful trio in Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Jordan Eberle and Taylor Hall.

"They're young and fast and when you're young and having lots of fun, you've got a lot of confidence, and when you've got confidence, you're a hard team to play against," Wings forward Darren Helm said Thursday.

The Wings have been hard to play themselves the last two games, both routs of the Ducks and Avalanche. Colorado is a young and fast team, too, but the Wings had good success in making the Avs start attacks from deep inside their own zone and only gave up goals during power plays.

The season is only a month old, and there's no guarantee the Oilers will continue the roll they're on, but after years of getting beat upon, these Oilers are a nice mix of high-end draft picks and veterans.

"You add it all together, they've got the makings of a real good team and the reason they're having success is not by accident," coach Mike Babcock said. "They're playing well. So they're going to be a tough test for our team. The next two games are going to be a real tough test.

"We're excited to have the opportunity. We had an off day yesterday, we should be as fresh and ready to go as you can possibly be for a back-to-back."

BERTUZZI UPDATE: Todd Bertuzzi skated for 30 minutes but remains sidelined by a nasty sinus infection that set in after he was high-sticked in the face by Minnesota's Devin Setoguchi. "I played two games and it just got worse and worse," Bertuzzi said. "I felt light-headed and dizzy, not myself. Then I got a sinus infection and went and got my ears checked. Had a little swelling. I'm on some pills, trying to get the swelling down."

Bertuzzi said there's no concussion.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Red Wings' Henrik Zetterberg misses Sidney Crosby, hopeful for return

By HELENE ST. JAMES

DETOUR

Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby, out since January with a concussion, is on a daily return watch, though he likely won't play this weekend.

Appreciative of the rivalry the Detroit Red Wings have had with Pittsburgh, and Crosby in particular, thanks to the Stanley Cup finals meetings in 2008 and '09, Wings forward Henrik Zetterberg said today he's eager to see his nemesis return.

"We just wish him to be back as soon as possible," Zetterberg said. "It's going to be really exciting to see his first game. He's been away for far too long. He's a great player. We need him for many, many years. I will watch the game the first game he will be back. I wish him luck."

Zetterberg's had many good one-on-one battles with Crosby in the playoffs and a few in the regular season.

"We have a rivalry, and it's a fun rivalry," Zetterberg said. "He's a great player; he's fun to play against. We miss him. He should be playing. It's got to be tough on him to not be able to play and be on the side for that long."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Red Wings' Todd Bertuzzi skates but still has swelling in ears

By HELENE ST. JAMES

DETROIT

The Detroit Red Wings won't have Todd Bertuzzi back before next week, at the earliest, as he's dealing with a pretty nasty illness.

Bertuzzi made an appearance on the ice for the first time since last week, but he left early and remains sidelined with a bad sinus infection that set in after he was high-sticked in the face by Minnesota's Devin Setoguchi.

"I just wanted to see how it was," Bertuzzi said. "I've had some problems with being dizzy and lightheaded. I've got to get the swelling down in my ears so I can get my balance back.

"It started when I got hit in Minnesota, and then I played two games and it just got worse and worse. I felt lightheaded and dizzy, not myself. Then I got a sinus infection and went and got my ears checked. Had a little swelling. I'm on some pills, trying to get the swelling down."

Bertuzzi said there's no concussion, and it's just a matter of waiting for the swelling to subside. He has missed the last two games. "I just don't feel right," he said. "I was dragging, and then it got worse."

Bertuzzi looked noticeably thinner but smiled when asked whether he had lost weight.

"If I say yeah," he said, "then it looks bad on my wife for not cooking right."

Bertuzzi said he felt OK for the 30 minutes he was on the ice, but when all his teammates joined him for the practice, "things were going pretty quick. They said, in three or four days, the medication should kick in and, hopefully, I can get my balance back. It's day-by-day for now."

While Bertuzzi recovers, the Wings are keeping Fabian Brunstrom in Detroit, giving them 13 forwards. Today's practice lines were the same ones as in Tuesday's 5-2 victory over Colorado:

Filppula-Zetterberg-Franzen
Cleary-Datsyuk-Holmstrom
Adbelkader-Helm-Hudler
Miller-Emmerton-Brunstrom (Eaves subbing)

These next two games are the last ones at home for the Wings until Nov. 23, as they go on the road for four straight games next week.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
In honor of the Carrier Classic, what would you propose for the next nontraditional game setting for one of our local teams?

Michigan State athletic director Mark Hollis would be a far better candidate to write this post than I would. He’s the one who came up with the game this Friday on the U.S.S. Carl Vinson. He’s the one who pushed for the first basketball game at Ford Field (the 2003 BasketBowl between MSU and Kentucky). It was his idea to have the “Cold War” between the MSU and Michigan hockey which, at the time, set an attendance record and spawned this huge run on outdoor games. Not only that, but he has a much better grasp at what’s financially feasible.

So understand that any ideas we throw out are merely of the pipe dream variety. Most professional teams will never forgo a home game unless the league mandates it (like the NFL Europe game) or it’s the NHL Winter Classic (which every team wants to be part of). Short of those games, there is way too much money to make from parking, tickets, suites and concessions and very little costs when you’re playing in the comfy confines of your own stadium or arena.

But it can’t hurt to put out the wish list, so here are some unconventional ideas. Maybe Hollis can try some on for size and let us know if they are even possible.

First, the obvious.

1. The Wings hosting the Winter Classic — I’ve written about this before. Fans have shouted for it. The Red Wings got to take part in the game in Chicago three years ago. They should get the chance now to host it. Ideally, the game would be at Michigan Stadium so they could get 110,000 fans in to watch. Realistically, it would be at Comerica Park so that Mike Ilitch could get more money out of it since he controls the venue. It should happen and probably will happen eventually.

2. The Lions playing outdoors — How many times have you walked into Ford Field on a beautiful fall Sunday (and we’ve had a bunch of them this year) and wished that the roof was retractable on Ford Field? Or, if you’re a traditionalist (or a masochist), maybe you’d love to be outdoors in 20 degree temps and a 6 inches of snow on the ground. Either way, there’s something about outdoor football and it would be awesome to have the Lions and play in the elements. The logical place would have been Tiger Stadium to really hearken back to the good old days. But now that it’s gone, maybe they could play at Michigan Stadium, Spartan Stadium or Comerica Park. This one’s a total pipe dream, the Lions will play a game in London before they’ll ever play a game outside of Ford Field in the state of Michigan.

3. The Pistons playing downtown — The Celtics used to play a few games a year in Hartford, CT. The Packers used to play one or two games a year in Milwaukee. The No. 1 complaint about the Palace is that it’s too far away for people who live downriver or in Detroit. (That complaint always seemed kind of lame to me. Fans from Oakland County seem to be able to make it downtown.) The Pistons could play at the Joe or at Ford Field. When he was introduced as the owner, Tom Gores was asked about running a bus from Detroit to the Palace to make the team more available to all of the area fans. He seemed open to any idea that would turn them into a more regional team. Well — here’s your idea! And while I’m at it — why not play a game at the Breslin Center. The crowds at the Palace have been lackluster for the past two or three years anyway. This would show them off to a larger audience.

Now that the obvious are out of the way, here’s the Mark Hollis section of the post (thinking outside the box, or in this case, the stadium).

1. Outdoor game for the Pistons — The problem with this plan is that the NBA season (when they’re actually playing) runs from November to April. And in case you didn’t notice, we don’t always have the best weather during that time. But it would still be very cool if they could put the Palace floor in the parking lot and set up bleachers around it. Maybe they could do it for a preseason game when the weather is slightly more agreeable. Plus, they don’t get many fans for exhibition games anyway, so even with bleachers, it would still be an attendance increase.

2. Tigers at Greenfield Village — Every summer, they play 1880s-style baseball at Greenfield Village. No gloves. No mound. Old uniforms. Old style bats. How about the sight of Justin Verlander taking on Derek Jeter in an exhibition game the old fashioned way? They wear the old uniforms once or twice a year, but this would be like the outdoor game in hockey — a true throwback. Odds of this ever happening? Less than 0%. Maybe Hollis can grab this idea and apply it to the MSU baseball team.

3. Wings at Ford Field — Ford Field had the Frozen Four in 2010 and it was, by all accounts, a huge success. The ice surface was modified after it was initially planned to be right in the middle of the stadium like they did at the Final Four. Why not bring the Wings in for the New Year’s Eve game or for a big Sunday afternoon NBC game and go for a spectacle? This might be enough of a stunt to get the Wings to leave the Joe and head across town to Ford Field. I doubt it will happen, but at least it has a better chance of happening than the Greenfield Village game.

The regular seasons (other than football) are too long. That’s why the NHL struck gold with the outdoor game. It’s something different in an otherwise dull procession of games. These ideas would generate interest both from fans and television networks. But would they generate money? Sadly, that’s the bottom line. And the answer is probably no. Otherwise they would have been tried already.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Detroit— Talk about upsetting a routine.

Rarely do the Red Wings play back-to-back games at Joe Louis Arena. Until this weekend, with games against the Oilers (tonight) and Stars (on Saturday).

"We just have to make sure someone doesn't direct traffic to the airport," Henrik Zetterberg said in regard to the typical practice of the team leaving town after Friday games.

Somebody better remind them to head home with two entertaining games against rapidly improving young teams.

First up is Edmonton, which is among the youngest in the league (26.9 average; Detroit is at 30.3), but a team that has as much pure talent as anyone.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, the No. 1 overall pick in June’s draft, has 12 points (six goals) his first 14 games. Along with linemates Taylor Hall and Jordan Eberle, both also high picks, they form one of the more exciting young cores in the league.

With goaltender Nikolai Khabibulin (.964 save percentage, 0.96 goals-against average) having a career-best season, the Oilers are rolling.

"They have all the makings of a very good team," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said Thursday. "It's not by accident. They're playing well."

Zetterberg pans trap

Zetterberg saw highlights of the Flyers-Lightning game where players were standing around on the ice Wednesday night, waiting for each other to make a move.

"Hilarious," he said of the sequence.

The Flyers were waiting for the Lightning in their 1-3-1 neutral-zone trap, and the Flyers dared them to come out.

"It was a good way to show how boring it could be if the other team doesn't do anything," Zetterberg said. "That's the way we played in Sweden in '10, '12 years ago. A 1-3-1, really strict, and the game became really boring.

"With the skill we have in this league, you shouldn't be able to play that way. If a team wants to do it, (fine), but it's a waste of talent."

Bertuzzi still out

Todd Bertuzzi (sinus infection) will miss his third consecutive game tonight.

He skated for the first 30 minutes of Thursday's practice, then left the ice.

"Things were going pretty quick," said Bertuzzi, adding his availability is day-to-day. "I'm just waiting for the swelling in my ears to go down and to get my balance back."

Wings want Crosby back

There was speculation Penguins captain Sidney Crosby would be back this weekend, but his concussion symptoms still haven't allowed it.

Crosby hasn't played since January.

"When you have one of the top players, if not the top player, in the league, you want him to play," Red Wings captain Nicklas Lidstrom said. "You want him to be the face of the league. When he's not there, you lose that superstar quality. Even if you play against him, you want to have him back for the sake of the game and the fans."

Said Zetterberg: "He's been away far too long. … He's a great player. I'll watch his first game back. I wish him luck."

Oilers at Red Wings

Faceoff: 7:30 p.m. tonight, Joe Louis Arena, Detroit
Wings' Henrik Zetterberg not a fan of Tampa Bay's trap

Ted Kulfan/ The Detroit News

Detroit — Henrik Zetterberg saw highlights of the Flyers and Lightning just standing around on the ice Wednesday, waiting for each other to make a move.

"Hilarious," said Zetterberg.

Tampa Bay was sitting in a 1-3-1 neutral-zone trap; Philadelphia kept the puck in its zone until the referee stopped play.

"It was a good way to show how boring it could be if the other team doesn't do anything," Zetterberg said. "That's the way we played in Sweden 10, 12 years ago. A 1-3-1, really strict, and the game became really boring.

"With the skill we have in this league, you shouldn't be able to play that way."

Zetterberg sided with the Flyers, believing the Lightning are stifling their offensive talent and dulling down the game.

"If a team wants to do it (fine), but it's a waste of talent," Zetterberg said.

Wings coach Mike Babcock doesn't criticize Tampa Bay and coach Guy Boucher for using the trap.

"Tampa was rewarded with a 2-1 win (Wednesday)." Babcock said. "Why would you forecheck when you can wait? It's been very successful for them and they have a good coach, very good players and play a system that works for them."

Todd Bertuzzi (sinus infection) skated for 30 minutes Thursday but isn't likely to play in either of the two games the Wings have this weekend.

Bertuzzi was struck against his face Oct. 29 in Minnesota, played two games after that, but a sinus infection and swelling in his inner-ear has caused him to feel light-headed and dizzy.

"I just don't feel right," Bertuzzi said. "I'm just waiting for the swelling in my ears to go down and get my balance back."

Detroit News LOADED: 11.11.2011
Four Red Wings on NHL All-Star Game ballot

By Ansar Khan

Four Detroit Red Wings are on this year’s NHL All-Star Game ballot -- Nicklas Lidstrom, Niklas Kronwall, Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg.

Two notable omissions are goaltender Jimmy Howard and forward Johan Franzen. But fans can write-in an player.

Voting begins Monday on NHL.com and concludes Jan. 4. The top three forwards, two defensemen and one goalie are assured spots in the Jan. 29 All-Star Game in Ottawa.

Here are the 127 players on the ballot, according to a release from the NHL:

Goalies (18)

Martin Brodeur, New Jersey Devils
Ilya Bryzgalov, Philadelphia Flyers
Marc-Andre Fleury, Pittsburgh Penguins
Jaroslav Halak, St. Louis Blues
Jonas Hiller, Anaheim Ducks
Nikolai Khabibulin, Edmonton Oilers
Mikka Kiprusoff, Calgary Flames
Kari Lehtonen, Dallas Stars
Henrik Lundqvist, New York Rangers
Roberto Luongo, Vancouver Canucks
Ryan Miller, Buffalo Sabres
Carey Price, Montreal Canadiens
Jonathan Quick, Los Angeles Kings
James Reimer, Toronto Maple Leafs
Pekka Rinne, Nashville Predators

Defencemen (36)

Jay Bouwmeester, Calgary Flames
Dan Boyle, San Jose Sharks
Dustin Byfuglien, Winnipeg Jets
Brent Burns, San Jose Sharks
Brian Campbell, Florida Panthers
Zdeno Chara, Boston Bruins
Drew Doughty, Los Angeles Kings
Alexander Edler, Vancouver Canucks
Tobias Enstrom, Winnipeg Jets
Sergei Gonchar , Ottawa Senators
Mike Green, Washington Capitals
Erik Johnson, Colorado Avalanche
Jack Johnson, Los Angeles Kings
Ed Jovanovski, Florida Panthers
Erik Karlsson, Ottawa Senators
Duncan Keith, Chicago Blackhawks
Niklas Kronwall, Detroit Red Wings
Kris Letang, Pittsburgh Penguins
Nicklas Lidstrom, Detroit Red Wings
John-Michael Liles, Toronto Maple Leafs
Tyler Myers, Buffalo Sabres
Dion Phaneuf, Toronto Maple Leafs
Alex Pietrangelo, St. Louis Blues
Chris Pronger, Philadelphia Flyers
Brent Seabrook, Chicago Blackhawks
Sheldon Souray, Dallas Stars
Marc Staal, New York Rangers
Mark Streit, New York Islanders
P.K. Subban, Montreal Canadiens
Ryan Suter, Nashville Predators
Kimmo Timonen, Philadelphia Flyers
Lubomir Visnovsky, Anaheim Ducks
Shea Weber, Nashville Predators
Ryan Whitney, Edmonton Oilers
Keith Yandle, Phoenix Coyotes
Marek Zidlicky, Minnesota Wild

Forwards (73)

Daniel Alfredsson, Ottawa Senators
David Backes, St. Louis Blues
Nicklas Backstrom, Washington Capitals
Jamie Benn, Dallas Stars
Patrice Bergeron, Boston Bruins
Danny Briere, Philadelphia Flyers
Mike Cammalleri, Montreal Canadiens
Jeff Carter, Columbus Blue Jackets
Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh Penguins
Pavel Datsyuk, Detroit Red Wings
Shane Doan, Phoenix Coyotes
Matt Duchene, Colorado Avalanche
Jordan Eberle, Edmonton Oilers
Patrik Elias, New Jersey Devils
Louie Eriksson, Dallas Stars
Tomas Fleischmann, Florida Panthers
Marian Gaborik, New York Rangers
Ryan Getzlaf, Anaheim Ducks
Claude Giroux, Philadelphia Flyers
Michael Grabner, New York Islanders
Taylor Hall, Edmonton Oilers
Dany Heatley, Minnesota Wild
Milan Hejduk, Colorado Avalanche
Nathan Horton, Boston Bruins
Marian Hossa, Chicago Blackhawks
Jerome Iginla, Calgary Flames
Jaromir Jagr, Philadelphia Flyers
Patrick Kane, Chicago Blackhawks
Ryan Kesler, Vancouver Canucks
Phil Kessel, Toronto Maple Leafs
Mikko Koivu, Minnesota Wild
Anze Kopitar, Los Angeles Kings
Ilya Kovalchuk, New Jersey Devils
David Krejci, Boston Bruins
Andrew Ladd, Winnipeg Jets
Vincent Lecavalier, Tampa Bay Lightning
Milan Lucic, Boston Bruins
Joffrey Lupul, Toronto Maple Leafs
Evgeni Malkin, Pittsburgh Penguins
Patrick Marleau, San Jose Sharks
Milan Michalek, Ottawa Senators
Rick Nash, Columbus Blue Jackets
James Neal, Pittsburgh Penguins
Alex Ovechkin, Washington Capitals
Zach Parise, New Jersey Devils
Joe Pavelski, San Jose Sharks
Corey Perry, Anaheim Ducks
Tomas Plekanec, Montreal Canadiens
Jason Pominville, Buffalo Sabres
Mike Ribeiro, Dallas Stars
Brad Richards, New York Rangers
Mike Richards, Los Angeles Kings
Bobby Ryan, Anaheim Ducks
Daniel Sedin, Vancouver Canucks
Henrik Sedin, Vancouver Canucks
Teemu Selanne, Anaheim Ducks
Alexander Semin, Washington Capitals
Patrick Sharp, Chicago Blackhawks
Jeff Skinner, Carolina Hurricanes
Ryan Smyth, Edmonton Oilers
Jason Spezza, Ottawa Senators
Eric Staal, Carolina Hurricanes
Jordan Staal, Pittsburgh Penguins
Steven Stamkos, Tampa Bay Lightning
Paul Stastny, Colorado Avalanche
Martin St. Louis, Tampa Bay Lightning
John Tavares, New York Islanders
Joe Thornton, San Jose Sharks
Jonathan Toews, Chicago Blackhawks
R.J. Umberger, Columbus Blue Jackets
Thomas Vanek, Buffalo Sabres
Ray Whitney, Phoenix Coyotes
Henrik Zetterberg, Detroit Red Wings
Michigan Live LOADED: 11.11.2011
Red Wings’ Henrik Zetterberg hopes Sidney Crosby returns soon, says NHL needs him

By Ansar Khan

DETROIT -- Despite the many bitter and heated battles Detroit Red Wings forward Henrik Zetterberg has had with Sidney Crosby, he hopes the Pittsburgh Penguins star returns soon from his concussion.

“It’s going to be real exciting to see his first game,” Zetterberg said. “He’s been away for way too long, and he’s a great player. We (the NHL) need him for many, many years, and I will watch the first game that he’s back in. I wish him well.”

Crosby’s return appeared near earlier in the week, but he has been ruled out of games Friday and Saturday. The earliest he can return is Tuesday at home against Colorado. He has been out since Jan. 5.

“I think the league misses him. I don’t think Detroit misses him,” Zetterberg said. “We have a rivalry, and it’s a fun rivalry. It’s fun to play against him. But we miss him. He should be playing. It’s got to be tough on him to not be able to play and be on the sidelines that long. I just wish him to be back as soon as possible.”

The Red Wings’ lone game against the Penguins this season is Dec. 13 at the Consol Energy Center.

Detroit coach Mike Babcock also hopes Crosby returns soon.

“He’s a phenomenal kid and he’s a workaholic and he has a passion to be great,” Babcock said. “That’s real important for our sport. People can relate to him. He makes our game better. You want all the great players playing.”

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.11.2011
Red Wings players critical of Tampa Bay's trapping, saying it's not 'fan-friendly' style

By Ansar Khan

DETROIT – The high-tempo, talent-laden Detroit Red Wings have rarely played a trapping style of hockey. So it's not surprising that they didn't endorse Tampa Bay's tactics in its 2-1 overtime win over Philadelphia Wednesday.

The Lightning played a 1-3-1 trap, with one "forechecker" standing at the Flyers blue line, three players hovering at the center-ice red line and one defender deep in his own zone. The Flyers, on a few occasions, reacted to this passive style by holding the puck in their own zone rather than trying to break through the trap.

Analysts on Versus, which televised the game, criticized Lightning coach Guy Boucher's strategy.

Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard didn't see the game, but asked, "So everyone just stood there? What's the point of that? I'm going to need to see that.''

Captain Nicklas Lidstrom also didn't watch the game, but said it "must have been awkward for players and the fans" and didn't sound like fun.

Henrik Zetterberg ridiculed Tampa Bay's strategy.

"I haven't seen it, but I actually think it's hilarious if they were just standing there and waiting for them to come," Zetterberg said. "It must be tough for the referee to know what to do."

"I actually thought it was a good way for showing how boring it could be if the other team doesn't do anything with the puck. That's how we played in Sweden for 10-12 years. We played the 1-3-1 really strict and the game became really, really boring. I think with the skill that we have in this league, you shouldn't be able to play that way."

He said the Flyers did the right thing.

Should the league try to prohibit such tactics?

"No," Zetterberg said. "If a team wants to do it they can. I think it's a waste of talent. If you have a good team like that then they should play a little more fan-friendly."

Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said he can't blame Tampa Bay for doing what it had to do to win. He blamed the post-lockout rule change that allowed two-line passes.

"I think when the NHL took out the red line (figuratively), all they had to do was watch the world junior games the previous few years," Babcock said. "The way it was in Europe was everybody stands back and waits. If you like that kind of thing, it's fine."

It's all about results, Babcock said.

"Tampa was rewarded with a 2-1 win. So why would you forecheck when you can wait?" Babcock said. "They forecheck when they get the opportunity, they wait for transition and they go like crazy. It's been very successful for them. (Boucher) is a real good coach, they got good players and they play a good system that works for them."

The game has gotten a lot of publicity, mainly because of how the Flyers responded, but Babcock said this is nothing new.

"If you look at the league every night, it's one guy (up) and four guys standing around the far blue (line)," Babcock said. "That's because everyone stretches out and that stretch pass, when you tip it you're racing. So all your offense is off the forecheck. If you want rush hockey and nice-looking hockey, you put the red line back in."

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.11.2011
Detroit Red Wings' Todd Bertuzzi trying to overcome dizziness, will sit out two more games

By Ansar Khan

DETROIT -- Detroit Red Wings forward Todd Bertuzzi was back on the ice Thursday for practice, but only the first half of it. He's still trying to get over some dizziness and a sinus infection and won't play in the next two games, Friday against Edmonton (7:30 p.m.) and Saturday vs. Dallas (7 p.m.), both at home.

Bertuzzi hasn't been the same since being hit in the face by Devin Setoguchi's stick in the Oct. 29 game at Minnesota. He played the next two games, but it kept getting worse, so he has sat out the past two.

"Dizzy and lightheaded, just got a little swelling in my ears, got to get my balance back," Bertuzzi said. "I just didn't feel myself. I got a sinus infection, got my ears checked, got a little swelling in there."

He said he had no energy and was "dragging out there."

"I wanted to come out (today) and see how my balance was, skate around with guys," Bertuzzi said.

He looks like he's lost some weight, but when he was asked he said, "I don't know. If I say, yeah, then it looks bad on my wife for not cooking right."

No changes to the lines they skated with the last game:

Cleary-Datsyuk-Holmstrom
Filppula-Zetterberg-Franzen
Hudler-Helm-Abdelkader
Miller-Emmerton-Brunnstrom/Eaves
Lidstrom-White
Kronwall-Stuart
Ericsson-Kindl/Commodore
Howard (starting)
Conklin

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.11.2011
Mark Howe set to join legendary father Gordie in Hockey Hall of Fame

By Ansar Khan

DETROIT — Gordie Howe’s unparalleled combination of strength and skills made him the most prolific goal-scorer of his time and, to many, the greatest hockey player of all time.

His son, Mark, blazed his own trail as a skilled, puck-moving defenseman for the majority of his 22-year career.

On Monday, the son of the Detroit Red Wings legend will join his father in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

The wait was long for Mark Howe, who retired in 1995 and became Hall eligible in 1998. It is the culmination of a career in which he thrived at two positions, in two leagues.

"As a kid, you grow up dreaming of winning Stanley Cups, Conn Smythe Trophies ... but you never dream of making it to the Hall of Fame," Howe, 56, said. "It’s as great an honor as a player could ever get."

Gordie and Mark Howe will be the fourth father-son combination to be enshrined into the Hall.

Mark Howe, the Red Wings director of pro scouting, spent six seasons as a forward in the World Hockey Association and 16 years as a defenseman in the NHL. He accumulated 405 goals and 841 assists for 1,246 points in 1,354 games.

"I didn’t always show it, but I had a fire inside of me," Howe said. "I always competed hard. I hated to lose. I was a very good skater and very good passer. Better than a lot of people."

Mark considered himself a very good baseball player and golfer. He also played football and wrestled at Southfield Lathrup High School.

But, being Gordie Howe’s son, there was never any doubt that hockey would be his career path. His late mother, Colleen, helped him deal with the pressures of being an icon’s son.

"She always told me to set my own expectations of myself," Howe said. "If you try to compare yourself to Gordie Howe in Detroit, it’s a lose-lose situation. Set my own goals, my standards. Try to meet those every day."

Gordie said Mark’s passion for the game started early. He would fire pucks at playground he scrounged up from construction sites and played until after dark, stringing up Christmas lights.

"People would stop in their cars in the neighborhood, wondering why we had our Christmas lights up," Gordie said. "The love of the game was always there."

Mark turned pro as an 18-year-old, joining the Houston Aeros of the fledgling World Hockey Association. It gave him the opportunity to play with his dad, who came out of retirement, and his brother Marty.

"If I didn’t go to the WHA, I had to wait two more years as a junior before being eligible for the NHL," Howe said. "I had the chance to make more money as an 18-year-old than my dad did in any year during his whole career."

His father was extremely protective during those early years, often retaliating against opponents who tried to rough up his sons.

"A lot of parents couldn’t watch their kids, with all the clips and cuts. It’s tough to watch your kid get hurt," Gordie said. "I didn’t mind. I just waited for the next line change and you could get even."

"I went over to a coach who was sending someone out deliberately to maim (Mark). High sticks were up around the throat and ears and he got cut up. I (skated) alongside the bench and got three (opposing players) with one swoop (of his stick).

"I said, ‘You put patches on my son. When those patches are off and you do it again, I’ll put more than a patch on you.?”

Mark said it took him six weeks to finally tell his dad to stop fighting his battles.

"If he says he’s not protective, he’s lying," Mark said.

Howe, like his dad, was a forward during his entire six-year WHA career. When the league merged with the NHL in 1979-80, Howe, playing for the Hartford Whalers, was moved to defense a few games into the season. He was fine with the switch since his best assets were skating and passing.

"I could get to loose pucks, put the puck on the tape, could get the puck moving, play 30 minutes instead of 22-23," Howe said. "I always considered myself a team player.

"I made a lot of mistakes. It’s tough to learn a position you hadn’t played before. They felt the good things outweighed the negative."

"As a passer — I include all of them, (former linemates) Ted Lindsay, Sid Abel -- no one passed the puck better (than Mark). That was an activity he learned in the backyard, shooting against the shingles on the house."

Mark overcame a serious injury in 1980-81, when he impaled himself on the old puck deflectors in the middle of the net. He spent a month in and out of the hospital due to infections and lost 20 pounds.

"It was day three or four and I hadn’t been out of bed much, kept throwing up real bad," Howe said. "They told me I had to start walking. I just couldn’t, I was on so much Demerol."

"I remember Dad picked me up and said, ‘You’re going to walk.’ I said I’m going to throw up and he said, ‘Do what you got to do.’ He helped me walk around the room and I think I threw up on him about five times."

The spike was buried about 5-6 inches into his hip, just missing his spinal column.

"I thought I was dying," Howe said. "I kept asking if I was going to live. I lost so much blood I went into shock. I was in surgery for five or six hours."

It took him a year to get back to feeling normal.

Howe’s best years were in Philadelphia. Three times he finished as the runner-up for the Norris Trophy as the league’s top defenseman. The Flyers reached the Cup finals twice, in 1985 and 87, but lost to the powerful Edmonton Oilers both times.

He jumped at the chance to sign with the Red Wings in 1992.

"It would have been a lot of pressure to play as an 18-, 20-year-old in Detroit with the name on the back," Howe said. "At 38, I was more than ready to handle it."

In 22 seasons, Howe’s teams reached the finals seven times, including his final year in 1995, when the Red Wings were swept by the New Jersey Devils. He said not winning the Stanley Cup was disheartening, but he relishes his two Avco Cup titles as WHA champion with Houston in 1974 and 75.

"You grow up dreaming of winning Stanley Cups," Howe said. "I gave it all that I had. Unfortunately, it didn’t work out."

Fortunately, he’s not saying the same about the call from the Hall. NBC broadcaster Mike "Doc" Emrick, who’s on the Hall of Fame committee, has pushed for Howe’s induction for years.

"After I got in, I wrote Mike, not to thank him for getting me in, but for the fact he believed I belonged there," Howe said.

Howe is being inducted into the Philadelphia Sports Hall of Fame on Thursday. From there, he will go to Toronto, where he will be joined by a group of about 40 friends and family members, including his three children and his father.

"It means so much more to me that Dad’s here to share it," Howe said.

"Anything I do in life will never come close to the feeling I have when my kids do something. I’m sure it means more to (his dad) than it does to me."

Michigan Live LOADED: 11.11.2011
Detroit Red Wings

Will 'hungry' Oilers devour Wings?

By Chuck Pleiness
Macomb Daily Sports Writer

DETROIT – When the Edmonton Oilers have come to Joe Louis Arena the last few years, it was almost a guaranteed two points for the Wings every night.

That won't be the case Friday night as the Oilers visit Detroit for the first time this season.

Edmonton is currently two points out of the top spot in the Western Conference.

"They're young so they're hungry," Jimmy Howard said. "You can see that in watching clips. They don't stop. They keep coming. We need to find a way to slow them down, just like we did against Colorado the other night, we need to make them come a full 200 feet."

The Wings are one a two-game winning streak, outscoring their opponents 10-2 in the process. And this is on the heels of snapping a six-game winless streak where the totaled six goals for in that stretch.

"The conference has been tight for a number of years," Danny Cleary said. "The difference between first and eighth, a lot of times, there aren't a lot of points. Then from eighth to 12 it's a few points."

"You have to be ready to go every night," Cleary added. "Every point is critical. At the end of every season teams can say 'if we had only got one there' or 'we blew that one there' and that difference is a playoff spot."

The Oilers have benefited through the draft due in large part to finishing last overall in the league each of the last two seasons.

"Obviously, the kid line with (Taylor) Hall, (Jordan) Eberle and (Ryan) Nugent-Hopkins looks very, very dynamic," Wings coach Mike Babcock said.

"It's impressive how some of the young kids coming in are having such an impact around the league, scoring goals and getting a chance to play right off the bat," said Niklas Lidstrom, who's 41.

Nugent-Hopkins is second on the team in scoring with 12 points (six goals), followed closely behind by Eberle (11 points) and Hall (nine points).

"You've got to stay close to them, not give them our much time and space with the puck because they're going to make plays," Lidstrom said. "They're quick players. When we have the puck we have to hang onto it, make them play defense."

The Oilers are also benefiting by the rebirth of Nikolai Khabibulin, who leads the league with a 0.98 goals-against average. He has lost a game in regulation, going 7-0-2 with two shutouts, and has a .964 save percentage.

"He's hot, playing well and gaining confidence," Zetterberg said. "It will definitely be a challenge for us. You have to be in front. You have to be there to screen the goalie and for second pucks and put some rebounds in."

Bertuzzi skates, but not ready to return Todd Bertuzzi skated for roughly 30 minutes Thursday. He has not skated since last Friday.

Bertuzzi, who has missed the last two games, was clipped in the face by the stick of Devin Setoguchi on Oct. 29 and the problems began to arise after that.

"I played two games and it kept getting worse and worse," Bertuzzi said. "I felt light headed and dizzy. I didn't feel like myself. Then I got a sinus infection and I went and got my ears checked and I had a little swelling in there. I've got some pills to try and get the swelling down."

The right side of Bertuzzi's face is still swollen from the high stick.

"That's when I got the sinus things right after that," Bertuzzi said. "I've had no energy and just been dragging. Then it's gotten worse."

Bertuzzi was asked if he suffered a concussion and he sheepishly shook his head no.

"I need to let the swelling in my ears down so I can get my balance back," Bertuzzi said. "I just don't feel right. I wanted to come out and see how my legs felt."

One thing Bertuzzi hasn't lost is his sense of humor. When asked if he had lost weight he said, "I don't know. If I say yeah then it looks bad on my wife for not cooking right."

Bertuzzi said with how he felt after skating there was no way he would be able to skate Friday against the Edmonton Oilers and is probably out for Saturday's game against the Dallas Stars as well.

"No, not the way I felt today," Bertuzzi said when asked if he was playing tonight. "No."

Old-time basketball The topic of conversation in the locker room was how the Philadelphia Flyers attempted to get the Tampa Bay Lightning out of their 1-3-1 zone coverage.

The Flyers used a four corners style offense to try and do that. In the first five minutes of the first period they did it twice and after about 30 seconds of inactivity both times the refs stopped the game to have a faceoff.

"I haven't seen it, but I actually think it's hilarious if they were just standing there and waiting for them to come," Henrik Zetterberg said. "It must be tough for the referee to know what to do."

"I actually thought it was a good way for showing how boring it could be if the other team doesn't do anything with the puck," Zetterberg added. "That's how we played in Sweden for, I think, 10 or 12 years. We played the 1-3-1 really strict and the game became really, really boring. I think with the skill that we have in this league, you shouldn't be able to play that way."

Babcock's solution to that is putting the red line back in.

"The reason there is no rush hockey is because of the way the game is set up," Babcock said. "If you like that kind of thing, it's fine. Tampa was rewarded with a 2-1 win. Why would you forecheck when you can wait? They forecheck when they get the opportunity, the way for transition and they go like crazy. It's been very successful for them."

"What the league's got to decide is, if you look at the league every night, it's one guy and four guys standing around the far blue (line)," Babcock added. "That's because everyone stretches out and that lengthens the pass. When you tip it and you're racing, so all your offense is off the forecheck. That's what taking the red line out has done and making the end zone bigger. If you want rush hockey and nice-looking hockey you put the red line back in."

Macomb Daily LOADED: 11.11.2011
Edmonton Oilers

Oilers drop another decision to Bruins
Edmonton has not beaten Boston in more than 11 years

By Joanne Ireland, edmontonjournal.com November 10, 2011

BOSTON - There was not going to be a shortcut to the win column. Not in Boston. Not against the reformed Bruins.

But the Edmonton Oilers still deviated from their game plan, turned pucks over, and didn’t have enough push back against the defending Stanley Cup champions.

By the time the Bruins were finished with the visitors at TD Garden on Thursday night, they scored a 6-3 victory — their fourth straight win after starting the season with a 3-7 record. They have outscored their opponents 24-8 in that stretch.

The Oilers, 9-4-0-2, had not given up five or more goals before they got to Beantown. And they have the Detroit Red Wings to contend with on Friday night.

“We knew they were going to look up the neutral zone and wait for us to make mistakes and, once we did, they capitalized,” said sophomore forward Taylor Hall. “We got back into the game, but the start of the second was how we started the game and you can’t do that, especially against the Stanley Cup champions. They’re going to stick it in your face and be confident about it. That’s what they did.

“That shows us that if you let off the gas for two minutes or five minutes, they’re going to capitalize. It’s not like we don’t know what we’re doing wrong,” Hall said.

“It’s pretty clear what we did wrong tonight (Thursday night). We have to fix it in a matter of 18 hours.”

The Bruins have won 10 straight games against the Oilers. Their last loss was on Oct. 17, 2000; the last Oilers win in Boston was back on Nov. 7, 1996.

The Bruins sent out Tuukka Rusk to man the net and got goals from five different players. After stealing a win in Montreal because of the work of goaltender Nikolai Khabibulin, Edmonton countered with Devan Dubnyk. He faced 28 shots.

Khabibulin will start against the Red Wings.

“I thought we showed good character coming back after the time out. We got ourselves back into it, then we got put back on our heels again,” said veteran winger Ryan Smyth. “We can’t do that against a team like this.

“They were the Stanley Cup champions last year, they know what to do to shut down teams.”

Down 2-0, the Oilers got two quick goals from Smyth (re-direction) and rookie Ryan Nugent-Hopkins — his seventh of the season. It was the first time this season that Boston has given up two in 29 seconds, but they came back with two more in the second.

Smyth scored his second of the night, his ninth of the season, on a third period power play. It was the first power play the Oilers have scored on the road trip, which is now four games old.

“The power play either gets you momentum or you score,” said Smyth. “We’ve had some success in the past at home. We have to start doing that on the road, too. If we do early on, maybe it changes the outcome of the game.”

The Bruins took a 4-2 lead into the second intermission with goals from defenceman Johnny Boychuk (screen), Jordan Caron — it started with a Ben Eager giveaway and ended up going in off Dubnyk’s skate, Brad Marchand, in a power-play deflection, and sophomore centre Tyler Seguin.

Seguin sent in a puck that launched off the end boards, pinballed its way to the Oilers goal-line, was cleared by Oilers defenceman Tom Gilbert only to go in off blue-liner Corey Potter’s skate.

Milan Lucic potted a late third period power-play goal, then just 44 seconds later, Marchand scored an unassisted marker to put the game well out of reach.

“I really couldn’t get much going right for myself,” said Dubnyk. “That fourth one, especially. He shot it, it went off a shin pad, off the backboard, off me, off Gibby, off Potter, top corner, it was one of those games.

“They did a good job of going hard to the net and getting shots through to guys in front. That makes my job tough, but it’s my job to find it and get in front of it.”

The Bruins are now 7-7-0.

“Turnovers. Turnovers. Flat out turnovers,” said Oilers head coach Tom Renney. “You don’t give good teams, experienced teams, an opportunity to come back the other way. We did that from the get-go.

“There’s holes in Boston’s game. We scouted it, we identified them, and we got ourselves back into the game because of it, but we needed to continue to do that. If you’re not going to continue to get pucks deep, if you’re not going to attack with numbers, you’re giving a good team, the Stanley Cup champions, an opportunity to counter attack.”

OIL DROPS: Sam Gagner played his 300th career NHL game ... Smyth extended his points streak to six games (six goals, four assists).

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Boychuk.

"It's sophomore stretch."

When Sutton took his five-game timeout and returned to the lineup Friday against the Detroit Red Wings.

"I'm the other team."

When Sutton elbowed Colorado Avalanche forward Gabriel Landeskog in the head in a game on Oct. 28.

"It's the one last conditioning skate. I'm pretty eager to get back into action."

At least I was able to push hard and keep up my game condition. That won't be an issue."

Sutton, a big man who plays a physical game, said at the time of the suspension that he wouldn't change his game and he repeated that sentiment on Thursday.

Acquired in a July trade with the Anaheim Ducks (Kurtis Foster went the other way), the six-foot-six, 245-pound Sutton has been an asset to goaltenders Devan Dubnyk and Nikolai Khabibulin with his ability to keep the crease clean.

"He's so poised with the puck," said Dubnyk. "Instead of panicking and rimming it off the glass, he makes these little passes and guys end up getting the puck out."

"I think that kind of goes unnoticed. It's one of many things we miss when he's not in the lineup."

"Having him over the puck is pretty calming. We miss that," Renney continued. "We miss his leadership."

Bruins suffer Cup hangover

There were concerns there’d be a price to be paid after the Bruins won the Stanley Cup, which is why coach Claude Julien and general manager Peter Chiarelli sought out advice before the 2011-12 season started.

A hangover was unavoidable, they were told. Julien just didn’t expect the team to fall into a lull so early.

"We know we'd have some struggles at some point. You never know when," Julien said. "Obviously the start of the year was disappointing for us. We're hoping it's behind us."

The Bruins were 3-7 in October.

"I'm not going to lie, it's been pretty tough," said winger Milan Lucic. "The way we started was evidence we had trouble dealing with it right off the bat. It took us a little bit of time to find our game."

"We had to take a step back and remember what got us there and we've been doing more of that. If we want to keep moving forward and get back in the picture, we need to continue playing that way."

After stumbling out of the gate, the Bruins rallied and won three straight before the Oilers arrived. They outscored their opponents 18-5 in that stretch.

"When you win a Cup there's so much more emotion in those games," said sophomore Tyler Seguin. "When you're that close that you can taste it, it's so different and to go from that to the regular season, you really have to adjust and get up for every game."

"It is a clean slate, but you know that every game you have a target on your back because you're the defending champions," said defenceman Johnny Boychuk. "You have to be at the top of your game."

"Look what happened to us in the first 10," he continued. "We tried to do things that were out of the ordinary and it got us in trouble. Once we realized that, we started playing like we did last year and it's been going better for us."

Teubert, Chorney to OK City

With Sutton set to return to the lineup on Friday, and Cam Barker back on the job, the Oilers assigned Colten Teubert to the Oklahoma City Barons.

He'd played two games during his call-up.

The Barons will have even more depth now on the defence with Taylor Chorney back with the organization. Waived by the St. Louis Blues, he was reclaimed by the Oilers and sent to the farm team.

Because another team did not put in a claim for Chorney, the Oilers did not have to waive him again.

Five Oilers on all-star ballot

Goaltender Nikolai Khabibulin, defenceman Ryan Whitney, forwards Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Ryan Smyth were among the 127 NHLers on the all-star ballot that was released on Thursday.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.11.2011
What was Barker thinking with that senseless penalty?

Posted by:
Jim Matheson

OK, we can live with the fact there's almost no offensive bite to Cam Barker.

He's got the same number of goals as Theo Peckham (one) in 12 games, playing a ton on the powerplay. Those points he put up in junior in Medicine Hat (65 in 89 games) to be the third overall pick in the 2004 draft, behind Ovechkin and Malkin? They haven't really translated to the NHL, at all. Three goals in his last 83 games, if you're counting, and 13 points. That's a season. He has one point this year; Peckham has two.

But the Oilers didn't lose against the Bruins Thursday because Barker couldn't find the back of the net with his six shots on Boston goalie Tuukka Rask. Blasting away from the point, on the powerplay, with most of them. They lost all hopes of winning or getting the game to overtime because Barker took a senseless penalty, taking down a Bruins' forward who was in no immediate threat of scoring on Devan Dubnyk, just after the Oilers' best skater this year, Ryan Smyth, had tapped in a goalmouth feed from Eric Belanger to make it 4-3 for the Bruins. Before you could spell WHAT WAS I THINKING?, Milan Lucic took David Krejci's terrific powerplay pass and slid it past Dubnyk to end the Oilers' abbreviated comeback hopes.

Again, Barker can't take that penalty at that time. Hopefully, he said sorry to one and all after the skate of shame back to the bench after Lucic's goal. What can you say about Barker's play in his 12 games (he missed three with a sore shoulder)? He's a heavy player, coach Tom Renney would say, at about 215-220 pounds. But, how would you categorize him?

(a) Shutdown guy?
(b) Offensive guy?
(c) Tough guy?
(d) None of the above.

Try (d). He's a plus player (plus 3), obviously a good thing. He's not a big liability. But he just seems to be there, if you get my drift. There's little outward emotion to his game. I don't pretend to be the coach, but unless I'm missing something, what does Barker do that would get an A on a report card? For sure, he can hammer the puck. But what else? I always go back to what Glen Sather used to say about defencemen. "They have to do one thing really well to stay in the league."

**

You have to think Magnus Paajarvi will be back in the lineup for the Red Wings Friday night after sitting out two games. That's enough watching from the pressbox. Do they need Ben Eager's sandpaper against the Red Wings? Probably not. They don't have a tough guy. Maybe he comes out, although Sam Gagner continues to struggle mightily to make things happen on the third line. He has two assists and no goals in nine games this year. Maybe Gagner is still having trouble with the ankle he sprained in camp. He's not around the puck much on the attack. To me, it looks like he has to be back in the middle, not on the wing. One good thing: he's winning 55 percent of his face-offs.

No sense taking Lennart Petrell out against Detroit. The Oilers will likely be shorthanded several times against the Wings and will need Petrell's PK ability.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Dubnyk in net for Oilers

Joanne Ireland
Recent Posts From This Author

With back-to-back games on the schedule, there was bound to be a goal-tending switch, so the Oilers will send out Devan Dubnyk against the defending Stanley Cup champions and the stingy Nikolai Khabibulin will close out the road trip with games against the Detroit Red Wings on Friday and the Chicago Blackhawks.

Head coach Tom Renney figured Dubnyk was a better for the Boston Bruins.

"This is a big strong team. I think this is tailor made for Devan," said Renney.

Khabibulin, 7-0-2 with a .98 goals against average, is 1-7-0 with two ties in games against Boston. His goals against average is 3.27.

Dubnyk is 2-3-0 with a 2.19 goals against average. He played in the 4-2 loss to the Phoenix Coyotes on Saturday.

"We expect a confident team that will come out hard and try to push us out of the game as quick as possible," said Renney. "We have to be equal to the task and use our puck speed and our attack speed and make sure if they're coming, that it's 200 feet.

"We have to minimize the turnover game which, the last couple of games, has kind of plagued us."

The Bruins, after a 3-7 start in October, have won their last three games. They have won their last nine meetings with the Oilers. Their last loss was Oct. 17, 2000.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Edmonton Oilers aim to prove they're for real

By ROBERT TYCHKOWSKI, QMI Agency

The Original Six Tour rolls through Boston tonight for a date with the defending Stanley Cup champions and everyone in the Edmonton Oilers dressing room is as dialled up as they’ve been all year.

“This is a game you circle on you calendar for sure,” said winger Taylor Hall. “Whenever we played Chicago last year, after they won it, it was the same kind of deal - you always want to measure yourself against the champions.

“We know they're playing very well lately and so are we. A game on the road, against the defending Stanley Cup champions, in a city like Boston is a big game.”

After a slow start attributed to a Stanley Cup hangover, the Bruins are on a three-game win streak, posting wins of 6-2, 7-0 and 5-3 over the Islanders, Leafs and Senators.

Edmonton, ahead of Boston in the standings at the moment on the strength of a 9-3-2 start, is looking forward to a chance to show they might just be for real.

“We definitely have an opportunity to send a message to the league,” said Jordan Eberle. “These guys are the best of the best and we have a chance, coming in on a fairly hot streak, to try and take them down.

“And this is my first time here in Boston, so I’m excited.”

The Oilers played poorly in their last two starts, losing in Phoenix and getting saved by Nikolai Khabibulin’s spectacular netminding in Montreal, but Boston isn’t looking past the challenge.

“They’re playing well, they have a lot of skilled forwards, speedy forwards,” said defenceman Johnny Boychuk. “You have to respect them because if you don’t they’re going to burn you.”

LATE HITS... The Oilers will start Devan Dubnyk in goal, resting Nikolai Khabibulin for a conference game Friday in Detroit.

“It’s not difficult,” head coach Tom Renney said of the decision. “We play back-to-back here. It’s one of those situations where Dubie has to play. Boston is a big, strong team, I think this is tailor made for Devan, quite honestly. With his size and strength it lines up well for us.”

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Versteeg hat trick sends Panthers into first place

By Kirk Penton
Special to The Miami Herald

The weather outside was frightful, but inside the Florida Panthers were delightful.

A few members of the Florida Panthers spent Thursday morning tweeting about how cold it was in Winnipeg and took pictures of the snow that had already struck the Canadian prairies. Then they hit the ice at MTS Centre and were red hot in thumping the Winnipeg Jets 5-2 at a sold-out MTS Centre.

Kris Versteeg recorded a hat trick as the Panthers won their second in a row in Canada, improved to 5-1-3 in their past nine games and ran their record to 8-4-3 overall — good enough for top spot in the Southeast Division.

They will return home to face the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday at BankAtlantic Center before heading out on another two-game road trip to Dallas and St. Louis next week.

“We feel like we’ve gotten off to an OK start, and it’s always nice to see your name at the top of the division,” defenseman Brian Campbell said.

Versteeg scored his team-leading sixth, seventh and eighth goals of the season, including an empty-netter practically from his back, to notch Florida’s first hat-trick since Radek Dvorak accomplished the feat nearly two years ago. Versteeg doesn’t even remember the specifics of his last three-goal game.

“Back in junior” he said, “I might have been 17 or 16. It felt pretty good.”

The Jets had just returned home from a season-long, seven-game road trip, but they came out flying. Evander Kane had two glorious chances on one shift to get the Jets on the board first, but he whiffed on the first one and he went too high on the second.

Versteeg got the visitors on the board at 7:14 of the opening frame. Thomas Fleischmann’s shot from the point bounced off Jets defenseman Zach Bogosian and on to the stick of Versteeg, who had no trouble depositing the puck into the net because Jets netminder Ondrej Pavelec was leaning the wrong way.

Sean Bergenheim had an excellent chance to give the Panthers a 2-0 advantage, but his wraparound attempt failed when he wrapped it around too early and the puck hit the side of the Winnipeg net.

Florida kept the pressure on, however, and it led to Nik Antropov’s penalty for an illegal check to the head of Dmitry Kulikov. Just more than a minute later, Versteeg followed up his own rebound on the power play and flipped the puck past Pavelec.

The Jets were held without a shot for the final 13:33 of the first period, and it took them another 10 minutes to get their first shot of the second, earning a Bronx cheer from the 15,004 spectators.

“It sure didn’t look like they came home from a road trip in the first five minutes,” Panthers coach Kevin Dineen said. “They came out with a ton of energy, and they really came at us hard. We absorbed that. We score that first goal, and then the game kind of settled down. I liked our game from then on.”

Before the Jets finally managed their fifth shot of the period, the Panthers pushed their lead to 3-0 when, on a delayed penalty to Kenndal McArdle and the Florida net empty, Versteeg delivered a perfect saucer pass to defenseman Jason Garrison, who fired a cannon past Pavelec for his sixth of the season.

The Jets went 23 minutes 2 seconds without a shot on goal. The Panthers had 10 shots during that span.

Winnipeg defenseman Dustin Byfuglien tried to get something going late in the second when he jammed his stick into Jose Theodore’s glove well after the Florida netminder had covered the puck.
Panthers, powered by Versteeg hat trick, take Southeast lead
Panthers line of Fleischmann, Versteeg and Weiss have accounted for most of the team's offense this season

By Harvey Fialkov, Sun Sentinel
8:56 PM EST, November 10, 2011

Not since the "Sunrise Express" line of David Booth, Stephen Weiss and Nathan Horton was rolling in 2008-09 have the Panthers had a more productive top line than they do so far this season.

Weiss is still the centerman, but he's flanked by Panthers newcomers Tomas Fleischmann and Kris Versteeg.

The torrid trio tallied seven points Thursday night with Versteeg notching his first career hat trick to lead the Panthers to a 5-2 victory over the Winnipeg Jets at the MTS Centre.

The 8-4-3 Panthers extended their point streak to six games (3-0-3) and leapfrogged over the Lightning and Caps into first place of the Southeast Division.

Versteeg leads the team with eight goals and his line has produced at least one goal in 13 of the team's 15 games. Their 43 combined points make up 42 percent of the Panthers' offense.

They've juiced up a power play that was ranked 30th last season at a 13.1 percent efficiency to fifth at 22.6 percent. They've scored seven of the team's 14 power-play goals, with Versteeg potting four.

"I think there's chemistry there and not on the ice only," Panthers coach Kevin Dineen said. "You see them spending some time together. Those aren't the kind of things you coach and they're all skilled players."

Versteeg and Fleischmann, both off to the best starts of their careers at 17 and 14 points after 15 games respectively, believe that playing on a team's top line as well as on the power play are contributing factors to their success.

"Steeg's a great one-on-one player but he got moved around a lot last year and now I think he's found a home and is comfortable with the two guys he's playing with," said Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson, who had Versteeg for 53 games last season. "Sometimes you can find chemistry by accident, you play together and have a little success and your confidence grows. That's what they look like right now."

Fleischmann's seven-game point streak was snapped in Thursday's 5-1 victory over the Maple Leafs when for the first time this season none of the three scored a goal in a win.

Fleischmann has continued the role he was on with the Avalanche last year before his season ended Jan. 20 because of continuing issues with blood clots in his lungs (that is now under control).

Fleischmann had 21 points in 22 games with Colorado.

"It's the movement and we're all on the same page," said Fleischmann, who's averaging a career-high 19:24 ice time. "You feel better when you're playing with the top line and get the opportunity to do things you used to do."

Versteeg, who has averaged 21 goals in his three full seasons, is on pace to score more than 40.

"It's three guys with chemistry that are skilled and who work hard and are gritty," Versteeg said.

Versteeg and Fleischmann both credit Weiss for his unselfishness.

"I try to draw people, go to the net and let those guys do their thing," said Weiss, who has 12 points. "We like to hang on to the puck and make plays."

All three are new dog owners with Versteeg and Fleischmann often walking their pooches together, which might call for a new nickname for their dogged line: Three Dogs Night? Top Dogs?

That might not work for these top Cats.

Panthers show power

The Panthers scored two power-play goals and added another goal during a prolonged delayed penalty.

Versteeg smacked in a rebound of Fleischmann's shot that ricocheted off a Jet to beat Ondrej Pavelec and score on Florida's first shot at 7:14. Not satisfied, Versteeg swatted in his own rebound for a power-play goal at 17:27 for a 2-0 lead after one.

At one point, goalie Jose Theodore, who improved to 6-2-2, didn't face a shot for 23:27. He finished with 25 saves.

On the delayed penalty, Versteeg set up defenseman Jason Garrison for a one-time blast and his career-high sixth goal.

Mike Santorelli added another power-play goal off a rebound of Brian Campbell's shot for his third assist of the game for a 4-0 cushion after two.

"We work on it, talk a lot about it as individuals and know where everybody is on the ice and what our responsibilities are, and how we want to generate offense," Campbell said of the Panthers vastly improved power play. "It's led to success."

They would need it as Winnipeg's Tim Stapleton and Andrew Ladd scored goals early in the third but Versteeg sealed the win with an empty-netter at 18:41.

"They came at us hard and we absorbed that," Dineen said. "We scored that first goal and the game kind of settled down. I liked our game from then on."

Forward Scottie Upshall left the game with an upper-body injury.

Sun Sentinel LOADED: 11.11.2011
The good news for the Kings on Thursday was that defenseman Drew Doughty appeared to find his offensive stride and scored a goal for the second straight game.

The bad news in the Kings’ seventh loss in nine games was they’re still not getting enough production to become a factor in the West, a problem that yet another Terry Murray lineup change did nothing to remedy.

Doughty’s goal, scored during a second-period power play, and a short-range shot by Mike Richards with 70 seconds to play were all the Kings could muster in a 3-2 loss to the Vancouver Canucks, who brought a large contingent of fans to Staples Center. The Kings are 2-5-2 since a 5-1-1 start, a repeat of the extreme streaks they experienced last season and were hopeful of avoiding with a deeper, more formidable lineup.

What should alarm General Manager Dean Lombardi most is that his team has been held to three goals or fewer in 13 of 16 games. That’s simply inadequate for a team that sees itself as a conference contender.

“The bulk of the season is coming up here. Huge, important parts of the season are coming up here,” winger Justin Williams said. “The offense, certainly myself at the top of the list, should be scoring more, getting to the net. I think we had a lot of chances tonight. We didn’t quite come through.”

Murray altered the lineup Thursday by adding center Colin Fraser, who made his season debut after recovering from off-season leg surgery, and winger Trent Hunter. But the moves had no impact on a sporadic offense that hasn’t extended beyond the top two lines.

Vancouver (8-7-1) scored all its goals in the first period. Goaltender Roberto Luongo made 28 saves for the Canucks in winning the fourth of his last five decisions, a turnaround for him following a slow start.

“We’re getting chances. It’s just not going in for us,” Kings defenseman Matt Greene said. “We’re getting our chances. It’s going to come.”

The Canucks capitalized on a five-on-three advantage and on a five-on-four advantage 42 seconds later to build a 2-0 lead in the first. Aaron Rome scored the final goal of the period while the teams were at even strength.

Kings forward Trevor Lewis went to the penalty box at 3:03 after he delivered a nasty and purposeless elbow to the mouth of Vancouver defenseman Kevin Bieksa and was given a five-minute major penalty. Doughty was sent off for cross-checking at 5:35 — he had taken several jabs at Ryan Kesler before taking one too many for the officials’ liking — and the Canucks converted the two-man advantage at 6:51. Sami Salo, who had shattered his stick on a shot attempt a few minutes earlier, kept his new stick intact on a shot from just above the right circle that appeared to deflect in front before it eluded Jonathan Quick.

Andrew Ebbett made it 2-0 at 7:33, with a centering pass that caromed off the foot of Kings defenseman Willie Mitchell and past Quick. Vancouver made it 3-0 at 15:42 on a rising, 55-foot slap shot by Rome.

The Kings cut the Canucks’ lead to 3-1 at 10:30 of the second period, during a power play. Anze Kopitar got the puck back to Jack Johnson, who faked a shot before zipping a pass to Doughty. His one-timer appeared to glance off the underside of the cross bar and past Luongo, Doughty’s second goal of the season and second in two games.

An apparent goal by the Canucks with 34 seconds left in the period was waved off after the referees ruled that Jannik Hansen had interfered with Quick. Replays showed contact between the two, though the Canucks contended the contact happened after the puck had gone into the net.

The Kings made it close on Richards’ goal, but not close enough.

“We need to find ways when we’re down in games to come back,” Williams said. “I felt the spirit on the ice when we were down a couple goals. We still had the fight. And that’s a real good sign. But we need to get one, a
Undisciplined play hurts Kings in 3-2 loss to Vancouver

By Elliott Teaford Staff Writer

Posted: 11/10/2011 10:42:29 PM PST
Updated: 11/10/2011 11:11:12 PM PST

The game was barely three minutes old when Kings forward Trevor Lewis skated alongside Vancouver Canucks defenseman Kevin Bieksa and cracked him in the mouth with an elbow, drawing blood and a five-minute major for a needless play.

The Kings yielded two goals on the ensuing power play and then a third while skating at even strength before the end of the first period and spent the rest of the game trying to rally in vain against the defending Western Conference champions.

No question, it was an undisciplined start and not surprisingly the Kings ended up losing 3-2 to the Canucks on Thursday night at Staples Center, their sixth loss in their last seven games. They have only two victories in their last nine games.

The Kings (7-6-3) simply never gave themselves a chance against Vancouver (8-7-1). Lewis’ penalty put them in serious jeopardy in the opening minutes and they never recovered, although they seemed encouraged by their play in the final two periods.

"It's very hard to dig out of a hole like that against that kind of a team," Kings coach Terry Murray said of trailing by three goals to start the game. "They were just too deep, too good. We couldn't do it, bottom line."

Given that the Kings have scored three goals or fewer in 13 of 16 games this season, it seemed especially improbable that they could rally from a three-goal deficit to defeat the Canucks. Scoring has been a big bugaboo for the Kings to start the season.

"We are getting to the bulk of the season, the huge part of the season is coming up, we should be scoring more," winger Justin Williams said. "We had a lot of chances (Thursday), but we didn't come through."

It was bad enough that the Kings were a man short for five minutes so early in the game, but then Drew Doughty took a cross-checking penalty to put them down two. Sami Salo converted on the 5-on-3, giving Vancouver a 1-0 lead at 6:51.

Salo sent a laser from the top of the right circle off the stick of defenseman Matt Greene and past goaltender Jonathan Quick for his fourth goal of the season in his first game back in the lineup after sitting out three because of a groin injury.

Andrew Ebbett made it 2-0 at 7:33, sending a pass into the slot that ricocheted off Greene's skate blade and into the net for his first goal of the season. Ebbett was trying to feed the puck into the slot to teammate David Booth.

Vancouver struck again when Aaron Rome sent a fluttering shot from the right wing past Quick at 15:42 for his second goal of the season, making it 3-0.

By the end of the opening period, the Canucks had outshot the Kings 12-3 and outplayed them in every facet of the game. Only a few narrow misses on what appeared to be a can't-miss scoring chances kept Vancouver's lead from being greater than 3-0.

Doughty scored a power-play goal to make it 3-1 midway through the second period and Mike Richards scored with Quick on the bench in favor of a sixth attacker with 1:10 remaining in the game to cut it to 3-2.

Also -

The Kings activated center Colin Fraser from the non-roster list and inserted him into their lineup against the Canucks. He skated on a line with Lewis and Ethan Moreau. - Upon further review, the second assist on the
Terry Murray’s postgame thoughts…

(on having to kill the early penalties…)

MURRAY: "Yeah, it’s a big hole, big hole. It’s very hard to dig out of a hole like that against that team. They’re just too deep, too good. They were President’s Trophy winners for a reason. We couldn’t do it, bottom line. We tried. We worked. I liked everything that we were trying to do on the penalty kill, right through the 5-on-5 in the third period. We did a real good job with intensity and compete. I thought we were carrying the play in the third period, trying hard to get back into it. You get close, but it’s too hard to turn the tables sometimes."

(on facing the early 5-on-3 penalty…)

MURRAY: “Have you guys looked at the replay? No? Well, do that.”

(on the lack of scoring from the third and fourth lines…)

MURRAY: "I liked our fourth line here tonight, with Fraser. That was his first game with the L.A. Kings, and not only did he play a pretty determined game, he made a couple plays there in the third period that gave us a look, anyway. On Stoll’s line, that’s where it kind of got out of sync a little, with everything that was going on (with penalty kills). I thought Hunter played fine. Again, I thought he played a better dot-to-dot game than maybe any other game that he’s been in. He recovered some pucks, pulled them off the boards, big in front of the net. Clifford did his thing, he was gritty and strong. So that gives us some of the momentum. Would I like to see a few more goals scored there? Yeah, absolutely, and I think it will happen. Hunter’s got a resume that shows 15-18 goals a year. So, it’s there.”
Greene postgame quotes (Nov. 10)

Posted by Rich Hammond on 10 November 2011, 10:50 pm

Matt Greene’s postgame thoughts…

(on the lack of scoring this season…)

GREENE: "It’s just not going in for us right now, but I thought we had a lot of chances tonight, after the first (period). I thought we were there. (The Canucks) did a good job of bottling things up there in front of the net and eliminating second chances, but I think it’s there. I think we’re getting our chances and it’s going to come."

(on the early five-minute penalty kill…)

GREENE: "That’s tough. It’s tough getting a kill like that. That happens to every team, and it’s a tough stretch in the game but it’s going to happen and we’ve got to get those kills.….There was time to come back, I thought we responded well to it. We came out of the first down 3-0 and got it going, got the late goal to make it 3-2. We had life all game. It’s tough coming back after being down 3-0."

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Tonight's game is the first of four meetings between the Kings and Vancouver Canucks. The Kings went 2-2-0 against the Canucks last season, with two wins in the first week of the season followed by two losses in March. The Kings scored one regulation goal in three of those four games. This season, the Canucks are off a 7-7-1 start and haven't played since their 6-2 whitewashing of Chicago on Sunday. Injured defenseman Sami Salo is considered a game-time decision for Vancouver. For the latest on the Canucks, check out these stories from the Vancouver Province and Vancouver Sun, followed by tonight's expected lineups for the Kings and the Canucks' full roster...

Salo could light up Kings tilt Thursday night (Vancouver Province)
Canucks' Sami Salo makes comeback...again (Vancouver Sun)

KINGS LINEUP
Gagne-Kopitar-Williams
Penner-Richards-Brown
Clifford-Stoll-Hunter
Moreau-Fraser-Lewis
Mitchell-Doughty
Scuderi-Johnson
Martinez-Greene
Quick
Bernier

CANUCKS LINEUP
Daniel Sedin-Henrik Sedin-Jannik Hansen
Chris Higgins-Ryan Kesler-David Booth
Andrew Ebbett-Manny Malhotra-Cody Hodgson
Aaron Volpatti-Maxim Lapierre-Dale Weise
Dan Hamhuis-Kevin Bieksa
Alexander Edler-Aaron Rome
Andrew Alberts-Keith Ballard
Roberto Luongo
Cory Schneider

CANUCKS ROSTER
2 — Dan Hamhuis — D
3 — Kevin Bieksa — D
4 — Keith Ballard — D
6 — Sami Salo — D
7 — David Booth — LW
9 — Cody Hodgson — C
14 — Alexandre Burrows — LW
17 — Ryan Kesler — C
20 — Chris Higgins — LW
22 — Daniel Sedin — LW
23 — Alexander Edler — D
25 — Andrew Ebbett — C
27 — Manny Malhotra — C
29 — Aaron Rome — D
32 — Dale Weise — RW
33 — Henrik Sedin — C
36 — Jannik Hansen — RW
40 — Maxim Lapierre — C
41 — Andrew Alberts — D
52 — Alexander Sulzer — D
54 — Aaron Volpatti — LW

Injured-reserve list
13 — Steven Pinizzotto — RW
21 — Mason Raymond — LW

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Is the 1-3-1 good for hockey?

Posted by Rich Hammond on 10 November 2011, 5:00 pm

An odd, fascinating scene took place last night in Tampa, where the Lightning dropped into the 1-3-1 formation and the Philadelphia Flyers, rather than trying to attack the cluttered neutral zone, simply held the puck. It led to the hockey version of an Old West standoff, and eventually the officials blew the play dead and called for a faceoff. It has led to great debate, among hockey pundits, whether Tampa Bay’s system is good for the game and even whether it should be legislated. Terry Murray, certainly a fan of defense-first hockey himself, has regularly spoken over the past year about the neutral-zone clogging and the increased difficulty of getting the puck through the middle of the ice, so I asked him for his thoughts on last night’s incident...

MURRAY: ‘I was actually surprised that it hasn’t happened before, and actually I think it has. When I watched a game last year, Tampa Bay and Washington, it was at Tampa Bay and I saw the game. Washington had the puck and Tampa Bay was lined up with their first forward on the offensive blue line and just waited. It’s just part of the game that is there right now, because of teams having their way of attacking and other teams’ way of playing without the puck. There’s nothing illegal about it. I actually watched a video on the computer the other day, of a youth hockey game. There were five guys standing in the neutral zone, waiting for the young kids to come attack. They were like 11, 12 years old. The thing that we have to have some awareness to, in the NHL, is that there are people watching, players watching, coaches watching. Now we’re starting to see it filter down through all of hockey. Personally, I’m concerned about it.”

Question: Just because it makes the game less watchable?

MURRAY: ‘When it starts to trickle down to the youth hockey programs, then you’re concerned about development. How do you develop your skill? How do you learn to play the game? How do you learn to pass the puck under pressure situations and carry the puck? There’s just a whole gamut of things that come into play, with the process of young players now. That’s my concern. I’ve got nephews that play hockey in Canada. They’re young kids and they love to play the game. It’s a lot of fun. They just want to have a tennis match. Let’s go back and forth and chase the puck and have some fun.” So it’s a concern.”

Jim Fox asked whether it is an offshoot of the “torpedo” system that originated in Sweden, given that European teams have long played without the red line, something relatively new to the NHL...

MURRAY: ‘That goes back to European hockey, years ago. Maybe even decades. Having no red line will certainly encourage that look on the defensive-structure side of the game. That is exactly the way they played in Europe for many years, and I think now there’s a conversation about putting the red line back in in Europe, so that the game becomes more of a flow game again.”

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Murray 'can't really speculate' on Parse

Posted by Rich Hammond on 10 November 2011, 4:00 pm

Scott Parse will miss tonight's game because of his "lower-body injury," and at this point there's no timetable for his return. Parse is on injured reserve, so his soonest possible return date would be next Thursday at Anaheim, meaning he will miss at least three games. Terry Murray didn't have much in terms of an update on Parse.

MURRAY: "It's not day-to-day. He's on the I.R. so he's out for seven days for sure. You evaluate it after that time, so I can't really speculate too far beyond that. We'll see how it is and just go from there.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Can Trent Hunter give the Kings what they're searching for, in terms of secondary scoring? Hunter, signed to a one-year contract after he came to training camp as a non-roster player, has proven to be a former capable of scoring 12-20 goals in the post-lockout NHL. He had one goal in 17 games with the New York Islanders last season, before a serious knee injury, but had been a double-digit scorer in every full season before that. Hunter has zero goals and one assist in five games this season, and will be returning to the lineup after a five-game absence as a healthy scratch…

HUNTER: “I think part of it, when you are sitting out, is that you do have to focus a little bit more. When you do get that call, you want to be as mentally and physically ready as you can be. I think I’ve done a good job of staying ready, and I’m definitely ready to get back in and contribute as much as possible tonight.”

Question: This line, with Clifford and Stoll, it’s two guys who can play in their own end but also score a little bit, right?

HUNTER: “Absolutely. You get Cliffy in there to crash and bang, and he’s got a great shot too. They’re both offensive guys, and Stolly creates a lot. Regardless of who you’re playing with, you always want to be good in your own end. You take care of your own end, and then the other end will hopefully take care of itself.”

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Penalties costly as Wild's five-game win streak ends

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO, Star Tribune
Updated: November 11, 2011 - 12:57 AM

SAN JOSE, CALIF. - It's one thing to march to the penalty box in Calgary.
The Flames have the NHL's worst power play on home ice.
It's another thing to march to the penalty box in San Jose, where the Sharks
boast the NHL's best power play at home.
The Wild was able to survive its fascination with the sin bin Tuesday against
the Flames, but it played with fire again Thursday night and got burned
because of it as the Sharks extinguished the Wild's five-game win streak
with a 3-1 victory.

Patrick Marleau scored two power-play goals, one of which was assisted by
former Wild defenseman Brent Burns. The Wild, which could have taken
the top spot in the Northwest Division with a victory, spoiled Antti Niemi's
shutout bid on Kyle Brodziak's goal with 6 minutes, 27 seconds left.

"It's definitely not part of the game plan," Brodziak said of playing
shorthanded. "We've got to stop [taking penalties]."

The Wild, 1-8-1 in its past 10 visits to HP Pavilion, played the third period
without Guillaume Latendresse. The first-line forward, who entered the
game on a three-game goal streak, wasn't skating well in the first two
periods. Coach Mike Yeo did not have an immediate update on
Latendresse's condition after the game.

Latendresse did miss a game at Vancouver on Oct. 22 with a sore groin.
Nick Johnson moved up to the first line in his place.

The Wild killed off seven power plays in Calgary. Thursday, it took three
 minors in the first 8:19 and gave San Jose five power plays in the game.

When the Wild stayed out of the box, it was fine. It entered the game having
allowed 1.79 goals per game and 16 at even-strength, and the Wild gave up
little at 5-on-5 to the high-octane Sharks -- the NHL's sixth-best offensive
team -- in the first period especially.

The Sharks, 8-1-1 in their past 10, went a 15-minute stretch at one point
with only one shot on goal. The Sharks' best chance came on a power play
when Burns set up Joe Thornton with Niklas Backstrom on the other side of
the net.

But a lunging Nate Prosser saved the sure goal with a good stick.

In the second, however, things started poorly after defenseman Justin Falk
got beat, resulting in a Pierre-Marc Bouchard hooking minor.

The Wild coughed up the first Marleau goal on an unforced error of sorts.
Backstrom tried to exchange a puck with Falk, and Falk fanned on the
collection. Marleau didn't, roofing it as Backstrom tried to recover.

Exactly 13 minutes later, Marleau made it 2-0 after Marco Scandella lost a
puck and was nailed for a questionable tripping penalty on Logan Couture.
Ryane Clowe set him up for the easy one-timer after Burns slid along the
blue line to draw the attention of the Wild penalty kill.

The Wild is 8-0 this season when not giving up a power-play goal, 0-4-3
when it gives up at least one. The Sharks are 9 for 25 on the power play in
the past five home games against the Wild.

Three minutes later, the Sharks extended their lead to 3-0 when Mitchell
one-timed Michal Handzus' faceoff win by Backstrom.

The three goals allowed in the second came after the Wild didn't allow one
in that period during the win streak.

It was the first matchup between the two teams since the summer trades
that included Burns and Martin Havlat going to San Jose and Devin
Setoguchi and Dany Heatley going to Minnesota.

Burns played a stellar all-around game.
Burns misses old teammates but not team

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO, Star Tribune
Updated: November 11, 2011 - 3:18 AM

SAN JOSE, CALIF. - Nick Schultz knew he made a mistake from the moment they shook hands.

There are certain people you don't make bets with. Brent Burns is one of them.

Late last season, the tattooed, self-described goofball walked into the Wild locker room, wondered why his defense partner had gone weeks without a haircut and talked him into a monetary wager: First one to cut his hair loses.

Fast-forward a month into this season: Burns’ address has changed. He now mans the blue line for the San Jose Sharks and faced his former team for the first time Thursday night.

But after months without a haircut, Burns looks like “Joe Dirt” and Schultz looks “like an absolute meathead,” Burns said.

That's why Schultz paid up Wednesday. Knowing Burns would keep the bet going until his hair was at his waist, Schultz has given up, plans to get a haircut "and move on to the next phase of my life."

"He finally got a mirror and looked in it," Burns said. "I've done worse for less [money]."

Wednesday night, Wild winger Cal Clutterbuck wanted to make a similar bet with Burns — longest to go without trimming his mustache.

Burns declined, saying, "You've got to know the guy, and he's crazier than I am."

Burns had a ball Wednesday night hanging with his old teammates. After spending his entire professional career in the Wild organization, Burns was caught by surprise June 24 when he was traded in the Devin Setoguchi package.

Burns created quite the firestorm Wednesday when he told reporters he hoped the Wild went "0-82. " The quote got tweeted, and some Wild fans reacted angrily by hammering Burns' personal Twitter account (@Burnz88).

"I should just go back to the old clichés all the time," Burns said.

Burns knew the Wild was 8-3-3 heading into Thursday's game, riding a five-game win streak. He knew the Wild was the NHL’s second-best team.

The Wild missed the playoffs during Burns’ last three years in Minnesota, and frankly, wasn't that good defensively — at times because of an overly exuberant Burns.

Burns is a competitor.

"It should be anybody," Burns said. "It doesn't matter if they work at Ford. They get fired from Ford, you think they're going to buy a Ford truck anymore? It's the same thing. I got traded. I've got a lot of friends there, it's great to see everybody, you want everybody to do well, but when a team gets rid of you, I think any normal person should have that competitive edge in you.

"You don't want them to do well without you and have people think it's because they got rid of you."

Burns has fallen in love with San Jose, which "has all the things I love," like Lake Tahoe and Napa being driving distance, surfing nearby and lots of areas to bike.

Even before playing a game, Burns signed a five-year, $28.8 million extension. He said it was an easy decision because of the reputation of the Sharks.

He remembered how well the Sharks treated former Wild defenseman Kurtis Foster when he broke his femur in San Jose, and he saw the class Doug Wilson had a week after the trade.

During a tour of HP Pavilion, the Sharks GM introduced Burns to Setoguchi, who was working out in the team gym — wearing Wild sweats.

"I thought that was really cool," Burns said.

Burns still misses Minnesota. He hasn't yet sold his home. He's having separation anxiety from his snakes and his dogs.

He said Wild players have raved about new coach Mike Yeo's communication, intensity and knowledge of the game. "The day before I got traded, I talked to [Yeo] on the phone for like two hours," Burns said, laughing. "My wife’s in the hospital because we just had our son. I got traded, and I'm like, 'Man, two hours I talked on the phone with him!'"

Burns is playing a safer game in San Jose, and juggling daddy duty.

"Those monsters are keeping me busy, that's for sure," Burns said. "It's so stressful babysitting. [My wife, Susan] gets mad. She says it's not babysitting when it's your kids. My daughter climbs on everything and is an accident waiting to happen. She just wants to hug baby brother all the time, and baby brother doesn't know what's going on."

Star Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Peters gains much as fill-in for Clutterbuck

Article by: MICHAEL RUSSO , Star Tribune
Updated: November 11, 2011 - 12:55 AM

SAN JOSE, CALIF. - Cal Clutterbuck returned to the Wild lineup Thursday night after missing one game because of an injury.

That meant Warren Peters was the choice to be scratched after playing in Tuesday's win at Calgary.

But that one game was enough of an eye-opener for Peters to know that if the Wild ever gets in a pinch, he has got the faith of coach Mike Yeo that he can more than just play, but actually contribute.

A minor league journeyman who is one of the key veteran cogs of the Houston Aeros, Peters has learned during past NHL call-up experiences that it's typically to eat up minutes.

But Tuesday against the Flames, Yeo, who coached Peters last year, gave Peters a significant role on the penalty kill. Almost six of his 10-plus minutes came shorthanded -- unheard of for Wild call-ups of years past.

"I know what he's going to do when he goes on the ice," Yeo said. "I know how he's going to play the game. I know how his battle level's going to be. I know he's going to go to hard areas and make hard plays, and I know he's going to play the system the right way.

"With that, it breeds a lot of confidence."

And that breeds confidence in Peters, 29.

"I know I can contribute, but you've got to have a coach who believes you can play at this level," Peters said. "It doesn't matter if you believe that yourself. You've got to get that chance, too. It's exciting to contribute."

Sheppard recovering

Former Wild first-round pick James Sheppard, now with the Sharks, said it felt like a "grenade" in July when he learned he needed knee surgery all over again. He missed all of his final season with the Wild due to a broken kneecap.

"I knew I wasn't 100 percent. And when you're in this league, you have to be 100 percent, especially with the role I'm going to be doing," Sheppard said. "I can't play at 75 percent. I didn't feel right."

He is skating on his own but still sounds a long way from playing.

"We really look forward to the day where not necessarily he can play, but he can get out there and fully become part of the team," Sharks coach Todd McLellan said.

Etc.

• Mikko Koivu, Dany Heatley and Marek Zidlicky are the three Wild players on this year's NHL All-Star ballot. Polls open Nov. 14 on nhl.com and close Jan. 4. The top three vote-getting forwards, two defensemen and one goalie will be selected to the All-Star Game in Ottawa, while the rest of the teams are selected by the NHL in consultation with each team's GM.

• Wild defenseman Clayton Stoner missed his sixth game because of a finger injury. "He's still not feeling 100 percent, and he's getting frustrated with that," Yeo said. "I know his legs are there and it's just a matter of letting things heal up."

• Yeo said rookie defenseman Justin Falk has set the bar "awfully high" with his play since Greg Zanon was injured. "I often joke that guys made a mistake because now we expect that of him all the time. I know he's capable of this game," Yeo said.

• McLellan raved about 24-year-old San Jose defenseman Justin Braun, who hails from the Twin Cities. "He's forced some players out of the lineup because of his good play," McLellan said. "He feels like he fits in now and should be playing. Last year he hoped he should play."

Star Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Sharks 3, Wild 1: Game recap

Updated: November 11, 2011 - 12:54 AM

STAR TRIBUNE'S THREE STARS
1. Patrick Marleau, San Jose: Two power-play goals in the second for the longtime Sharks star.
2. Antti Niemi, San Jose: Made 21 saves on 22 shots.
3. Brent Burns, San Jose: Strong defensively and also had an assist in his first game against his former team.

By THE NUMBERS
27 Consecutive successful penalty kills for the Wild until Marleau's first goal.
0-4-3 The Wild's record when surrendering a power-play goal, compared to 8-0 when it doesn't.
33 Saves by Wild goalie Niklas Backstrom, in net for the second consecutive game.

MICHAEL RUSSO
Star Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Former Shark Devin Setoguchi gets a warm welcome in San Jose

By Bruce Brothers
bbrothers@pioneerpress.com
Updated: 11/11/2011 12:17:17 AM CST

SAN JOSE, Calif. - The competitive element brought the Wild and San Jose Sharks together for two blockbuster trades over the summer.

The human element, however, was not lost.

Devin Setoguchi, who was dealt to Minnesota in a deal that brought Brent Burns to the Sharks, went to St. Paul to pick up some Wild gear, then returned to San Jose and resumed his typical summer workout regimen with Sharks strength and conditioning coach Mike Potenza at the team's training facility.

About a week after the trade, Burns arrived in San Jose to search for a home and to tour the team's facilities with general manager Doug Wilson.

He ran into Setoguchi.

"It was a little weird when Burnsie came walking through the double doors and I was standing there, working out," Setoguchi said.

"He's got Wild gear, working out in the Sharks' gym," Burns recalled. "Doug Wilson gave me a tour of the rink, and he said, 'Oh, I think you know Seto.' I thought that was just really cool.

"I had just never seen that before. When you get traded, you never know, everybody is so nice and you never know if it's because you got traded. You see that, it just shows that that's the way it is."

Setoguchi called Wild general manager Chuck Fletcher and coach Mike Yeo along with Wilson before he set foot back into the Sharks' building.

No one objected, least of all Potenza.

"I'm still his friend," Setoguchi said. "He wants to help me get better no matter what, even if I'm on a different team."

All this comes as no surprise to Sharks coach Todd McLellan.

"My experience with this organization throughout the four years is that right from ownership through management we care; we care about people," McLellan said. "We care about individual players. They're not just contracts that are moved on."

"Players have gone and come back to our organization in the past, and we feel a responsibility to help the human being develop from there on. So there was no reason not to treat Seto with a ton of class and allow him to become a better person and player."

Cutting comments: Burns and Wild defenseman Nick Schultz had a friendly wager of more than eight months to see who could go longest without getting a haircut, but Schultz conceded this week.

"He cheated," Burns said. "We weren't supposed to do anything - no cutting, nothing. And he was trimming, which is cheating."

Schultz said he got the consolation prize, however.

"I love that he had to come to a new team looking like that, a fool with some gross hair," Schultz said of his former defensive partner. "Now he's got a mustache that's even worse."

Briefly: Winger Cal Clutterbuck, who missed one game because of an upper-body injury, returned to the lineup Thursday night, and forward Warren Peters was a healthy scratch.

-- Forward Guillaume Latendresse missed the third period with an undisclosed problem.

Pioneer Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Former Wild defensemen Brent Burns feeling right at home with Sharks

By Bruce Brothers
bbrothers@pioneerpress.com
Updated: 11/11/2011 12:09:09 AM CST

SAN JOSE, Calif. - Brent Burns did not take long to become accustomed to California.

He took up surfing.

"During the summer we go surfing in the morning, go biking and then work out," he said. "All the things that I love and that I loved about Minnesota; it's a huge biking community here, which is one of my passions."

The former Wild defensemen is now a regular for the San Jose Sharks after a summer trade between the teams, and he picked up a second-period assist as San Jose beat Minnesota 3-1 Thursday night at HP Pavilion, ending the Wild's five-game winning streak.

Burns' assist gave the 26-year-old former all-star three goals and three assists in 14 games.

Burns had barely moved his family into an apartment in San Jose over the summer before he took his road bicycle out for a little ride.

He had spotted some hills nearby, so when he came to an intersection, he turned in that direction. Soon, he recalled, he was panting and sweating and 6-1/2 miles into an uphill grind with one switchback after another. His body was begging him to stop, but he refused to until he got to the top.

When he did, his odometer said he had gone 8.5 miles, the last seven-plus uphill.

"It took me 54 minutes to get up there," he said, "and 12 minutes to get back down."

Although he remains a neophyte on the surfboard, Burns is adapting to San Jose. Although he'll miss the snow of a Minnesota winter, he noted, there are benefits. For one, when his wife, Susan, wants to take 19-month-old Peyton and 5-month-old Jagger to the park, she doesn't have to bundle them up.

Burns misses his dozens of snakes, which are still back at his old place in the Twin Cities, and the family also had to leave its dogs behind. But the Sharks have some outstanding defensemen in Dan Boyle and Marc-Eduoard Vlasic for him to emulate, and the team has been winning - Friday's victory gave the Sharks a 9-4-1 record.

The Wild (8-4-3) have been winning, too, and Burns seemed pleased about that.

"I think the trade worked out well for both teams," he said.

Burns was hurt that his comments of the day before became a controversial topic in the Twitter universe and were quoted out of context.

But his former teammates understood. Burns and his family joined about 10 former teammates for dinner Wednesday night, and not a single one brought up his tongue-in-cheek observation that he hoped the Wild would go 0-82.

"When a team gets rid of you," he explained, "I think any normal person should have that competitive edge. You don't want them to do well without you and have people think it was because they got rid of you."

Good friends such as Nick Schultz, Pierre-Marc Bouchard, Mikko Koivu and others have spent their whole careers with one team, Burns pointed out, a group that included him before the June 24 deal that brought him to San Jose. He called it weird to get traded. Not only did he leave his pets and his favorite restaurants behind, but also friends in and outside the Wild organization.

On the other hand, the Sharks have made him feel at home.

"It's been an easy transition," he said, "but it's still a transition. It's still a shock."

Despite his jabs of the day before, Burns on Thursday offered nothing but good words about his former team and its coach, Mike Yeo.

"They're a great team," he said. "I think with the changes, they made great changes. I've heard great things about Yeo. Obviously, they're playing really well."

Burns said he had a long phone conversation with Yeo two days before he was traded and called the coach an excellent communicator who brings intensity to the job.

He compares Yeo to McLellan.

"He's got that thing where you instantly respect him, and you're terrified of him," Burns explained, "and yet you know he's there for you if you need him. I've heard that about Yeo, too."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Montreal Canadiens: Josh Gorges scores overtime winner against Coyotes

By Pat Hickey, The Gazette November 11, 2011

GLENDALE, Ariz. - Josh Gorges scored at 1:45 of overtime to give the Canadiens a 3-2 victory over the Phoenix Coyotes Thursday night. The Coyotes’ Raffi Torres sent the game into overtime when he scored on a rebound at 5:50 of the third period. Mikkel Boedker opened the scoring for the Coyotes in the first period, but the Canadiens took the lead on second-period goals by Brian Gionta and Travis Moen.

The captain’s on a roll: Gionta scored his fourth goal of the season and his cross-ice pass set up Moen for his goal. Gionta, who played through an injury over the first three weeks of the season, has three goals and three assists in the last six games. His goal showed his determination as he took the puck off Boyd Gordon’s stick behind the Phoenix net and then beat Mike Smith on a wraparound.

Price goes wandering: Carey Price stopped 32 shots to boost his season record to 6-6-2, but his penchant for leaving the crease proved costly as the Coyotes took a 1-0 lead. Price went almost to the sideboards to corral a loose puck. He failed to clear the puck when he fired it behind the net to the other side of the ice. He managed to get back into the crease, but was beaten by Boedker.

Moen sets hot pace: Moen’s goal was his fifth this season and he’s on pace for a career season. The veteran, who scored six goals in 78 games last season, had a career-high 11 goals with Anaheim in 2006-07. That was the year he also scored seven playoff goals, including the Stanley Cup winner against Ottawa.

Injury scare: The Canadiens, who can’t afford to lose any more players, survived a scare when Tomas Plekanec went hard into the boards after contact with Oliver Ekman-Larsson in the first period. Plekanec lay on the ice for several minutes before he was helped to the dressing room. He returned in the second period and collected an assist on Moen’s goal.

VIP bobbleheads: The above average crowd of 14,138 at Jobing.com Arena included a large number of U.S. armed forces personnel and one special veteran as the team commemorated Veterans’ Day. The VIP was John McCain, the U.S. Senator from Arizona and former presidential candidate. McCain, who was a highly decorated Navy pilot in the Vietnam War, was interviewed after the first period and the team handed out John McCain bobblehead dolls.

What’s next: The Canadiens had a practice scheduled for Friday morning in Phoenix before flying to Nashville where they will meet the Predators Saturday night (7 p.m., CBC, RDS, TSN Radio-990).

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
The poster boy for overachievement was an undrafted free agent coming out of junior and an unknown when the Canadiens got him from San Jose in the Craig Rivet trade. That might have been Bob Gainey’s best deal.

Trading with Sharks’ general manager Doug Wilson, the brother of one of his best friends, Gainey got the first-round draft choice the Canadiens used to select Max Pacioretty in 2007. Gorges showed up at training camp and impressed with his hockey smarts and spirit. Both qualities were n display for the sequence that led to the winning goal in Phoenix.

Gorges got clobbered behind the Canadiens net by a taller, heavier Phoenix forward.

He picked himself up, dusted himself off, moved up ice and converted a nifty Lars Eller play into the goal that got the undermanned Canadiens two valuable points.

Gorges hadn’t scored since Oct. 15 last year. That one was a winner, too – 2-1 over Buffalo.

Then came a season cut short by knee injury, a summer of rehab and a one-year contract to prove his value to the team … again.

Many of the things Gorges brings to the Canadiens don’t show up on the scoresheet.

He’s one of the leaders in the room – and a valued source of good quotes for the media.

He’s Carey Price’s best friend on the team, and that was important two seasons ago when The Franchise was going through tough times.

Gorges is also a steady defence partner, and the latest beneficiary is P.K. Subban. Last season’s rookie sensation did not have a great October, but P.K. is playing smarter and more controlled since Gorges became his partner.

Subban and his teammates need a good November.

The win kept the Canadiens within four points of eighth place in the Eastern Conference, but the schedule is about to become brutal.

Starting Saturday night in Nashville, the Canadiens play nine games in 15 days.

Five are at the Bell Centre. The Canadiens are 2-4-2 on home ice this season, but the advantage is a short ambulance ride to the Montreal General Hospital.

Interviewed at morning skate in Phoenix, Jaro Spacek said the team has had a healthy lineup for maybe 10 of the games in the two-plus seasons he’s played for the Canadiens.

The team that escaped the desert with two points was missing Andrei Markov, Scott Gomez, Andrei Kostitsyn, Mike Cammalleri and Chris Campoli.

Maybe we’ll see them all in the lineup at some point this season.

But I’m not holding my breath … like all of us were when Tomas Plekanec slammed into the boards and lay on the ice for a scary long time during the first period.

The whole season looked to be in the balance until Pleks came back to assist on the Canadiens’ two regulation-time goals.

The team has two irreplaceable players: Plekanec and Carey Price.

One of them will be waking up sore on Friday, while the other savors a very solid effort, highlighted by the 17 saves Price made in the second period.
Canadiens down Coyotes on Gorges’ OT winner

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Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Canadiens will try to break their two game losing streak against the Coyotes in Glendale, AZ on Thursday. Winners of four out of their last five, the 'Yotes' are coming off an impressive 4-2 win last Saturday against the Oilers, who just beat Montreal on Tuesday night.

At 7-4-2, they are mid-pack in the West, sitting in seventh. They have scored 38 goals on the season, three more than the Habs, and allowed 36, three less than Montreal. The key stat for them so far has been scoring first. When they do, the Coyotes are 6-0-2. And they know how to hold a third period lead. They have not lost in seven games in which they led going into the final 20 minutes.

They have an average power play (8-for-46, 17.4 percent, 15th in the league), but they are well above average on the penalty kill (42-for-48, 87.5 percent, 8th in the league). The real story is this: They gave up three power play goals in the first four opportunities to San Jose in the season opener and since then have killed 41 of their last 44 penalties, which is 93.2 percent. If you throw out those first four attempts, they'd be tied with the Penguins for the NHL’s top PK percentage.

Lauri Korpikoski, Boyd Gordon, Radim Vrbata and (when he’s healthy) Martin Hanzal have been their top penalty killing forwards.

Dave Tippett’s team doesn’t waver much in their approach. They play a structured, defensively sound game, have a good amount of speed and, without a superstar scorer, have usually gotten it done with a balanced attack and making the most of their opportunities.

“Well got the puck on net early; we got it behind them early,” defenseman Adrian Aucoin said after beating the Oilers. “It was a textbook Dave Tippett game. He implements such an easy game for us to play. We don’t have the big names or the superstars, but we find ways because of our system and the way he demands that we play.”

Without much fanfare and with a limited budget (since the club is still owned by the league), GM Don Maloney had numerous holes to fill on his roster this summer and has done an admirable job. His most interesting free agent pick-up could be goalie Mike Smith, who looked done at times when he played for the Lightning last season and was briefly sent in the AHL. But he’s benefited from working with goalie coach Sean Burke and he’s 6-2-2 on the season, allowing two goals or less in six of his first 10 starts. His GAA dropped to 2.36 after Saturday’s win and his save percentage is .926.

In Keith Yandle and Derek Morris, they have a tandem that moves the puck extremely well, Yandle becoming a star last season thanks to his explosive skating and offensive instincts.

Tippett has put together an effective shutdown tandem with veteran Rusty Klesla and David Schlemko, who was trying to break into the top six when veteran Michal Rozsival suffered a concussion in the season opener. Rozival has just started skating again this week. Schlemko leads the team with a plus-9. Klesla is plus-7.

Thirty-nine year old Ray Whitney, now in his 19th season, leads the Coyotes in scoring with six goals and 14 points in 13 games, hoping to avoid another banged up season. He had his third multi-point game of the season against Edmonton, been playing on a line with Radim Vrbata recently and Gordon, one of four centres who Maloney acquired since last season. The other centres are Daymond Langkow, Cal O’Reilly and former Hab Kyle Chipchura, who began the campaign in the AHL.

Gordon may be bumped off that trio and down to the third line in favor of Hanzal, who seems set to return from a lower body injury on Thursday. That would likely set off a chain reaction that could land Chipchura back in Portland, Maine, where he spent most of the season so far, rather than play against his old team. He had recently been on a fourth line with rugged Raffi Torres and Patrick O’Sullivan.

Here’s how they lined up against the Oilers, and if Hanzal returns, he’ll skate with Whitney and Vrbata, with Gordon and O’Reilly likely each moving down a notch and Chipchura out of the picture.
Coyotes need room to roam

By PAT HICKEY, The Gazette November 11, 2011 2:08 AM

The sky is G so blue above the Arizona desert that it has often been substituted in postcards for the sky over, say, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh or even sunny Florida.

But the future of hockey in the Valley of the Sun remains as cloudy as ever.

Depending on your point of view, Jobing.com Arena was half-full or half-empty Thursday night when the Canadiens faced the hometown Phoenix Coyotes. (Geographical disclaimer: The arena is a half-hour drive from downtown Phoenix).

The team has been owned by the National Hockey League for two full seasons. A parade of would-be buyers have kicked the tires, haggled over the price and faded into the picturesque sunset.

This summer brought news that two groups had been pre-approved by the National Hockey League. One is headed by Jerry Reinsdorf, a local resident who owns the Chicago Bulls and the Chicago White Sox. The frontman for the other group is Greg Jamison, who is the former president of the San Jose Sharks. When a local insider was asked about the progress of the sale, he shrugged his shoulders and replied: “Who knows.”

The most baffling aspect of the Coyotes situation is why the other 29 owners in the league haven't pushed commissioner Gary Bettman to resolve the mess here by allowing someone to buy the team and move it. The current situation was created when Bettman vetoed Jim Balsillie's bid to buy the team from Jerry Moyes and move it to southern Ontario. Since then, Bettman has made it his personal crusade to keep the team in this market.

While it may be admirable to say the NHL doesn't want to abandon the loyal fans here, there's every indication the fan base simply isn't large enough to support an NHL team. The uncertainty over the team's future doesn't encourage fans to invest themselves emotionally and the local economy is in the Dumpster, but attendance has steadily declined since the end of the lockout.

In the first season after the work stoppage, the Coyotes drew an average of 15,582 fans. In the first year under league ownership, the average had dropped to 11,989 and the average last season was 11,285.

The decline flew in the face of Bettman's long-held assertion the best cure for low attendance in the league's non-traditional markets is a winning team. The Coyotes, under the leadership of general manager Don Maloney and head coach Dave Tippett, have defied the odds and have made the playoffs in each of the past two seasons with one of the NHL's lowest payrolls.

At the end of September, the team announced season-ticket renewals were at an all-time high and that ticket sales generally were up. Heading into Thursday's game, the Coyotes were averaging 10,023 fans. Only the Dallas Stars, with an average of 10,001 fans, were drawing less.

And there's another fact that should concern the 29 other owners - the Coyotes don't have any better success drawing fans on the road. The average turnout for a Coyotes road game is a league-low 13,272.

The Coyotes have become an endangered species and it's time for the NHL to find them a more hospitable habitat.
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The Coyotes have become an endangered species and it’s time for the NHL to find them a more hospitable habitat.

Montreal Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
Needed move turns to beneficial one for Predators

Written by
Josh Cooper | The Tennessean

The decision to put rookie Craig Smith at center against the Ducks didn’t involve much thought for Predators Coach Barry Trotz.

With a roster depleted up the middle, Smith was his only option for the finale of a five-game road trip.

“It was out of necessity,” the coach quasi-deadpanned following Nashville’s 4-2 win at Anaheim late Wednesday.

The reasoning to put Smith at center on that line was simply logical after David Legwand suffered an upper-body injury against the Kings on Tuesday.

Smith had played the position at times while Mike Fisher rehabbed, first from offseason shoulder surgery and then a concussion, but Trotz could have never predicted the proficiency of Smith or his line against the deep Ducks.

The trio of Smith, Colin Wilson and Patric Hornqvist combined for eight points and scored three goals in the victory.

If it was Wilson (age 22) and Hornqvist (24) keeping the 31-year-old Legwand young before his injury, the 22-year-old Smith boosted the trio’s youthful exuberance by a few notches.

“He likes to shoot the puck, but at the same time, he gets open in front,” Wilson said. “I think it’s a great combination. We all went hard on the forecheck and developed some turnovers too.”

Smith’s shoot-first mentality bodes well for the line. He is tied for the team lead with 45 shots on goal. Hornqvist ranks third with 39.

Though Wilson technically plays the wing on the line, his center-like passing vision helped create opportunities for Smith and Hornqvist.

Against the Ducks, Wilson found Smith coming off a cycle in front of goaltender Jonas Hiller for a goal to make it 4-2 early in the third period.

Wilson and Hornqvist played well, Smith said.

“They were playing well with themselves. I was trying to fill in the gap with Legwand out,” Smith said. “They were making a lot of plays out there. They were making it easy for me to get open. Everything was kind of clicking.”

All-star balloting: The NHL released its All-Star ballot on Thursday. It includes three Predators — defensemen Shea Weber and Ryan Suter, and goaltender Pekka Rinne.

Weber ranked third in defenseman plus/minus (plus-10) going into Thursday’s games, while Suter ranked fifth (plus-7). Rinne has a .929 save percentage and 2.30 goals against average.

Fans can vote online at nhl.com.

Day off: The Predators did not practice Thursday, but are scheduled to be on the ice at Centennial Sportsplex today at 11 a.m.

Tennessean LOADED: 11.11.2011
Rookie Craig Smith notched his third multi-point game of the season, and Martin Erat recorded the seventh goal on a penalty shot in franchise history in a 4-2 victory over the Anaheim Ducks on Wednesday in Anaheim.

Erat made it 3-1 after he was hooked on a breakaway during a penalty kill at 12:48 of the second period. Vernon Fiddler was the last Nashville player to convert a penalty shot back on Nov. 16, 2008, at Calgary.

Smith scored twice raising his season total to seven goals, tied with Patric Hornqvist for the team lead.

Having spent most of the season on the wing, Smith played center in place of David Legwand, the Predators’ leading scorer, who was sidelined by an upper body injury he sustained a night earlier in a victory at Los Angeles. He also had an assist on Colin Wilson’s goal, which made it 2-0 4:54 into the contest.

Originally, that second goal was credited to Hornqvist, which would have given him a franchise record of at least one goal in seven straight games. Instead, that streak ended with him tied with J-P Dumont and Alexander Radulov, both of whom did it during the 2007-08 season.

Hornqvist did have three assists, which matched his career high.

The game was the last of five straight on the road. Nashville was 3-1-1 during that stretch.

The Predators host Montreal on Saturday (6 p.m., Bridgestone Arena) in the 1,000th regular season game in franchise history. It also is the first of five straight at home, where the team has won just twice in five tries this season.

Nashville City Paper LOADED: 11.11.2011
Devils' Ilya Kovalchuk still a game-time decision, coach Pete DeBoer says

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger

The plan, as Devils coach Pete DeBoer explained it Wednesday, was for injured winger Ilya Kovalchuk to skate with the team at practice today, after missing the two previous games with a lower-body injury.

But the plan changed, apparently, as Kovalchuk, who is believed to be suffering from a groin strain, skated on his own before practice rather than working with the rest of the full team.

"As I said yesterday, it’s day to day and, unlike a broken bone, when there’s a definite time line on it, it really is, we show up, see how it feels and make a decision," DeBoer said after practice. "He’s feeling good about it, but we’re going to retain the right to daily make a decision on him. So that doesn’t mean he won’t play (tonight, against the Washington Capitals at Prudential Center) and it doesn’t mean that he will. I’m going to see how he is in the morning, and we’ll make a decision then."

Kovalchuk last played in the shootout win over the Flyers in Philadelphia last Thursday, but he apparently suffered the injury late in the third period and did not take part in the overtime or the shootout.

He missed last Saturday’s game against Winnipeg and missed Monday’s practice but took part in the morning skate Tuesday before the game against Carolina. However, he did not play in that game. DeBoer said the coaches considered playing Kovalchuk on Tuesday but decided against it.

Though DeBoer said Kovalchuk hasn’t been ruled out for Friday night’s game, it is the front end of a back-to-back, home-and-home with the Capitals, continuing Saturday in Washington.

So it would seem unlikely the Devils would take a chance on bringing Kovalchuk back on the front end of a back-to-back unless the team is absolutely convinced he is fully healthy.

Meanwhile, without Kovalchuk today, DeBoer shuffled his lines somewhat, moving David Clarkson down to a third line with Mattias Tedenby and Ryan Carter and moving Nick Palmieri up to play with red-hot Adam Henrique and Zach Parise.

Asked if he hoped to get Palmieri — who has just one goal and three assists in 13 games — going by putting him with Parise and Henrique, DeBoer said that’s kind of the idea.

"You hope so," the coach said. "(Palmieri) had a real good opportunity early in the year to play with some good players — I think he started with Kovalchuk and his line, and kind of worked his way down from there, and, like Henrique, is hopefully working his way back up into a key role."

"Obviously, they’ve been doing well, so it’s my job to make sure I don’t get in the way of that," Palmieri said about his new assignment. "I feel like I’ve been playing well the last couple games, so I guess I’m getting an opportunity to play with two guys that have been? really playing well. And I’ve got to make most of this opportunity."

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.11.2011
Devils hope promotion will get Nick Palmieri going

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger

Devils coach Pete DeBoer was asked if he hoped that putting Nick Palmieri on a line with the red-hot Adam Henrique and Zach Parise might help get the struggling Palmieri (one goal, four points, minus-4 in 13 games) going.

"You hope so," DeBoer said. "He had a real good opportunity early in the year to play with some good players — I think he started with (Ilya) Kovalchuk and his line, and kind of worked his way down from there, and, like Henrique, is hopefully working his way back up into a key role."

DeBoer said Palmieri had strayed from his game at some point early on, which is why he was taken off the Kovalchuk line in the first place. But the coach said Palmieri had gotten back to his game in recent weeks, and Palmieri agreed.

"I think I kind of simplified my game," Palmieri said. "Obviously, I’d like to be producing a little bit more still, but the chances are there. The last couple games I’ve been getting good chances — I’ve been getting a lot of shots at the net, so I think that if I just continue doing what I’ve been doing, it’s bound to come sooner or later. And I think playing with those two guys is only going to help."

Palmieri said his game consists of getting the puck deep; playing physically to create room for his linemates, and shooting the puck when he gets the opportunity. He said he has managed to keep his confidence up by looking past his meager statistics.

"I try and look more at the overall game than just the numbers aspect," he said. "I feel like I’ve been creating chances and creating offensive opportunities and playing well enough to score. They just haven’t been going in. I mean, that happens. Everyone goes through a stretch one time or another where the puck’s just not finding the back of the net. I’m not different than anyone else; I just think that as long as I can stick with it and not concern myself too much with numbers, I think I’ll be fine. I’m not overly worried about my lack of production as of right now."

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.11.2011
New Jersey Devils

Ilya Kovalchuk's status remains 'day-to-day' for Devils

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger

Devils coach Pete DeBoer said injured winger Ilya Kovalchuk did "go on the ice a little bit" before practice today, but DeBoer said the fact Kovalchuk did not practice with the team does not mean he will not play Friday when the Devils host the Washington Capitals at Prudential Center in the front end of a home-and-home set.

"As I said yesterday, it's day-to-day, and, unlike a broken bone — when there's a definite timeline on it — if really is, we show up, see how it feels, and make a decision," DeBoer said of Kovalchuk, who has missed the last two games with a lower body injury, believed to be a strained groin. "He's feeling good about it, but we're going to retain the right to daily make a decision on him. So that doesn't mean he won't play tomorrow; and it doesn't mean that he will. I'm going to see how he is in the morning and we'll make a decision then."

Kovalchuk was not available to reporters after practice. DeBoer said Kovalchuk may or may not take part in the morning skate Friday.

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DeBoer said he thought Nick Palmieri had a good game in the Devils' 3-2 win over the Carolina Hurricanes Tuesday, and he said he hopes putting him with two of the team's hottest players in Adam Henrique and Zach Parise would be a good idea.

"We're just moving some people around," DeBoer said. "I thought Nick had a real good game last game; I thought Clarkie (David Clarkson) has played some of his best hockey with (Mattias) Tedenby on his line, so, right now, I think the (Patrik) Elias line has consistently given us what we're looking for, and the other lines we're going to keep working at until we can feel the same kind of comfort level."

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Forward Eric Boulton did not practice, either. Boulton has been out since fracturing his hand his hand in a fight Oct. 21. He has missed eight games. .... DeBoer said the coaching staff is considering using both of their goalies in the home-and-home with Washington. Martin Brodeur has played the last two games, while Johan Hedberg has not played since Nov. 3 in Philadelphia.

Star Ledger LOADED: 11.11.2011
Devils practice: Ilya Kovalchuk still not practicing

By Colin Stephenson/The Star-Ledger

Good morning, folks, Colin here, filling in for Rich. Still no sign of Ilya Kovalchuk on the ice for Devils practice, and Eric Boulton (injured hand) isn't out there, either. We'll keep an eye on things and pass along information as soon as we get it, which will be after we talk to coach Pete DeBoer after practice.

In the meantime, here are the lines:

Sykora-Elias-Zubrus
Parise-Henrique-Palmieri
Tedenby-Carter-Clarkson
NEWARK – Physically, Zach Parise feels as good as he did before he hurt his knee.

The Devils captain feels he still needs to do more, however, to be the player he was before the injury.

With Ilya Kovalchuk still nursing a nagging leg muscle pull that might sideline him again for tonight’s game against the Washington Capitals, Parise believes "everyone has got to elevate their game" and that includes him.

"I think I can do more," he said Thursday. "I know I can do more. There’s no question I’m an offensive guy, and I want to put up some points. I expect myself to. But I know that they’re going to come."

Devils coach Pete DeBoer also believes Parise has another gear.

"I didn’t coach him last year, [but] from the opinions in the room, everybody thinks that he’s got another level to get to, and I don’t think he would argue with that," DeBoer said.

"He missed a year of hockey. It’s not a physical thing. It’s not a mental thing. And we’ve seen flashes and stretches of it where he’s been real good. … Just in talking to the people that have been around him for six or seven years, everybody feels that there’s another level there that he’s going to get to."

Parise’s numbers aren’t terrible. He’s second on the Devils with five goals and also has three assists in 13 games.

Still, the 27-year-old left wing led the team in goals for four consecutive seasons and points for three consecutive seasons before his 2010-11 campaign was cut short by Nov. 2 arthroscopic surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee. He missed all but one of the team’s final 70 games and then had to endure a long off-season.

Parise said he feels great "conditioning-wise" and "skating-wise." It’s more about getting back to playing with his instincts.

That his longtime center Travis Zajac is out with a torn left Achilles tendon hasn’t helped, but he believes he’s begun to forge some chemistry over the past three games with rookie center Adam Henrique. Parise has one goal and two assists over those three games while Henrique has four goals and an assist.

"The last three games I feel like things have been way more natural for me," Parise said. "I’m not forcing things, holding on to the puck more. The last three games mentally I’ve been in a better place. I feel better about my game. It’s hard. It’s hard missing a full season. You’re excited to get back and you just want to go 100 miles an hour on the ice.

"I think things are settling down more and it’s good finding some chemistry with Adam. You need things like that too when you’re coming back. You need help and I think I’m finding that right now with Adam."

BRIEFS: DeBoer said Wednesday "the plan" was for Kovalchuk to practice Thursday. He did not but did skate prior to practice. DeBoer said Kovalchuk "may" participate in the morning skate today and didn’t rule him out for playing tonight. … G Martin Brodeur will make his third consecutive start.
Brodeur starting to hit stride for Devils

By HOWARD KUSSOY

Last Updated: 8:31 AM, November 10, 2011

Posted: 3:38 AM, November 10, 2011

Martin Brodeur had played 1,135 games in his 19-year career. He wasn't going to worry about three.

After giving up three goals in a season-opening loss, the 39-year-old Devils goalie injured his right shoulder in his next game, missed nearly three weeks and then allowed five goals in his first game back.

Since then, the likely Hall of Famer has won two straight games, helping the Devils reach a season-high three-game win streak after wins over Winnipeg and Carolina.

"I come back, we lose 5-3 and it's like people think it's the end of the world," Brodeur told The Post after yesterday's practice. "I didn't play much yet. I felt good in the past two games. Who knows what the next game is going to bring? It could be a shutout or a blowout. You just got to roll with the punches and do as good as you can. Not because of who I am is everything going to come easy. You've got to work and make it happen."

Brodeur, who said he is still dealing with some shoulder pain, was praised by coach Pete DeBoer for his 25-save performance in Tuesday's 3-2 win over the Hurricanes.

"I thought he was outstanding," DeBoer said. "He really gave us an opportunity to get a win. It was 1-0 for Carolina and there were two or three opportunities to extend the lead to 2-0 where it could really deflate us, and he made some big saves at some key times."

One save he couldn't make was from teammate Adam Henrique, who mistakenly knocked the puck past Brodeur for a goal. The veteran offered encouragement to the rookie, who later scored the game-winning goal, embracing his role as leader.

"When I was younger I remember guys being around me and helping me out through some adversities," said Brodeur, referring to Ken Daneyko, Bruce Driver and Claude Lemieux, among others. "It's the simple things you do sometimes that people appreciate and it's really rewarding. You're at a different stage in your career and you enjoy different things. I was at that stage, people were around me to help me achieve certain things, so now it's my time to try and help."

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In advance of a home-and-home series with the Capitals, tomorrow in Newark and Saturday in Washington, DeBoer gave some of his "big minute guys" the day off from practice, including Ilya Kovalchuk, Zach Parise, Patrik Elias, Petr Sykora, Dainius Zubrus and Henrek Tallinder.

DeBoer said Kovalchuk, who has missed the past two games with a leg muscle injury, is scheduled to skate today.

"It's all day-to-day and monitoring the situation, but that's the plan," DeBoer said.

New York Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Ilya Kovalchuk did not take part in Devils practice Thursday but could play Friday against the Capitals at Prudential Center, NJ.com reports.

Kovalchuk has missed two games with a lower body injury believed to be a leg muscle pull.

"As I said yesterday, it’s day-to-day, and, unlike a broken bone -- when there’s a definite timeline on it -- it really is, we show up, see how it feels, and make a decision," coach Pete DeBoer said of Kovalchuk.

"He’s feeling good about it, but we’re going to retain the right to daily make a decision on him. So that doesn’t mean he won’t play tomorrow; and it doesn’t mean that he will. I’m going to see how he is in the morning and we’ll make a decision then."

The website reports Kovalchuk did skate before practice.

The Devils also play at Washington on Saturday.

New York Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
NY Islanders can't hold 3-0 lead, fall in overtime to Colorado Avalanche
Avalanche 4, Islanders 3

By The Associated Press
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Friday, November 11 2011, 12:54 AM

DENVER - Kyle Quincey scored a power-play goal 2:39 into overtime and Jean-Sebastien Giguere made 30 saves, helping the Colorado Avalanche rally from a three-goal deficit and beat the slumping Islanders, 4-3, on Thursday night.

With the Avalanche on the advantage following a high-sticking penalty against goalie Al Montoya, Quincey sent a shot in from near the blue line.

Josh Bailey, Brian Rolston and Michael Grabner scored for the Islanders, who led 3-0 until the final minute of the second period.

Then, the momentum shifted.

Paul Stastny, Milan Hejduk and Jan Hejda added goals for the Avalanche, who snapped a four-game losing streak.

Montoya was sensational, turning in one sprawling save after another. But he surrendered a goal to Stastny with 21 seconds left in the second on a 5-on-3 power play and another to Hejduk that trickled through his legs with nearly 14 minutes remaining in regulation.

Hejda tied it at 3 when his shot caught Montoya by surprise, sneaking into the net under Montoya's arm.

IN AND OUT

Evgeni Nabokov was scratched, as Rick DiPietro served as Montoya's backup.

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.11.2011
DENVER -- With a three-goal lead entering the final minute of the second period, the Islanders had this one, and they let it get away in ugly fashion.

Al Montoya made 47 saves, but he lost his cool after being run into once too often and high-sticked David Jones 1:53 into overtime for a penalty. Then Kyle Quincey scored on the power play 2:39 into OT, giving the Avalanche a 4-3 win. Jones originally was credited with the goal.

The Islanders took a 3-0 lead on Michael Grabner's fifth goal eight minutes into the second period, but the Avs rallied back to snap a four-game losing streak.

After Milan Hejduk's toss to the slot hit off Montoya's pad and slithered across the goal line 6:07 into the third to make it a 3-2 game, the Islanders looked as lost as the Avalanche had appeared for long stretches of the second.

Simple clears turned into turnovers. Forechecking wasn't there. And when Jan Hejda's shot from 40 feet on a rush ticked off Mike Mottau's stick and under Montoya's arm with 9:25 to go, the score was tied -- and Colorado kept coming.

The Islanders got a late power play when Daniel Winnik was called for goaltender interference, the third Avalanche penalty for running into or roughing up Montoya, but the Isles could not convert in regulation.

The Islanders made the home team look inept often in the second period, but there still were plenty of nervous moments as the horn sounded to end it.

An Isles power play was negated by Matt Moulson's inadvertent high stick with 1:27 left in the period and then, with a second to go before the Avalanche started a power play, Jay Pandolfo was called for holding in the neutral zone.

Paul Stastny converted a rebound on the two-man advantage with 20.7 seconds left in the second. Colorado pressed with a one-man power play and nearly pulled within a goal, but the horn mercifully sounded.

Before that, the Islanders seemed primed for a laugher. P.A. Parenteau beat a defenseman to a puck behind the Colorado net and fed Brian Rolston for a goal from the slot just 34 seconds into the second to give the Isles a 2-0 lead. After another couple of listless shifts from Colorado, coach Joe Sacco called timeout and veteran defenseman Shane O'Brien exhorted his teammates while Sacco remained silent.

Colorado had some more jump after that. Perhaps too much; the Avalanche defensemen were gambling, and the Isles capitalized on the counter-attack. Moulson came down on an odd-man rush and flipped a one-handed pass that Grabner chipped past J.S. Giguere for a 3-0 lead.

Near the end of that lone first-period power play, Josh Bailey won a draw and headed right for the front of the net, where he redirected Mark Streit's pass in for his first goal of the season.

By ARTHUR STAPLE  arthur.staple@newsday.com
Andrew MacDonald needs to boost offensive numbers

By ARTHUR STAPLE  arthur.staple@newsday.com

DENVER -- Andrew MacDonald hit a small milestone this week. He practiced two days in a row, the first time he's done that since he underwent arthroscopic hip surgery the first week of April.

That's not exactly huge news, especially given that he hasn't missed any of the Islanders' 13 games, including Thursday night's against the Avalanche.

MacDonald teams with Travis Hamonic to form the Islanders' only real matchup defense pair, sent out regularly against the opponent's top line. MacDonald still is working out some kinks in the burgeoning game he showed off last season.

"It can get frustrating at times, not being on the ice whenever I'd like," said MacDonald, who has missed days of practice throughout training camp and the regular season. "I wouldn't say it's been hampering me. It's more getting down the timing of things, being in game situations, and that might still be coming even if I practiced every day."

MacDonald's numbers haven't been pretty, much like the rest of the team. His minus-6 entering Thursday night's game was worst on the team and reflective of how much he's played -- his 22:29 of ice time per game is second only to Mark Streit.

He also has only one goal, a power-play tally in a 2-1 win over the Wild Oct. 10. The seven Islanders defensemen who have played this season have totaled only two goals and 13 assists, with a goal and seven of those assists coming from Streit.

"There's definitely opportunities to be that fourth man joining the rush, and it's invaluable if you can do it wave after wave with any of your D," said Mike Mottau, who returned to the lineup after sitting for five games.

MacDonald showed promising offense last season, going 4-23-27 in 60 games, tops in scoring among the Isles' numerous defensemen. After four pro seasons bouncing between Bridgeport and the Islanders, MacDonald seemed to find a home in the bigs and a partner in Hamonic, the physical teenager who played beyond his years.

As a go-to pair this season, there have been a few bumps. "When you play against top guys in this league, they're going to get chances. Travis and I talk about that a lot," MacDonald said. "It's been good, knowing I'll be with a certain guy every time out, even though that could change. We've got to work through it as a team."

Jack Capuano coached MacDonald in Bridgeport and with the Islanders, so he has no reservations about using him even without much practice time.

"Any time you come off a surgery like he had, it takes a little bit of game time to get back to where you were," Capuano said. "A-Mac's playing real well, even if the numbers don't show it."
In N.H.L., Disclosure of Concussions Is Lagging

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

GREENBURGH, N.Y. — Concussions continued to cast a long shadow over the N.H.L. on Thursday.

The Rangers said there was no update on the condition of defenseman Marc Staal, who has not played this season and is still recovering from a concussion sustained in February that the club did not disclose until September.

Pittsburgh’s Sidney Crosby, who has been sidelined by a concussion since early January, was cleared for contact a month ago and has practiced all week, including Wednesday, when he took several hard hits. Despite speculation that he would return for Friday’s home game against the Dallas Stars, Coach Dan Bylsma said Crosby would not play in either of the team’s games this weekend. That leaves Tuesday’s game against the Colorado Avalanche as the earliest possible return date for Crosby.

Toronto goalie James Reimer has not played since Oct. 22, when he sustained an injury that the Maple Leafs have characterized variously as whiplash, concussion-like symptoms and an upper-body injury.

The N.H.L. has earned praise this season for taking measures to reduce concussions, including introducing stronger rules against boarding and checks to the head, and strictly enforcing those rules through fines and suspensions. But questions persist about a league policy that allows teams to be vague about disclosure of injuries, and a recent incident suggested that in-game concussion protocols might be inconsistently applied.

Staal’s concussion is a topic of conversation once again because the player who caused the injury, his brother Eric of the Carolina Hurricanes, will face the Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Friday night. It is the first time the Hurricanes and the Rangers have played since the Rangers revealed that Marc had sustained a concussion when Eric caught him with his head down on a legal but thunderous body check Feb. 22 in Raleigh, N.C.

In an article on NHL.com on Monday, Eric said Marc still experienced headaches when he exerted himself physically, though on Tuesday he said he did not want to characterize Eric’s current symptoms.

After Thursday’s practice, Rangers Coach John Tortorella said there was no update on Marc Staal’s condition. He has not practiced with the Rangers since training camp.

The Rangers adhered to N.H.L. policy last season when they did not disclose that Staal had developed concussion symptoms after the hit. Staal also injured a knee on a separate hit in that game, and that was the reason given when he missed the next three games. He missed two more games in mid-March, an absence that the Rangers revealed in September to have been caused by postconcussion symptoms. During that time, Staal also did not say he had concussion symptoms.

Under the N.H.L.’s injury-disclosure policy, clubs may not lie about players’ injuries, but they are not obligated to volunteer specifics. “You guys didn’t ask, so I didn’t give you the information,” Tortorella said in September when asked why the Rangers did not disclose Staal’s concussion.

The N.H.L. players association and players say the policy is in place to preserve players’ privacy and to protect them from targeted hits that might aggravate injuries.

But the policy did not seem to have preserved Staal’s health; he continued to play with concussion symptoms without facing questions about the effects of doing so.

Dr. Paul S. Echlin, a concussion specialist and researcher from London, Ontario, who has conducted head-injury studies with junior teams, said he agreed with the impulse to preserve privacy. But he also said, “Leadership should come from all areas,” including professional clubs, when it comes to proper treatment of head injuries.

“When you’re dealing with a serious, life-altering thing like a brain injury, you don’t minimize it,” Echlin said. “It’s a player’s individual right not to disclose. But this not giving the full answer is a difficulty I have with it. If you’re going to go forward with concussion prevention, you have to be honest and open about it.”

Echlin pointed to apparent inconsistencies in the application of the in-game concussion protocol, which was announced with great fanfare last season. Under the protocol, players suspected of sustaining a concussion are to be taken to a quiet room for 10 to 15 minutes of evaluation before being allowed to return.

But in a game Oct. 29, after Artem Anisimov lay flat on the ice for a minute after being checked into the boards, he was not taken to a quiet room. Instead, he stayed on the bench with an ice pack on his neck and took his next shift.

Bill Daly, the N.H.L.’s deputy commissioner, said Thursday that the in-game protocol was being adhered to, and that the quiet room issue was “a team responsibility and decision.”

In an article in The Toronto Star on Thursday, Reimer’s mother said her son “still has that nagging headache” from the Oct. 22 collision with Montreal’s Brian Gionta.

“That’s the frustrating part for us — not knowing what it is, and why they’re not calling it a concussion when they say ‘concussion-like symptoms,’” Marlene Reimer said.

A week after the injury, Maple Leafs Coach Ron Wilson sounded a bit like Tortorella.

“I’m not going to share that with you, whatever it happens to be,” Wilson told The Globe and Mail. “I’m not obligated to do that.”

New York Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Rangers Surge Behind Gaborik’s New Line

By JEFF Z. KLEIN

Since Coach John Tortorella put center Derek Stepan between Artem Anisimov and Marian Gaborik for parts of the game against Montreal on Nov. 5, the line’s brilliant passing, puck-hawking and goal scoring have galvanized an otherwise spotty Rangers attack. In his third season in New York, Gaborik may finally have the linemates to lift him to the top of the scoring charts. Going into Friday’s home game against Carolina, the Rangers has won five straight. It’s early yet, and Tortorella shuffles lines constantly. But the Stepan-Anisimov-Gaborik troika is lighting the goal lamp like the Rangers’ Goal-a-Game (GAG) Line of Jean Ratelle, Vic Hadfield and Rod Gilbert did in the early ’70s.

New York Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Brandon Dubinsky’s efforts for NY Rangers this season have not been pointless. Forward trying to live up to big offseason deal

By Peter Botte

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Friday, November 11 2011, 12:46 AM

No one has to tell Brandon Dubinsky the numbers. Zero is an easy one to remember.

Dubinsky, who signed a $16.8 million contract after leading the Rangers in scoring last season, still is searching for his first goal.

While saying he’s making sure to concentrate on other aspects of his game, frustration clearly is building ente ring Friday’s match against Carolina at the Garden, the Rangers’ 15th of 82 this season.

“I’m only human. It’s been tough mentally a little bit not getting those points and to not contribute offensively on a consistent basis,” Dubinsky said after practice Thursday in Greenburgh. “Obviously, I feel the pressure and I understand I have to step up and contribute and be that guy.

“But I’ve got to continue focusing on the other parts of my game. For the most part, I’ve done that... It’s not like my game is completely in the toilet and I’m turning pucks over or on the ice for a lot of goals against. I just have to stay confident and believe in myself.”

With the Rangers (8-3-3) on a five-game winning streak after Wednesday’s victory in Ottawa, Dubinsky added that he “would definitely feel a lot worse if this team wasn’t winning hockey games right now.”

Dubinsky, who has six assists on the season, registered two shots and four hits in 17:35 of ice time Wednesday, spending a good chunk of the game dropped to left wing on the third line alongside Brian Boyle and Brandon Prust.

“When guys, and there’s a number of them, are fighting it offensively, they’ve got to do the other things. And that’s what I’ve liked about some of our players (Wednesday) night, in the third period especially,” John Tortorella said. “Eventually, Dubie and a few other guys will get consistent offensively, but they have to contribute in the other part of it. I thought there were a number of big defensive plays in the third period, Dubie included.”

DEFENSE MECHANISM

Tortorella offered no opinion on Anton Stralman’s first practice since his free-agent signing last weekend. The defenseman, who has been working out in Sweden since failing to make the Devils as a training-camp tryout, said no plans for an AHL conditioning stint have been discussed.

New York Daily News LOADED: 11.11.2011
OTTAWA -- The heart is no surprise, but the head of this Rangers team last night was surely the 21-year-old kid from Hastings, Minn., with no shoulders but enough hockey sense to make up for handful of forwards skating in mud.

The 3-2 win over the Senators came by way of a standard effort from Henrik Lundqvist -- which is to say he was terrific in making 29 saves -- and a superlative performance from Derek Stepan, playing the role of Brad Richards better than Richards himself.

"Scratching and trying to find a way to get it done," coach John Tortorella said after his team notched its fifth win a row. "Step’s line was a key offensively, and Hank made some key saves at key times. So I thought everybody chipped in."

Stepan’s line, with Artem Anisimov and Marian Gaborik, produced all three Rangers goals and finished the night with seven combined points. Gaborik had two goals, Anisimov had two assists, and Stepan finished with a goal and two assists.

"Arty and Step are playing with a lot of confidence," said Gaborik, who is leading the team with nine goals. "A lot of those goals were great forecheck by those guys. Hopefully we can keep it up."

In this five-game winning streak, Stepan has three goals and five assists and has been a catalyst to get The Great Gabby moving in the right direction -- which means putting the puck in the net with the same ease he showed roofing his second goal, what would turn out to be the game winner on a slow 2-on-1 with Stepan 8:30 into the third.

"I think all three of us create quite a bit of space for everyone," Stepan said. "Obviously Gabby is a high-level player and has a lot of skill. He knows the game, he’s been in it a long time, so me and Arty are just trying to learn from him and create as much space as we can for him."

It’s the three lines below them that Tortorella shuffled from the second period on, making it a guessing game every time there was a line change.

"I really didn’t like any of the lines except Step’s line," the coach said. "So we tried to change things. I think it helped us checking wise. … It will come, but guys are still trying to be consistent both offensively and defensively."

The two goals the Senators did score -- one from Milan Michalek to open the scoring in the second and one from Nick Foligno to cut the lead to the 3-2 in the third -- were both on wide-open wrist shots that The King had very little chance on. What did help was the 23 blocked shots the Blueshirts absorbed, along with the 21 giveaways they forced on the Senators.

"Guys are paying the price, that’s why we’ve been winning lately," Lundqvist said. "It felt great to get this win and we have to keep it going here."

Mike Rupp had successful surgery yesterday to repair a torn meniscus in his left knee and he’ll be out 4-6 weeks.

New York Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Rangers' Richards plays with many different linemates

By BRETT CYRGALIS

Last Updated: 8:43 AM, November 10, 2011
Posted: 3:38 AM, November 10, 2011

OTTAWA -- It was tough to count all of the different linemates Brad Richards played with last night during the Rangers' 3-2 win over the Senators, but the unofficial count is four.

Richards started the game on the line he has been with for a while, between Brandon Dubinsky and Ryan Callahan. By the start of the second period, coach John Tortorella swapped Dubinsky for Ruslan Fedotenko, and by the third Richards was back centering Dubinsky, adding Brandon Prust on the other wing.

"Richy's line was just struggling," Tortorella said after his team won its fifth game in a row. "He [Senators coach Paul MacLean] had them up against [Jason] Spezza's line and they were just struggling."The bright side of that could be that one of the spin-off lines created was Fedotenko-Brian Boyle-Callahan."I think it helped us checking wise, putting Boyle, Fedotenko and Cally together," the coach said, "trying to get a little more balance. It will come." Actually, in a game where the top line of Artem Anisimov-Derek Stepan-Marian Gaborik accounted for seven points and all three goals, Tortorella still found solace in his team's ability to defend.

"I really thought we played pretty well defensively," Tortorella said. "The shots they had [31], a lot of those [were] from the outside."

The fourth line, which mostly was Sean Avery-Erik Christensen-Andre Deveaux, all got between five and six minutes a piece.

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In a game that was supposed be chippy, there were very few signs of actual aggression. The most recent time these two teams met was on Oct. 29, when the Senators came away with a 5-4 shootout win in the Garden.

But during that game, Wojtek Wolski hit Senators captain Daniel Alfredson, giving him a concussion that he is still suffering from. Later in the game, Zenon Konopka hit Anisimov into the boards and got a game misconduct.

Konopka made his displeasure known yesterday morning when he told reporters that he was "still [ticked] off" about his captain being out. During warm ups, Konopka stretched at mid-ice setting a bait, and Sean Avery took it. The two traded a quick barb, and when they got on the ice together for the first time, just 2:50 into the game, they dropped the gloves.

Another fight went down in the second period, with the Rangers up 2-1, when Andre Deveaux and Jared Cowen stood up in orchestrated fashion and tangoed.

Neither fight was too hate-filled, and most of the 47 combined recorded hits were easy to forget.

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Mike Rupp had successful surgery yesterday to repair a torn meniscus in his left knee and he will be out 4-6 weeks. Rupp had missed the past six games because of the injury.

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Defenceman free-agent signee Anton Stralman reportedly skated at the Rangers' Westchester facility and is expected to be ready for tomorrow's Garden match against the Hurricanes.

New York Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Tough times for Staal brothers

By ANDREW GROSS
STAFF WRITER
The Record

Mike Sauer likely has as good an understanding as any Ranger of the dynamic right now between injured teammate Marc Staal and his older brother, Eric. Not only did the defenseman’s brother play in the NHL, but an injury has sidelined Kurt Sauer for all but one game since 2008-09.

Eric Staal’s Hurricanes face the Rangers tonight at Madison Square Garden for the first time since his high hit on his unsuspecting brother in Carolina on Feb. 22.

Marc Staal finished last season but has yet to play this season and is out indefinitely as he suffers from post-concussion symptoms stemming from his brother’s unpenalized check.

Sauer said he figures Eric Staal smiled at first and thought, "Yeah, I got him good," at the time of the hit, but that quickly turned to a sick feeling about the consequences.

"You take it all away and, at the end of the day, they're family," Sauer said. "If he could take it back, I'm sure he would.

"He's a good player and he plays hard," Sauer added. "We're going to key on him because he's a big player for them. If it means we rub him out, that's what we'll do."

While Marc Staal waits for the headaches he suffers when he works out to subside, Eric Staal is suffering through a miserable season.

After compiling 33 goals and 43 assists last season and, as an All-Star captain, choosing Marc Staal for his squad, Eric Staal has three goals and two assists in 15 games and is an NHL-worst minus-16.

Reportedly, Eric Staal planned on visiting his brother in New York.

"If it was anyone else, I would have done the same thing," Eric Staal told NHL.com on Monday about the hit. "That's the hard part about it. It's total hindsight and it doesn't change anything. He knows that. I know that.

"He's going to play again," Eric Staal added.

"His career in hockey isn't over. It's going to take some time, but he needs to make sure he's thinking about himself and his future."

And because Sauer and the Rangers do understand there are complexities to the situation, they're not expressing any bitterness toward Eric Staal.

"It's kind of a weird situation," said Dan Girardi, Marc Staal's longtime defense partner. "We'll see how it goes on the ice. It was a freak thing. Obviously, it was not his intent to injure him."

BRIEF: Swedish defenseman Anton Stralman, who signed a one-year deal worth $900,000 on Saturday, joined his new teammates on the ice for the first time Thursday as the Rangers practiced in Greenburgh, N.Y. But Stralman, 25, who has played 212 NHL games with the Blue Jackets and Maple Leafs, will not make his Rangers' debut tonight. "There's a lot to learn system-wise, get the timing back," Stralman said. "Hopefully it won't take that long."

Bergen Record LOADED: 11.11.2011
Brandon Dubinsky trying to snap out of slump

By STEVE ZIPAY  steve.zipay@newsday.com

GREENBURGH, N.Y. -- To snap his scoring drought, Brandon Dubinsky hasn't yet turned to watching video of last season's 24 goals.

"I'm not that superstitious, but I've definitely given it some thought," said Dubinsky, who had 10 goals through 14 games in 2010-11 but has none in 14 games this season for the Rangers, who have scored 37 goals (ranked 16th in the league entering Thursday night at 2.64 goals per game).

Dubinsky, 25, who signed a four-year, $16.8-million contract last summer, Thursday admitted he was pressing and called it the most frustrating stretch of his career.

"I think so. I'm only human," said Dubinsky, who has no points in the last four games. "It's been tough mentally not getting those points and not contributing offensively on a consistent basis. That being said, I think I've matured as a player and a professional. I've got to try and continue focusing on the other parts of my game."

Dubinsky has six assists and an even plus/minus rating. "It's not like my game is completely in the toilet and I'm turning pucks over and I'm on the ice for a lot of goals against," he said, "so I've just got to stay confident and believe in myself."

The Rangers have only one line clicking, the Artem Anisimov-Derek Stepan-Marian Gaborik trio. In Ottawa, Dubinsky was shuffled in among third-liners Brian Boyle and Ruslan Fedotenko. He had two shots on goal, and recorded four hits.

"Those guys are good puck possession-type guys; they kind of play my style," he said. "If I'm with those guys [tonight against Carolina], hopefully it'll give me an opportunity to get open and let them do some of the grinding underneath the hash marks and try to find me in scoring position. They're capable of making great plays and scoring goals, too."

Despite his slump, the Rangers are 8-3-3, compared to a 7-6-1 start last season, and have won five straight.

"It would definitely feel a lot worse if we weren't winning," Dubinsky said. "It's not a matter of work ethic, it's about trying to get a bounce, try to get something lucky to happen for me, have one go in off my butt or something like that. Hopefully that will relieve some of the pressure because sometimes, when you're fighting a little bit, you over-try, you over-squeeze."

Notes & quotes: Expect the same lineup Friday night for the Rangers against the Hurricanes (5-7-3) . . . D Anton Stralman said "it would be hard" to play after one practice . . . Henrik Lundqvist, Marian Gaborik, Brad Richards and the sidelined Marc Staal are among 127 players on the NHL All-Star ballot for fan voting, which concludes Jan. 4.
Jets find little comfort at home

PAUL WALDIE

The Winnipeg Jets have been away from the MTS Centre so long they probably didn’t recognize the sound of people cheering for them.

The Jets played the Florida Panthers at home Thursday after two weeks on the road, long enough for two European prime ministers to be ousted, one more debt crisis to emerge and Winnipeg to open a new airport. The Panthers were one of three teams the Jets beat on their seven-game odyssey, albeit in a shootout and thanks entirely to a lucky bounce.

But there was no luck Thursday and the friendly surroundings weren’t nearly as Florida as easily won 5-2. The Jets haven’t won in four games and are now 5-8-3 with 13 points.

Jet coach Claude Noel didn’t hide his anger after the game, chastising his players for listless play in the first two periods that put them behind 4-0. The team came on in the third, outshooting Florida 17-5 in that period and scoring twice, but it wasn’t nearly enough.

“As far as the game goes, didn’t enjoy the game. We played poor for a good portion of the game,” Noel said afterward. “We had very few good players in the first period, very few in the second. What did we have, 10 shots after two periods? There was a gameplan in place, I thought we would be better and we weren’t. We wanted to be physical, we wanted to use speed. They got on the board early, they sat back and we watched them play. We turned pucks over, we did all the things that we didn’t need to do.”

Winnipeg has had two constants in the last six games - taking a multitude of penalties and playing in front of some outstanding goaltending by Ondrej Pavelec.

On Thursday the Jets addressed the penalty problem somewhat, taking four in the game. That was one less than their season average and a far cry from the 14 they took Tuesday in a loss to Buffalo. But it didn’t do them any good as the Panthers took advantage anyway, scoring on two power plays and netting another when they pulled goalie Jose Theodore just as the Jets were about to be called for a penalty.

Then Pavelec’s play slipped. Florida’s Kris Versteeg scored on the Panthers’ first shot on goal, popping in a rebound after a shot by Tomas Fleischmann. Versteeg added another a few minutes later and by the end of the first period Pavelec had let in two goals on five shots. He let in two more in the second on 10 shots and then got pulled in favour of Peter Mannino, who had been called up from the Jets farm team recently due to an injury to regular backup Chris Mason.

There were “bad bounces everywhere,” Pavelec said after the game. “But I don’t think we played hard enough to be successful.”

When asked if the Jets could take any comfort from their play in the third, Pavelec said: “No. We say that all the time. You want to play all 60 minutes and win the game.”

Noel was even more blunt about his goaltender’s play: “He was no worse than anybody else. He was the same as everybody else. We were not good from the goaltender on out. What do you want me to say?”

He paused and added: “It was a poor performance by our players. It’s that simple.”

The Jets showed signs of life at times. The scored two quick goals in the third, including one on a power play. They also got the crowd excited with several hard checks, including one by Kenndal McArdle that flattened Versteeg.

But for the bulk of the game it was all too clear that the Jets just aren’t up to playing a decent team like Florida when it’s clicking. The Panthers simply dominated every aspect at times, holding the Jets to just four shots on goal in the first period. During one stretch of 23 minutes and 27 seconds over the first and second periods, the Jets didn’t get a single shot on goal.

“The first 40 minutes, we just weren’t skating. We were sitting around watching,” said Andrew Ladd, who scored the Jets’ second goal. “They are a fast team, they like to play an up-tempo game, we just stood around and watched them.”

Panther coach Kevin Dineen said his team was expecting the Jets to come out strong.

“They came out with a ton of energy. They came at us hard, we absorbed that. We scored that first goal, the game settled down, and I liked our game from then on,” he said after the game. “We were ready for what they did in the third period. They pushed hard, and I liked our response to that push. I just liked our overall game tonight.”

The Panthers’ line of Versteeg, Fleischmann and Stephen Weiss was outstanding, flying past the Jets constantly. Coming into the game that line had accounted for 15 of the Panther’s 38 goals. They played a role in all four goals Thursday with Versteeg getting three and adding one assist.

It was Versteeg’s first NHL hat trick and the first he’d had since playing as a junior.

“It’s been a long time, but it was a lot of great work by the guys,” he said after the game. “The linemates get you the puck in areas to score, and I was just a fortunate recipient today.” He now has eight goals and nine assists so far this season for 17 points.

Panthers defenceman Brian Campbell had a more cautious assessment of his team’s play.

“Sometimes it’s tough when you get up 4-0. You want to keep that lead and you want to play safe,” he said. “You’re on the road and you want to get those two points and get out. For us playing safe doesn’t seem to be working for our team. It gets us on our heels.”

Florida is clearly gelling after going through a massive overhaul last summer that saw more than a dozen players join the team including Fleischmann, Versteeg, Theodore and Brian Campbell. Head coach Kevin Dineen is also a new addition along with assistant Craig Ramsay, who coached the Jets last year when they were the Atlanta Thrashers.

Dineen spent weeks trying to blend the team’s chemistry, foregoing typical team-building exercises during the preseason in favour of letting his new troops just get settled in south Florida. The results were mixed at first, but Florida has come together and earned at least one point in eight of their last nine games. The Panthers are now 8-4-3 with 19 points.

“I just liked our game and our composure,” he said Thursday after the game. “We’ve got a good road record, and we take pride in that.”

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.11.2011
Hockey’s death trap

robert macleod

Somewhere, Roger Neilson must be smiling.
The ludicrous spectacle of the Philadelphia Flyers refusing to advance the puck as a way of opposing the neutral-zone trapping tactics of the Tampa Bay Lightning Wednesday night was something the late NHL coach would have dreamed up.

And now the NHL might have to step in and do something about it.

“The question becomes, is there some additional penalty [than a stoppage in play] that you employ,” NHL spokesman Gary Meagher said on Thursday. “And I’m not suggesting there is.

“I’m saying, that’s the type of discussion point that the league’s general managers would have.”
The GMs will meet in Toronto next Tuesday and Meagher suggested the topic would be one of those discussion points.

Less than a minute into the first period of their game on Wednesday, the Flyers gained possession of the puck in their own end and the Lightning lined up in their 1-3-1 trap defence implemented last season when Guy Boucher took over as head coach.
The system calls for one player to be near each blueline and three along the red line, a suffocating tactic that makes it very difficult for the opposition to cleanly move the puck from out of its own end.

When the lead Tampa Bay skater, Martin St. Louis, refused to cross over the Philadelphia blueline to pressure the puck handlers, Flyers defenceman Kimmo Timonen made one leisurely pass cross ice to Braydon Coburn.

For at least 30 seconds, Coburn just stood on the ice with the puck at his skates as the Tampa Bay players refused to be drawn in to attack.

Compelling hockey this wasn’t for both the spectators at the game and a U.S. national television audience.

“I could take three bites out of my dinner and then look up and they were still in the same spot,” said Toronto Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson, who caught the game on TV. “I don’t know if I want to watch that, either.”
The stalemate finally ended when referee Rob Martell blew the whistle and ordered a defensive zone draw, which was the only option he has in accordance with the NHL rule book.

According to the rules, the onus is on the Flyers to try advancing the puck, even if the opposition refuses to aggressively fore-check.

When the teams finally got down to actually moving the puck, it was the Lightning who emerged with a 2-1 win in overtime, but the overall product didn’t rest well with some players.

“This games on National TV. … Way to sell it boys,” Leafs forward Joffrey Lupul tweeted.

“Tampa Bay Lightning are chipping away at our escrow 1-3-1 at a time,” Phoenix Coyotes forward Paul Bissonnette tweeted.

There have been several suggestions on how the NHL can rectify the problem, including a shot clock that would force the team in control of the puck to move it out of their own zone in a specified time or face a penalty.

Others have suggested the NHL should try to devise a way to make the neutral zone trap an illegal defence.

Wilson, for one, is not sure where the fix lies.

“illegal defence?” he asked reporters in St. Louis before the Leafs’ game against the Blues Thursday. “Now you have to fore-check? How do you mandate that?”

Wilson said he is not a proponent of the trapping style favoured by the Lightning.
Feschuk: Kudos to Philly coach for exposing game’s flaw

Dave Feschuk

It was like watching basketball in the pre-shot-clock era. Or paint drying on prime-time TV.

The Tampa Bay Lightning rolled out their 1-3-1 neutral-zone trap against the Philadelphia Flyers, essentially stacking all five skaters between the blue lines. So the Flyers, in a stroke of strategic cheekiness, decided they wouldn’t bother entering the neutral zone.

As long stretches of time elapsed in the game’s opening period, Philadelphia defencemen would stop skating, stand in their own end, and stickhandle the seconds away.

Said Flyers defenceman Chris Pronger of the Lightning’s neutral-zone barricade: “That’s not hockey in my book, but whatever. The league’s letting (the Lightning) do it. Would you pay money to watch that? I wouldn’t either. That was a (nationally televised) game, too. Way to showcase the product.”

If the NHL is serious about increasing scoring and making a skill-based game more aesthetically appealing, it will think hard about finding a way to make it illegal. Kudos to Philadelphia coach Peter Laviolette for creatively exposing one of the game’s banes.

As Jaromir Jagr said of the game, which ended in a 2-1 Tampa overtime victory: “It was like a chess match.”

Waiting for a checkmate has never been a TV-ratings smash for a reason. Minimizing the impact of coaching strategy while maximizing the exposure of the game’s highly skilled stars should be the NHL’s next move.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.11.2011
Like so many hockey mothers, Marlene Reimer has been through this before, and it never gets easier. Nearly three weeks into her son James’s latest experience with the unpredictable effects of a head injury, there’s anxiety in the uncertainty.

“We’re beginning to be a little more concerned than we were at first,” the mother of the Maple Leafs goaltender was saying Wednesday. “At first, when (the Maple Leafs) said it was just going to be a day-to-day whiplash kind of thing, you just wait it out. But definitely our concerns are getting a little stronger as time that passes. We’re definitely hoping there are going to be some answers coming out of the team shortly, what they’re doing or what they’re planning to do.”

Marlene was speaking over the phone from the family’s home in tiny Monweena, Man., a 2 ½-hour drive north of Winnipeg, only a couple of days removed from a Toronto visit with James and James’s wife, April. James, of course, is still feeling the effects of an Oct. 22 collision in Montreal in which his protective mask was knocked into orbit while the Leafs goaltender’s prowess was simultaneously thrown into doubt. The team, which had won four of six heading into that game, is coming off two straight lopsided losses in which the respective starters, Ben Scrivens and Jonas Gustavsson, have been pulled. So it’s not a stretch to suggest Leafs Nation is desperately pining for James’s return.

Given the standard secrecy that surrounds NHL medical reports, Marlene Reimer ranks among the few people on the planet who can speak freely and with some authority about the current condition of Toronto’s sorely missed No. 1.

So, how is James?

“He looks clear. His eyes look fine. But he says he still has that nagging headache,” Marlene said. “I think his doctor finally said, ‘Let’s take you off the ice and see if it improves.’ ... I’m hoping there’ll be some good news pretty soon.”

Every case is different, of course, and James’s is curious, to be sure. What was once termed “whiplash” by the club has since been referred to as “concussion-like symptoms,” not to mention the generic “upper-body injury.” If the fans roll their eyes at the terminology, imagine how a parent feels.

“That’s the frustrating part for us — not knowing what it is, and why they’re not calling it a concussion when they say ‘concussion-like symptoms.’” Marlene Reimer said. “Like, how is that not a concussion? ... The initial test showed him to be clear of a concussion. But as it goes on, it’s kind of mystifying. He’s okay some days. And some days he’s definitely not okay.”

The worrying thing, for the Reimer family, is that this isn’t James’s first run-in with this type of injury. Marlene said James, 23, has had “several” concussions, not to mention the case of whiplash he suffered last season while playing for the AHL Marlies. (That bout of whiplash, she said, came with a sore neck and headaches, but James recovered from it “quickly” and without the lingering effects that have accompanied his current state).

Marlene Reimer remembers James’s first concussion vividly. It came in a midget-AAA game, a collision that left James, about 16 years old, lying prone on the ice as a long silence fell over an arena. On that day Marlene, unhappy with the care her son appeared to be receiving, burst onto the ice to help.

“I thought, ‘That’s my boy lying out there,’” she said. “I figured, if there’s no action, I’m definitely going to make sure we get some action.’ I know when all was said and done he said, ‘Mom, don’t you ever do that again.’ I said, ‘Well, then, make sure your trainers look after you. Because mom’s coming if they don’t.’”

Brian Burke, the Leafs general manager, doesn’t yet need to worry about fending off a protective matriarch as she barges into the Leafs’s trainers’ room. Marlene said she hasn’t harboured concerns about the quality of medical care being administered to her youngest of four children since James progressed to the game’s upper echelons.

“I’ve definitely seen an increase in respect for the effects of a concussion,” she said. “But at the same time, sometimes it seems to take a while before they’re recognized as concussions. To me, in a way, it’s still too slow. Maybe they have to. They start at the bottom. They say, he had his bell rung. He had whiplash. Or, concussion-like symptoms, and finally, a concussion. Well, by that time, a fairly long period of time has elapsed where treatment could have begun. At the same time, I know that, as much as the team wants to win, I do admire the way they’ve taken James out and have just let him be the person who decides whether he’s well or not.”

“I know (Leafs coach) Ron Wilson had asked him, before they brought Ben Scrivens up the first time, ‘How do you feel?’ ... And James said, ‘Not 100 per cent.’ And Wilson had said, ‘Okay, well then you don’t play.’”

Marlene is concerned enough about James’s brain-injury history that she keeps a file of articles detailing the latest research on the subject.

“That is my big concern, that he stays healthy,” she said. “And if he doesn’t, what are the repercussions? What is it we should be looking for? How should it be handled? What are the best options if he does get hurt?”

Speaking of questions: How is James occupying his time on the injured reserve? His mother said he goes to practice every day, though he isn’t currently partaking in on-ice practice. (He does light workouts while his teammates skate). And how’s the home life? The big news is that James bought April a puppy for her birthday; it’s a Havanese and high maintenance.

“He said it feels like they’ve just had a baby,” Marlene said.

The puppy’s name? It’s the same as a certain goalie’s nickname: Optimus.

When will Optimus Reim, the master, be given a medical leash long enough to resume his playing career? A hockey mother let out an exasperated sigh. Certainly Leafs Nation can relate to the angst surrounding a great unknown.

“I asked him on the weekend, ‘When do you think you’ll be back?’ He said, ‘I have no idea.’ And now he’s been out so long that, by the time he’s ready to go back, he’s going to need to do a lot of conditioning and he’s going to have to do a lot of practicing. It’s not like, ‘Today I feel fine. Let me take the net.’ I’m sure it will be a slow road back,” Marlene Reimer said. “We’re worried, for sure. But really, with a concussion, it’s so much a wait-and-see. One day he’ll say he hasn’t had the headaches and you think, ‘Oh, yes. Maybe he’ll be back this weekend.’ The next day he says, if he’s going on a 1 to 10 scale (where 10 is perfect health), he’ll say it was a 3. So you wait for the next day.”

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.11.2011
OTTAWA — If the Philadelphia Flyers’ goal was to draw the attention of the hockey world to the Tampa Bay Lightning’s passive neutral zone trap, consider it mission accomplished.

If their hope was to inspire a rule change to eliminate the tactic, they might have to wait a while. Maybe a long while.

In a game Wednesday at St. Pete Times Forum, the Flyers countered the Lightning’s stifling 1-3-1 trap — one forward just outside the opposing team’s blue-line, three players lined up across centre ice, one defencemen inside the Tampa blue-line — with a strategy best described as wait and see.

Just seconds after the opening faceoff, Philadelphia defenceman Chris Pronger took possession of the puck at the left faceoff circle inside his own blue-line, his forwards in the neutral zone. When the Lightning made no attempt to pursue the puck, lining up 1-3-1, Pronger simply waited ... and waited some more.

After 30 seconds, the referees ruled the play dead, employing Rule 72.1 of the National Hockey League official rule book, designed “to enforce continuous action and both referees and linesmen should interpret and apply the rule to produce this result.”

A faceoff took place in the Flyers’ zone. It didn’t stop there, though, as the Flyers continued to employ the tactic throughout the game.

Tampa’s trap system is designed to make opponents force plays, creating turnovers in the neutral zone and rushes back the other way. It was successful in helping the Lightning surprise the Washington Capitals in the playoffs last season, as Tampa advanced to the Eastern Conference final.

The Anaheim Ducks also employed a version of the 1-3-1 alignment to defeat the Ottawa Senators in the 2007 Stanley Cup final.

The Flyers’ mockery of the plan by doing nothing themselves was hardly spontaneous. Flyers coach Peter Laviolette chose to make the statement he doesn’t like the strategy in front of the Lightning’s home fans. The Flyers were booed by Lightning fans, but rinkside observers reported that Flyers players were calling Lightning players “cowards” when they refused to go after the puck carrier.

“It’s not hockey in my book,” Pronger told reporters after the game, won 2-1 by Tampa in overtime. “But whatever. The league is letting them do it. Would you pay money to watch that?”

Whether the NHL will try to find a way to crack down on the use of the trap seems a longshot, at best. The wording of such a rule would likely have to be vague or convoluted, or both. It would be tough to enforce, too.

There was no comment from NHL headquarters on Thursday.

“Once you start putting in rules like that, you’re going to slow down the game with all the whistles, and I don’t think fans would like that,” Ottawa Senators centre Jason Spezza said Thursday. “It would kind of be like the three-second-in-the-key-rule in basketball. If that rule was ever called by the book, there would be stoppages all the time.”

At the same time, Spezza, fellow Senators centre Jesse Winchester and team general manager Bryan Murray all said they liked the message Laviolette sent to Lightning coach Guy Boucher: If Tampa isn’t willing to put any pressure on a puck carrier, the puck carrier will just stand still himself.

Winchester agreed with Pronger’s comment that the trap must be difficult to watch as a spectator, and he labelled the Flyers’ countermove as “ballsy.”

Winchester, who makes his living as an aggressive forechecker, said he understands the Lightning players are only doing what they’ve been instructed to do, but acknowledged he would have difficulty sitting back in the neutral zone if he were asked to do the same.

Like Spezza, Murray said a rule outlawing traps would be difficult to enforce, but added he thought the final decision on the matter might be made by fans showing their dislike for the strategy.
Alfredsson set to return Friday

Posted on 10 November 2011. By James Gordon

Daniel Alfredsson is set to return to the Ottawa Senators’ lineup after missing five games with a concussion, and the hope is he’ll immediately create a different kind of headache for opposing defencemen.

After starting out with a surprising burst of scoring — that was supposed to be the Senators’ weak link this season — the Senators have fallen back into the middle of the NHL pack on offence.

The current dip coincides with the loss of Alfredsson, who took an elbow to the head from New York Rangers winger Wojtek Wolski on Oct. 29 and didn’t return.

Not only did the injury take the most dynamic member of the Senators’ second line out of the mix, it also allowed opponents to really key in on the top trio of Colin Greening, Jason Spezza and Milan Michalek.

The result: Those three combined for all of two points over the following four games.

Now, on 11/11/11, No. 11 returns against a team he has dominated over the years.

“I feel ready and I feel very confident about going back — otherwise I wouldn’t be,” said Alfredsson, who has 40 goals and 81 points in 80 career games against the Sabres.

“I’m not going to be cautious,” he added. “You’ve got to be ready at all times on the ice. I’ve said that before, so it’s the same. I think if you don’t feel you’re ready, you shouldn’t start playing again.”

While Alfredsson was frustrated about missing time, he was also encouraged by his colleagues’ overall play without him.

“I’m seeing a pretty good team,” he said. “Obviously some turnovers cost us last game (a 3-2 loss to those same Rangers), but other than that, we’re doing a lot of good things which, when you’re losing, (are) not going to be noticed.

“But I think we’ve come a long way from the beginning of the year to where we are now.”

It was tough to tell who was happiest about the captain’s return: The man himself, linemates Stephane Da Costa and Nick Foligno, or head coach Paul MacLean.

“Isn’t that good news?” MacLean said with a big grin following a brief, up-tempo practice Thursday afternoon. “Can’t wait until (Friday). Won’t even sleep tonight. Or I should sleep better tonight.

“I think he averages 30 goals a year — he’s done it, he has a track record of doing it.” MacLean explained. “That gives you a second line that the other team has to respect and obviously, with the leadership and how he plays and everything else that goes with it... for us right now, a little shot in the arm offensively would be a real good thing.”

Despite dropping four straight contests to drop back below the .500 mark, the Senators clearly remain a very upbeat group.

There certainly is big difference between this skid and the one that saw them lose five of six to start the season. The earlier setback was peppered with blowouts and atrocious defensive play, whereas the past few outings arguably could have gone either way.

“A lot of our game is real solid,” MacLean said. “Since the first day of training camp, we’ve been working on getting out of our zone, getting out of our zone, getting out of our zone, playing defence fast, and really, it’s been a main focus for us. And we’ve done that.

“We’ve done a good job of tracking the puck, playing without the puck,” he continued. “Where we haven’t done a good job is with the puck. We haven’t taken care of the puck.”

MacLean was referring to a combined 46 turnovers charged to the Senators over the past four games. While the NHL’s extended stats are notoriously unreliable, anyone with reasonable vision could spot the myriad mental lapses in those contests.

It’s a continuing concern, though a little more offence could cover up the occasional slip as well.

“What we’ve lacked in the last three games, to me, is one more goal,” MacLean said. “Just some more offence and you know, Daniel brings that to us, but also our team as a group can probably get to the net better, shoot the puck more often and have people get to the net maybe a little bit harder and stay there a little bit longer.”

ALL-STAR SENS?

Fans voting for the starting lineup at this year’s NHL all-star game in Ottawa will have five Senators to choose from, including Alfredsson.

“Obviously, it would be special to play in your home town, there’s no question, but that’s not something I set out as a goal before the season,” Alfredsson said. “I think it would be a great bonus. I want to come back healthy and play as many games as I can and see where it goes. But it would be a lot of fun.”

Spezza, Michalek, Erik Karlsson and Sergei Gonchar are the others on the list.

MIGHTY MICHALEK

Paul MacLean was asked during training camp whether or not he thought Michalek was a potential 40-goal scorer. The winger notched his 10th of the season Wednesday, putting him on pace to score 51 over a full schedule.

MacLean didn’t answer then and he wouldn’t offer a prediction Thursday either.

“I’m still not going there,” he said with a chuckle. “He’s got a long way to go — he’s only at 10. I think, like I’ve said lots of times in this room, Milan’s a real good player and I think he’s showing us that he’s a good player, he’s energized, that he wants to play, and I hope he gets as many as he can.”

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.11.2011
Giveaways doom Senators in loss to Rangers

Posted on 09 November 2011. By Allen Panzeri

Even as they committed an astonishing 21 giveaways, the Ottawa Senators were, somewhat incredibly, still in Wednesday’s game against the New York Rangers until the final seconds.

Indeed, that the Senators still had a chance to win tells you something about the Rangers; they weren't much better, though in the end they were good enough to squeeze out a 3-2 victory.

It was Ottawa’s fourth straight loss, but Ottawa coach Paul MacLean could take some encouragement from the fact that his team, despite its mistakes, played (almost) well enough to win.

"I thought we played real well," said MacLean.

"I thought we were in control of the game for the most part, for the whole game.

"But again, the lack of efficiency and execution in our own zone led to create opportunities for them.

“We turned the puck over 21 times I believe it was. Those are just things that are going to come back and haunt you.”

And haunt them they did.

Marian Garborik had two goals, while Derek Stepan had one goal and two assists for the Rangers.

Milan Michalek and Nick Foligno scored for the Senators.

Craig Anderson faced only 19 shots while Henrik Lundqvist faced 31.

As the Senators now head out on a six-game road trip, all the Senators can do is practise the mistakes out of their system, said MacLean.

We have to keep doing it and make sure we stress the focus for the whole period,” he said.

"That’s all we can do – talk about it and make sure we play for the whole game.

“One thing about the NHL, you have to go out and execute every shift you’re on the ice. Otherwise the other team is going to take advantage of what you give them and we gave them great opportunities.“

That was a sentiment echoed by Jason Spezza.

"Mistakes are really costing us right now,” he said.

"We’re finding ways to lose games rather than finding ways to win games."

After a scoreless first period, the second seemed at first as if it might tilt in Ottawa’s favour.

Just three minutes in, Jesse Winchester put maybe the best pass he’s ever made on Erik Karlsson’s stick for a chance that Lundqvist just barely got with his glove.

And five minutes later, Michalek broke the scoreless tie when he froze Lundqvist with a shot to the high stick side for his 10th goal.

Alas, the euphoria lasted just 42 seconds.

Over the next two minutes, starting at 9:21, the Senators would pay for turning over the puck.

They had to expect that after 17 giveaways over two periods.

Gaborik would get his first of the night and Stepan would add another to erase Ottawa’s 2-1 lead.

WHY SENATORS LOST: One word: giveaways. The mistake-prone Senators turned the puck over all night, giving it away 21 times, and they paid for it.

STUD: Derek Stepan. He was in on all three New York goals, getting one of them and two assists. He got the second after taking the puck from David Rundblad behind the Ottawa net and eventually knocking in a rebound. On the first, he was the beneficiary of a turnover by Sergei Gonchar and got the puck to Marian Gaborik for a goal.

DUD: David Rundblad. You have to wonder what Brian Lee was thinking when Rundblad got stripped of the puck behind the Ottawa net by Stepan, leading to New York’s second goal. Rundblad sure made a liar of coach Paul MacLean, who said in the morning that “at this point in time, David Rundblad is the better player.” That point in time must have been fleeting.

MILESTONE: Jared Cowen’s fight with Rangers centre Andre Deveaux at 13:16 of the second period was the first of his NHL career. Cowen had what could best be called a scuffle with Toronto’s Dion Phaneuf in a pre-season game, coming out of it with an instigator penalty and a misconduct, while Phaneuf got just a minor. The consensus on this one was that it was a draw.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 11.11.2011
OTTAWA - Paul MacLean was wearing a smile Thursday, and not just because it brought another chance to chat with the media, which he said (he did) is his favourite time of the day other than having a cup of tea or glass of wine with his wife.

Apple (what hockey players often call an assist) turnovers aside, the Senators coach was pleased with the play of his team in its last outing.

And why not? If it wasn’t for the inexcusable giveaway by a veteran of 1,073 games (Sergei Gonchar) who should know better, and the understandable mistake by a rookie with 12 games experience (David Rundblad) who has lots learn, two of the Rangers’ three goals Wednesday night would have been avoided.

Minus those gaffes, the Senators defeat the hottest team in the conference 2-1, while leading on the shots clock 31-17, despite committing twice as many (19-8) giveaways.

They then wouldn’t be packing with them a four-game losing streak while embarking on a stretch of road games that starts Friday in Buffalo and continues on through Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

Nonetheless, MacLean was enthusiastic when speaking of the opportunity. To “show the Canadian people what kind of team the Ottawa Senators are.”

Not to spoil the surprise, people, but what they are is exciting. Not to mention hell on a sportswriter at deadline.

Eleven of the Senators’ 16 games have been decided by one goal. They’ve lost the last three, but have won six.

“Early on in the year, when we got down, we probably felt like we had to open things up right away, but we probably believe in the system a little more now that we’ve won those close games,” said Jason Spezza.

“You stick to the plan and you hope throughout the game that you get a late goal. Instead of opening it up and letting them get more scoring chances, we try to limit their chances still and create something for ourselves.

“Paul is trying to teach us how to play a style of game that’s going to be successful in the playoffs, when our team does get to that level.”

In the meantime, the Senators will spend this season running cold and hot, like they’ve done with a six-game winning streak and a four-game slump in their past 10. So will individuals.

One rookie who was en fuego Thursday was Stephane Da Costa.

When he was on the ice, the puck followed him. He set up Nick Foligno’s second-period goal and had some glorious chances himself, including one which saw him magically juggle the puck with his stick past a Rangers blueliner.

Da Costa’s maligned defensive play is improving as he learns angles — during one battle he stripped the puck from a surprised Brad Richards. I didn’t think Da Costa was close to ready for the NHL this season. I’ve changed my mind. With his passing, vision, growing confidence … I can even see a little of the “younger Adam Oates” comparison made by Bryan Murray.

“It’s a great compliment,” said Da Costa. “Now I’m under pressure. I’ve got to make good passes.”

That he grew up in France, the 22-year-old Da Costa was asked if he had even heard of Oates, who retired in 2004 and stands as one of the most creative playmakers ever. Of course he did.

“From NHL ‘94,” Da Costa said, referring to the video game.

Da Costa did meet Oates’ old triggerman, Brett Hull, when he was a 17-year-old playing in the NAHL.

“It was a charity game in Texas and he was the coach of the veteran team, with Mark Messier, the Hanson brothers …,” said Da Costa. “I was on the other team. At the end of the second, I switched to the old team. I played with Messier. I just wanted to pass it to him all the time.”

Murray gets even more criticism for his free-agent signings than he does compliments on his drafting.

But Da Costa, a Merrimack grad he convinced to become a Senator, is going to be a good one.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
BUFFALO - On the 11th day of the 11th month of the 11th year of the century, the Senators will welcome back No. 11.

Captain Daniel Alfredsson was along for the ride as the Senators packed their bags for one of their longest road trips of the season, and he expects to suit up Friday against the Sabres.

Alfredsson will take winger Chris Neil’s place. Neil suffered an ankle injury in Wednesday’s 3-2 loss to the Rangers and won’t be available to play in Friday’s game or Saturday in Toronto.

Alfredsson, 38, less than two weeks removed from suffering a concussion after a ugly elbow from Rangers winger Wojtek Wolski, skated on a line with Stephane Da Costa and Nick Foligno and declared himself ready to go.

“(The odds are) pretty good. It was good (Wednesday) and again (Thursday), I’m expecting myself to be back and ready to roll,” said Alfredsson.

“I’m not going to be cautious. You’ve got to be aware at all times on the ice. I’ve said that before. If you don’t feel you’re ready, then you shouldn’t start playing again. I feel confident in my reaction time and I’ll just try to play as normal.”

If Alfredsson is “normal,” then he’ll be one of the Senators’ best players as the club tries to snap a four-game losing streak to start a stretch of six straight on the road.

“It would be a huge boost for our team to get our captain back in the lineup,” said centre Jason Spezza. “He does a lot for our team on and off the ice. It would definitely give us a bit of a jump.

“He’s feeling pretty good. He’s definitely recovered well from injuries in the past. I think this early in the season he wouldn’t come back unless he was 100% and ready to contribute.”

Coach Paul MacLean, who said Neil got hurt after taking a knee from New York’s Brandon Dubinsky in the third period of Wednesday’s game, was pleased to hear Alfredsson was ready. The stats show it’s a good night for a return. In 80 career games against the Sabres, Alfredsson has 41 goals and 40 assists — more than a point a game.

“Isn’t that good news? I can’t wait till (Friday). I may not sleep,” said MacLean. “Actually, I should sleep better. He averages 30 goals a year. He has a track record of doing it and it gives you a second line the other team has to respect.”

There was concern when Alfredsson first suffered the injury, with plenty of uncertainty about head injuries — especially with Pittsburgh’s Sidney Crosby sidelined since January.

Alfredsson said he has kept in contact with team physician Dr. Mark Aubry. One of the foremost concussion experts in North America, Aubry assured Alfredsson he wouldn’t be out for an extended period.

“It was frustrating for a while,” admitted Alfredsson. “I can’t say I felt terrible, really. I had headaches the day it happened. Since then, I haven’t taken any medication or anything. I’ve been able to be up and moving. I just had to be cautious about how much I did.

“I was pretty confident that it was going to settle down. When I talked to (Aubry) a week after, it was getting to the point where it was going to get better soon. All I know is the way I feel. I feel ready. I feel confident about going back. Otherwise, I wouldn’t.”

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
Pronger quick to critique Tampa Bay's stall tactic

By Sam Carchidi
Inquirer Staff Writer

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - Flyers defenseman Chris Pronger said Thursday that the Tampa Bay Lightning are pushing hockey "into the stone ages."

No word on if he thinks Fred Flintstone should be the Lightning's coach.

The reason for Pronger's anger: The first period of the Flyers-Tampa Bay matchup Wednesday was like watching a Princeton-Penn Ivy League basketball game before the shot clock was introduced.

The Flyers used the NHL's version of "stall ball" or "keep-away."

The reason? Tampa Bay sat back in a 1-3-1 trap and made no attempt to pursue the Flyers when they had the puck in their defensive end.

After the Lightning's 2-1 overtime win, Pronger, the Flyers captain, called Tampa Bay's tactics "embarrassing" to the NHL.

One day later, Pronger had even stronger comments. He suggested that NHL commissioner Gary Bettman should fine teams that sit back and don't go after the puck.

A league spokesman said Bettman would have no comment on the matter, and that "players are entitled to their opinions without rebuttal from the commissioner."

In the first period Wednesday, the Flyers circled in their own end as the Lightning sat back in the neutral zone or at their own blue line.

"What do you want us to do if they're not going to forcecheck?" Pronger asked rhetorically in a conference call from Naples, Fla., where the Flyers started a two-day bonding trip. "... If they want to just stand there, why would I want to skate into it? It's asinine to think so."

Pronger noted that Tampa Bay has exciting offensive players, such as Steven Stamkos and Vincent Lecavalier, and that "it's a disservice to them and to the league" to play the trap, which New Jersey used to much success in the past.

Wednesday's game turned off a national TV audience, Pronger said, because it "turned into a stalemate."

It may have been boring at times, but it was effective for Tampa Bay, which held the Flyers to just 15 shots. The Lightning shut down the high-scoring Flyers despite being without two of their best defensemen (Victor Hedman and Mattias Ohlund, who were injured) and using a struggling goalie, Dwayne Roloson.

For the entire first period, the Lightning sat back, waiting for the Flyers to make a move out of their defensive zone. The Flyers defenseman circled, and circled and waited and waited and... .

The Flyers were trying to get Tampa Bay to make a move toward their puck-carriers before they started their attack.

Instead, the Lightning just sat back. Like department-store mannequins.

The Flyers waited out the host Lightning, and the fans booed loudly.

Twice, the Flyers were called for defensive-zone faceoffs for not moving the puck forward.

A league official called Toronto for advice during the game, then told the on-ice officials the Flyers had to keep the puck in motion and couldn't sit back in a "four corners" offense.

"We didn't do anything different than we do all the time," Lightning forward Dominic Moore said. "...You just stick with your game and don't worry about the rest of it."

Flyers coach Peter Laviolette said "the onus to me comes to the person without the puck to get it back."

Laviolette didn't think the Flyers lost because of the trap, but because "we went to the penalty box too much and had costly turnovers."

Laviolette conceded that trying to penetrate into the Tampa Bay zone "was like throwing a pass into the end zone with 10 defenders on the goal line."

"At the end of the day, we're in the entertainment business, so the league will have to decide if they like it," said center Danny Briere, adding that the fans "lose" when forced to watch that type of game.

Bonding trip. As the Flyers started their bonding trip in Naples, about half the team golfed, while other players sat at the pool or beach, and the coaches went on a fishing trip. They later had a team dinner.

Pronger said the trip gives the players, many of whom are in their first season with the Flyers, a chance to build chemistry and "get a better feel where everybody is coming from."
Flyers caught in Tampa Bay's trap

By FRANK SERAVALLI
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FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. - As if there was not enough controversy surrounding the sporting landscape in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania this week, the Flyers are adding to it.

At least they are willing to keep it all on the ice.

With 19,206 boos raining down on Chris Pronger at the St. Pete Times Forum on Wednesday night, as he comfortably held the puck on his stick and skated in circles in his own zone to avoid Tampa Bay's neutral-zone turnover gauntlet, he realized then that the game plan might not be a popular one.

But Pronger says the onus is not on him or the rest of Tampa Bay's opponents to make a move.

Twice, the Flyers were whistled for defensive-zone faceoffs and threatened with delay-of-game penalties in their 2-1 overtime loss. Ultimately, the league decided not to penalize the team after conferring with the "War Room" in Toronto.

Pronger took it one step further yesterday, saying the NHL should crack down on teams who play a passive style since it "pushes hockey back into the stone ages."

"I think it's been called an embarrassing moment," NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said on his radio show yesterday. "The good news is the game has gotten to such a point from an entertainment and skill and excitement standpoint, I'm kind of enjoying the fact that there's some outrage when something that tries to take the game out of its normal flow gets this kind of reaction."

Bettman said he believed league officials reacted appropriately.

"Did I like it? No. Is it the most horrible thing I've ever seen on the ice? No. But I do think it has now added another agenda item to the general managers' [meetings] next week," Bettman said. "If you're playing smart, tactical hockey, that's your prerogative and it's incumbent on the other team to figure out how to deal with it. By the same token, if this became too prevalent and too much of the game and too regular, then I think we'd have to deal with it, and we will."

Danny Briere said the Lightning's neutral-zone trap was more like an "0-4-1" setup instead of a "1-3-1." Point being: There was no lead attacker. Thus, the Flyers sat for minutes on-end in the first period, goading Tampa Bay into an attack that never came.

"I don't think it's good for the game," Briere said. "At the end of the day, we're in the entertainment business. It wasn't a very entertaining game. It's the fans that lose in the end. I'm sure Tampa Bay was happy, they got their two points. But it's the people that pay, the fans that support us."

Peter Laviolette, the man who installed the game plan, said he would be reluctant to change his approach for the next game against Tampa, even though the Flyers mustered just 15 shots. They gained a 1-0 lead, which ultimately forced the Lightning out of their trapping setup.

"I don't know what people want us to do," Pronger said. "If they're not going to forecheck, why should we go after it? If they're going to stand there, why would I want to skate right into that?"

"If they want to try to sell that as hockey, then so be it. They've got some exciting players, highly skilled players, for them to not showcase those guys is a disservice to the game of hockey and the league."

Golf or Gulf?

With a healthy, 4-day layoff in between Wednesday night's overtime loss in Tampa and their next contest across the state against the Panthers on Sunday in Sunrise, the Flyers stopped off in Naples on the southwest Florida coast to take a break from hockey.

Briere said 11 players decided to golf at nearby Colony Golf & Country Club, others lounged by the pool or at the beach, and the coaching staff went on a chartered fishing expedition in the Gulf of Mexico. Assistant coach Craig Berube caught a 200-pound grouper. A group of Flyers spent the afternoon playing cards poolside.

Briere, usually a scratch golfer, said the golf "didn't go so well" for him, but teammate Matt Carle (@mattcarle25) tweeted that it was a day full of "Caddyshack" and "Happy Gilmore" quotes before they could even hit the driving range.

"This is nice and relaxing," Briere said. "It's a chance to get away from everything at home and spend some time together as a team. On most of the road trips, we don't have a chance to hang out much aside from a dinner here and there."

While the Flyers have the advantage of less strenuous travel in the Eastern Conference, they have a distinct disadvantage - especially early in the season - of not having an extended road trip to further on-ice relationships in-person.

"There are a lot of different activities here," Pronger said. "When you get opportunities like this, to rest and recuperate, you've got to use them to your advantage. It is critical for teams who want to be successful, you've got to take advantage of your time spent together."

"Trips like these give you more of a feel for everyone... Looking back at the end of the season, you can see the progress of a team, it makes you want to look out for a buddy, all of those things you need to be successful in the playoffs."

Slap shots

Rookie Erik Gustafsson rejoined the team in Naples, Fla., yesterday after missing the Tampa Bay game with a wrist injury. Ilya Bryzgaloav, Chris Pronger, Claude Giroux, Kimmo Timonen, Danny Briere and Jaromir Jagr were listed as candidates on the NHL All-Star fan ballot, which was released yesterday. Out of 126 players, the Flyers - who have six representatives on the ballot - are tied with Chicago, Anaheim, Boston and Pittsburgh for most by one team. Voting for the Jan. 29 All-Star Game in Ottawa concludes on Jan. 4. Former Flyers coach John Stevens, who played 834 AHL games and won Calder Cups both as a player and a coach, will be inducted into the AHL Hall of Fame in Atlantic City on Jan. 30.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 11.11.2011
Pronger wants NHL review of Tampa tactics

FT. LAUDERDALE, Fla. — An imaginary memo with reality overtones ...

To: Gary Bettman, NHL commissioner.
From: Chris Pronger, Philadelphia Flyers captain.
Subject: How hockey should be played.

Dear Gary,

By now, I’m sure some video of Wednesday night’s Flyers-Lightning game has come to your attention.

Or maybe you watched it live on national television with millions of other hockey fans who wondered what the heck was going on out there.

I thought the game of hockey was supposed to be changing after the lockout, that we were getting away from the clutching and grabbing and neutral-zone trapping, to make the game more exciting.

But apparently Tampa chooses to go back to the ’90s, with a style reminiscent of the New Jersey Devils.’

Which is why our coach, Peter Laviolette, instructed our defensemen to hold the puck at the defensive zone faceoff dots for several long stretches (one clocked at 49 seconds) to demonstrate our point.

I voiced my displeasure with Tampa’s tactics after the game and continued that line of thought when I spoke to some members of the Flyers’ travel media on Thursday.

Here’s what I told them:

“I don’t know if there’s a way to fine teams for not doing anything the way they did. I don’t feel the need, or if anyone wants to complain about us, what do you want us to do — just go into their ... if there isn’t a forecheck, why should we go after it?

“The whole point is, when you get a team to forecheck you, is to beat the player and pass the puck and move north-south or east-west or whatever you’re going to do. If they’re just going to stand there, why do I want to go into that?

“There are five guys sitting right back there at the red line and further back. It’s asinine to think so (you should attack that), I think they’re pushing hockey back into the Stone Age. But (Tampa general manager) Steve Y. (Yzerman) and (coach Guy) Boucher got their two points.

“If they want to try to sell that as hockey, then so be it. But again, look at the players on their team; they’ve got some exciting players, with skill, who can play at a high level. For them to not showcase those guys is a disservice to the game of hockey and the league.

“I don’t think it’s the refereeing. It’s just another thing they have to think about. I think it’s got to come from Gary Bettman, it’s got to come from the league office.

“You’ve got to do something out there. That was a nationally televised game turned into I don’t know what you want to call it, a stalemate if you will, a chess match — we’re not going to forecheck, we’re not going to go ahead; we’re not going to forecheck, we’re not going to go ahead.”

“I don’t really have an answer for you, that’s above my pay grade. That’s for the gentlemen in New York to figure out.”

Yours truly,

Chris

Team bonding

The Flyers are spending Thursday and Friday hanging out in Naples, Fla., about a two-hour bus ride from Sunrise, where they meet the Florida Panthers on Sunday.

Thursday saw about 11 players play golf, another bunch go fishing (they caught a whopper of a grouper) and others just sat around the pool and played cards.

Actually, the retreat is billed as giving the players a chance to get to know each other better away from the ice. With about nine new faces in the lineup, that’s a good thing.

“This is a nice road trip in that we get to spend some time together,” Daniel Briere said during a media conference call. “Get away from everything back home and just get the guys together.”

Many of the Flyers’ road games are one-stop trips, so there isn’t that much time to get to know people.

“We don’t have a chance to go out much, apart from a dinner here or there,” Briere said. “It’s a chance to get to know the guys a little better.”

Burlington County Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Overtime like pulling teeth for Flyers as they fall to Lightning

By The Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Brett Connolly scored 2:30 into overtime to give the Tampa Bay Lightning a 2-1 victory over the Flyers, 2-1, Wednesday night.

Connolly won it after Dominic Moore skated into the Flyers’ zone and got the puck past a defender into the low slot, from where Connolly beat goalie Ilya Bryzgalov.

Marc-Andre Bergeron netted the tying goal in the third period for the Lightning, who have won seven of nine.

Scott Hartnell had the lone goal for the Flyers. Philadelphia routed Columbus 9-2 Saturday but was shut down by Tampa Bay, which outshot the Flyers, 24-15.

Defenseman Chris Pronger returned after missing six games because of a right eye injury. He had been out since being struck just outside the eye by a stick blade during a game against Toronto Oct. 24.

Hartnell put the Flyers ahead 1-0 with a power-play goal against goalie Dwayne Roloson at 9:34 of the second.

Bergeron tied it with a shot from the high slot at 7:41 of the third. Steven Stamkos assisted on the goal, giving him six points during a three-game point streak.

Twice in the opening five minutes of the game the Flyers held the puck in their zone, attempting to force the Lightning to abandon their 1-3-1 defense. After about 30 seconds of stagnant play both times, the officials stopped the game to have a faceoff.

The Flyers employed the tactic, which Washington used against Tampa Bay last season, seven times during the scoreless first period.

A steal by the Lightning during Philadelphia’s delay strategy midway through the second turned a chorus of boos into a loud cheer.

Tampa Bay failed to capitalize on two late second-period power plays, set up by slashing and high-sticking penalties against Pronger.

Jaromir Jagr had his seven-game point streak snapped, a run that included six goals and 11 points.

NOTES: Flyers defenseman Erik Gustafsson missed the game with an undisclosed injury. ... The Flyers announced that Braydon Coburn has agreed to terms on a multiyear contract extension ... Matt Reed returned after missing three games with an undisclosed injury ... Jagr played in his 1,288th NHL game, one fewer than Mathieu Schneider for 54th place on the NHL career list.

Philadelphia 0 1 0 0—1
Tampa Bay 0 0 1 1—2

First Period.None. Penalties_Lecavalier, TB (tripping), 6:15; Hartnell, Phi (hooking), 6:45; Carle, Phi (boarding), 9:28.

Second Period_1. Philadelphia, Hartnell 6 (Voracek, Timonen), 9:34 (pp). Penalties_Thompson, TB (high-sticking), 1:03; Brewer, TB (interference), 3:24; Kubina, TB (tripping), 9:17; Pronger, Phi (slashing), 15:01; Pronger, Phi (high-sticking), 17:27; Roloson, TB, served by St. Louis (delay of game), 19:51.

Third Period_2. Tampa Bay, Bergeron 3 (Stamkos, Lecavalier), 7:41 (pp). Penalties_Coburn, Phi, major (fighting), 3:09; Downie, TB, major (fighting), 3:09; Voracek, Phi (tripping), 6:17; Timonen, Phi (interference), 13:17; Hartnell, Phi (kneeing), 16:05. Continued...

Overtime_3. Tampa Bay, Connolly 3 (Moore, Kubina), 2:30. Penalties_None.

Shots on Goal_Philadelphia 6-4-4-1_15. Tampa Bay 7-6-9-2_24.
Power-play opportunities_Philadelphia 1 of 5; Tampa Bay 1 of 7.
Winter Classic Jerseys: Insert latest rumor here

We get a lot of email about Winter Classic jerseys, and I never know how to respond. "We don't know" is usually the basis of what I reply with, no matter the question.

When are they being released?
Why haven't they been released yet?
How much will they cost?
Are these jerseys I saw on the Internet real?

There's so much information and misinformation out there, and everybody wants to know that These Are The Jerseys. We've seen reports that claim sources in the organization say one thing, only to see reports that claim sources in the organization say another thing weeks later. (These latest ones today are pretty damn sexy, for what that's worth.)

We've seen fake jerseys created on the Internet, then mass produced 8,000 miles away, then shipped to seemingly thousands of people who also happen to buy tickets to games at the Wells Fargo Center.

This is what happens when the NHL and the team take fooooooover to unveil the actual jerseys. People are duped into buying things that aren't real, and the hype and drama surrounding what the team will actually wear on January 2 builds and builds and builds and builds. We doubt the NHL really cares all that much about this, though.

Our answer, and this will likely be our answer until the team announces something: We don't know. There are too many rumors around these damned jerseys to be sure of anything. But I do hope these latest rumors are true.

Delaware County Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Flyers stand by response to Lightning’s trap

FT. LAUDERDALE – On second thought, Flyers coach Peter Laviolette probably would not have done anything different.

Given a chance to digest what happened in Tampa Bay on Wednesday night when the Lightning went into a trap and just stood their ground without movement, Laviolette said he stands by his belief that “the onus is on them [Tampa]” to pursue the puck.

The Flyers lost 2-1 in overtime. To his credit, Laviolette said his team didn’t lose the game because of the trap but because they didn’t convert power-play opportunities and spent too much time in the penalty box.

At the same time, no one liked what occurred in the opening period on VERSUS.

Lighting coach Guy Boucher went into a 1-3-1 trap seven times that period and reduced the game to a virtual standstill. The move had both the Flyers and even the on-ice officials confused over what to do since the Flyers stood their ground, as well, on their side of the red line, refusing to advance.

“They held onto it and stayed in their defense,” Laviolette said of Tampa. “There’s a lot of turnovers that can happen. They put a lot of guys on the blue line.

“It’s like throwing a pass into the end zone where you know they got 10 defenders and you should look for something different.

“I am of the belief that the onus is on them to check the puck. We were waiting for them to pursue it. It’s not the game we want to play or like to play…”

Chris Pronger lashed out at Boucher’s tactics after the game. On Thursday, after the Flyers players did a little team bonding – golfing, fishing, swimming, beach and pool lounging around – Pronger took a shot at Lighting general manager Steve Yzerman.

“I think they are pushing hockey back to the stone ages here,” Pronger said. “Again, Stevie Y and Boucher got their two points, so if you want to try and sell that as hockey then so be it.

“But again, as I said last night, look at the players they got on their team. They got some exciting players, who are highly skilled and can play at a high level. For them not to showcase their guys is a disservice to the game of hockey and the league.”

He is referring to Steven Stamkos, Martin St. Louis, Vinny Lecavalier, etc.

Pronger said it was an embarrassment to all. Laviolette said that wasn’t his intent by refusing to advance the puck.

“Our intent was not to embarrass the game or the league or the sport,” Laviolette said. “You guys know we are an attack-oriented team.

“We want to check forward and push forward and send multiple people into the offensive zone. It’s not the way we played the game last night.

“Again … I stand by my thought. You need to pursue. Somebody needs to check the puck.”

Pronger said he didn’t think this tactic was something that the NHL would rule “illegal” but given the new rules after the lockout designed to open up the game and generate offense, he hinted that maybe fining teams would eliminate such tactics.

“I would suspect if you start fining teams for not doing anything like they did,” he said. “Everybody wants to complain about us. What do you want us to do? If they are not going to forecheck, why should we go after it?

“The whole point when you get a team forechecking is you beat a player and pass the puck and move the puck and move north-south or east-west or whatever you are going to do.

“If they’re going to just stand here, why am I going to skate up into that? They got five guys sitting right back there at the red line. And further back. It’s asinine to think otherwise.”

Pronger said the league office needs to do something, not the on-ice officials, who he says already have too much to comprehend.
Yet another Winter Classic jersey

November 10, 2011, 1:01 pm

The Flyers’ Winter Classic jersey has finally been leaked ... again.

Yahoo! Sports’ hockey blog Puck Daddy has given us some new photos of what very well could be the Flyers’ Winter Classic jersey. But we’ve been down this road before, with several different designs floating around the Internet since the summer. The knockoffs have been plentiful.

However, these jerseys seem to be a little more authentic. The pictures show very intricate stitching and details, along with Reebok tags on the interior.

Odds are that we will see a couple more speculative designs for the Flyers’ Winter Classic jersey before its official unveiling on Black Friday, but until then, this is certainly the most official-looking one to date.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Lightning defend use of trap against Flyers

November 10, 2011, 9:00 am

TAMPA BAY – Lightning coach Guy Boucher defended his use of a 1-3-1 trap against the Flyers on Wednesday night.

He feels it’s way to balance the tables between the two clubs.

“We all know we have recently been struggling in the first period this year,” Boucher said. “We needed a complete team effort against the most offensive team in the league. We’ve had major injuries to top-end guys this season…

“The one thing I see is the majority of the time we’re sticking to our plan. I really like our patience to our game and for me, what this tells me is the guys are all in.”

His players might be “all in” on the trap, but chances are the NHL is not and this will likely get reviewed at the Board of Governors meeting next month.

“They have a set forecheck in the neutral zone and we have a set breakout,” Flyers coach Peter Laviolette said, who would like to see some clarification of what each team’s responsibility is against the trap.

“As soon as we get some pressure, we get into our routes. My point on the clarification is if we want to stand there [against the trap], they should come after us.”

Shots
The 15 shots for the Flyers were their fewest in a game since they had 15 on Feb. 10, 2010 at New Jersey. Jaromir Jagr, Claude Giroux and Scott Hartnell combined for nine of those shots. The Flyers actually had more shots miss the net (19) than went on the net (15).

Loose pucks
Lightning agitator Steve Downie, who tried to mix it up with Scott Hartnell, dropped gloves with Braydon Coburn. Coburn celebrated his new four-year, $18 million contract by beating the logo off Downie’s jersey, who seldom gets pounded in a scrap. … The Flyers picked up a point for the fifth straight game.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Phoenix Coyotes’ struggles vs. Montreal Canadiens continue

By Jim Gintonio - Nov. 10, 2011 11:00 PM
The Arizona Republic | azcentral.com

Time marches on: After the passage of two decades, a century turning and a new millennium, the Coyotes still are looking for a way to beat the Canadiens.

They had the upper hand but let the game slip away, losing 3-2 in overtime in front of 14,138 on Thursday night at Jobing.com Arena.

The Coyotes, now winless in their past 13 games against the Original Six team, were their own worst enemy on a front where they usually excel, all-out effort. That trait, coach Dave Tippett said, was exhibited by the third and fourth lines but not pervasive throughout the lineup.

"That's the effort we needed from everybody," he said. "We were behind the game. They outworked us. We had some guys, third and fourth line stepped in and really tried to give us a spark.

"(The Canadiens are) missing a couple of their top guys, and they came out and worked hard, and we didn't work as hard as them, so that's probably the way it should end up."

Mikkel Boedker's goal with 5:43 elapsed in the first period gave the Coyotes a 1-0 lead, and that boded well because they were 6-0-2 this season when scoring first. But the momentum did not last long.

The Canadiens scored twice in the second period, on goals by Brian Gionta, who wrangled the puck from Boyd Gordon behind the net, and Travis Moen, who broke free from two defenders and popped one past Coyotes goalie Mike Smith from between the circles.

The Coyotes tied it when Raffi Torres knuckled in a rebound on a Keith Yandle shot at 5:50 of the third period, but the Canadiens prevailed on an unassisted goal by Josh Gorges only 1:45 into the extra session.

"I think we came out a little flat," Torres said. "We got the first goal, but we didn't build on it. Our compete level's got to rise up."

Both goaltenders, Smith and the Canadiens' Carey Price, were outstanding at several points during the game. Smith, for example, blocked eight shots when the Coyotes were in a shorthanded situation in the first period; he ended with 33 saves, one more than Price.

"That was huge," Tippett said. "If Smitty doesn't make some good saves for us, we're way behind in that first period. We were lucky to come out 1-0. The desperation level in the battles was just poor."

Gorges' game-winner was a tough one for the Coyotes to give up, showing how even a slight calculation effort can cost a team: "... One forward overshakes it and screens the goalie, simple as that," Tippett said.

The Coyotes, who were 4-1 in their past five games, did show resolve, however, exemplified by their 21 blocked shots, six by David Schlemko and five by his defensive partner Rostislav Klesla. Center Martin Hanzal, back after missing two games with a lower-body injury, notched five hits.

Boedker's goal was his first in 10 games, and if he starts to emerge, it could provide a lift on the upcoming five-game road trip.

"We got a a point, and we can be happy with that, but we came out a little rusty at the gate, and they had some good legs."

Tippett was expecting more from everyone, considering how he liked the way the team practiced this week. It goes beyond hard work, he said.

"It's disappointing," he said. "We felt like we had a pretty good week, feeling good about ourselves. It's not wanting to work hard, it's the desperation level that you need to win.

"That desperation level led to a lot of one-on-one battles that we lost. We didn't have enough of that desperation tonight."

Report

Key player: Canadiens defenseman Josh Gorges scored the game-winning goal in overtime.

Key moment: Coyotes left wing Raffi Torres' game-tying goal in the third period allowed the Coyotes to gain a point.

Key number: 8 Saves by goaltender Mike Smith on a first-period penalty kill that for a time stifled the Canadiens' momentum.

View from the press box

A goaltender's aim is to keep his team in the game, and Mike Smith has met that challenge this season. His crystallizing moment Thursday was on a penalty-kill when he blocked eight shots. As Smith gets more familiar with his teammates, his level of play should continue to rise.
Sen. John McCain has 'sense of urgency' about keeping Phoenix Coyotes in Valley

By Bob McManaman and Jim Gintonio - Nov. 10, 2011 09:13 PM
The Arizona Republic

Arizona Sen. John McCain dropped the ceremonial puck for Thursday night's game between the Coyotes and Montreal Canadiens, but he isn't dropping his crusade to help keep the franchise in the Valley.

McCain, invited to the game in honor of Military Appreciate Night at Jobing.com Arena, said time is running out on the Coyotes if a suitable owner cannot complete a purchase of the team soon.

The NHL presently owns the team and covers its costs, but has said a deal would likely have to be finalized by the end of this year for the Coyotes to remain in Arizona beyond this season.

Asked if that deadline is realistic, McCain said, "I don't know. But I do know that the National Hockey League is not going to keep this franchise going forever. It's not their job. Their job is to oversee the National Hockey League, not spend money on it. I do have a certain sense of urgency about it."

McCain said he will continue to support the team's efforts to stay in the Valley and do whatever he can to help. He said he is not, however, directly involved in any ongoing negotiations with two potential ownership groups.

"The only way I'm involved is really to encourage negotiations and to assist by being a cheerleader," McCain said. "I don't have the expertise and talent to know what a right deal is or a bad deal is.

"But when I see a group like the Goldwater Institute standing in the way of the elected representatives' decisions, then I do weigh in. I do weigh in."

The Goldwater Institute, a Valley watchdog group, helped delay a sale of the team to Matthew Hulsizer by threatening to sue the city of Glendale. Goldwater officials claimed the deal would have put taxpayers at risk.

McCain fired a series of slap shots at the Goldwater Institute on Thursday, calling the group arrogant "fat cats" that are harming the state's economy.

"I think it would have a devastating effect on the economy of the state of Arizona in general and the Westside in particular if this hockey team left," he said. "So I do feel I have a role to play as a representative of the people of Arizona.

"Not to get into details, but when an organization like the Goldwater Institute, elected by nobody, representing nobody except maybe some very wealthy donors, makes a decision like they did and it's harmful to the economy of state of Arizona, then I do weigh in.

"I've never seen such arrogance and frankly, Barry Goldwater would want them to change their name because Barry Goldwater believed in the responsibility with the elected representatives of the people, not an unelected group of fat cats like who's at the Goldwater Institute."

The Coyotes passed out 10,000 McCain bobblehead dolls for Thursday's game. What were the Senator's impressions of their likeness of him?

"It's by far the best as far likeness," he said. "Tragically, it shows that the aging process is accelerating."

Plus-minus stat shaky
The over-under statistic, while interesting to use as a base of comparison, sometimes does not tell the whole story.

Adrian Aucoin lays out this perfect example.

"It depends," he says. "I've been on some teams where guys . . . even in our case, Keith (Yandle) stays on longer so when Derek (Morris) changes I go on. I end up getting a lot of his plusses. It happens on all teams."

David Schlemko, who leads the team at plus-9, with defensive partner Rusty Rostislav Klesla at plus-7. Still, he agrees that numbers can be deceiving. "I think plus-minus can be a pretty skewed stat at times," he said. "You can look at it either way.

"I've definitely been on the other side of it before where you're minus-3 one game, and you have nothing to do with any of the goals that are going in. Obviously, we're doing something right with a plus-minus like that, but you don't put too much stock in it . . . it's a bit of a skewed stat."

Coach Dave Tippett sees extremes on both sides of the statistic.

"When there's a guy who is high plus or a real low minus, you start to have some variables in it, but I don't think it's the most-efficient stat there is," he said. "I think there's way better ways to do it, but that's just my opinion.

"I just think that plus-minus should be with the players who are actually involved in the play, not just on the ice. That's the way I calculate it, but . . . stats are stats, you look at all of them."

Taylor Pyatt agrees with Tippett's logic.

"Yeah, it's weird," he said. "You get on a run when you don't think you're playing that great, and you get a bunch of plusses, and then you feel like you're playing well, and every time you step on the ice, it's a minus again. Sometimes it's not an accurate stat as to the way you're playing."

Ice chips
- Center Daymond Langkow has been granted a leave of absence following the death of a member of his family.
- Center Martin Hanzal (lower-body injury) returned to action Thursday night.
- Shane Doan, Ray Whitney and Yandle are on the NHL All-Star ballot. Fan voting begins Nov. 14. Yandle made the team last season.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 11.11.2011
Forward Tangradi in the fold with Penguins

By Josh Yohe, PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Friday, November 11, 2011

The Penguins have recalled their best forward prospect, left wing Eric Tangradi, from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton on Thursday.

Tangradi leads Wilkes-Barre/Scranton and is 10th in the AHL with seven goals. He has 12 points in 12 games.

Coming off an indifferent training camp, Tangradi's recall comes at a surprising time. The Penguins sent center Dustin Jeffrey and left wing Steve MacIntyre to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton for a "conditioning assignment" Tuesday, but the Penguins said both remain on the active 23-man roster.

Earlier in the day, Penguins coach Dan Bylsma announced right wing Tyler Kennedy as a "game-time decision" for Friday night. He has not played since Oct. 15 because of a concussion.

Celebrating the vets

The Penguins will honor military veterans with a full day of activities Friday through their game Friday night against Dallas at 7 p.m. On the "Support Our Heroes" agenda:

» 12 wounded veterans will attend the game-day practice at Consol Energy Center. They represent Wounded Warrior Project, Operation Troop Appreciation and the Veteran's Administration.

» Players will wear special camouflage jerseys in pre-game warm-ups. The jerseys will be autographed and auctioned with proceeds going to Wound Warrior Project and Operation Troops Appreciation.

» Fans in attendance will receive an American Flag Foundation wristband.

» ROTC members will be stationed at all entry gates.

» Military veterans will participate in Zamboni rides during game breaks and intermissions.

» Select military members will be hosted in suites purchased by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

» All veterans will receive a 20-percent discount at the team store today and Saturday.

Source: Penguins media relations

Tribune Review LOADED: 11.11.2011
The long and winding road Sidney Crosby has taken while recovering from a concussion continues to curve.

This week began Monday with promise. Crosby, who has not played for the Penguins since Jan. 5, said then that his anticipated return for a game tonight against Dallas at Consol Energy Center was “a possibility.”

However, Crosby will not play Friday night or Saturday night at Carolina, Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday after his club’s third practice this week.

Bylsma has addressed Crosby’s status each of the past two days because there is “no news with Sid,” according to a senior member of general manager Ray Shero’s hockey operations staff. There is no plan for Crosby to speak daily, as was his preconussion routine, said that staff member.

Dating to his training-camp debut in September, Crosby has not spoken routinely this year.

Bylsma stressed the Penguins were “not keeping a secret” near the beginning of his daily meeting with reporters.

“When he’s going to play, we’ll make sure to let you know,” Bylsma said.

Crosby continues to operate without any expressed reoccurrence of symptoms (headache, nausea, disorientation) since he was cleared for full-contact practices by team physician Dr. Charles Burke on Oct. 13.

Penguins teammates spent much of the daily media availability yesterday with bemused looks on their faces as a large gathering of reporters — including those from ESPN and Canada’s TSN and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation — pressed for information on Crosby’s status.

“There’s been a long wait for Sid’s arrival,” center Jordan Staal said. “He’s pretty much kept everyone in the dark, just like he’s kept you guys in the dark.”

If there is a light at the end of this tunnel, it might go unrecognized by Crosby’s teammates and coaches. There remains no firm answer to lingering questions pertaining to what steps Crosby must complete before he resumes playing.

“From a coaching standpoint, we’re not looking for something as some indicator on the ice that says Sidney can play,” Bylsma said. “From a medical standpoint in terms of clearance and progressions, that’s all in the (medical team’s) directive. That’s not something I know a lot about.”

Crosby’s medical team is known to include: Burke, an orthopedic surgeon who will clear him for return-to-play status; Michael Collins, a clinical psychologist with extensive neuropsychology training and head of the UPMC Sports Medicine Concussion Program; and Ted Carrick, a Georgia-based chiropractor who specializes in neurological treatment.

Last Friday night, Crosby cut short his participation in the Penguins’ West Coast trip for a scheduled appointment with his medical team, Bylsma said. Crosby identified those medical team members as either Burke and/or Collins on Monday, but he has not said if he also consulted with Carrick, who treated him over the course of a week in August.

Teammates haven’t had to avoid dissecting every development regarding Crosby since training camp opened Sept. 17. Rookie center Joe Vitale cited an “unspoken” collective decision not to focus on the daily distraction Crosby’s concussion story line could have provided the Penguins (9-3-3, 21 points)

Added veteran defenseman Paul Martin: “Me, personally, and I can’t speak for everyone else, I don’t talk to him about it.

“The more attention we pay to it, the tougher and more frustrated we get,” Martin said. “For us as a team, and individually, we play. That’s what we’ve got to do. We can’t concentrate on what Sid’s doing. We have to focus on the guy’s we’ve got playing in the games and go from there.

"Obviously, we’d like to have him back as soon as possible, but that’s up to him."

Celebrating the vets

The Penguins will honor military veterans with a full day of activities Friday through their game Friday night against Dallas at 7 p.m. On the “Support Our Heroes” agenda:

» 12 wounded veterans will attend the game-day practice at Consol Energy Center. They represent Wounded Warrior Project, Operation Troop Appreciation and the Veteran’s Administration.

» Players will wear special camouflage jerseys in pre-game warm-ups. The jerseys will be autographed and auctioned with proceeds going to Wound Warrior Project and Operation Troops Appreciation.

» Fans in attendance will receive an American Flag Foundation wristband.

» ROTC members will be stationed at all entry gates.

» Military veterans will participate in Zamboni rides during game breaks and intermissions.

» Select military members will be hosted in suites purchased by Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

» All veterans will receive a 20-percent discount at the team store today and Saturday.

Source: Penguins media relations

Tribune Review LOADED: 11.11.2011
Crosby still not playing

By Dave Molinari, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

For weeks, people outside the Penguins organization pointed to their game tonight against Dallas as a likely date for Sidney Crosby to resume playing.

After all, Crosby has been progressing nicely for some time, and the Stars game comes after a slow stretch in the Penguins schedule.

Logical as such thinking might have been, it wasn't accurate.

Coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday that Crosby, who hasn't played since Jan. 5 because of a concussion, won't be in uniform for the Dallas game or the one Saturday night at Carolina.

That means the earliest Crosby could return is the home game Tuesday against Colorado.

"He had a good week of practice and is progressing, but he won't be playing this weekend," Bylsma said. "We're not keeping a secret. When he's going to play, we'll make sure we let you know."

The Penguins, though, could be getting right winger Tyler Kennedy back tonight.

He has missed the past nine games because of a concussion, and Bylsma said that whether to use him will be "game-time decision."

Because Kennedy is questionable, at best, the Penguins recalled left winger Eric Tangradi from their minor league team in Wilkes-Barre. He has seven goals and five assists in 12 games with the Baby Penguins.

6 players on All-Star ballot

Even though he hasn't played in more than 10 months, Crosby headlines a list of six Penguins on the ballot for the 2012 NHL All-Star Game.

The others are centers Evgeni Malkin and Jordan Staal, winger James Neal, defenseman Kris Letang and goalie Marc-Andre Fleury.

Voting will be entirely digital for the sixth consecutive season and will begin Monday online at NHL.com/vote and via mobile devices.

They just stood still

The most popular topic of discussion in the Penguins locker room Thursday might have been the 1-3-1 configuration Tampa Bay broke out early in its 2-1 overtime victory against Philadelphia the previous night.

And, more to the point, the Flyers reaction to it.

Which, at least for a while, was to do nothing.

With the Lightning players deployed strategically in the neutral zone, the Flyers declined to force play into the Tampa Bay end.

That led to players from both sides mostly standing around, and referee Rob Martell reportedly threatening the Flyers with a delay-of-game minor if they didn't try to advance the puck.

Trouble is, there's no provision in the rulebook for that, although the Lightning had to take a more aggressive approach after Philadelphia scored a power-play goal in the second period. How much of the audience for that nationally televised game still was tuned in by then is hard to say.

"I thought it was a little comical," Penguins winger Steve Sullivan said. "It was pretty funny to see a team try to expose another team, especially in their own rink."

"I would like to know who [the fans] were booing. Were they booing the Philadelphia Flyers for not moving the puck or were they booing the home team for standing around, doing nothing?"

Trade wins

The Penguins and Stars made a pretty significant trade Feb. 21, when the Penguins sent highly skilled defenseman Alex Goligoski to Dallas for winger James Neal and defenseman Matt Niskanen.

Although Niskanen was the least prominent player in the deal, he might have benefited more from the change of scenery than anyone else.

He started strong with the Penguins, then tailed off enough that his job security looked to be an issue coming into training camp.

He had a strong preseason, however, and that has carried over through the first 15 games. Niskanen has a goal, three assists, a plus-minus rating of plus-3 and is averaging about 18 1/2 minutes of ice time per game.

"[The trade] gave me an opportunity to come in with a fresh start, with a new organization," Niskanen said. "Playing with some of the best players in the world is a heck of an opportunity for me."

Post Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
Penguins' stars come up big and bright

By Dave Molinari, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Some teams seem to have it all and, a couple of months ago, the Dallas Stars looked to be one of them. Pick just about any affliction that could beset a franchise -- shy of a plague of locusts, anyway -- and there's a pretty good chance the Stars had it.


Pile all that onto a club coming off a fifth-place finish in the Pacific Division - - one with a first-year coach, no less -- and it's easy to believe that Dallas would earn 22 points. By right around the Christmas break.

Scouting report

Matchup: Dallas Stars at Penguins, 7:08 p.m. today, Consol Energy Center.

TV, Radio: Root Sports, WXDX-FM (105.9).


Penguins: Have three-game winning streak at home. ... D Kris Letang averages 27:10 of ice time, among highest totals in league. ... Penalty killing has reclaimed top spot in NHL (93.2 percent).

Stars: Have allowed seven first-period goals, tied for second fewest in league. ... LW Jamie Benn ranks among NHL leaders with 11 points in road games. ... Are 5-1 in games tied at second intermission.

Hidden stat: Dallas is 8-1 when being outshot.

Suffice to say, few, if any, observers anticipated that the Stars, who will face the Penguins at 7:08 p.m. today at Consol Energy Center, would have that many already, or that Dallas would be first in the overall standings going into Thursday.

"For a team that had to go make a trade [adding Eric Nystrom from Minnesota] to get to the [salary-]cap floor, they've been off to an impressive start," said Penguins defenseman Matt Niskanen, a Stars alum.

Never mind that Dallas' top player, Brad Richards, left via free agency over the summer, or that the guy running their bench, Glen Gulutzan, still is learning his way around NHL buildings, since he never had worked in one in any capacity before this season.

So many negatives.

So many more points.

"We have to be ready for maybe the best team in the league right now," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday. The Stars have won four games in a row and, while they aren't likely to maintain their current 11-3 pace, they have come by their success honestly.

Their formula starts with a couple of forwards, Loui Eriksson and Jamie Benn, whose productivity is much higher than their profiles, at least in many Eastern Conference cities.

[Eriksson] is a guy who, if he was in a bigger [hockey] market, everybody would know who he is," Penguins defenseman Brooks Orpik said. "He's not in the spotlight as much, but he's a really talented guy.

The Stars record, however, reflects more than the contributions of a couple of players. Veterans Brenden Morrow, Mike Ribeiro and Michael Ryder are off to strong starts, and ex-Penguin Alex Goligoski, while not performing to his potential, can be a difference-maker.

What's more, goaltender Kari Lehtonen has been excellent -- he has earned every Dallas victory to date, which means he has more than any other team in the league -- and defenseman Sheldon Souray, an accomplished Penguins-killer, is reviving his career in a big way after a full-season exile in the American Hockey League.

Souray has four goals, nine assists and a plus-minus rating of plus-11 in 14 games. If there was a Norris Trophy for the first sixth of the season, Souray would be contending for it.

"I'm surprised they got off to an awesome start, but I'm not surprised by the way they're playing, with the guys they have," said Penguins winger James Neal who, along with Niskanen, was acquired from Dallas for Goligoski.

"They have the players to be a good team, and Goligoski obviously helped their [defense corps] a lot."

What might help move is ownership stability, and reports Thursday out of Dallas said that Vancouver businessman Tom Gaglardi could get control of the franchise by the end of next week. Going from bankruptcy to a stable, deep-pockets owner should allow general manager Joe Nieuwendyk to patch any holes that develop on his depth chart before the playoffs.

What effect any of that will have on the support the Stars receive remains to be seen. Dallas has embraced the team at times in the past, but has pretty much ignored it this season.

Five of the first seven home dates have attracted fewer than 8,500 fans, despite the fact that the Stars have played some of the finest hockey in the league.

"It's definitely not a hockey town," Neal said. "There's not too much media attention over there. But I'm sure that if they keep going the way they are, they'll start bringing some attention."

Post Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Penguins have recalled left winger Eric Tangradi from their farm team in Wilkes-Barre.
Tangradi, 22, has seven goals and five assists in 12 games with the Baby Penguins.
He had two goals in a 4-2 victory at Norfolk Wednesday.
Six Penguins on All-Star ballot

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Injured center Sidney Crosby, who hasn't played since Jan. 5, headlines a list of six Penguins who are on the ballot for the 2012 NHL All-Star Game.

The others are centers Evgeni Malkin and Jordan Staal, winger James Neal, defenseman Kris Letang and goalie Marc-Andre Fleury.

Anaheim, Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia also have six players on the ballot, tying for most in the league.

Voting will be entirely digital for the sixth consecutive season and will begin Monday online at NHL.com/vote and via mobile devices.

Post Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
Penguins center Sidney Crosby, who has not played since Jan. 5 because of a concussion, will sit out at least two more games.

Coach Dan Bylsma confirmed today that Crosby will not be in uniform for a game against Dallas Friday night at Consol Energy Center or one in Raleigh, Carolina the next night.

Crosby did not speak with reporters for the second day in a row.

Bylsma said that right winger Tyler Kennedy, also recovering from a concussion, will be a game-time decision Friday.

If Kennedy doesn’t dress, the Penguins would have to recall someone from their farm team in Wilkes-Barre to field a full 20-man complement of players.

Post Gazette LOADED: 11.11.2011
So far this season it seems all the Sharks need to do to guarantee success is play against a team that someone in their own locker room recently called home.

Thursday night was the latest example as San Jose defeated the Minnesota Wild 3-1 in the highly anticipated meeting between teams who swapped four key players in offseason trades.

"We wanted to play for them, for sure," said Torrey Mitchell, whose first goal of the season provided breathing room in a game that saw teammates Brent Burns and Marty Havlat facing the team they played for last season. "I don't know the feeling, but for those guys, whenever you play against your old team, you kind of want to shove it back in their face a little bit."

The pattern this season has been the same. Facing Colin White's former team, the Sharks beat New Jersey. Facing Michal Handzus' last employer, the Sharks beat Los Angeles.

Two power-play goals by Patrick Marleau and one at even strength by Mitchell gave goalie Antti Niemi the offensive support that he needed as the Sharks improved to 8-1-1 in their last 10 games. Kyle Brodziak scored the lone goal for the Wild, which saw its five-game win streak end.

While Burns and Havlat were facing their old teammates for the first time, so were Devin Setoguchi and Dany Heatley, former Sharks who went the opposite direction in two blockbuster deals.

Setoguchi heard nothing but cheers from the HP Pavilion crowd, but there was a smattering of boos mixed in the reception that Heatley got.

So was there much chirping on the ice with everybody knowing each other so well?

"Not too much, maybe a little bit here and there," said Burns, the only one of the four players involved to pick up a point. "It wasn't really as weird as I thought it could have been. We always had a pretty competitive group, and it was just like a scrimmage at the start of the year in training camp. It was fun."

Still, he acknowledged, "It was good to get it over with. You knew the first one was going to be weird, and I'm sure the first one in Minny is going to be the same thing."

Neither team dented the scoreboard in the first period, but it didn't take long for the Sharks to jump into the lead once the second period began.

At 2:34, the Sharks took a 1-0 lead when Marleau took advantage of a sloppy play by Wild defenseman Justin Falk and beat goalie Niklas Backstrom. Marleau's second power-play goal came at 15:34 on a play that started with Burns controlling the puck at the blue line then dishing it to Ryane Clowe, who set up Marleau with a perfect cross-ice pass.

But it was Mitchell's goal with just 1:21 left before the second break off a faceoff won by Handzus that had to have damaged the Wild's sense that it could come back.

"Zus is so good on faceoffs," Mitchell said. "He saw something and said, 'Line up here and one-time it.' So I said, 'Yes, sir' and it worked out great. The rest is history."

Brodziak spoiled Niemi's bid for his first shutout of the season when he one-timed the puck into the San Jose net at 13:33 of the third period, but overall coach Todd McLellan was very pleased with the Sharks performance.

And he let it be known he thought it was a good thing for all the relocated players to get this game in their rearview mirrors.
Marleau scores twice in Sharks' 3-1 win over Wild

Thursday, November 10, 2011

Patrick Marleau scored two power-play goals in the second period, and the San Jose Sharks snapped Minnesota's five-game winning streak with a 3-1 victory over the Wild on Thursday night.

Torrey Mitchell also scored in the second period for the Sharks, who have won eight of nine. Antti Niemi stopped 21 shots and remained undefeated in four games against the Wild.

Kyle Brodziak scored Minnesota's lone goal.

Niklas Backstrom, who recorded his first shutout of the season in a 3-0 win at Calgary on Tuesday, made 33 saves but fell to 1-6-1 in San Jose.

Dany Heatley and Devin Setoguchi combined for one shot in their first visit to San Jose since being traded to the Wild in separate deals for Brent Burns and Martin Havlat.

Marleau scored his first goal after taking the puck off the stick of Wild defender Justin Falk and firing it past a surprised Backstrom.

Dan Boyle took a shot from the center line, with Backstrom making an easy stick save. There then appeared to be miscommunication as Backstrom tried to pass it easily to Falk, but Marleau came in full speed for the goal.

Marleau scored again 13 minutes later when he took advantage of Ryane Clowe's no-look pass to his stick and fired a shot past Backstrom for his 52nd career multigoal game.

Mitchell scored straight off a faceoff won to the right by Michal Handzus with 1:21 remaining in the second.

The Wild scored with less than seven minutes remaining when Brodziak took a nice pass from Marek Zidlicky and easily beat Niemi.

NOTES: The Wild killed off 23 consecutive short-handed situations before allowing two goals in two power plays in the second period. ... Marleau has 12 points in nine games. ... The Sharks scored two power-play goals in a game for the third time. ... Clowe has a four-game point streak. ... Heatley and Setoguchi were given a nice hand from the sellout crowd. ... Wild F Cal Clutterbuck (upper body) returned to the lineup after missing Tuesday's game. ... The Sharks are 9-0-1 in their last 10 home games against the Wild.

San Francisco Chronicle LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Blues rally for point but fall in shootout

By DAN O’NEILL • donell@post-dispatch.com | Posted: Friday, November 11, 2011 12:10 am

By his own admission, Ken Hitchcock is not the prototypical hockey coach. He is apt to describe himself as somewhat of a “duck” behind the bench. With his white hair, placid speaking manner and jovial demeanor, he has been compared at various times to Bob Keeshan of “Captain Kangaroo” television fame.

“He’s been a very calming voice,” Blues forward Alex Steen said before Thursday’s game, “so far.”

The Blues might hear a slightly different voice from their new coach this morning, after a wildly contradictory performance and 3-2 shootout loss to Toronto on Thursday at Scottrade Center.

Hitchcock’s voice might sound a little more like Captain Bligh of Mutiny on the Bounty fame, and it certainly will address the pratfalls of slow starting. Five minutes into the Toronto tilt, the evening adopted a starkly different texture than the invigorating 3-0 pasting of Chicago on Tuesday.

If the Blues showed Hitchcock their best Tuesday, they saw their evil twin in the first period Thursday, an inconsistency that has marked a 7-7-1 record.

“We weren’t battling near as much in the first period,” said Jason Arnott, who scored the Blues’ first goal. “We let them in the game and then it was too late to battle back.”

Renowned for making in-game adjustments, Hitchcock changed channels during the intermission. “He just came in here and said we’re not working hard enough and we’re not doing the things he’s been telling us, and if we don’t get back to it, it’s going to be a long night,” Arnott said.

Patrik Berglund’s goal with less than two minutes remaining in the game finally got the Blues off the regulation hook, producing a point in the standings. But after Phil Kessel converted Toronto’s first shootout attempt, Leafs netminder Ben Scrivens denied Alex Steen, T.J. Oshie and Matt D’Agostini to make it stand up.

Toronto had given up 12 goals in its past two games, but Scrivens stopped 38 shots in regulation and overtime to prepare for the shootout.

“The goalie was good and we missed a few chances,” Hitchcock said. “But we bucked up in the second and third periods and really played…. You’re thinking that when you outshoot a team 31-8 over the final two periods you’re going to win a lot of hockey games.”

Coming off back-to-back lopsided losses, the Northeast Division-leading Leafs buzzed the Blues throughout the first period, pressing the home team into three penalties and converting two power-play goals to establish a 2-0 lead.

Things could have been considerably worse if not for the play of Jaroslav Halak. The Blues netminder demonstrated his shutout Tuesday was no fluke, as he made several outstanding saves on otherwise promising Toronto opportunities.

Although he scored his 12th goal during the blitz, Kessel might have had a hat trick in the opening 20 minutes if not for Halak. As it was, there was little the diminutive gatekeeper could do to prevent the two goals, as the visitors outshot their accommodating hosts 14-8.

“If you take away the first period, … we have to clarify a few things on the penalty-kill, but the second and third periods were great from our side,” said Halak, who stopped 20 shots. “In the NHL, it’s really hard to get behind and then try to catch the other team.”

The Leafs got a power-play goal midway through the first when left-shooting defenseman John-Michael Liles scored through a screen to give Toronto a 1-0 edge with 8:33 to go. The goal was the second of the season for Liles.

The Blues continued to run into trouble with the law. Moments after a penalty to Vladimir Sobotka was nullified, D’Agostini was found guilty of a trip. Essentially on the back end of a four-minute PP, Toronto got another goal with Kessel banging in a rebound.

The Tale of Two Teams emerged in the second, as the Blues reversed roles with the Leafs. Still, they struggled to score. At one point, midway through the second, Berglund was alone in front of Scrivens but faked himself out, loosing control of the puck as he deked.

The Blues broke through on a power-play goal to trim the deficit. Alex Pietrangelo moved down the boards and zipped a pass to Arnott in the slot. The veteran beat Scrivens with a quick release for his fourth goal and the Blues trailed by one. Despite outshooting the Leafs 14-5 in the second, they still trailed at the break.

“We need to play more on top of the goalie, we had a lot of shots but we were off to the side a little bit and that’s something we’ll talk about,” Hitchcock said.

The Blues pressed the issue even more decisively in the third and at one point enjoyed a 10-0 advantage in shots. Under siege, the Leafs would not register their first shot on goal until less than eight minutes remained. But, despite a late power play, the Blues still were scrambling to draw even, until Berglund buried a rebound to tie the score with 1:56 to play. The goal was the fourth for Berglund, his first point in six games and the 15th shot for the Blues.

Although they continued to dominate in overtime, they didn’t score the decisive goal. In the end, Hitchcock’s demeanor probably won’t be much different today. He was anything but discouraged by the evening.

“It’s hard to fault the effort in the second and third and the overtime,” Hitchcock said. “It’s hard to fault anything there. But the first period for me was an alarm bell. That’s something we have to talk about tomorrow, address and change. If we want to be a good team, we can’t have those periods.”

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
Blues make a trade with Columbus

By DAN O'NEILL • doneill@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8186  | Posted: Friday, November 11, 2011 12:00 am

Four days after hiring Columbus' former coach, the Blues have swapped defensemen with the Blue Jackets.

The clubs have not confirmed the deal, but sources told the Post-Dispatch that the Blues have sent Nikita Nikitin to Columbus in exchange for Kris Russell.

Russell, 24, was the Blue Jackets' third-round pick in 2005. A 5-foot-10, 185-pound left-handed shooter, he has 18 goals, 79 points and a minus-29 plus-minus rating in 268 NHL games. This season, he had two goals, three points and a minus-1 in 12 games.

Russell is considered a good skater who needs to use his speed more wisely. He isn't known for his passing and could use some improvement in his defensive zone. He was a healthy scratch for Columbus' 6-3 loss to Chicago Thursday, dropping the Blue Jackets to 2-12-1 this season.

It's reasonable to think that Ken Hitchcock, who was hired Sunday by the Blues, was involved in the deal and believes Russell can help the club.

Nikitin, who was a fifth-round pick in 2004, had been a healthy scratch in eight of the Blues' last nine games. In his second season with the Blues, Nikitin had one goal, eight assists and a minus-4 plus-minus rating in 41 NHL games. In seven games this season, he had no points and a minus-5 rating. He had been a healthy scratch in eight of the club's last nine games.

Russell is scheduled to make $1.3 million this season, $1.3 million in 2012-13 and will be a restricted free agent in 2013-14. Nikitin was making $600,000 on a one-way contract, meaning he would be paid the same amount if he were sent to Peoria.

Nichol returns

Scott Nichol was back in the Blues lineup after taking a blow to the head Tuesday in the win over Chicago. Nichol left the game in the first period and did not return. But he practiced Thursday morning and was given medical clearance to play.

Nichol said he might have returned Tuesday, but the NHL and teams are being justifiably diligent about head injuries. "Everyone is a lot more aware of it," Nichol said. "I felt good, but there's a certain protocol you have to follow and that's what we did."

Flyers stall Tactics

Blues players who saw it got a kick out of the Tampa Bay-Philadelphia game Wednesday night, during which Flyers defenseman Chris Pronger circled in his end and declined to advance the puck while Tampa Bay maintained its 1-3-1 formation.

"It's ... a system that is frustrating people and Tampa Bay must be doing it right if teams don't want to try to attack on them," Blues defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk said.

"I don't think I'd have that presence of mind. I'm the type of guy who likes to go-go-go."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
Blues trade Nikitin to Columbus for Russell

By JEREMY RUTHERFORD | Posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 10:22 pm

Four days after hiring Columbus’ former coach, the Blues have swapped defensemen with the Blue Jackets.

The clubs have not confirmed the deal, but sources tell the Post-Dispatch that the Blues have sent Nikitin Nikitin to Columbus in exchange for Kris Russell.

Russell, 24, was the Blue Jackets’ third-round pick in 2005. A 5-foot-10, 185-pound left-handed shooter, he has 18 goals, 79 points and a minus-29 plus-minus rating in 288 NHL games. This season, he had two goals, three points and a minus-1 in 12 games.

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St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
The Maple Leafs have killed the Blues' power play.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 1 ... with 4:40 left in regulation.

The Blues are going on the power play after Joffrey Lupul was whistled for slashing.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 1 ... with 7:01 left in regulation.

Toronto goalie Ben Scrivens just came up with an incredible leg save on a sure goal by Alex Steen.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 1 ... with 13:44 left in regulation.

The Blues and Maple Leafs are underway in the third period with the Leafs clinging to a 2-1 lead.

The Blues trail Toronto 2-0 after the first period tonight at Scottrade Center.

John Michael-Liles and Phil Kessel have power-play goals for the Maple Leafs, who had been outscored 12-1 in their last two games.

The Blues picked up the pace in the second period, scoring the only goal of the frame, but still trail Toronto 2-1 at the second intermission.

After falling behind 2-0 after the first period, Jason Arnott put the Blues on the board with a power-play goal with 11:59 left in the second period. It was Arnott's fourth goal of the season and was assisted by Alex Pietrangelo.

The Blues had another power play with 5 minutes left in the second period and had great movement and solid scoring chances, but couldn't put the puck past Toronto goalie Ben Scrivens.

The Blues outshot the Maple Leafs 13-5 in the second period and now lead 21-19 in that department.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 1 ... at the 2nd intermission.

The Blues have pulled to within one goal, as Jason Arnott netted his fourth of the season on the power play.

The Blues went on the man-advantage after Dion Phaneuf took his second penalty of the game, a slashing call.

Defenceman Alex Pietrangelo jumped on a loose puck on the wall and skated toward the corner before feeding Arnott in the slot. Arnott got off a quick wrister.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 1 ... with 11:59 left in the 2nd period.

Patrik Berglund had a wide-open look in the slot, but didn't get off a shot.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 0 ... with 12:33 left in 2nd period.

The Blues and Toronto are underway in the second period with the Leafs leading 2-0.

The Blues' PK unit began the night ranked 25th in the NHL, killing off 76.1 percent. But their 1 for 3 tonight, as the club as been very undisciplined through 20 minutes.

The Maple Leaf goals came after a boarding call against Patrik Berglund and a tripping call against Matt D'Agostini.

Meanwhile, the Blues were 0 for 1 on their only power play of the period. The team is being outshot 14-8 so far.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 0 ... at the 1st intermission.
Another Toronto power-play goal has given the Leafs a two-goal lead on the Blues.

After the Leafs took a 1-0 lead on a power-play goal, the Blues killed off a goaltending interference call against Vladimir Sobotka. But seconds later, Matt D'Agostini was called for tripping.

Ten seconds into their third penalty of the night, the Blues gave up Phil Kessel's NHL-leading 12th goal of the season. He knocked in a loose puck in front of the net.

Maple Leafs 2, Blues 0 ... with 2:58 left in the 1st period.

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Toronto defenseman John-Michael Liles has second goal of the season, scoring a power-play goal to give the Maple Leafs the early lead.

Patrik Berglund was in the penalty box for boarding. After some slick passing, Liles ripped a shot past Jaroslav Halak.

Maple Leafs 1, Blues 0 ... with 8:33 left in the 1st period.

***

Jaroslav Halak is sharp early tonight, making a save on a tight shot by Phil Kessel, who leads the NHL with 11 goals.

Blues 0, Maple Leafs 0 ... with 13:16 left in the 1st period.

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The Blues and Maple Leafs are underway in the first period at Scottrade Center.

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TONIGHT'S LINEUP

Forwards
Vladimir Sobotka-David Backes-T.J. Oshie
Matt D'Agostini-Patrik Berglund-Chris Stewart
Alex Steen-Jason Arnott-Jamie Langenbrunner
Evgeni Grachev-Scott Nichol-Ryan Reaves

Defensemen
Barret Jackman-Kevin Shattenkirk
Carlo Colaiacovo-Alex Pietrangelo
Ian Cole-Roman Polak

Goalie
Jaroslav Halak

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
Nichol ready to go; Halak in goal

By DAN O'NEILL | Posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 1:11 pm

Blues forward Scott Nichol will be back in the lineup against the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight after taking a blow to the head in Tuesday's win over Chicago. Nichol left the game in the first period and did not return.

But he practiced this morning and has been given medical clearance to play. Nichol said he might have gone back in on Tuesday, but the league and the various teams are being justifiably diligent about head injuries.

"Everyone is a lot more aware of it," Nichol said. "I felt good, but there's a certain protocol you have to follow and that's what we did."

The 5-foot-9 Nichol joked about taking the baseline test and answering things correctly with one exception: "My height was a little bit higher, I don't know how that happened," he said.

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Fresh off his shutout of Chicago, Jaroslav Halak will be in the Blues net tonight.

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Blues players who saw it got a kick out of the Tampa Bay-Philadelphia game on Wednesday night, during which Flyers defenseeman Chris Pronger circled in his own end and declined to advance the puck while the Lightning maintained their 1-3-1 formation.

"It's obviously a system that is frustrating people and Tampa Bay must be doing it right if teams don't want to try to attack on them," Blues defenseeman Kevin Shattenkirk said.

Perhaps, but Tampa Bay ranks 23rd in the league in goal-against average (3.00 per game) and is 19th in 5-on-5 differential (0.97). The Blues play host to the Lightning on Saturday and the offense-oriented Shattenkirk is not sure he can employ the stall tactic.

"I don't think I'd have that presence of mind," he added. "I'm the type of guy who likes to go-go-go."

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
The big NHL story Wednesday night was the Flyers-Lightning game, which turned into a staredown between Tampa Bay coach Guy Boucher and Philadelphia coach Peter Laviolette.

The defensively challenged Lightning use a zone trap scheme while trying to slow opponents. The Flyers tried to lure the Lightning out of that trap by refusing to advance the puck up ice against it.

The resulting standoff featured Flyer defensemen holding the puck for extended periods in their own zone, unchecked, as time clicked off the clock. The guys at Versus got pretty worked up about it.

This tactic made for poor viewing and stirred quite a bit of media chatter. Several NHL players weighed in on the controversy through the miracle of Twitter.

"It's not hockey in my book," Flyers defenseman Chris Pronger told the Philadelphia Inquirer. "But whatever. The league is letting them do it. Would you pay money to watch that?"

The tactic worked, however, as the Lightning held the Flyers to 15 shots in a 2-1 overtime victory. Somewhere out there Jacques Lemaire is beaming.

Elsewhere around the NHL:

Capitals coach Bruce Boudreau is taking desperate action while trying to shove his team into gear. You may recall he briefly benched his star player, Alex Ovechkin. Then he subjected his listless team to the dreaded bag skate.

The Canucks hope to get winger Mason Raymond back during the next few weeks. He has recovered from his playoff neck injury and he has finally resumed practicing with the team. Also, Alex Burrows will return soon after suffering a minor back injury against the Blues last Friday.

Is Penguins star Sidney Crosby coming back any time soon? Maybe, maybe not. The mystery continues. Mid-day word in Pittsburgh suggested that his debut could come Friday.

As it turns out, maybe Mike Smith isn't such a terrible goaltender for the Phoenix Coyotes.

As it turns out, maybe Jonas Gustavsson is the wrong kind of Monster for the Maple Leafs in goal. With James Reimer sidelined with post-concussion syndrome, the once-vaunted import has failed mightily. The Leafs are shooting down rumored interest in spare Islanders goaltender Evgeni Nabokov, but the season could get away from Toronto if things don't improve soon.

Comedian/talk show host Artie Lange loves Don Cherry. And he can do a decent imitation of him, too.

St Louis Post Dispatch LOADED: 11.11.2011
Maple Leafs 3, Blues 2 (SO)

The St. Louis Blues managed to get a late tying goal from Patrik Berglund, but could not get any more Thursday as they dropped a 3-2 shootout loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Toronto rookie goalie Ben Scrivens turned away 38 of 40 shots in just his third NHL start. Scrivens did not allow a goal in the shootout, turning away Blues forward Alex Steen, T.J. Oshie and Matt D'Agostini.

Patrik Berglund broke a five-game scoreless drought when he banged home the rebound of a shot by Chris Stewart with 1:56 remaining in regulation to force overtime.

How it went

Toronto got three straight power plays in the first period and converted on the first two, getting goals from John-Michael Liles and Phil Kessel. Kessel had an NHL-leading 12 goals in 16 games.

Jason Arnott's power-play goal at 8:01 of the second period cut Toronto's lead to 2-1. The Blues outshot the Leafs 14-5 in the second period, but couldn't get anything past Scrivens until Berglund banged one in late in the third.

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 11.11.2011
Maple Leafs shoot down Blues

By NORM SANDERS - News-Democrat

ST. LOUIS -- For a rookie goaltender making his third NHL start and fourth appearance, Toronto's Ben Scrivens left quite an impression Thursday at Scottrade Center.

Handed an early 2-0 lead thanks to power-play goals, Scrivens stopped 38 of 40 shots and was the main reason Toronto nailed down a 3-2 shootout victory over the St. Louis Blues.

Two first-period power play goals by the Maple Leafs put the Blues in an early hole and Scrivens did his best to keep them from escaping after that.

He made several big saves and got help from the Blues, who just missed converting several chances.

"You're thinking if you outshoot somebody 31-8 in the last 40 minutes you're going to win a lot of hockey games," Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said. "The goalie was good and we missed a few chances."

Down 2-0, Blues forwards Alex Steen and Patrik Berglund each had golden scoring opportunities that failed to materialize.

Continually bottling up the Leafs, who were outshot 40-22 overall and 30-8 in the second and third period, the Blues fired off eight unanswered shots to start the third period.

The biggest moment came on a diving glove save by Scrivens with Steen staring at what looked to be an empty net.

"He comes across pretty good," Steen said. "I didn't get a lot on it to be honest with you. It's rolling and I'm trying to go upstairs. It just kind of flutters up, which gives him the extra time to get across."

Berglund was turned away on a redirection try during a third-period power play. He made up for that later by forcing overtime, scoring with 1 minute, 56 seconds remaining in regulation.

That got the Blues one point, but it was a night where they definitely felt they should have had two.

"We bucked up in the second and third period and really played," Hitchcock said. "It's one of those points you've got to say is a good point, but disappointing when you've got a team on the ropes like that and we didn't get a chance to bury them."

Scrivens entered the game with a 1-1 record and 4.0 goals-against average.

Toronto came in leading the Northeast Division, but also had been outscored 12-1 in its last two games. That included a 5-1 loss to the Florida Panthers on Tuesday.

After being outplayed in the first period -- and outshot 14-8 -- the Blues came out with more fire in the second period.

Only some strong saves by Blues goaltender Jaroslav Halak kept the Toronto lead from being worse than 2-0. The Leafs converted on their first two power-play opportunities with goals from John-Michael Liles and NHL goals leader Phil Kessel, who collected his 12th in 16 games.

"It's hard to fault the effort in the second and the third and the overtime," Hitchcock said. "But the first period, for me, is an alarm bell -- and that's something we've got to talk about tomorrow and address and change.

"If we want to be a real good team, we can't have those periods. ... We got out of it 2-0 and we were lucky it was still 2-0. It could have been three or four and it could have been really over."

The Blues finally got something past Scrivens when Jason Arnott scored on a second-period power play.

Arnott took a quick pass from Alex Pietrangelo and fired a shot from the slot for his fourth goal, falling over backwards after letting the shot go.

Hitchcock says it will take more than anything he or his staff does to motivate the team.
Blues and Columbus swap defenseman

News-Democrat

In a trade confirmed by the Canadian sports network TSN, the St. Louis Blues reportedly sent defenseman Nikita Nikitin to the Columbus Blue Jackets late Thursday in exchange for defenseman Kris Russell.

Russell, 24, has two goals and an assist in 12 games with the Blue Jacket this season. The 5-foot-10, 180-pound native of Caroline, Alberta, was a third-round draft pick in 2005 and has 18 goals and 79 points in 288 NHL games.

Nikitin was scoreless in seven games with the Blues and had been a healthy scratch in several recent games. A fifth-round draft pick in 2004, Nikitin has one goal and nine points in 48 games with the Blues.

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 11.11.2011
Hitchcock is quick to get results with Blues

By NORM SANDERS - News-Democrat

ST. LOUIS -- In Ken Hitchcock's mind, improving the St. Louis Blues goaltending is as easy as improving the play of everyone around the goaltender.

It happened Tuesday night against the Chicago Blackhawks, and the result was the first shutout all season by Jaroslav Halak.

Halak was tested a few times early, but also stood up well under heavy pressure during four Chicago power-plays and a relentless assault in the third period.

This was the same Halak who entered the game with a 1-6 record, a 3.35 goals-against average and extremely low .856 save percentage.

Hitchcock said the overall defensive system helps produce better goaltending, and he has the history to back it up.

Goalies who have thrived under Hitchcock's system include Steve Mason in Columbus and Ed Belfour in Dallas. When Hitchcock had a run of three straight 100-point teams in Philadelphia, his 2002-03 squad led the league in goals-against average with Roman Cechmanek getting 33 wins and posting a 1.83 goals-against average.

"We've got to get down on these easy chances," said Hitchcock, whose 7-7 team continues its five-game homestand tonight against Toronto. "We've got to eliminate the breakaways, 2-on-1s and 3-on-2s against, and then you can evaluate your goaltender," Hitchcock said. "It's hard to evaluate goaltending when you give up easy back-door chances or you give up easy odd-man rush chances.

"I think if we eliminate that, we can get a better read. We've got to stop giving up the easy scoring chances."

When watching film of recent Blues games, Hitchcock noticed the team had allowed three breakaways and three 2-on-1 chances against Vancouver. The Blues still won that one with Brian Elliott in net.

"Elliott stood on his head and made acrobatic saves," Hitchcock said. "We've just got to find a way to kind of stop staring at the puck and react a little bit quicker defensively so we're not giving up those chances."

The Blues didn't hang Halak out to dry much Tuesday, a trend the team would like to continue.

"Guys were buying in all over the ice making plays," Blues captain David Backes said. "Jaro was outstanding in net and bailed us out with a few chances when we really needed them at critical times in the game."

For now, Hitchcock is content to see how things play out. But each player is being evaluated and, based on his track record, the ones working the hardest and smartest will avoid trouble.

"I'm relentless to the point where I don't look at it kindly when there isn't a firm commitment from everybody throughout the lineup," Hitchcock said. "I think any coach does that. You can't beg people to check and work. It's got to be automatic if you want to win."

One player Hitchcock liked immediately is Backes.

"I see so much Keith Primeau in him," Hitchcock said. "I don't really care where he plays, center, right wing, ... I really like how he plays, what he says, how he thinks."

"There's a reason this guy's the captain. He's pretty impressive for me."

Cole gets a chance

Blues defenseman Ian Cole, whose promotion from minor-league Peoria on Sunday was overshadowed by the coaching change, was in the lineup against the Blackhawks.

Cole played just under 19 minutes, blocking two shots.

"There's a real trust within the organization for Ian and they want to see what he can do," Hitchcock said. "He's had a very good AHL campaign so far this year, he's played very well. He's been really solid and he's a left-(handed) shot, which can really help the group here.

"We're kind of excited to give him go here and see what it looks like."

Another sign that Cole could stick around for a while was defenseman Taylor Chorney being placed on waivers Wednesday by the Blues.

Cole said his own performance mirrored that of the Peoria Rivermen during the early portion of the season.

"Started off a little slow, lost the first four games," he said. "Guys weren't really clicking and there was some miscommunication everywhere on the ice. I think I followed that same trend, trying to get it figured out at first.

"Then the past couple weeks, the team's been playing very well and I've been following that trend."

The former first-round pick and University of Notre Dame All-American had one goal and four points in 26 games last season.

He made his season debut Tuesday while paired with veteran defenseman Roman Polak.

"I love playing with him," Cole said. "He's so solid, so good at what he does. I want to follow the path that he took here. He was up here a little bit, went down to Peoria, kept playing and got called back up here.

"He's been rock-solid ever since, so if I could follow that path and be another Roman Polak, it would be a hell of a career."

Belleville News-Democrat LOADED: 11.11.2011
TAMPA --

Tampa Bay Lightning

Bolts not concerned with critics of style

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune

Published: November 11, 2011

"It gives me food for thought ... but I hear people say that's a trap, it's not a trap, it's a 1-3-1 and we use it sometimes off faceoffs when we lose a faceoff," Wilson told reporters on Thursday. "A lot of teams use it now based on the success Tampa had last year doing it. But not to the extent where a guy doesn't go over the blue line to check, that's boring to me."

Tampa Bay is not alone in its strategy, Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff said.

"It's more pronounced than other teams, but there's probably 15 teams that play 1-3-1," Ruff told the Buffalo News. "We play it on occasion. We like a couple different looks, though. That's his right to play whatever system he wants."

Lecavalier was a bit surprised by all the backlash.

"For the past 95 games it's been the same system and we didn't change anything, so that's why I'm surprised there is all this talk about it," he said. "I don't really care about what they are saying. We are playing the way we want to play and that's it."

Boucher was steadfast.

"When we attack, we attack. When we defend, we defend -- pack mentality," he said. "So I don't want to answer to other people. We're ourselves and that's who we are and that's how I coach. I'm paid to win."

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011

Canada's TSN network, which showed the Ottawa-New York Rangers game, scrapped the scheduled intermission topic to concentrate on what was taking place in Tampa.

"I almost played both sides of the fence on TV, saying, 'Did I like it? No. Did I enjoy it? No. Did I understand? Absolutely,'" former NHL defenseman and current TSN analyst Aaron Ward said of the stalemate.

"But coaches are judged on (wins) and when you have the highest scoring team coming in in Philadelphia and you have to make up a game plan, you know what the makeup of your locker room is and you can determine what is going to be successful. The 1-3-1 in clogging the middle is going to do that."

The Lightning won 2-1 in overtime, limiting the Flyers to a season-low 15 shots on goal.

Boucher was not bothered by the criticism.

"I don't care what people say," Boucher said on Thursday. "I coach our team and I'm paid to win games and our rink is full. (General manager) Steve Yzerman is happy. The comments don't bother me and I really don't know the extent of it.

"We play the same way we played last year and we're going to continue playing that way. In every game, every team has a strategy. We have a strategy against the other team and during the game we adjust and re-adjust and other teams have to do the same against us. It's an ongoing process, whether it's on the ice or off the ice. The only thing that matters is what happens on the ice. We've got our strengths and weaknesses. We play to our strengths."

There was even some suggestion Tampa Bay's top players such as Steven Stamkos, Vinny Lecavalier and Marty St. Louis should be embarrassed to be asked to play in this system.

"I don't agree with that," Ward said. "One of the greatest things about hockey is upsetting the focus of the opponent. And do you think Philly was all that thrilled about playing that game? They managed one goal, and they are way ahead of everybody in goals scored."

The discussion extended to locker rooms throughout the league.

"You want to see hockey, people pay to see a show, people pay to see skating and skills and stuff like that," former Lightning wing Alex Tanguay told reporters in Calgary. "And I guess it's working for (Tampa), but as far as I'm concerned, if I was a fan paying, I would much rather see a team that is aggressive and skating rather than a team that is waiting for something out there."

Toronto coach Ron Wilson was an interested observer.
TAMPA --

The Philadelphia Flyers tried to lull the Lightning to sleep on Wednesday. But the Tampa Bay Lightning declined to take the bait and walked out with a victory.

While Philadelphia tried to play a game of keep-away, Lightning rookie Brett Connolly helped rally Tampa Bay to a 2-1 victory with his first career winning goal 2:30 into overtime in front of an announced sellout crowd of 19,204.

The Lightning have won three consecutive games, all in overtime, and seven of the past nine overall to move into a tie with Washington for first place in the Southeast Division. Goaltender Dwayne Roloson stopped 14 shots to help Tampa Bay win for the fifth consecutive time at home. Marc-Andre Bergeron notched his third goal of the season with a third-period power-play marker that tied the game at 1.

For Connolly, the sixth overall pick in the 2010 draft, it was his third goal of the season and atoned for his missing an open shot in the slot in the final minutes of the third.

"You want to help the team win, and I wanted to put that one away in the third period, but it was rolling and I couldn't get the shot away," Connolly said. "Fortunately I was able to get the OT game-winner, so it's a good feeling."

Connolly followed up a play by Dominic Moore, who picked up the puck at center ice with speed and forced his way toward the net and put the puck on goal to set up the winner.

"Dominic Moore is a man of big moments," Lightning coach Guy Boucher said. "He makes it happen again, going wide, crashing the net and forcing himself in and Connolly just capitalizes on crashing the net."

But it wasn’t an easy process to pick up the victory.

Philadelphia, the league’s highest-scoring team, averaging four goals per game, sat back and dared the Lightning to forecheck instead of sitting back in their 1-3-1 neutral zone system. The Flyers did so against a team giving up more than 30 shots per game and missing two of its top four defensemen.

So the Flyers put forth a strategy of sitting on the puck in their zone, waiting for Tampa Bay to come forward. The first two times the Flyers instituted this style, the play was finally whistled down by the officials after the puck didn’t move for more than 30 seconds, setting up a faceoff in the Flyers zone.

The Flyers then began to move the puck around, instead of sitting on it, but Tampa Bay did not break out of its system. Instead, the Lightning remained patient in what essentially looked like a game of chicken played by two parties refusing to take the first step forward.

The end result was a season-low 15 shots on goal for the Flyers and a season low allowed by Tampa Bay, which had allowed fewer than 25 shots on goal only twice this season.

"That’s the fun of it, strategizing and trying different things, so we have no problem with the way teams play and we have no problem with the way we play," Moore said. "You just stick with your game and don’t worry about the rest of it."

It wasn’t until the second period that somebody broke through as the Flyers scored on a power-play goal when Scott Hartnell tipped a Jakub Voracek shot past Roloson at 9:34.

Bergeron, who leads all defensemen with 15 points on the season, tied the game at 7:41 of the third with a rocket one-timer from the right point for his third goal of the season with the Lightning on the man advantage.

With Philadelphia slowing the pace, it seemed to play more into the Lightning’s frame of mind, wanting to play a pack-mentality defensive game with the injuries the team has been facing.

“We are missing two of your top three defensemen and we’re playing the most lethal team offensively in the league,” Boucher said. "So I think our forwards got back early and our defensemen had great gap and that’s what we wanted to do tonight.”

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning notes: RW Ritola, team part ways

By ERIK ERLENDSSON | The Tampa Tribune
Published: November 09, 2011
Updated: November 10, 2011 - 3:00 AM

TAMPA --

Tampa Bay Lightning RW Mattias Ritola cleared unconditional waivers on Wednesday, the final hurdle before the team and Ritola part ways and the remainder of his contract is terminated.

Ritola cleared regular waivers last week and was assigned to Norfolk of the American Hockey League on Saturday. But after discussing the matter with Tampa Bay general manager Steve Yzerman over the weekend, Ritola opted not to report to the minor league team and is seeking to return to Europe.

Reports out of Sweden on Wednesday stated Ritola signed a deal with Modo of the Swedish Elite League, but agent Don Baizley did not immediately return a message seeking confirmation.

Claimed on waivers from Detroit at the start of last season, Ritola struggled to find consistency and missed time last season because of an inner-ear issue. This season, he had difficulty getting into the lineup, especially after the team kept rookie RW Brett Connolly on the roster, and did not register a point in five appearances.

"I guess I'm disappointed that things didn't work out," Yzerman said. "First of all, he is a good young man and I believe he is a good hockey player. He has already spent a lot of time in the American Hockey League (four seasons), I understand where he is coming from and I respect where he is coming from.

"And I don't want to hold him back in his career and this enables him to move on with his hockey career."

Injuries mounting

Already without top-four defenseman Mattias Ohlund, out since the start of the season after having arthroscopic surgery on both knees, the Lightning faced the Flyers on Wednesday without top-four defenseman Victor Hedman and top-six forward Ryan Malone.

While neither is expected to be out long, the short-term loss will be felt on the ice.

"It's just the name of the game right now that we have to struggle with a lineup that is not necessarily our A lineup," Lightning head coach Guy Boucher said. "It's just a reality and we did it last year and were able to come through it and do some good things. So, hopefully we can do that again."

Connect the dots

There are plenty of connections between the Flyers and Lightning organizations, with many former players and coaches on each side.

Former Tampa Bay players on Philadelphia's roster include: D Matt Carle, D Andrej Meszaros and D Matt Walker, while goaltending coach Jeff Reese served the same role with the Lightning during the 2004 Stanley Cup season.

Lightning RW Steve Downie is a former first-round pick of the Flyers while assistant coach Wayne Fleming, currently recovering from surgery for a brain tumor, was previously an assistant with the Flyers.

Twitter talk

Have a question for Lightning C Steven Stamkos and have a Twitter account?

Stamkos will hold a live Twitter discussion hosted by Tissot watch company on Thursday at 3 p.m. Fans looking to ask questions can submit one by using the hashtag #TissotTimeOut.

Tampa Tribune LOADED: 11.11.2011
Whining about Lightning's 1-3-1 defense misses the point

By Tom Jones, Times Staff Writer

Imagine this: A slugger steps up to the plate in a baseball game. The defense goes into an exaggerated shift in an attempt to prevent a hit. So the batter steps out and refuses to hit until the defense goes back to its normal spots. Ridiculous, right?

That's essentially what the Flyers did Wednesday night when the Lightning, missing several regulars, sat back in its 1-3-1 (prevent) defense hoping to slow the league's top-scoring team. In protest, the Flyers took their puck and tried to go home. They skated figure eights, played with the puck and made little attempt to attack the goal.

Then they whined about the Lightning's tactic, as did the Versus announcers calling the game nationally. That outrage became hockey's hot topic across the United States and Canada on Thursday.

And somehow, the Lightning is the bad guy.

Never mind that Sabres coach Lindy Ruff estimates half the league plays a form of the 1-3-1. Never mind that Lightning coach Guy Boucher was hailed as an innovator for introducing this style to the NHL more than a year ago. Never mind the Lightning held the Flyers to a mere 15 shots, half their normal output. Never mind the Lightning won the game 2-1 in overtime.

Versus analyst (and former Flyer, by the way) Keith Jones called the Lightning's style "embarrassing," said Boucher "should be embarrassed," applauded the Flyers' work stoppage and summed up his comments by saying the Lightning should be "punished."

Punished? Punished how? And for what? For winning? Exactly what rules were broken?

Meantime, Jones' sidekick, Mike Milbury, who thinks that the louder he talks, the more right he is, walked off the set during the second intermission in protest of the Lightning's style. (Gee, if I'd known that's what it took to get him off the air, I would've paid someone to play the 1-3-1 years ago.) Before he left, Milbury ripped into the Lightning and said, "The objective of the game is to score goals."

Wait, isn't the objective to win the game? Milbury's definition of the game's purpose might be the reason the former coach now spends his time in a broadcast studio instead of behind a bench.

Stanley Cup-winning coach (Devils, 1995) and Hall of Famer Jacques Lemaire, often criticized for his neutral-zone trap that suffocated offenses, said, "Are we supposed to coach so we please the people? We please the people who are announcing the game? Is that a new style, or what? Do we have to please Milbury when we coach? It's the first time I hear this."

Boucher's defense was less sarcastic but more direct: "I'm paid to win games, and our rink is full, and (GM) Steve Yzerman is happy."

As for the Flyers, see: Yap, shut your.

For much of this season, the Lightning's 1-3-1 defense has looked like a none-3-none defense. Entering play Thursday, the Lightning was tied for 24th in the league in goals allowed, which suggests the other teams on its schedule figured out a way to score against Tampa Bay. Yet the big, bad Flyers, the Broad Street Bullies, would rather belly-ache than come up with the brains to figure out an antidote and the brawn to execute it.

Maybe someday the league will have a rule outlawing the 1-3-1. But how can you blame a team for putting in a legal game plan it believes is best suited for success and then having it succeed? Isn't that the point?
Jacques Lemaire zings Versus commentators who criticized the Lightning, and Guy Boucher

Here is what former Devils and Wild coach Jacques Lemaire said about the criticism of Lightning coach Guy Boucher from Versus commentators Mike Milbury, Keith Jones and Pierre McGuire Wednesday night about the team’s 1-3-1 trapping system, which they said makes for such boring hockey the Lightning and Boucher should be embarrassed and even “punished.”

"Myself, I laugh at this," Lemaire told the St. Petersburg Times in a phone interview. "I laugh at it this because are we supposed to coach as we please the people who are announcing the games or make comments on the games? Is that a new style or what? Do we have to please Milbury when we coach? It's the first time I hear of this."

If anyone knows about criticism, it is Lemaire. Lemaire's trap was vilified by hockey watchers and commentators all over North America as detrimental to the game because the defensive posture in the neutral zone was, when played correctly, very difficult to beat. It slowed down the action, critics said. It created boring hockey. But it also won, as Lemaire and the Devils captured the 1995 Stanley Cup.

Boucher heard much of the same during Wednesday night's game with the Flyers, who decided several times to not even try to attack Tampa Bay's 1-3-1. Instead, Flyers players skated with the puck in their defensive zone, for up to 50 seconds at a time, waiting for the Lightning to make a move. It also should be noted, the first time Tampa Bay did break ranks to forecheck, Philadelphia lost the puck.

Still, Milbury, Jones and McGuire were merciless on the Lightning, saying the team and Boucher should be embarrassed at the way they played. Jones even went as far as to say the Lightning should be "punished" in some way.

Our media writer, Tom Jones, will be getting into all that in a story for tomorrow's paper and we will write about Lemaire again on Sunday, but thought you might like a preview of Lemaire's comments on the criticism of the Lightning and Boucher. It should be noted Boucher and Lemaire are friends.

-- "What's the coach's job? It's to find a way to win, find a way to look at your personnel and find a way to win. You adapt to the players you have and try to maximize all your strengths and try to find a way that players will be comfortable."

-- "It didn't look good to me when I saw the Flyers stop playing. What does it show? What is the coach showing to his players, that I don't like the way they play, so we won't play? The Flyers have a good team, they've got to play."

-- "I don't have advice to give to anybody. The style we played when I coached, people were criticizing the way we played. well, it's their job. That's all they do. They have the mike. They have their comments on it, and some guys with the mike try to coach. They couldn't coach so they go behind the mike because they couldn't find a way to win. So, it's no big deal."

-- "I think (Boucher) has to coach the way he feels is going to win games, and that's it. The rest, you want to play a certain style that maybe doesn't fit your team and lose and then in a month you're looking for a job? What's that?"

-- "We (the Devils) played against them last year. We beat them. We played, we beat them. They are entitled to play the way they want. There's no rule to say you can't do this or can't do that."

Posted by Damian Cristodero
St. Petersburg Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Kessel leads Leafs past Blues

When Toronto's top goalie James Reimer went down with an injury, the Maple Leafs looked for someone to step in and pick up the slack.

Ben Scrivens was ready, willing and able Thursday night.

Scrivens, making his third NHL start, thwarted the St. Louis Blues on three shootout attempts and stopped 37 shots through overtime to help the Maple Leafs snap a two-game losing streak with a 3-2 win over the Blues.

"It's a double-edged sword," Scrivens said. "They don't know much about me. Also, I don't know much about them. So I just tried to get out there and stay big and try and track the puck and force them to beat me with a good move or a good shot."

Phil Kessel scored the only goal in the shootout. John-Michael Liles and Kessel scored first-period, power-play goals, and Tyler Bozak added a pair of assists.

"A win's a win," Liles said. "It's good to get back to winning ways. It's a tough team over there. They battled hard (and (Scrivens) played well for us down the stretch."

Scrivens, recalled from Toronto of the AHL on Oct. 27, came up time and time again when the Leafs were pinned in their zone.

"I was in kind of desperation mode," Scrivens said.

Jason Arnott and Patrik Berglund scored for St. Louis, and Jaroslav Halak stopped 20 shots.

Toronto outshot the Blues 14-8 in the first period, but St. Louis turned that around and had a 32-8 edge the rest of the way. The Blues just had trouble getting pucks past Scrivens.

"I thought we did a good job of funneling pucks to the net," Blues winger Alex Steen said. "We just missed our opportunities. I had one, (Berglund) had a really good one. It ended up costing us the game."

The Leafs took advantage of some undisciplined penalties by the Blues in the first period, scoring on two of three power plays.

Liles scored from the right circle 11:27 into the game, taking a pass from Dion Phaneuf and beating Halak on the stick side.

Kessel netted his NHL-leading 12th goal of the season, deflecting Joffrey Lupul's shot over Halak with 2:58 left in the first on Toronto's third power play.

"We did a lot of play with our eyes and not our legs," Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said. "You can't kill penalties if you just play with your eyes."

The Blues turned the tide in the second period, outshooting Toronto 14-5 and cutting the lead in half when Arnott netted his fourth of the season on the power play at 8:01. Arnott took a pass from Alex Pietrangelo and sent a shot from the slot past Scrivens.

Scrivens had a shaky start in which he allowed quality rebounds, but he improved as the game went on. He made key stops on Alex Steen early in the third and David Backes midway through the period to preserve Toronto's 2-1 lead.

"Yeah, (Scrivens) played really well," Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson said. "Obviously, we needed that to get us at least one point, and then we eventually won in the shootout."

The Blues, who kept pushing in the third period, tied it when Berglund hammered in Chris Stewart's shot with 1:56 left. They got some solid scoring chances in overtime, but Scrivens was up to the challenge each time.

"Good two periods, but I think we should have had the two points," Steen said. "The truth is, we walked away with one. Now we move forward."

NOTES: Kessel, who leads the league with 23 points, has at least one point in 13 of 16 games. ... Arnott has 16 goals and 34 points in 39 games against Toronto. ... Lupul has seven points in five games. ... Maple Leafs C Phillippe Dupuis played in his 100th NHL game. ... Wilson and Hitchcock have coached a combined 2,396 NHL games. Wilson is the active leader at
Leafs face another season stunted by sieves in net

A mere 19 days after James Reimer left the ice, yet to return, it's clear the Toronto Maple Leafs could be in serious distress without their No. 1 goaltender.

Backup Jonas Gustavsson and third-stringer Ben Scrivens have both struggled to pick up where Reimer left off after six solid games, and the latest in a long line of problems with Leafs netminders seems all too familiar given Toronto's woes in goal the past three years.

Coming off 7-0 and 5-1 losses in their past two games, the Leafs held a team meeting on Wednesday to regroup heading into their game Thursday against the St. Louis Blues.

While their teammates attempted to take the focus off the goalies, all eyes will likely be on the starter given their recent turns in goal.

Another bad game and it could be time for Leafs general manager Brian Burke to find someone else to shoulder the load.

"This is an opportunity," Scrivens said. "I'm trying to make the most of it right now. Going to try not to think so much and get back to playing my game. I'm not sure what the exact cause is for some of the goals that have gone in."

"Of course you want to try to stop all of the shots, but I mean sometimes it's like that," Gustavsson said. "You just have to keep going. You're going to make mistakes during the season."

Those mistakes, however, are beginning to add up. After an excellent outing in Columbus last Thursday, Scrivens was shelled against the Boston Bruins on Saturday and pulled 35 minutes in with the score 5-0.

Three nights later, Gustavsson got the same treatment, lasting only 37 minutes against the Florida Panthers before being yanked with his team down 3-0.

While there were defensive breakdowns in front of them – especially against Boston – this season has continued a longstanding trend of Leafs goalies failing to make nearly enough saves.

This season, Toronto's three netminders have a combined .888 save percentage, which is third worst in the league and well off the league average of .910.

In fact, since coach Ron Wilson arrived in 2008, the nine goaltenders that have played under him have stopped the lowest percentage of shots in the league (.893), which is miles behind the likes of Boston (.925) and Florida (.918).

If as the old axiom goes, for every good coach there's a good goalie, there's an argument to be made to the opposite effect for Wilson, as his teams have received so little support in net that it's been difficult to win many games.

Reimer is the only Leafs goaltender to have posted a better than league average save percentage (.920) in that time frame, while the likes of Justin Pogge (.844), Curtis Joseph (.869) and Vesa Toskala (.886) have pulled the overall number way down.

Scrivens, with only three appearances, is hardly to blame for the trend.

Gustavsson, however, has now appeared in 74 games – roughly 30 per cent of the games Wilson has coached in Toronto – and statistically seems to be trending down.

So with Reimer's return date from concussion-like symptoms unknown, another ugly outing by Gustavsson on Thursday could force Burke to hunt for a capable goaltender.

The short list of potential fill-in candidates isn't exactly full of world beaters:

- Evgeni Nabokov is being used as trade bait by the New York Islanders, who are rumoured to want a second-round pick for his rights

- A free agent, Marty Turco is currently team-less and working out with a junior team

- Panthers backup Scott Clemmensen has been passed on the depth chart by rookie Jacob Markstrom in Florida

- And Michael Leighton has been playing well in the minors in the Philadelphia Flyers system after falling out of favour there

All four of the above have had success in the past and could offer a short-term solution while Reimer recovers.

Doing nothing, however, can't be an option if this keeps up, as the Leafs have seen year after year since the 2004-05 lockout what happens when you struggle in goal.

You don't make the playoffs. And often, you don't come close.

Toronto Globe And Mail LOADED: 11.11.2011
ST. LOUIS—Practice did not make perfect for Ben Scrivens here Thursday night, but it had the desired effect on the Leafs goalie.

"I think a good practice (Wednesday in Toronto), that was the switch for me," said Scrivens, who righted himself from a pair of forgettable outings in leading the Leafs to a 3-2 shootout win over the Blues at the Scottrade Center.

"I got everything else out of my mind. This time I don’t think I had the nerves I had against Boston (five goals on 14 shots) and the last game (two goals on seven shots in relief against Florida)."

Scrivens had answers almost every time the Blues pushed to win this game, especially in the final period when the Leafs' play fell off badly.

Ex-Leaf Alex Steen had the game-tying goal on his stick in the third, but Scrivens, already sprawled out, was still able to extend more and get a glove hand on what looked to be a sure goal.

Toronto built a 2-0 lead in the first period on power-play goals from John-Michael Liles and Phil Kessel. Jason Arnott got one back for the Blues on a power play in the second. Then with dogged checking, the Blues hemmed the Leafs in their own end for much of the third and finally hit pay dirt at 18:04 with the 2-2 goal from Patrik Berglund.

Instead of wilting, Scrivens found more resolve. With nothing decided in the five-minute overtime, he stopped Steen, T.J. Oshie and Matt D’Agostini in the shootout while Kessel scored the only goal the Leafs needed for the win.

And so Toronto escaped with the two points, and the team’s 10th win, which marked a major step in the right direction compared to last season, when the club’s 10th win did not come until Dec. 6.

"Ben played great for us," Liles said, echoing a phrase in the Leaf dressing room. "I thought we kind of sat back a bit, and we will take a lot away from this game. We have to be more consistent, play the way we did in the first period."

While the win eased the pressure of two sloppy defeats — and equally sloppy play from Scrivens and Jonas Gustavsson — it came with a price.

Defenceman Mike Komisarek was slashed by Arnott late in the game and left the game in obvious pain.

"He’ll get an x-ray in Toronto (Friday) and we’ll see," Leafs coach Ron Wilson said.

Scrivens and Gustavsson came under intense scrutiny after sub-par performances against the Bruins and Panthers, in which the Leafs were outscored 12-1. There was no end to the debate about the state of the Leafs’ goaltending in the absence of No. 1 James Reimer.

That debate extended to which goalie — Scrivens or Gustavsson — should start Thursday in St. Louis. And by extension, which one truly deserved the start.

"Ben played great, but let’s not get ahead of ourselves," said Wilson, referring to which goalie he will start in the Hall of Fame game against Ottawa on Saturday.

"They (media) build a statue for him (Scrivens, after his first career win in Columbus last week) then tear it down (after the rough outings). You have to be reasonable, he’s a young goalie, and we’ll do what’s best for both our goalies."

The win for Scrivens was his second in four career NHL starts. When he gets his fifth is not a major concern of his. "I’m happy with whatever starts I get," Scrivens said.

Gustavsson, similarly, is just waiting for the nod from Wilson.

"For sure you always want to play," Gustavsson said. "But it makes you work harder. There’s always two goalies and only one can play. You don’t feel sorry for yourself, you go out and push the other guy for the good of the team."
Cox: Hockey Hall welcomes another Howe

Marty Howe, like most of the men in his family, says little most of the time and less if possible. But there’s a wry sense of humour that emerges from the muttering and mumbling, produces a quip that’s easy to miss, then disappears again.

There’s just a way the Howe men talk. You’ve got to listen. You’ll learn something if you do.

So you ask Marty what it’s been like, living and playing the sport of hockey in the shadow of his famous father, the illustrious Gordie, and also alongside his more successful younger brother, Mark, and you get a response of feigned annoyance from Marty.

“Well, it’s gettin’ harder now,” says Marty. “It was a lot easier before this year.”

This year, you see, is the year Mark enters the Hockey Hall of Fame, joining his dad, leaving Marty behind with the rest of us mere mortals.

The three once played together briefly on a line in the WHA with Houston for promotional purposes, although Marty was a defenceman and, back then, Mark was a winger. Gordie was Gordie, still a force then at 45 years of age. Between the brothers, well, there was a noticeable difference. Marty was a little more hot-headed, by his own description, but the better athlete, although he loved football more than hockey.

Mark, on the other hand, was the son who did all his homework at school so he could race home and spend the rest of the day playing on the backyard rink until mother Colleen ordered him in for dinner.

“Look at any picture of Mark on the ice,” says Marty. “He’s never smiling. He’ll have a bit of a wrinkled forehead because he was always thinking about something out there. Gordie was even worse that way than Mark, although at least Gordie would smile sometimes.”

Maybe it was that singular focus that will land Mark alongside Gordie as an honoured member on Monday night, the same evening Ed Belfour, Doug Gilmour and Joe Nieuwendyk will be inducted.

Mark, now 56, had to wait 13 years after becoming eligible to get the call from the Hall, absurd for anyone who watched him play or carefully considered his remarkable career, spent first as a scoring forward but most impressively as one of the most complete defencemen of his era. Broadcaster Mike Emrick, a member of the Hall’s induction panel, was relentless in his drive to get Mark elected.

“The last couple of years, people would tell me I was getting close, and I’d get my hopes up thinking about what an honour it would be, but then I wouldn’t get the call,” said Mark, who played 22 seasons in the WHA and NHL. “The next day I’d be dejected, and then one day later, life would go on.”

He ended his career with Detroit in 1995, playing until his battered back would allow no more, getting a few seasons with the famed winged wheel on his chest that his father had worn for 25 years. Marty had wanted the same distinction, and in 1984, with his career winding down with the Hartford Whalers, he approached GM Emile Francis with a request to be moved to Detroit so he could play one game with the club.

The next day, he showed up to find his equipment gone from his dressing room stall. The trainer had been told to put it in the referee’s room because Marty had a “bad attitude.”

Before the season was over, he was in the minors, then retired.

“Playing one game in Detroit was just a wish I had, a goal,” he said. “But it never happened.”

Both boys have warm memories of spending time with Gordie during the 1960s when he had a deal with Eaton’s that had him visiting stores across the country every summer. He would start in Newfoundland and his sons would join him partway, maybe in Winnipeg, and would be by his side during the days and then sit and watch as he signed hundreds of cards at the hotel in the evening.

They’d squeeze in some golf and fishing along the way, wonderful times, in Mark’s memory, for boys to spend time with their famous dad during the years in which many superstar athletes often look back and regret time spent away from family.

“It was a nice bonding thing,” says Mark. “I did a lot of things with my father that a lot of people don’t have the opportunity to do with their dads.”

By the time Marty had quit the NHL, Mark was just getting rolling. Whalers coach Don Blackburn had switched him from the wing to defence, and after being traded to Philadelphia, he fell under the wing of retired Flyer blueliner Ed Van Impe.

“He had to play the game a certain way, and he told me how he thought the game,” said Mark, a brilliant skater. “I started to think the game a little better. I’d ... study the games when they were being replayed late at night, watch to see the mistakes I’d made.

“As a young kid being compared to my father, it was a no-win situation. My mother taught me how to set my own standards. Eventually, my goal became to play a perfect game every night.”

In his partnership with Brad McCrimmon, he often did. Mark was plus-85 one year, plus-349 over a decade. He and McCrimmon spent three of those seasons together, and the loss of McCrimmon in the Yaroslavl plane disaster this summer hit Mark hard.

“He was the best partner I ever had, and the best friend I ever had,” he says. “The best chemistry I ever had was on a line with my dad. Next to that, it was playing with Brad.

“The last time we talked, he apologized because he wouldn’t be able to make the Hall of Fame induction ceremony. With Brad, we talked hockey a lot, looked at each other for advice. That’s what I miss the most.”

Colleen Howe had died in 2009 after battling with dementia for years, leaving his father a little lost, his short-term memory fading. Mark would visit his dad at his Detroit-area home and see him forlornly looking at old Detroit team pictures.

“He would say, ‘So-and-so is dead, and that guy’s dead, and I should be dead,’” recalls Mark.

The family would hear that lament, and worry.

“I hated when he’d say that stuff,” said Marty. “I’d tell him, ‘Stay on the green side, Dad. It’s better than the alternative.’

Along with brother Murray and sister Cathy, it was decided that Gordie shouldn’t live on his own anymore. So these days, he splits time between the four children, often in the fall with Cathy in her new Texas home, usually the holidays with Murray, the winters with Marty near Hartford and much of the summer down on the Jersey shore with Mark on his boat.

Gordie, 83, still does appearances, with Marty handling his business affairs. Otherwise, he cuddles and spills his teacup poodle Rocket, named after you-know-who.

“Basically, that dog is Velcro-ed to my dad’s forearm,” says Mark.

The Howes have been a family story for decades, always a little bit about all of them, and they remain that way as Mark, father to three of his own, is ushered into the famed hockey hall 39 years after it welcomed Gordie. Mark’s first request upon being informed by Hall chairman Bill Hay that he was to be enshrined was to be able to tell his dad. He located him in Toronto at a golf event, with Marty by his side.

Mark’s had his acceptance speech written for more than a month, and now just frets about delivering it correctly. Marty’s sure his brother will hit all the right notes, and all of the family will shed a tear, wishing Colleen was able to be there.

For the boys, it’s never been simple to be the hockey-playing sons of Mr. Hockey. How could it have been? But it hasn’t turned out too badly, either. They’ve known and loved their dad, treasuring the times they’ve had and the time they have left. Together.

Toronto Star LOADED: 11.11.2011
NHL scoring leader Phil Kessel is among five Leafs on the league all-star ballot, released Thursday. Voting starts Monday for the Jan. 29 game in Ottawa, where teams will once again be selected in a fantasy draft format, the one that left Kessel as the final pick last year. Here are the Leaf selections:

G James Reimer
On the shelf, but still ranks 24th with a 2.58 GAA.

D Dion Phaneuf
Coach Ron Wilson called the captain the league’s best D-man. He’s among the top 10 defencemen in points and ice time.

D John-Michael Liles
Smooth skater had nine points through 15 games.

F Phil Kessel
Impressive plus-10 while leading the league in scoring.

F Joffrey Lupul
On a line with Kessel and a rotation of centres, he’s been among the league’s top 20 scorers.
ST. LOUIS -

No less than five Maple Leafs have been named to the all-star game ballot.

Goalie James Reimer, defencemen Dion Phaneuf and John-Michael Liles, and forwards Phil Kessel and Joffrey Lupul got the nod for the 2012 game on Thursday.

Voting begins on Nov. 14 and ends on Jan. 14. The annual goal-fest is scheduled to be played on Jan. 29 in Ottawa.

"It's a nice feather in the cap, but at the same time it does not mean anything unless the team is having success," Liles said after the Leafs beat the Blues 3-2 in a shootout on Thursday night.

"We have had some success here. When our team is successful and winning that generates, there are more eyes on you. It's a good situation to be in right now."

The Leafs already have 10 victories, improving to 10-5-1 with the win against the Blues.

Kessel, who was the last pick by team captains at the all-star game last season, should be a lock to play again. He will be exactly that if he keeps his scoring pace up.

Phaneuf also stands a good chance of going, while Lupul and Liles probably will be in tough. Reimer, still recovering from concussion-like symptoms, does not stand much of a chance of being voted to the game.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
Leafs good enough, long enough

By Steve Buffery, Toronto Sun
First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 11:40 PM EST

TORONTO -

Leafs coach Ron Wilson couldn’t have asked for a better scenario than how Thursday night’s game went against the St. Louis Blues.

His two healthy goaltenders, Ben Scrivens and Jonas Gustavsson, are both under the gun to come up with a solid game or two with regular starter James Reimer out with concussion-like symptoms.

The two goaltenders had given up a combined 13 goals on just 48 shots leading into Thursday’s game. Wilson elected to start Scrivens against the Blues and the Leafs started the game strong in the first period, firing 14 shots at Jaroslav Halak and jumping into a 2-0 lead while limiting the Blues’ chances, giving Scrivens a chance to settle in and gain some confidence. But after the first period, the Blues dominated and Scrivens had to bail the Leafs out time and again.

Scrivens stopped 37 of 39 shots against the Blues in regular time and the overtime, including a huge save on Alex Steen in the third, and was huge in the shootout, stopping all three Blues shooters. He gave up the tying goal to Patrik Berglund late but played a splendid game and you would have to believe that Scrivens will be Wilson’s main guy going forward until Reimer gets back.

PRE-GAME STUFF

Even when the Maple Leafs play the St. Louis Blues in early November, the airwaves and newspapers are full of Leafs news leading up to the game. For instance, everybody with a press pass, and many without, tweeted on Thursday afternoon that goaltender Gustavsson is “disappointed” that he wasn’t given the start last night — a stunning, shocking revelation ...

Meanwhile, a Toronto “Breaking News” channel reported around 3 p.m. that the Leafs haven’t decided who was playing goal against the Blues — hours after some Toronto newspapers, the Sun included, and radio station reported that it would be Scrivens. Makes you wonder what their definition of “breaking news” is ... Leafs coach Wilson did a one-on-one with TSN’s James Duthie prior to the game. Earlier in the week, Wilson did one with Christine Simpson on Sportsnet. One can only assume that Saturday he’ll sit down with someone from the CBC. It’s almost like some MLSE flak set up these interviews so we could see Wilson’s “human side.” Me, I always suspected that Wilson was a regular human-type person. People don’t realize that Wilson is a funny, interesting dude and his disdain for the media can only be described as reasonable and understandable ... Nice idea having former NHLer and World War II veteran Howie Meeker read In Flanders Field to commemorate Remembrance Day ... A TSN insider reported that Reimer will start skating “soon.” What does “soon” mean exactly? In a couple of days? In a week? In a couple of weeks? The Leafs keep saying he’s getting better, so we can only assume he’ll start skating “soon.”

ANOTHER RANT ON ICE SIZE

Say what you want about Wilson, but his teams play an entertaining brand of hockey, particularly on the rush, as do teams coached by Ken Hitchcock. Made for a lively match Thursday night, unlike that disgrace between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday night, when the Lightning sat back with their 1-3-1 trap. You want to beat the trap? Widen the ice. It’s like these players, much bigger and faster than players of yesteryear, are playing in a phone booth. In the first period of the Leaf-Blues game, the puck must have hit an official 19 times. There’s not enough room for 10 big skaters and four zebras anymore. Maybe NHL people will wake up and smell the coffee some day.

HERE AND THERE

Mikhail Grabovski looks distracted or something ... These restaurant commercials where everyone has perfect teeth and smiles like hyenas are annoying ... Watching the TSN panel, Bob Clarke looks like he’d like to smack someone ... Speaking of the TSN panel, I was there when Tampa GM Phil Esposito took a poke at Bob McKenzie in the visitor’s dressing room at Maple Leaf Gardens some years back. Wild stuff. The Hoser was a lowly print scribe back then and not a TV big shot.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
Kessel lifts Leafs past Blues

By Terry Koshan, Toronto Sun
First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 10:50 PM EST

ST. LOUIS -

Here's a piece of news that's pertinent to all in Leafs Nation.
The Maple Leafs managed to make it through a hockey game without making a goaltending change.

What's more, they won another road game, this time registering a 3-2 shootout victory at the Scottrade Center against the St. Louis Blues on Thursday night.

Rookie netminder Ben Scrivens made 37 saves and then stopped Alex Steen, T.J. Oshie and Matt D'Agostini in the shootout.

And coach Ron Wilson summed up the perceived public feelings toward Scrivens, who was great last week against Columbus but then faltered versus Boston, in a way only Wilson can.

"Everybody, you know, they build a statue, they knock it down and piss on it, and now they will be out there building it again," Wilson said. "You have to be reasonable. He is a young kid, if he starts (against Ottawa on Saturday), hopefully he is a little more focused this time."

Phil Kessel, on a forehand deke, beat Jaroslav Halak for the only goal in the shootout.

The Leafs improved to 10-5-1. Their 10th win last season did not come until Dec. 6, in their 26th game.

Defenceman Mike Komisarek was slashed on the right hand late in the third and will go for X-rays, Wilson said.

There's absolutely no way the Leafs would have won had Scrivens not been terrific for much of the night.

The Blues, playing with a lot more energy since the hiring of coach Ken Hitchcock, dominated the final 40 minutes of regulation and it was no surprise when Patrik Berglund jammed the puck into the net with one minute 56 seconds remaining in the third period.

The Leafs were terrible at clearing the zone through the second and third periods, and barely were clinging to a 2-1 lead when Berglund scored.

Scrivens was shaky to start the game and excellent to finish it. In the third period, when Luke Schenn, who mostly had a solid outing, couldn't clear the puck, Scrivens made his best save on Steen. The former Leaf was staring at an open net until Scrivens lunged across the crease and made a stop.

Before that, Scrivens, who was named first star, was sharp to make stops on David Backes and Oshie.

"Any time you are down on one side of the net and the puck is free with their guy open, you can't help but be in desperation mode," Scrivens said of the save on Steen.

"My confidence grew the last couple of days in practice. The good practice (on Wednesday) was the switch for me. I don't think I was as nervous as the Boston game. That's the stuff you learn from. I'm happy with whatever starts I am getting. Beggars can't be choosers."

Wilson said he had not decided whether Scrivens or Jonas Gustavsson would start against the Senators in the annual Hall of Fame game. There's almost no way it can be Gustavsson. Scrivens shouldn't be replaced after a performance such as that.

John-Michael Liles and Kessel scored for the Leafs, who had one goal in their previous seven-plus periods. Tyler Bozak assisted on both goals as Toronto built a 2-0 lead in the first period.

Jason Arnott also scored for the Blues, giving him 16 goals in 39 career games against Toronto.

One positive other than Scrivens was the fact the Leafs scored two power-play goals for only the fifth time in 16 games. Liles is becoming more comfortable with his teammates, and as such is sneaking in the back door with more regularity.

That the win was ugly on the whole didn't matter in the Leafs dressing room.

"It wasn't pretty, but not all of them are," Phaneuf said. "We didn't play the best game ever played, but we won the game.

"That extra point can be big coming down the stretch, and I know that is a long way away, but any point you get early is one that can't be taken away at the end of the year."

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
Agent says Reimer improving

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun

First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 08:18 PM EST | Updated: Thursday, November 10, 2011 08:49 PM EST

TORONTO -

The Maple Leafs won’t take the muzzle off of James Reimer, but agent Ray Petkau spoke Thursday night of a positive outcome to this three-week head injury saga.

Petkau said the Toronto goaltender will be returning to the ice soon and has not experienced headaches in several days after being forced to stop on-ice workouts a week ago.

“We are 100% confident the Leafs are handling this situation well and that includes James, his family and all involved,” Petkau told TSN.

The Leafs were taken aback a day earlier when his mother Marlene went public in a Toronto newspaper about her concerns with the vague medical reports the Leafs had issued. Since he was heavily jolted in the head by Brian Gionta in Montreal on Oct. 22, the club said he was suffering from whiplash-like effects, then changed that to concuss-like symptoms and finally to the ultra-secretive upper-body injury.

It’s true that there are similar symptoms to whiplash and concussion that could have made this hard to diagnose, but the Leafs have been very tight-lipped and not allowed Reimer to speak, thus deepening the mystery.

Marlene’s assertion that James had suffered “several” concussions in the past, the worst as a 16-year-old with the Red Deer Rebels, was also alarming to the fan base, compounding doubts the Leafs can stay in the playoff race if Jonas Gustavsson and Ben Scrivens can’t hold the fort long-term.

General manager Brian Burke, who last year was caught in the middle when Tomas Kaberle’s father popped off about Ron Wilson’s coaching style, did not want to comment on Reimer on Thursday, except to say Reimer’s concussion in junior “is not news to us” and was on the table when the Leafs and Petkau signed a three-year, $5.4 million US deal in June.

Petkau told TSN that reports of Reimer having multiple concussions are “exaggerated” and maintained there is no concussion diagnosis, despite the warning signs.

“His baseline test was great, James passed it with flying colours,” Petkau said.

Burke directed any further Reimer queries to Wilson, who was in St. Louis with the team.

Wilson said earlier Thursday that Reimer was “status quo”, a week after it was determined he should stop going on the ice to see if that might clear his headaches. Reimer has been around the MasterCard Centre doing light workouts and at the ACC on game nights.

Wilson said he didn’t approve of a parent being asked to comment in the media, but many player relatives have close relationships with reporters and in Reimer’s case, there has been so much conflicting information about this injury.

As for the current goaltending picture, the next week leading to a four-game road trip should be interesting. It’s believed Burke is not looking to bring in another goaltender, but if Gustavsson in particular can’t put some wins together, the GM might have no choice except to go shopping.

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
TERRY KOSHAN, Toronto Sun
First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 08:24 PM EST | Updated: Thursday, November 10, 2011 08:28 PM EST

ST. LOUIS -
Confidence can be difficult to grasp, but the Maple Leafs say they have it in both of their backup goalies.

"You lose as a team and we win as a team," captain Dion Phaneuf said prior to the game on Thursday against the St. Louis Blues.

"There is no finger-pointing in our room. We are very confident in both goalies."

James Reimer will be out for the foreseeable future with concussion-like symptoms, leaving the crease to Jonas Gustavsson and Ben Scrivens.

Gustavsson hasn’t exactly taken the bull by the horns, while the wide-eyed Scrivens made his NHL debut just last week.

"I like the confidence that Benny has," Phaneuf said. "He’s a really easy-going guy and I think that is a great quality to have when you are a goalie."

Still, coach Ron Wilson acknowledged that it’s "inevitable" for players to tighten up when the goaltending might not be spectacular.

"You do get a little tentative when you worry about what is going on behind you," Wilson said. "We have to do a better job defensively to help the goalies out."

HELP FROM THE CFL
Ken Hitchcock indirectly turned to a couple of Canadian Football League coaches — Wally Buono of the B.C. Lions and Marc Trestman of the Montreal Alouettes — while he waited to get another coaching job in the NHL.

Hitchcock did not talk to either CFL man, but liked from afar how both have seemed to adjust in the past few years.

"I remember everyone talking about the demise of Wally Buono at the start of the year when their team was struggling and now look at them. I read articles on Wally. And I read Marc’s book (Perseverance: Life Lessons on Leadership and Teamwork). It’s pretty open, the way they have changed over time. They have made the right changes you have to make as an older coach and they have become mentor coaches. I think it has impacted the teams. They have learned to adjust."

STEEN A JETS FAN
Not surprisingly, Blues forward and former Leaf Alex Steen actually circled the date of Feb. 25 on his calendar, when the Blues visit the Winnipeg Jets.

Steen was born in Winnipeg on March 1, 1984, when his dad Thomas played for the Jets.

"It’s going to be fun — a lot," Steen said. "The last couple of summers I have been back, and I only go back for a couple of weeks, you could tell the buzz has changed. Last summer before they announced it, you could tell everybody was ready for a team and they were talking as if in the near future they would get one. This summer, when I was back, it was announced and the city was just on fire. It is amazing.

"I have watched two games on TV and the crowd seems unreal there. It will be fun. Going back at the end of February — I looked at the schedule right away."

ALL-STAR NODS
Five Leafs — Reimer, Phaneuf, defenceman John-Michael Liles and forwards Phil Kessel and Joffrey Lupul — were named to the 2012 all-star
MLSEL taking one for the team

By Lance Hornby, Toronto Sun
First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 07:20 PM EST
Richard Peddie, president and CEO of Maple Leaf Sports and

TORONTO -
Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Ltd. is hoping for playoff fever in the spring, but first made a symbolic gesture to stop the flu bug in the autumn.

In one of his last public functions before he retires in six weeks, CEO Richard Peddie joined his two main pro team general managers to get inoculated with Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

With thousands of fans in close proximity on game nights, the ACC can be the breeding ground for the illness that costs many work days and kills a few hundred across the province each year. Peddie, Brian Burke and Bryan Colangelo took part and hundreds of workers at MLSEL are being asked to get shots, too.

“We can’t make it mandatory, but we really encourage them to do it,” Peddie said. “There are a lot or urban myths out there about getting a shot, stories that ‘my friend got sick’ or ‘I got a cold’. It was the same during SARS (in 2003). We were in the playoffs and the Philadelphia Flyers were worried about coming up here. Ian Clark, my CFO, and I were supposed to go to New York for a bond financing and the people there didn’t want to see us because of SARS. But this is just something we believe in doing.”

The question of who replaces Peddie after Jan. 1, 2012, is still to be determined. Peddie, who is not involved in the search, says it has been quiet the past few weeks, with the possible sale of controlling shares held by the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan also complicating matters. Executive vice-president Tom Anselmi was the last known internal candidate, but Peddie says it’s possible the post could remain vacant for a time after he leaves.

“We have the two Brians and a lot of good business people,” Peddie said “We’ll be fine.”
Scrivens gets nod for net

By Terry Koshan, Toronto Sun

First posted: Thursday, November 10, 2011 02:42 PM EST | Updated: Thursday, November 10, 2011 06:44 PM EST

ST. LOUIS -

Ben Scrivens will make his third NHL start in a week Thursday night.

Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson tapped the 25-year-old to play against the St. Louis Blues at the Scottrade Center.

“We believe in both of our goalies,” Wilson said after the morning skate. “Every once in a while you’re going to struggle. Tonight, I have decided to go with Ben. Simple decision. I hope both guys play well. I don’t need one. I want both to play well.”

Jonas Gustavsson started against the Florida Panthers on Tuesday, but was pulled in favour of Scrivens in an eventual 5-1 Leafs loss. The opposite happened in the previous game, when Scrivens was yanked against the Boston Bruins and Gustavsson mopped up in a 7-0 loss.

Gustavsson, naturally, was disappointed when he was told this morning he would not start.

“Yeah, you always want to play,” Gustavsson said. “(But) you can’t feel sorry for yourself.”

Scrivens did not speak to reporters after the morning skate.

With James Reimer nursing concussion-like symptoms, both Scrivens and Gustavsson have not been good recently. Though it was just a week ago, Scrivens’ first NHL start, a 38-save win in Columbus versus the Blue Jackets, mostly has been forgotten.

Scrivens is 1-1 with a 4.05 goals-against average and .867 save percentage in three appearances, while Gustavsson is 4-4 with a 3.78 average and a .878 save percentage in nine games.

Wilson reiterated there is no timetable for Reimer’s return to the lineup.

Still, the Leafs say they have confidence in both Gustavsson and Scrivens.

“I like the confidence that Benny has,” captain Dion Phaneuf said. “He’s a really easy-going guy and I think that is a great quality to have when you are a goalie.

“You lose as a team and we win as a team,” he said. “There is no finger-pointing in our room. We are very confident in both goalies.”

Jaroslav Halak, who had been struggling before he shut out the Chicago Blackhawks on Tuesday night in Ken Hitchcock’s first game as Blues coach, will start against the Leafs.

“I think we can build off (the win against the Blackhawks),” Hitchcock said. “We played a heck of a game. It’s not about the opponent now. It’s about the way we play.”

Alex Steen, who was traded to the Blues along with defenceman Carlo Colaiacovo in a swap that sent forward Lee Stempniak to Toronto on Nov. 24, 2008, will play the Leafs for the third time since the deal.

“It’s Toronto, the team that drafted me and got me started,” Steen said. “So that is always going to be special. But as far as the team, there is no one really there anymore (that he played with). I played with Schenn and Grabovski and Kulemin for 20 games, and that was it. Everyone else is new.”

Toronto Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
Rejuvenated Canucks bounce Kings

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun columnist November 11, 2011 12:11 AM

LOS ANGELES — The Vancouver Canucks have their bounce back. Hockey is fun again.

Funny how a couple of big wins can do that.

After three days of rest and rejuvenation, the Canucks whistled while they worked Thursday and beat the Los Angeles Kings 3-2 to climb back above .500 in the National Hockey League and put their dead October farther behind them.

“Yeah, we’re winning,” captain Henrik Sedin said of the Canucks’ sudden upswing. “We’re playing the way we want and being relaxed and comfortable on the ice. You know as well as we do how tight this league is. If you play 90 per cent of your capacity, you’re going to lose a lot of games in this league. We know we have to be extremely focussed.”

The Canucks seem much more than just 10 per cent better than a week ago.

Vancouver can finish its six-game road trip with four wins if it beats the reeling Anaheim Ducks tonight near Disneyland. Already, Southern California seems like a magic kingdom to the Canucks.

Even before they overran the Kings with three goals in nine minutes in the middle of the first period, the Canucks were feeling good about a lot of things.

The afterglow of Sunday’s 6-2 win against the Chicago Blackhawks got brighter as players played for a couple of days in the sun. The return to practice Tuesday of Mason Raymond after a career-threatening back injury further lifted spirits. One Canuck said he has never been part of a group with as much camaraderie. By Wednesday, it was clear the Canucks had rekindled their enthusiasm.

That is vital because on several nights during their Stanley Cup hangover it was obvious the Canucks were straining to find any real passion or joy for the game.

Coaches can talk all they want about execution and playing the right way, but no one does his best work when it seems like drudgery.

Coming to California for three extra days turned out to be a very good thing, even if it turned a long road trip into a marathon. The thrill was gone, but now it’s back. At least for now.

“We spent some quality time together as a team,” Canuck goalie Roberto Luongo explained. “Early in a season, sometimes you need that. That lets you grow as a team and form the chemistry you need the rest of the way. This was good for us.”

The Canucks looked Thursday profoundly different than the team that played one week earlier in a stupor, looking lifeless and disinterested during a 5-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild that Canuck defenceman Kevin Bieksa said was the worst game he’d ever been part of.

Bieksa wasn’t in much condition to say anything three minutes after the opening faceoff Thursday when King Trevor Lewis’ elbow left the Canuck bleeding inside and outside his mouth and Vancouver on a five-minute power play.

And when Drew Doughty cross-checked Ryan Kesler 2 1/2 minutes later, the Canucks had a two-man advantage.

Sami Salo, whose sore groin kept him out the previous three games, blasted post-and-in through Kesler’s screen to make it 1-0 at 6:55.

Still on the power play, Andrew Ebbett doubled the lead 42 seconds later when his centring pass towards David Booth caromed into the net off Los Angeles defenceman Willie Mitchell.

At 15:42, Aaron Rome made it 3-0 when he hammered the shot of his life, a heavy one-timer from Henrik Sedin’s excellent backhand pass that blew past goalie Jonathan Quick’s glove hand.

Rome is another reason the Canucks have been reinvigorated.

After missing the first month of the season with a hand injury, Rome returned to the lineup in Chicago and scored on the power play. So he has two goals in two games, which equals his scoring output from the first 131 games of his NHL career.

And he’d have had a third goal, too, had officials not contentiously waved off an apparent score with 34 seconds remaining in the second period, ruling incidental contact in the crease on Quick by Canuck Jannik Hansen. Replays showed Hansen was outside the crease, and there was little contact.

“I changed sticks,” Rome said of his hottest scoring streak. “I want to give the sticks credit. I think we’re maybe getting over the hump.”

The disallowed goal left Canucks’ lead at 3-1, as Los Angeles had scored at 10:30 of the middle period when Drew Doughty’s power-play one-timer past Dustin Brown’s screen gave Luongo no chance. A deflection by Mike Richards with 70 seconds remaining and the Kings’ goalie on the bench brought Los Angeles within a goal, making close a game that was pretty lopsided for two periods.

Luongo, who in October was in the worst form he has had since coming to the Canucks in 2006, played well a third straight game and finished with 28 saves. He won for the fourth time in five starts. We’re not fully pumping his tires quite yet, but Luongo certainly looks on the way back.

All the Canucks do.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Booth, Kesler looking for chemistry with Canucks

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun columnist November 10, 2011

LOS ANGELES — For most of the time since David Booth's Oct. 22 trade to the Vancouver Canucks, it looked like whatever chemistry he'd possessed with Ryan Kesler had been lost to youth hockey in Detroit.

The fast, powerful, shoot-first forwards spent a season together in bantam hockey and another with the United States national under-18 team. But the expectation by some that history meant they'd instantly mesh as National Hockey League teammates turned out to be naïve.

"We never thought that," Canuck general manager Mike Gillis said before Vancouver's game Thursday against the Los Angeles Kings. "Their past [as teammates] was more of a coincidence than anything. We just thought that their style would make them complimentary players, and we still do."

Kesler, who had summer surgery on his hip, and Booth have struggled this season.

But Booth's best game as a Canuck was Sunday in Chicago, where he had a goal, assist and four shots in the 6-2 win against the Blackhaws. And both 27-year-olds believe their line is progressing and becoming more dangerous offensively.

"I think we both play the same way," Kesler said. "As linemates, we're starting to feel better each game and last game was our best game. We just have to find some chemistry and that's what we're working on."

"We played off and on together [as kids] but we're not going to be like the Sedins."

No two players in the NHL are like Canuck identical twins Daniel and Henrik, but Booth believes his old friendship with Kesler still counts for something.

"I think if you have a good relationship with people, those things lead to on-ice performance," Booth said. "It's definitely going to take time, but I think relationships off the ice go a long way on the ice."

FINALLY GONE DRY: It was speculated in July that Philadelphia Flyers' star Mike Richards was traded to the Kings partly because he refused to join "Dry Island," a voluntary abstention from alcohol at the request of former coach Peter Laviolette.

But if Richards wouldn't go dry off the ice, he certainly had on the ice for his new team. His goal in Tuesday's 4-3 win against the Nashville Predators was the first point in five games and the second goal in 14 for the centre with a $69-million contract.

"You put pressure on yourself regardless of the situation," Richards said. "I've been through slumps in the past and know how to get out of them. The recipe is just hard work and sticking with it and not getting discouraged. I'm just trying to be upbeat and help out any way possible."

"The first month was more mentally draining than anything. Just trying to work through some things and getting to know the players, you have a lot of thinking going on instead of just reacting. I'm starting to feel comfortable now. I know the numbers aren't there but I feel I'm playing alright."

HAPPY TEAM: The pampering and time off in LA, Mason Raymond's return to practice and the afterglow of the Chicago win clearly lifted spirits and enthusiasm of Canuck players this week. But nobody was happier at Thursday's morning skate than radio broadcasters as the TEAM 1040 announced the extension of their Canuck rights for another five seasons.

"I think there were a lot of questions when the radio rights left CKNW," Canuck play-by-play man John Shorthouse said of the 2006 bidding war won by the TEAM. "They had had the Canucks for so long, and the radio station and hockey team were so intertwined.

"But once people saw how the rights fit with a 24-hour sports station, it was a no-brainer. The TEAM is a perfect home for the Canucks."

DANCING WITH ELLEN: Not all Vancouver broadcasters were at the Staples Center. Global television anchors Barry Deley and Squire Barnes were in Los Angeles to appear on the Ellen DeGeneres Show and talk about Deley's amazing win last week in the B.C. Children's Hospital Dream Lottery.

Deley, who had supported the lottery since his daughter was treated for leukemia at Children's Hospital in 2004, was grocery shopping when his name was drawn from a barrel live on Global. The quick-thinking Barnes called Deley's cellphone on the air to tell his colleague if he'd won a grand prize worth $2.5 million.

The sitdown with DeGeneres was filmed Thursday and is scheduled to be broadcast Monday.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Aaron Rome’s teammates ruin his interview, as is tradition

Posted by Harrison Mooney?

November 10, 2011

Aaron Rome recreates the healing of the widow’s son from the book of 1 Kings with Dan Carcillo.

When you think about it, last season was the best season of 28-year-old Aaron Rome’s NHL career. For the first time since he broke into the NHL with the 2006-07 Anaheim Ducks, Rome established himself as a bona fide NHL top-six defenseman, dressing for a career-high 56 NHL games. He played in a Stanley Cup Final for the second time in his career, dressing for two and a half more games than the last time he was there. Also, he matched his NHL career-high in goals, with one.

Of course, he was hardly able to enjoy any of this success because he spent the season being hated by everybody for it. When he played well enough to earn a regular spot in the lineup, fans ripped him mercilessly for displacing Keith Ballard. Then, his run to the Stanley Cup Final — in which he found himself contributing in a top four capacity and scored another goal — was cut short when he mistimed a hit on Nathan Horton, was unfairly vilified as a despicable headhunter on par with The Kurgan, and earned himself an unprecedented four-game, season-ending suspension.

And then he broke his hand in the preseason.

But things are finally looking up for Aaron Rome, who returned to the lineup Sunday in Chicago and contributed right away. He scored a pivotal goal in his first game back, putting himself a goal away from doubling his career-high single-season totals with plenty of time to get it done. Then, the big score earned him some rare camera time with Joey Kenward for Canucks Today.

That said, don’t get too excited: his teammates made sure to give him that familiar “ruined moment” feeling by hovering in the background of the shot for pretty much the entire interview.

Be sure to watch the whole interview, as Rome does his best to stay focused while his teammates lurk in the background of the shot, pour handfuls of sand on his shoulder, and even shout stuff from afar when they’re not in the picture (listen carefully for Kevin Bieksa droning “Rooooommeeeeeeer” like the ghost of Christmas past at the one-minute mark).

As usual, when it comes to interview bombing, Ryan Kesler’s leading the charge with a classic Keslurk, but I’d argue that Bieksa’s just as into it, if not moreso.

Meanwhile, Alexander Sulzer quite literally phones in the lurk, spending the entire team prank buried in his mobile device, and a creepily-mustachioed Andrew Alberts tries his best to appear casual by staring at the ocean with his hands in his pockets.

It’s conspicuous as Hell. If Rome goes missing, it was Alberts.

It’s worth noting that this isn’t the first time Aaron Rome has gotten a rough ride during an interview. Last season, when he scored his first as a Canuck into an empty net in Nashville, his teammates gave him a full face of shaving cream for his efforts.

Basically, ruining Aaron Rome’s very rare moments is pretty much an organizational tradition by now.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
LOS ANGELES — Vancouver Canuck Sami Salo has a diabolical sense of humour when it comes to the media and his injuries.

He once told reporters about waiting for blood work to come back from the lab — a couple of minutes after coach Alain Vigneault had informed the reporters that Salo, in fact, did not have the flu but an injury. And when Salo was busted on the spot, the defenceman maintained his poker face and seamlessly began discussing the connectedness between his blood and the injured area.

So it wasn’t surprising this morning that Salo tucked his cards to his chest when asked if he’ll be returning tonight to play the Los Angeles Kings (7:30 p.m., Sportsnet Vancouver, Team 1040) as the Canucks try to maintain a very positive week.

After missing three games with a groin injury — we think — Salo practised Wednesday and skated this morning with teammates.

“I felt good,” Salo said. “But I’m not the coach and the coach makes that [lineup] decision.”

Ah, yes, Sami, but Vigneault said Wednesday that he trusts Salo to tell him when he’s ready to go.

“We haven’t had that meeting yet,” Salo responded in his deadpan tone.

Vigneault said only that Salo would be a game-time decision.

It will be surprising if the 37-year-old is not in the lineup when the Canucks face the Kings at the Staples Center.

Alex Burrows (back spasms) skated this morning with teammates for the first time since last Friday, but Vigneault said the winger won’t play tonight. Burrows could play Friday night against the Anaheim Ducks.

Anything less than a Southern California sweep will be a little disappointing for the Canucks.

The Ducks have lost six straight while the Kings ended a five-game winless streak with a 4-3 win Tuesday against the Nashville Predators.

It was just the fifth time in 15 games this season the Kings scored more than two goals in a game and Los Angeles remains one of the National Hockey League’s lowest-scoring teams. After a 5-1-1 start, the Kings have gone 2-4-2 and haven’t yet seen the benefit of major off-season moves to acquire Mike Richards and Simon Gagne.

“It’s no different than if you’re in Vancouver, Chicago, Detroit or anywhere, you add players and it gives players the belief that management and coaches think it’s your time,” Los Angeles defenceman Willie Mitchell said. “So I think we have a lot of excitement.

“We have had a few systems changes that we haven’t adapted to as quickly as we wanted to. We have all the pieces there, it’s just as a group we have to navigate our way and find our roles within it and realize how good we can be.”

There is a lot of pressure on coach Terry Murray.

“When you have good regular seasons, the expectations are always higher and we want that,” he said. “We want high expectations. We talk about living up to our own billing. It’s a good thing. You push through, you become a better group.”

Roberto Luongo starts in goal for the Canucks and faces the Kings’ Jonathan Quick.

• INJURIES:

Canucks — LW Mason Raymond (back), LW Alex Burrows (back) are out.
D Sami Salo (groin) will be a game-time decision.

Kings — No injuries.

• PLAYERS TO WATCH:

Canucks — Linemates C Ryan Keller and LW David Booth have struggled but are showing progress. Coaches still believe they’re a good combination and the Canucks badly need offensive consistency from the second line.

Kings — After being voted off Dry Island in Philadelphia, new King C Mike Richards broke a four-game points drought with a goal Tuesday but hasn’t looked like one of the best two-way forwards in the NHL.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
VANCOUVER — Team 1040, the radio voice of the Vancouver Canucks, and the National Hockey League team announced today they have signed a new six-year deal that will see the station broadcast all Canucks games through the 2016-17 NHL season.

The Vancouver station, part of the Bell Media stable, has carried Canucks games since 2006, when they wrested the property away from long-time rights holder CKNW 980.

"We are pleased to have a radio partner that is so committed to providing our fans with comprehensive coverage of their favourite team," Victor de Bonis, chief operating officer, Canucks Sports & Entertainment, said in a statement. "The TEAM 1040 has been a strong partner for our hockey club for the past five years and we look forward to six more years of great hockey coverage."

Bell Media radio stations are also official broadcasters for the Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators and Winnipeg Jets.

"We are extremely proud of our Canucks coverage and are thrilled that the team is continuing to put their trust in Team 1040 with this early renewal," Chris Gordon, president of Bell Media Radio, said in a statement. "As we saw during last year’s Cup run, sports fans in the Lower Mainland know to turn to Team 1040 for Canucks coverage. This extension ensures they’ll have industry-leading coverage from Vancouver’s best sports broadcasters for the next six years."

Team 1040’s Canucks coverage is led by play-by-play broadcasters John Shorthouse and Rick Ball, along with analyst and former NHLer Dave Tomlinson.

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Introducing: The 'Salo is Your Pal-o' T-Shirt Design Contest

Posted by Harrison Mooney

While scanning the Canucks tumblr feed earlier this morning (a place just teeming with love for Sami Salo), I came across the following catchphrase, from the mind of Claire Gibson: "Salo is Your Pal-O." And, not unlike the day I discovered that 'Dammit I'm Mad" was a palindrome, this blew my mind.

Considering that Salo is the ultimate team guy and his teammates adore him, this catchphrase is as accurate as it is awesome, and it deserves to be more widely used. Better yet, it has to be on a t-shirt, and that’s why PITB is launching The ‘SALO IS YOUR PAL-O’ T-shirt Design Contest, which will solicit Images for and award prizes to what will presumably be the best t-shirt ever made. Here’s how to enter:

1. Open up Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, or some such other illustrating software (MS Paint y’all!) and create the awesomest t-shirt design you can, obviously incorporating the central "Salo is Your Pal-O" slogan. Make it just as awesome as a phrase like that deserves. Also make it nice and big.

2. Submit said design to us, via e-mail (passittobulis@gmail.com), by Sunday, November 20.

Here’s the best part: this contest is a total prizefest, ya’ll. The top five designs will all receive something for their efforts.

• 5th, 4th and 3rd place will receive copies of the Maple Street Press Canucks Annual, which may be previewing a season that’s already started, but features a ton of stellar Canucks writing nonetheless.

• 2nd place will receive a t-shirt featuring their ‘Salo is Your Pal-o’ design, what for wearing about town and looking snazzy and stuff.

• 1st place will not only receive a copy of the t-shirt they’ve designed, but a copy of the 2nd place shirt as well. Two shirts! Or, put another way, all the “Salo is Your Pal-o” apparel in existence.

Buddy Jesus, like Salo, is your pal-o.

And don’t think the panel of judges is simply in-house. In addition to myself and Daniel, the winners will be determined by the following pantheon: Puck Daddy editor Greg Wyshynski, The Province beat writer Jason Botchford, Vancouver Sun columnist Cam Cole, Sportsnet columnist Mark Spector (boo! how he did get in here?!), host of Sportsnet’s Hockey Central Jeff Marek, Grantland columnist Katie Baker, and Vancouver Canucks’ writer Derek Jory, who may even consult the man himself.

Why such a star-studded lineup? No reason whatsoever. But it’s pretty impressive, no? Rest easy, contest entrants, you’re in the good hands of hockey’s writing League of Extraordinary Gentilepersons (there’s a woman).

And finally, if you’re still debating whether or not to enter (if so, what’s wrong with you, this contest is nuts), consider the following: the last time PITB combined with a reader to produce an awesome t-shirt design, it led to the Tanner Glass Scrabble challenge. Who knows where your shirt could end up?

Vancouver Sun: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Canucks ride red hot power play to 3-2 win over Kings

By Jim Jamieson, The Province November 10, 2011

Three days off in Southern California paid dividends for the Canucks, as they rode a red hot power play to a 3-2 win over the struggling Kings.

The Kings drew to with one with a Mike Richards goal with 1:10 left with goalie Jonathan Quick out for an extra attacker to draw within one, but couldn’t dig out of a hole they dug for themselves early in the game.

The result allowed the Canucks to get a game above .500 (8-7-1) and can improve on that on Friday in Anaheim when they close out this six-game road trip.

It unravelled early for the Kings, after fourth liner Trevor Lewis took a five-minute major for elbowing Canucks defenceman Kevin Bieksa blatantly in the head just 3:03 into the game. Bieksa had to be helped off the ice bleeding from the mouth, but it opened the door for a Canucks power play that produced five goals in the previous game in Chicago and six in its previous nine opportunities.

“I feel pretty good,” said Bieksa, who took numerous stitches on the inside of his mouth but returned to start the second period.

“I’ll do that most days, not every day, my lip was hanging off, but luckily I look like a model against so it’s all good.”

It just got worse for Los Angeles when Drew Doughty took a cross-checking minor on Ryan Kesler in front of the Kings goal with 2:28 left in the major, putting his team two men short.

Sami Salo, just back from missing started it off at 6:51 when his shot through Chris Higgins’ screen went in off the left post behind Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick.

Andrew Ebbett scored another goal with the two-man advantage just 42 seconds later. Ebbett took a pass from Cody Hodgson and his shot on goal from the right circle hit Kings’ defenceman Willie Mitchell’s right skate and went into the goal at 7:33.

“The power play has been really good, the last two games especially,” said Bieksa. “In five minutes we’re going to do something, at least get some shots and get some momentum. The guys got me a couple of goals so it was nice.”

The Canucks made it 3-0 at 15:42 of the first period after a long and dominant shift from the Sedins line that ended with a pass to Aaron Rome on the point and shot that beat Quick through a Jannik Hansen screen. For Rome, it was his second goal in his second game of the season and has now doubled his NHL career total in that span.

The Kings managed to finally beat Vancouver goaltender Roberto Luongo in the second period when defenceman Drew Doughty scored his second goal in as many games on a Kings power play. Doughty took a Jack Johnson pass and one-timed a shot over Luongo’s left shoulder at 10:30 to make it 3-1.

The goal snapped a streak of 40 straight kills for the Canucks PK unit that spanned 11 games.

Canucks goaltender Roberto Luongo was solid, stopping 28 shots – his best likely a save on Justin Williams’ backhander at 8:42 of the third and the Kings pressing to get back in it.

“We spent some quality time together as a team and sometimes early in the season you need that,” said Luongo. “I think it was good for us.”

ICING – Winger Alex Burrows (back spasms) will skate on Friday morning in Anaheim and may play against the Ducks.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Sutton returns to Oilers

Postmedia News November 10, 2011

With his sentence now served, the Edmonton Oilers will have Andy Sutton back on their blue-line Friday against the Detroit Red Wings.

The defenceman served his fifth and final game of a league suspension when the Oilers took on the Boston Bruins on Thursday night.

"It’s been too long for all of us," said coach Tom Renney. "I know he’s sore from working out. He’d rather play."

Sutton elbowed Colorado Avalanche forward Gabriel Landeskog in the head in a game on Oct. 28.

"It seemed like a long time for a five-game suspension," he said after one last conditioning skate. "I’m pretty eager to get back into action.

"At least I was able to push hard and keep up my game condition. That won’t be an issue."

The six-foot-six, 245-pound Sutton said at the time of the suspension that he wouldn’t change his game and he repeated that sentiment on Thursday.

No Sid for Penguins this weekend

The speculation ended in a hurry Thursday: Pittsburgh Penguins superstar centre Sidney Crosby won’t be dressing for either of his team’s games this weekend.

During the week, rumours had Crosby suiting up Friday to face the Dallas Stars.

"I will confirm that Sidney is not playing in the next two games," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review. "He had a good week of practice. He is progressing. We aren’t keeping a secret. When he’s going to play, we’ll make sure we let you know."

Crosby did not speak with reporters for a second consecutive day.

During the week’s practice sessions, Crosby skated on a line with Pascal Dupuis and Matt Cooke.

The Penguins also play Carolina on Saturday — without their leader.

Pittsburgh’s next game after the weekend is Tuesday against the Colorado Avalanche.

Sabres owner, Penn State alum calls scandal “troubling”

Buffalo Sabres owner Terry Pegula earned a bachelor of science degree in petroleum and natural gas engineering from Penn State in 1973 and stands as one of the school’s greatest supporters.

Last year, Pegula donated $88 million US to the school — reportedly the largest private donation in Penn State history — to build a new hockey arena and start a Division I hockey program.

The new rink is slated to open in 2013.

Despite the recent scandal involving the school’s football program, Pegula is reportedly not considering withdrawing his donation.

The Sabres’ owner released a statement on Thursday.

"The events that are unfolding at Penn State University are deeply troubling and a matter of great concern to me and my wife Kim. As many have expressed, our primary concern is for the individuals and families who may have been victimized.

"Penn State’s reputation has been severely tarnished. We are encouraged to see the university trustees have begun the process of restoring integrity and trust in the institution. This process will take a period of time and trust will need to be re-earned as a result of these recent disclosures.

"Penn State is supported by millions of students, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators. Our own support for Penn State and its hockey program is well known and will continue. We expect the University will carry out its educational mission with high standards and integrity."
Canucks vs Kings Game Day

CANUCKS (7-7-1) at L.A. KINGS (7-5-3), 7:30 p.m., STAPLES CENTER

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province November 10, 2011

CANUCKS (7-7-1)
at L.A. KINGS (7-5-3), 7:30 p.m., STAPLES CENTER

TV: SNV, Radio: TEAM 1040

THE SETUP

THE CANUCKS:

Tonight is Game 5 of this six-game road trip, but the Canucks have enjoyed some sun and golf in the Golden State since arriving in Los Angeles on Sunday.

THE KINGS:

Until a 4-3 win Tuesday over Nashville, the Kings had gone 1-4-2 in seven games. Not what Dean Lombardi had in mind when he acquired Mike Richards and Simon Gagne in the summer.

HREE THINGS TO WATCH

1 Kings coach Terry Murray complained earlier in the week he wasn't getting enough scoring from his defencemen. Los Angeles has eight goals from its back end, compared to Canucks defencemen having 10, but two of those L.A. defencers' goals came last game, Drew Doughty and Alec Martinez getting their first.

2 Anze Kopitar is flying, but his fellow forwards are having almost as much trouble finding the net as the blueliners. The Kings scored more than two regulation goals only twice in their first 14 games before "erupting" for four on Tuesday. Willie Mitchell is ninth in team scoring - that's saying something.

3 Dustin Penner ($4.25 million) had just one point, an assist, until he picked up two more helpers on Tuesday. The 29-year-old, 6-foot-4, 242-pound power forward, who had 32 goals three seasons ago with the Oilers, is an unrestricted free agent at season's end. At this rate, he'll be lucky to earn half his current salary next year.

By THE NUMBERS

1: Surrey's Colin Fraser is going to suit up as a King for the first time tonight after he was placed on the active roster Wednesday. The centreman hasn't played since March 29, when he was an Oiler, and required ankle surgery in the summer.

LEADERBOARD

vancouver canucks

GOALS 6 2 PLAYERS
assists 13 H. SEDIN

POINTS 18 H/D SEDIN

PIM 28 2 PLAYERS

IN NET 5-4-1 LUONGO

3.06 GAA / .894 SV%

VISITOR

GOALS 8 KOPITAR
assists 10 KOPITAR

POINTS 18 KOPITAR

PIM 25 PENNER

IN NET 6-3-3 QUICK

1.87 GAA / .936 SV%

INJURIES

CANUCKS:

LW Mason Raymond (back surgery), not cleared for contact; D Sami Salo (groin), day-to-day; RW Alex Burrows (back spasms), day-to-day.

KINGS:

RW Scott Parse (lower body), injured reserve.

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Salo could light up Kings tilt Thursday night

By Jim Jamieson, The Province November 10, 2011

Canucks defenceman Sami Salo was back at practice on Wednesday and, unless something goes sideways by today's morning skate here, it's expected he'll return from a sore groin to play against the Kings.

"There's no guarantees, but I felt good," Salo said after coming off the ice at the Staples Center.

"It was a good skate. We'll see how I feel tomorrow."

Salo last played on Nov. 1 in Calgary at the beginning of the current road trip, but pulled himself out of the lineup in the pre-game skate two days later in Minnesota.

Salo has missed three games, but has had a good start at age 37. He has three goals and eight points in 12 games.

Head coach Alain Vigneault said the determinant on Salo returning to the lineup would be how he feels on Thursday morning.

"He looked all right," Vigneault said. "He skated well. We'll have a morning skate and we'll see how he responds."

Vigneault also said that injured winger Alex Burrows (back spasms) is improving and will likely skate on his own this morning, but ruled him out of playing against the Kings.

RAYMOND PRACTICING

Injured winger Mason Raymond was back on the ice with his teammates at Wednesday's practice, but was the only one wearing a white jersey - indicating no contact.

Raymond did take some light contact in his first practice back on Tuesday, but Vigneault explained that his status hasn't changed.

"He worked all week long with Glenn [Carnegie, Canucks skills coach], where he was getting contact," said Vigneault.

"He's been getting bumped, pushed. I don't think we want anybody to run him, but he can push back."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Canucks’ Hansen revving up for first-line play

Third-liner has the speed to make things interesting

By Jim Jamieson, The Province November 10, 2011

He may not be the first player you’d think of to replace Alex Burrows on the Sedins line, but Jannik Hansen will be logging first-line minutes again here tonight with Danny and Hank as the Canucks take on the Kings.

Burrows has been a fixture with the Sedins since the middle of the 2008-09 season, but during the debacle in Minnesota a week ago - a 5-1 loss that may have been the worst overall performance in several seasons - head coach Alain Vigneault revved up his line combination blender. He moved Burrows back with previous linemate Ryan Kesler and tried Cody Hodgson with the twins before going to Hansen near the end of the game.

Hansen has remained there the next two games and may stay a while with Burrows out with back spasms. While you can question putting a player who’s never had double-digit goals in an NHL season with two of the most gifted offensive players in the league, Hansen scored a key goal in the Canucks’ 6-2 win in Chicago on Sunday - to restore a two-goal lead late in the second period after the Hawks had made it 3-2.

It’s not the first time the fleet Hansen has skated with the Sedins, it’s just that you don’t see it often.

"Whenever you get a chance to play with them it’s just a matter of trying to fit in and doing whatever you can to help them," said Hansen. "You kind of play their game and try to adjust as best you can. Try to get them the puck as much as possible and stay out of the way. Get in front of the net and create some space for them. You don’t need to do too much when you’re out there other than get open."

Hansen is used to playing a third-line role, where he can use his speed to finish checks and be a regular part of the penalty kill.

Now, he knows he’s expected to contribute some offence.

"Obviously, when you’re put in a situation like that, you’re forced to play a more offensive game and there’s a lot more pressure on you to produce," he said. "If you’re not, they’ll put somebody else there."

"He’s an easy player to play with," said Daniel Sedin. "He’s got such good speed and he gets in on the forecheck and retrieves pucks. We try to keep it simple."

Like Burrows, Hansen’s speed brings an extra element to the line. Hands, maybe not so much, but Vigneault likes it for now.

"I think the twins like playing with him because he’s got speed, he goes to the net and he’s one of our best guys at standing in front of the net, and they like that about Burr," said Vigneault. "With his speed and his puck protection it’s a good fit."

Vancouver Province: LOADED: 11.11.2011
Kings' Doughty could be best D-man ever

By Jim Jamieson, The Province November 10, 2011

LOS ANGELES -- Drew Doughty aspires to be the best defenceman in the world.

The Kings' young blueliner is talented enough to get there one day, but trying to make up for a lost training camp that was the casualty of a contract stalemate and justify the resulting eight-year $56 million deal took him off his game in the early going. A shoulder injury that cost him the last two weeks of October didn't help much either, but scoring his first goal of the season in Wednesday’s 4-3 win over Nashville and leading his team, as usual, in ice-time at 23:31 was a sign things are turning around.

The Kings had an excellent 5-1-1 start, but hit a 1-4-2 slide before beating Nashville here on Wednesday. Doughty is one of the difference-makers the Kings need to be at his best to keep the trend going when they host the Canucks on Thursday.

"I think when I first came back I felt great," said Doughty, who doesn't turn 22 until Dec. 9. "I felt really good the first couple of games. Then the injury came and I was a little slow to come back, but I feel better now. I'm getting my legs under me. I'm starting to play a few more minutes again. Once I'm playing a lot of minutes I'm into the game and I play my best."

Doughty has also been caught up in the raised expectations of a Kings team that spent big money to bring in Mike Richards and Simon Gagne in the off-season. Doughty says he loves pressure and has played under it for much of his hockey life, but Kings head coach Terry Murray said there are different ways to handle it.

"Pressure is a good thing," said Murray. "It just needs to be the right way. I think there's a sense whenever you come into a team after missing a training camp because of business, you've got to go out and prove your worth right away. That's the feeling young players have and sometimes that can come back on you in many different ways. That's happened with Drew and we've had some conversations about just going out and being a good player, just doing the things that come instinctively rather than over-thinking things. Play well defensively, be a good team player moving the puck and that's when good things start to happen for you."

Doughty, who was a Norris Trophy finalist in his second NHL season, acknowledges a $56 million contract raises expectations, but says it hasn't affected his play.

"Even before I had this deal, the last couple years, I felt like I was a key player on this team," he said. "If I'm at my best every night, we have a better chance of winning. That deal doesn't bring any added pressure to me. It's in the past now and I've just got to forget about it. No matter what or where I'm playing it's about helping the team win."

Doughty is also fighting criticism after he fell from 59 to 40 points last season.

But Kings teammate and former Canuck Willie Mitchell said Doughty's role has also expanded to being a key shutdown player as well as a point producer.

"Any time you have a year like that, then teams get more aware of you and play you tighter so it's a lot tougher to have those scoring chances," said Mitchell. "But I think the defensive part of his game is evolving, getting better and better."

"He knows it hasn't been the best of circumstances as far as him coming back, missing training camp. It's only human nature that you'd think you have to do something extra after you miss all that time. But sometimes less is more and you're starting to see that within his game and seeing his game getting better day by day."

Doughty was a surprise standout as a youngster on a star-studded Canadian blueline in the 2010 Olympics and he wants to fulfill that promise.

"I don't expect anything less," he said. "I want to be the best defenceman in the world. There's days when I'm on the ice where I do feel that way and some where I don't but that's just part of the game. I'm going to do everything I can in games and practices to be the best. I won't be satisfied with anything less."
Five Capitals on NHL All-Star ballot

By Katie Carrera

Five Capitals are among those included on the NHL All-Star ballot, which was released by the league Thursday.

Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, Mike Green, Alexander Semin and Tomas Vokoun are among 127 players listed on the NHL’s fan ballot. The top six vote-getters — three forwards, two defensemen and a goaltender — will take part in the 2012 NHL All-Star game in Ottawa on Jan. 29.

Voting begins on Nov. 14 and runs through Jan. 4, 2012 and in addition to selecting players who were included on the ballot, other nominees can be written using the NHL’s online ballot.

— For those looking to relive HBO’s “24/7 Penguins/Capitals: The Road to the NHL Winter Classic,” the series will be sold on DVD next month. The series first goes on sale at the Verizon Center team store on Dec. 1 prior to the Capitals’ game against the Penguins, and then will be available elsewhere beginning Dec. 6.

Washington Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Alexander Semin hopes ‘good part’ of his season is about to begin

By Katie Carrera

It hasn’t been the easiest 13 games to start 2011-12 for Alexander Semin. He’s recorded three goals and eight points, but leads the team with nine minor penalties — a trend that Coach Bruce Boudreau said “can’t be done” earlier in the week.

On Thursday, Semin spoke with reporters with the help of Igor Kleyner from Russian Machine Never Breaks serving as an interpreter.

"Last year I started really well and then the whole thing went [bad],” Semin said. “I’m hoping maybe the bad part of the season is over for this season and the good part is just about to begin.”

The constant knock on Semin throughout his career is the 27-year-old’s penchant for taking penalties, particularly untimely stick penalties. In Washington’s 5-2 loss to Dallas on Tuesday, Semin scored his first goal in eight games but also took a pair of tripping minors that prompted Boudreau to take away his ice time late in the contest.

"I’m really not sure what’s going on with penalties,” Semin said. “I’m kind of puzzled myself. I don’t know for sure if all of those penalties were really penalties or not, but it is what it is and I’m just going to try to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Last season, Semin led Washington with 27 minors (71 penalty minutes) and in 2009-10 he had a team-high 33 minors (66 penalty minutes).

This year in addition to leading the Capitals in minor penalties, Semin is tied for the team lead in penalty minutes (18) with Matt Hendricks. At this stage of his career, Semin likely doesn’t get the benefit of the doubt from referees making any infraction, regardless of severity, a focus for officials.

Despite Semin’s offensive struggles and the number of penalties notwithstanding, Boudreau has largely been complimentary of the talented forward. He’s praised Semin’s increased work-ethic and effort, and earlier in the week Boudreau said "I like the way he’s trending."

“The coach has told me that aside from scoring he has been happy with my game this year, especially with the way I’ve played on the defense,” Semin said. “Scoring is just one component of my game and hopefully it will return.”

As for what he makes of all the talk of accountability throughout the Capitals’ organization over the past several months, Semin said that the important thing for the team to do is go out and play.

“Actually, I think thinking about all this stuff may actually be counterproductive. We know how to play hockey,” Semin said. “We just need to get out there and play and do what we know how to do and things will be working out all right. If you start thinking about all this stuff too much, it can actually be counterproductive.”
首都冰球队可能将Marcus Johansson与Alex Ovechkin配对迎战新泽西人

By Katie Carrera

教练Bruce Boudreau在大部分情况下已经保守地选择他的组合，但星期四，根据他的评论，不要对第二年中心Marcus Johansson与Alex Ovechkin对战新泽西人感到惊讶。

Johansson因为感到不适而被给予星期四的休息，但Boudreau有将21岁的瑞典人上场的打算。

“有些年轻人有时不想休息，”Boudreau说，“他说他感到不适，我说，‘好吧，好吧，如果我需要你，如果你感到不适，如果你的休息日能让你在星期五变得更好，那么你休息吧。’”

周三参加训练的中心位置都不同，Nicklas Backstrom被安排在Brooks Laich和Alexander Semin之间，Cody Eakin占据了Laich的位置，Mathieu Perreault，星期六对达拉斯时是健康放弃，被移动到与Ovechkin和Troy Brouwer的连线。

假设Johansson准备好星期五对阵新泽西人，他很容易滑入那个顶级角色。

“我认为有时候它使这个线变得更快，”Boudreau说，“有时你会等待，在训练营中，Marcus没有达到标准，在他自己的话，我会这么认为。但他开始了，这对我来说是相当好的。”

这是Boudreau偶尔使用的一种方法，他将这对组合放在一起，为了帮助推动Ovechkin的上场，Johansson的速度加快了他周围的速度，让比赛更快发展。

“我只认为事情发生得更快，”Boudreau说，“Nicky是个很好的人，但Alex非常聪明，能在被调整时做出调整。”

华盛顿邮报LOADED：11.11.2011
Bruce Boudreau optimistic about Mike Green potentially returning this weekend

By Katie Carrera

Although Mike Green’s status for Friday’s game in New Jersey remains questionable, the defenseman appears to be nearing his return to the Capitals’ lineup after missing the past six games with an injured right ankle.

“I’m getting better each day. Finally, I think I’m getting close,” Green said. “We’ll see what the docs say today and tomorrow and we’ll go from there.”

Coach Bruce Boudreau said he is “more optimistic every day” when it comes to the possibility of Green returning to the lineup. Green spent the bulk of Washington’s practice session Thursday skating with Roman Hamrlik, his defense partner for the majority of the season, which seemed to be a positive sign.

The two-time Norris Trophy finalist did not participate in the team’s power play drills, but he watched the unit work through various sets. That said, Boudreau doesn’t believe there will be much of an adjustment period for Green whenever he is back in a game.

“I don’t think there would be that much of an adjustment for Mike,” Boudreau said. “Erskie was out for eight months and was fine. Mike’s been practicing pretty strong with us for this week and he knows the way we play, so I think he’ll be Ok with it.”

Green said taking part in the Capitals’ tough Wednesday practice, filled with bag skates and battle drills, was a good opportunity for him to gauge his recovery before the back-to-back games against the Devils.

“It was a tough practice. I felt good, my wind was good, my legs felt good, just a matter of me making sure I’m strong with my injury,” Green said. “Hopefully it’s tomorrow, I’m hoping.”

Washington Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Marcus Johansson not on the ice for Capitals’ practice

By Katie Carrera

The Capitals’ Thursday practice is underway here at KCI but Marcus Johansson is not among those taking part in the workout.

The second-year center is the only player on the active roster not on the ice this morning and has been given a mainentance day, according to a team spokesman. Johansson is expected to make the trip with the Capitals to New Jersey for Friday’s game against the Devils.

— Winger Jay Beagle, who has missed the last 10 games with a concussion, worked out on the ice alone this morning before the rest of the team went out on the ice.

— The Capitals have a few alterations to their forward line combinations in practice Thursday. Granted while this may be partially due to Johansson’s absence, there are more tweaks from the lineup that was used against Dallas than simply filling in for the 21-year-old Swede.

So read into these lines what you will:

Ovechkin-Perreault-Brouwer

Laich-Backstrom-Semin

Chimera-Eakin-Ward

Hendricks-Halpern-Knuble

Washington Post LOADED: 11.11.2011
Sheldon Souray’s sweet trip from Hershey back to NHL stardom

By Stephen Whyno
The Washington Times
Thursday, November 10, 2011

Sheldon Souray has been selected to three NHL All-Star games. But a year ago he was in Hershey, Pa., miles and miles away from any NHL city and even further away from playing in the league.

Signed to a five-year, $27 million contract by the Edmonton Oilers, the defenseman failed to live up to expectations and became disgruntled. The Oilers then loaned Souray to the Hershey Bears as they didn’t want to play him with their prospects in the American Hockey League. He spent a year there — calling it an “unsettling” situation — but managed to, in the process, rehabilitate his career.

“I wasn’t in any different situation than most of those guys — if not all of them — in that we were all trying to get to the next level,” Souray said. “So I think it’s unsettling for everyone down there. Last year was a different kind of challenge for me, but it’s behind me. Maybe it was a good thing.”

It seems like more than a maybe. Souray, bought out by the Oilers in the offseason, signed with the Dallas Stars on a one-year, $1.65 million, show-me-you-can-play contract. Through 14 games, he’s tied for No. 1 in the NHL in plus-minus at plus-11 and is tied for fourth among defensemen with 13 points.

On Thursday, he was back on the All-Star ballot, a sign of respect for a guy who paid his dues for a year but certainly seems to be back on top of his game.

“He’s brought leadership, he’s brought toughness to our back end and he’s brought commitment to play good D,” Dallas coach Glen Gulutzan told the Capitals Radio Network. “He’s solidified us in a lot of those areas, so he’s been a tremendous acquisition for us.”

A year in Hershey might not have been ideal for a defenseman who has played well over 600 career NHL games. But he pumped in 19 points in 40 games for the Bears and provided a veteran presence for a playoff team.

“You make the best of the situation that you’re given. They were good guys down there, a good coaching staff, a good organization to play for,” Souray said. “They made the transition for me real easy — as easy as they could. And I appreciated that.”

Much like Wade Redden, the New York Rangers defenseman spending another season in the AHL along with his $6.5 million cap hit, Souray seemed out of place. And his teammates knew it.

“You don’t know what to expect when a guy comes from the NHL, maybe he’s going to shut ‘er down,” Mathieu Perreault said. “But he came to Hershey and he was working hard and he was doing everything in his power to make our team win. I thought he was a really good guy in the dressing room for us.”

Souray helped mentor young defenseman Dmitry Orlov and was a rock on the blue line when healthy. His all-around game might have slipped in previous years in the NHL, but his shot still made a mark on opponents.

As a player being paid $4.5 million among teammates often making a little over 1 percent of that, Souray was helpful in and out of the dressing room. Perreault said Souray would often pick up the tab when he went out with fellow Bears players.

“I had a fun time down there and all the guys — it was good players down there and all the guys made it easy,” he said.

As for picking up the check every once in a while, Souray just smiled.

“I might’ve. I can’t remember,” he said. “You’d have to ask my accountant.”

Ask Souray’s accountant this year and the wallet is lighter, but the shot is just as heavy — and the production seems to be enough to spark a career revitalization. And perhaps another trip to the All-Star game, a long way away from Hershey.
Mike Green close to returning to Capitals' lineup
Johansson has maintenance day; Neuvirth expected to start Friday

By Stephen Whyno
The Washington Times
Thursday, November 10, 2011

Mike Green and the Washington Capitals have been playing a game of wait-and-see for a while now. A right ankle injury has kept the defenseman out of the lineup since Oct. 22.

Now, it seems that game is nearing an end — and that he’ll be able to play in one very soon. Whether that will come Friday night at the New Jersey Devils, Saturday night at home against the Devils or neither remains to be seen.

"I'm getting better each day. Finally I think I’m getting close," Green said. "We’ll see what the docs say today and tomorrow and we’ll go from there."

Green took part in another full team practice Thursday and again talked about feeling “great.” With a decision still pending, coach Bruce Boudreau said he’s “more optimistic every day,” but noted Green was still questionable to play.

“Anything is hypothetical and it’s all possible. I guess if he played Friday, we’d see how he was Friday and make a determination after that,” Boudreau said Thursday. “There’s never any, ‘Well, he’s playing both for sure, or he’s playing one for sure.’ If he doesn’t feel good enough in Friday’s skate, then we’ll put it off and hopefully he’ll be there to go Saturday.”

Green wanted to “push” his ankle’s limitations in Wednesday’s bag skate, and he did so in suicide sprints and one-on-one battles. But he wasn’t able to go in two-on-two battle drills, something he said was probably for the best.

But what that workout did was show Green he could deal with some pretty intense physical exertion.

“The wind was good, legs felt good, so it’s just a matter of making sure I’m strong with my injury,” he said.

Johansson has ‘maintenance day’

Center Marcus Johansson’s absence in Thursday’s practice at first appeared odd, but Boudreau explained the “maintenance day” as a result of some lingering soreness.

“He’s fine,” Boudreau said. “Some of the young kids sometimes never want to take a day off, and he said he was sore. And I said, ‘Listen, I need you. So if you’re sore and if the day off is going to make you better on Friday, you take the day off.’ He reluctantly came to the trainer today and said, ‘I’m pretty sore in one area.’"

If Johansson plays Friday in Newark, expect him to be on the first line with Alex Ovechkin and Troy Brouwer.

Loose pucks

Expect Michal Neuvirth to start at the Devils on Friday night as he was the first goalie off the ice Thursday. Against New Jersey in his career, he is 4-0-0 with a 1.00 goals-against average and .970 save percentage. … Thursday’s practice included Brooks Laich on the second line and Cody Eakin centering the third.
Caps' recent rash of penalties stems from being outworked

By Stephen Whyno
The Washington Times

Thursday, November 10, 2011

After Thursday's practice, Washington Capitals coach Bruce Boudreau met with an unidentified player about penalties in the offensive zone. The message was clear to him and the entire team.

"It's about moving your legs and not getting lazy," the coach said.

Watching video and going through drills, the Capitals know they haven't played as well during the past six games as they did during their 7-0-0 start.

Many of the problems, Boudreau said, are correctable — and that includes committing penalties at a higher frequency and at inopportune times.

"If you're not killing penalties, then you can't be taking penalties. Why are you testing fate? That'll probably be the biggest thing. Just staying out of the box more, you give a team a chance to win the game," right wing Mike Knuble said Tuesday, after Washington's fourth loss in six games. "It's kind of been the recipe for failure probably since Edmonton is untimely penalties."

Starting Oct. 27 in Edmonton, the Capitals have taken 29 minor penalties in six games.

In total, Washington is short-handed just an average of 1:04 more per game than when it won seven straight, but it's how the penalties are happening that is taking a toll. Many have been during tied or one-goal situations.

"It is frustrating any time you take penalties. Some of them haven't been very good, but I think that's because we've been getting outworked," defenseman Karl Alzner said. "And that's what happens when you get outworked is you have to take an extra holding or hooking penalty, or you get forced to sometimes shoot the puck out of play. I've done it tons of times in my career. It all comes down to just working harder than the other team."

Coaches generally aren't upset with a roughing call, or one that prevents a quality scoring chance. Over half the minor penalties during this stretch have been stick infractions (hooking, high-sticking, tripping or slashing), and a couple were holding penalties.

That kind of thing doesn't bode well for winning.

"Not even good penalties," Knuble said. "Very rarely have we taken a good penalty at a moment where a guy had to do something to save a goal. It's just little trips and hooks and high-sticks. Guys are sitting on the bench [thinking], 'Here we go again.'"

It's something, Boudreau noted, that even veteran teams need to be reminded of: Staying out of the box is paramount. But it's even a bigger deal with this team because of what it can do at even strength.

"When you don't take penalties, you get to roll four lines. We've got four lines that are fairly good. When you take penalties, it disrupts everything," Boudreau said. "Whether you take eight minors like it was in Edmonton, which sort of started this whole thing, or five penalties or six penalties in Vancouver [on Oct. 29] or the amount of penalties you take in any of the games that we've lost, it disrupts the flow of the game for us."

That emphasis, which involves video and more on off days, will continue during this weekend's home-and-home series with the New Jersey Devils, Friday on the road and Saturday at Verizon Center.

But no matter how much the Caps talk about fixing the problem, the solution comes down to the little things that lead to losses.

"We know we don't want to take penalties — when we're not moving our feet we're taking tripping penalties and hooking penalties," defenseman Dennis Wideman said. "When you're not working hard, you're taking those penalties."
Capitals’ Semin seeks return to elite offensive production

Boudreau says Russian winger poised to ‘break out’

By Stephen Whyno

The Washington Times

Thursday, November 10, 2011

This season, when the Washington Capitals have had rough games, some fans have been quick to point to the enigmatic Russian winger with minimal production as someone who should be held accountable. But Alexander Semin largely hasn’t been bad, according to coach Bruce Boudreau, who has cited his hard work.

Semin on Thursday agreed with that notion of strong play away from the puck but made it clear he would like to break out of an early scoring slump that he called a “dark period.”

“Last year I started really well, and then the whole thing went [wrong],” Semin said through interpreter Igor Kleyner. “I’m hoping maybe the bad part of the season is over for this season and the good part is just about to begin.”

Semin showed a bit of a spark Tuesday against the Dallas Stars, scoring on a snappy one-timer while wide open in the slot. He has three goals and five assists to go along with a minus-1 rating.

Boudreau sees signs that Semin is poised to go on an offensive run despite some struggles.

“There’s no reason to think that Alexander Semin has all of a sudden become a bad hockey player,” the Caps’ coach said. “He skates too well; he handles the puck too well; he shoots too well. He’s going to break out.”

Penalties again have plagued Semin’s season. He leads Washington with nine minor penalties, the most recent of which earned him a seat on the bench for much of the third period against Dallas. Boudreau chided Semin in his postgame comments for taking too many penalties.

“I’m really not sure what’s going on with penalties. I’m kind of puzzled myself,” Semin said. “I don’t know for sure if all of those penalties were really penalties or not, but it is what it is, and I’m just going to try to make sure it doesn’t happen again.”

Semin is getting paid $6.7 million on a one-year deal to score, but he’s a capable player even without big-time numbers, as long as the penalties don’t define him. For guys counted on to score, trying to play an all-around game is a way to compensate.

“It’s hard when you don’t get goals. You just have to keep working hard,” forward Mathieu Perreault said. “He’s such a good player — we all know he can score a lot of goals in this league, so it’s just a matter of keep working hard and do the right things and they’re going to come.”

For long stretches, Semin has done those things. He has been hustling to loose pucks and winning battles that have made him an effective player away from the puck.

That trend earned praise from Boudreau earlier this week, and it’s something Semin hopes to build on while also adding offense.

“The coach has told me that aside from scoring he has been happy with my game this year, especially with the way I’ve played on the defense,” Semin said. “Scoring is just one component of my game, and hopefully it will return.”

With the Caps seeking to bust out of a recent funk, the sooner the better.

Washington Times LOADED: 11.11.2011
Caps' Eakin quickly fitting right in

By: Brian McNally | 11/10/11 8:05 PM

Capitals forward Cody Eakin is just 20 years old. But he is far from a typical NHL rookie. After a solid first month in the minors with Hershey of the American Hockey League, Eakin was promoted to Washington last week and hasn't looked out of place with a goal and two assists.

Eakin has appeared in three games -- all on the second line, where his speed has been a natural fit next to center Marcus Johansson. He certainly has the pedigree. Eakin was a junior hockey star in Canada the last two seasons and played on his sport's biggest stages: the world juniors tournament last winter with Team Canada against the best under-20 international players in the world and the Memorial Cup tournament last spring, in which the top four Canadian junior teams play for a championship. Eakin was even part of a blockbuster trade last winter when Swift Current dealt him to Kootenay for five players and three draft picks.

After all that, the jump to the NHL hasn't fazed him. Eakin looked calm and collected against Carolina last Friday when he had a two-on-one with teammate Alexander Semin, one of the world's most-gifted offensive players. Maybe most rookies would have given the puck back. Instead, Eakin saw he had space and wristed a shot past goalie Cam Ward for his first NHL goal. It was a sign that Eakin is already comfortable at this level.

"What normally would have happened is I probably would have overthought it and tried to force a pass," Eakin said. "That still happens in practice. But I kind of didn't really think about anything. Going back on it, I barely remember it."

- Brian McNally

Washington Examiner LOADED: 11.11.2011
It's official: the Winnipeg Jets are a team that takes a licking, and keeps on sticking.

Today, Canada Post unveiled a set of three stamps to commemorate the team's inaugural year. Charleswood MP Steven Fletcher, the minister responsible for Canada Post, said designers rushed to get the stamps out, after the announcement of the Jets' return was made too late to include the stamps in its usual design releases.

Canada Post unveiled three Winnipeg Jets

Canada Post unveiled three Winnipeg Jets "Picture Postage" stamps to help celebrate the return of the National Hockey including the first goal scored on home ice at the MTS Centre by Jets player Nik Antropov on October 9, 2011. (CANADA POST)

The new designs feature two types of Jets logos. The third stamp features an image of forward Nik Antropov scoring the team’s first goal in the Oct. 9 home opener.

The stamps are printed in sheets of 21 and sell for $24.95. The limited edition collector sheets sell for $34.95. Canada Post also unveiled a new postcard, featuring the starting lineup of the first home game. The products will be sold at all Canada Post outlets and online.

Winnipeg Free Press LOADED: 11.11.2011
Winnipeg - The next time a member of the Winnipeg Jets talks about minding their P’s and Q’s, don’t just assume he’s using a figure of speech.

He might not even be talking about hockey.

It turns out these Jets have an interesting pastime on the road, something I learned Thursday while questioning players about their recent 14-day road trip.

I wanted to find out what they did for fun, away from the rink.

They say off-ice shenanigans can be as important as on-ice systems when it comes to turning a collection of 20-odd players into a team. This team needed plenty of bonding, judging by their ragged play before they hit the road.

Rugged forward Chris Thorburn, sporting a new shiner under one eye, was ready to shine some light on the subject.

“We got into some stuff that you wouldn’t believe,” Thorburn said, drawing immediate visions of rowdiness and debauchery, perhaps in the Big Apple.

Or maybe waterfront partying in Miami.

“Scrabble games,” Thorburn said.

Seriously?

“On the iPad or iPhone,” he continued. “You can stay in your room and just go back and forth. Guys have fun with that.”

That sounded a little complicated for somebody technically impaired and in his forties.

“So am I,” Thorburn said. “But I had to join, just to hang out.”

Of course. Peer pressure.

So a good, clean-living 28-year-old from Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., out on the road with the boys, was forced into games of hotel Scrabble.

Oh, there was some other fun to be had. Like a subway ride to the trendy Soho neighbourhood in Lower Manhattan, between weekend games in New Jersey and New York City, complete with some sneakiness from Kyle Wellwood.

“Wellwood let Maxwell and McArdo hop on the wrong train, knowing the whole time,” defenceman Brett Festerling revealed. “He kind of smiled as the doors closed. But they figured their way back.”

“That’s typical Wellwood,” Tanner Glass chipped in. “A little smirk, and let ‘em get on the bus.”

There was some Halloween hijinks, too. Glass going as Katy Perry, Kenndal McCardle as MC Hammer.

And you can’t usher in the month of Mo-vember without starting a moustache growing contest.

“Best moustache, Kenndal McCardle,” Glass offered. “His face just holds it really well. He looks great.”

The worst?

“The guys who know they have bad ones are just keeping them off,” Glass said, just out of earshot of 20-year-old Alex Burmistrov and his clean-shaven upper lip.

But it sounds like the off-ice highlight of the Mother of All Road Trips was trying to land Double Letter and Triple Word Scores.

And good luck if you joined the trip late.

“My Scrabble’s gettin’ better,” Festerling, a callup from St. John’s, said. “I could tell the boys had been playin’ a lot on the road trip.”

Word is the king of the game is goalie Chris Mason.

“He traps you,” defenceman Mark Stuart challenged. “He’s like a Tampa Bay Scrabble player.”

If you hadn’t seen highlights of the Lightning/Flyers game the night before, you might have drawn a blank on that comment.

Mason wasn’t going to let that go without a few words of his own.

“These guys think puttin’ a big word in, with six letters out there, is the way to play Scrabble,” the Jets elder statesman explained. “And they’re all one point. Instead of connecting the words and making the combinations and scoring points. I play to win. I don’t play to make a big word.”

What all this fun and games eventually spells out for the Jets remains to be seen.

“It’s tough to put your finger on it right now,” Glass said. “You got to know your teammates a little bit. That’s always important when you’ve got a young team with some new faces, like we have this year.

“It’ll be measured here in the coming weeks, how good the trip was for us.”

Measured in how many W’s and L’s the Jets rack up. And that’s all about hockey.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
WINNIPEG - It took two periods before the Jets showed any interest in playing and by that time it was too late.

The Jets looked tired and disinterested in the first two periods and spotted the Florida Panthers a 4-0 lead, barely generating any offence at all, before coming back with a strong, but ultimately fruitless, third period.

It was not what the Jets or their fans were hoping for after a promising seven-game road trip through the Eastern Conference.

The 5-2 loss to the Florida Panthers featured some of the usual suspect areas of the Jets' game — penalties and penalty killing — as well as a subpar performance from goalie Ondrej Pavelec.

The only positive was a strong third-period pushback by the Jets, but it wasn't nearly enough and another sellout crowd went home disappointed and likely wondering where they can go for a refund on those tickets with an average price of $92.

Overall it was the Jets worst performance of the season.

They obviously had no gas left in the tank after the road trip and didn't get any favours from the refs once again, but they won't make excuses and we sure won't do it for them.

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The good news for the Jets is they get to play the worst team in the NHL Saturday, the 2-12-1 Columbus Blue Jackets. Of course, the Blue Jackets are likely also licking their lips at a chance to play a Jets team that has just five wins in the first 16 games. Tim Stapleton got his first goal of the season on a third-period power play. The No. Goals club is starting to get lonely for Blake Wheeler ... What a great effort by Kris Versteeg to score the hat trick goal into the empty net after getting hauled down by Dustin Byfuglien. Empty-netters don't come nicer than that ... Good line from a buddy of mine: "This is the first game I've seen where the Jets 'give a sh--factor' is really low." ... Was that the official moment when the honeymoon ended? Boos rained down on the Jets as they left the ice trailing 4-0 after two periods.

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The Jets came out like gangbusters in the first period, but after Evander Kane gassed two great scoring opportunities, they went to sleep. The Jets didn't have a single shot in the final 13 minutes of the first period and they looked spent after the long road trip. In this league, you can't afford to be tired. The Jets didn't record another shot until 9:53 of the second period.

They went 23:02 without a shot on goal, which is a tad embarrassing ... The Jets were so sluggish, they would have been more entertaining if they were playing the 1-3-1 trap against Philadelphia ... The Jets defencemen, led by Byfuglien, take a lot of shots at the net, maybe as many as any defence unit in the league, but the majority of them get blocked or go wide ... Versteeg was Mr. Opportunistic, scoring a couple of cheesy first-period goals, both off unlucky bounces for the Jets ... The penalty call on Nik Antropov in the first period for hitting to the head was complete garbage. It was a clean hit and nowhere near the head and, of course, Florida scored on the ensuing power play. Blaming the refs is for losers, but on this occasion they were out to lunch ... Jets fans gave it to Jack Skille, whose hit in Florida knocked Toby Enstrom out with a broken collarbone. Skille hurt the Jets, particularly their power play, more than he can know ... Alex Burmistrov is not your typical Russian. In the third period, he hammered Bryan Campbell to the ice, stole the puck, hit the outside of the post with a quick shot and then hammered another defenceman into the boards while chasing the rebound. Great sequence with little reward.

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Tanner Glass has played above expectations offensively so far and has been exactly as advertised in the toughness department. Glass went toe-to-toe with Sabres tough guy Cody McCormick on Tuesday and the fight is currently the highest rated tilt from this season at hockeyfights.com. Only two fights from last season got higher ratings than the Glass-McCormick bout. Sabres TV commentator Rob Ray, who knows a thing or two about throwing haymakers, called it the best fight he's seen in two years. If you want to vote Burmistrov, Antropov, Kane, Kyle Wellwood or Pavelec into the all-star game, you'll have to put them in as write-in candidates. The NHL's official ballot, with 127 names on it, came out Thursday and only three Jets are on the list: Forward Andrew Ladd and defencemen Enstrom and Byfuglien. Considering Enstrom is hurt and Ladd and Byfuglien have struggled to find their groove so far, none of the three are likely to be playing in the all-star game in Ottawa. Burmistrov and Wellwood have been the Jets best forwards so far, but they aren't likely to get many votes outside Winnipeg. All-star voting opens on Monday at NHL.com/vote.

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Though many fans were convinced the referees had it in for the Jets on Tuesday (and Thursday for that matter), the players continued to point to the people in the mirror as the real culprits. Wheeler, who took a costly penalty in overtime, said the team has to learn from what happened in Buffalo. "We just have to keep our feet to ourselves for a while," Wheeler said. "It seems like every little incidental contact is being called so we've just got to work hard to keep our feet moving and get in front of the other team instead of trying to use our sticks so much."

Well said Mr. Wheeler, but it's easier said than done. Just ask Byfuglien about his third-period slashing penalty in the offensive zone.

Winnipeg Sun LOADED: 11.11.2011
WINNIPEG - Eric Fehr has cleared another hurdle on the road to recovery and there’s one more big one left to pass before he makes his Winnipeg Jets debut.

The Winkler product was cleared for contact by Jets team doctors on Wednesday and took part in Thursday’s morning skate without the red jersey that alerts teammates to take caution.

However, the timetable for right-winger’s return to the lineup remains up in the air.

“Obviously, it’s encouraging and it’s the news I wanted to hear. I wish I could play today but that’s not the case,” said Fehr, who was acquired from the Washington Capitals this summer and has been rehabbing since having off-season shoulder surgery to repair a torn labrum. “I don’t think there’s any rush right now. I think guys are a little shy to bump into me. Right now, it’s status quo, practising with the guys and taking it day-by-day and hoping for the best.”

Fehr was removed from the injured reserve list on Thursday and if all goes well over the next few days, he should be able to get into game action before the end of the month.

The next step for Fehr is to take part in contact drills during practice, something that isn’t always the easiest thing to encourage.

“Right now, it’s all positive,” said Fehr. “Skating, shooting and stickhandling feels good, but when you bring in body (contact), it changes things. I’ll have to see how I react to it and see how the shoulder feels after I take a couple of hits. It’s partially mental and partially physical. Once you get all of those things together, it’s time to play.

“At this point, you do as much work on conditioning as you can but you’re not going to feel ready until you’re put in that spot.”

At least Fehr hasn’t lost his sense of humour while being stuck on the sidelines.

“The guys were a little shy, obviously in a pre-game skate nobody is running into each other. I’m sure there will be a time when the coach has to say get in the corner and go hit Fehr. That will come,” said Fehr. “They’re scared about something. Maybe they think I’m going to knock them over.”

Jets head coach Claude Noel is encouraged by the progress Fehr is making, but understands there’s no use rushing him back until he’s 100% healthy.

“You’ve got to ease into it,” said Noel. “Even when he gets playing again, let’s be smart about how we’re managing this thing. Eric is going to be a good player for us. We’d like to have him for more than a couple of weeks and then re-injure it.”

MAXWELL CLAIMED: The Jets roster shrunk by one player on Thursday morning as forward Ben Maxwell was claimed off waivers by the Anaheim Ducks.

Maxwell had no points in four games with the Jets this season and has a goal and two points in 36 NHL games with the Jets, Atlanta Thrashers and Montreal Canadiens.

SKILLS ON DISPLAY: The Jets will host their first annual skills competition on Tuesday night at MTS Centre.

Among the events being held are the fastest skater competition, hardest shot competition, a puck control relay and a breakaway competition.

Zach Bogosian, Mark Stuart, Evander Kane, Tim Stapleton, Bryan Little, Jim Slater, Kyle Wellwood, Mark Flood, Ron Hainsey, Chris Thorburn and Ondrej Pavelec will represent Team White, while Dustin Byfuglien, Johnny Oduya, Kenndal McArdle, Andrew Ladd, Alex Burmistrov, Tanner Glass, Blake Wheeler, Nik Antropov, Brett Festerling, Chris Mason, Peter Mannino and Fehr will suit up for Team Blue.
ESPN / Daily Debate: Big problem with patience and down on the Ducks

By Scott Burnside and Craig Custance

Burnside: Good day, my friend. I am in Pittsburgh awaiting the next chapter in the Sidney Crosby drama. Will he play Friday against the Stars or won't he? If he won't, when will he play? But let's start our debate on last night's interesting tilt in Tampa, where the Lightning erased a 1-0 third-period deficit and defeated the Philadelphia Flyers 2-1 in overtime. Of course, all anyone is talking about is the stall tactics employed by the Flyers early on when the Lightning began the game in a passive 1-3-1 defense. It looked funny, but in my mind is there a bigger non-story? Gee. So the officials made the right call, blew the play dead as they would on an icing call when the defensive team delays in touching the puck, and life goes on. I would wager we will not see this again until the moon turns blue and the Leafs win a Stanley Cup, but maybe our outrage button has been turned to mute (hardly a chance of that happening, but let's proceed). What were your thoughts on the great delay?

Custance: You in Pittsburgh? Stunned. First of all, you'd think that a team standing around and doing nothing would send people scrambling to change the channel in huge numbers, but I found the buzz on Twitter and other social media surrounding the stall completely fascinating. If you weren't watching that game, you almost had to tune in just to see what everyone was talking about. I found it oddly captivating to watch Chris Pronger stand there and do nothing. I also found it interesting how the opinions were generally split on who was in the wrong based on what teams fans liked. Lightning fans were livid at the Flyers for not advancing the puck and Flyers fans were livid at the Lightning for employing the 1-3-1 in the first place. I guess that's how it goes. They mentioned on the broadcast that Scotty Bowman suggested a rule change that would limit the players who could skate backward in the neutral zone. Although he has forgotten more hockey than I'll ever know, I hope this one incident doesn't set in motion any rule changes. Let's see if this becomes a more widespread issue. Leave it to Chris Pronger to sum it up after the game, telling our friend Tim Panaccio: "Way to showcase the product." I wish I could have been in that dressing room after the game.

Burnside: Funny that Pronger was outraged, but was he not a guy just standing there statue-like with the puck until the officials blew the play dead? Come on. Get over yourself. How about those two senseless minor penalties Pronger took? Wonder whether fans got their money's worth from that. OK. Rant over. Hopefully we will not discuss this issue again for many a blue moon. But speaking of ghastly (how's that for a transition?), what's up with the Ducks and can they be saved? As much as we lauded Jonas Hiller's return from vertigo, he's looked more than a little unbalanced of late, and last night's 4-2 home loss to Nashville (will Pekka Rinne win every game over the course of his new seven-year contract?) marked the sixth straight game without a win from a Ducks team that was pretty much a consensus pick among prognosticators to make the playoffs next spring. Do you think changes are afoot or is this just a normally streaky team going through a down cycle?

Custance: It seems like every November we're wondering if Randy Carlyle is in trouble, and then suddenly the Ducks find a way to string wins together and make us question why we ever doubted them in the first place. That said, the Ducks need to take advantage of their current homestand after struggling on the road. Last night's loss to the Predators started a stretch in which the Ducks play 11 of 13 games at home, so they might want to capitalize, especially considering how bad they looked on the road. But you're right, Hiller needs to be better. The word from Nashville is that the Rinne signing has relieved things a bit in that dressing room. The contract talks and potential of losing all three of their stars certainly had to be a black cloud over the team. Now you have some positive momentum and an ownership group that has been very public in its declaration that it will spend to win. We saw the kind of lift that can provide a team last year with Terry Pegula in Buffalo. He backed it up spending big in free agency. Imagine the push the Predators would get if Ryan Suter gets a deal done.

As for tonight, I'm looking forward to a couple games: In Boston, you've got Taylor versus Tyler. The second game of my doubleheader will be Minnesota at San Jose, where half the players on the ice will be competing against former teammates. Too early to pick a winner between the summer deals made by Doug Wilson and Chuck Fletcher?

Burnside: Yes, a very interesting night on the NHL docket with some familiar faces going head to head. I spoke with Josh Harding and Minnesota GM Chuck Fletcher this week, and it's a nice story taking shape in Minnesota with Harding coming back after missing an entire season, plus part of the previous season with injury. He was the NHL's first star this week but as always at this point in the season, it's about being able to sustain that level of play. The Wild's special teams are pretty ordinary, and while they're getting pretty good even-strength production, it's been a bit of a disappointment in terms of Dany Heatley's production. The Sharks, meanwhile, are cruising as most people thought they would. Good team, but like Washington none of what they do in November, December, etc., means as much as the playoffs, when this team will need to prove itself. Maybe I'm being too hard on them after making it to the Western Conference final two straight years, but I still can't shake the feeling this is a team that has underachieved written all over it. I know that will make Pierre LeBrun unhappy, but there you go.

Custance: I don't know how you can call a team that has advanced to the Western Conference finals for two consecutive years an underachiever. I think Todd McLellan and this group of Sharks gets unfairly labeled because of failures of teams in the past. There's been a steady evolution going under McLellan, and I certainly wouldn't lump them in with the Caps, who I think have more to prove this spring than the Sharks. I realize the ultimate goal is to win the Stanley Cup, but I think there are a lot of fan bases that would be more than happy to see their teams advance to the conference finals for two consecutive years. Alright, Scotty, I'll let you dive into Sidney Crosby coverage. Could be an interesting couple days in Pittsburgh. Have fun!
ESPN / Sharks, Wild benefiting from summer deals

By Pierre LeBrun

We are trained to look for winners and losers when teams make big trades, but the Minnesota Wild and San Jose Sharks may just be winners in the moves they made together this past offseason.

Three trades involving big names between the two clubs from June to August seem to be helping. The Wild and Sharks were a combined 16-7-4 heading into Thursday night’s meeting between the two teams at HP Pavilion.

“This is the way deals should work,” Sharks GM Doug Wilson told ESPN.com on Thursday.

“I truly believed both teams could benefit from these trades, and certainly early on it appears both teams have,” Wild GM Chuck Fletcher told us.

Dany Heatley leads the Wild with 10 points in 14 games.

Let’s review the moves:

• On June 24 before the first round of the NHL draft in Minnesota, the Wild sent star blueliner Brent Burns to San Jose in exchange for winger Devin Setoguchi, prospect Charlie Coyle and a key piece: a first-round pick that night (which became center Zach Phillips from Saint John of the QMJHL).

• On July 3, the Wild and Sharks exchanged star wingers with Martin Havlat going to San Jose and Dany Heatley heading to Minnesota.

• On Aug. 7, Minnesota traded injured forward James Sheppard to San Jose in exchange for a third-round pick in 2013.

From San Jose’s perspective, the moves were meant to inch the Sharks closer to a Stanley Cup after back-to-back conference finals appearances. In Burns, they acquired the marquee top-four blueliner they craved (one that’s going to be around for a long time). In Havlat, they got a winger with more speed than Heatley, an element that was lacking last season. And although Havlat missed the first four games of the season with a shoulder injury, he is easing his way back into form.

“To get that type of defenseman at 26 is very rare, so that’s why we felt we had to be aggressive,” said Wilson.

So far, so good; the Sharks look locked and loaded for another spring run.

“You can’t underestimate the roles of Joe Pavelski and Logan Couture in all this, and our belief that they could take on bigger roles this season,” said Wilson. “Plus, we added Michal Handzus for the third line, which was important.”

The trades were a little trickier from Minnesota’s perspective. The Wild were coming off another disappointing season, the third straight without a trip to the playoffs. Something big had to be done. The intent was to get better now, but also for the future. That was a more difficult challenge, but Fletcher pulled it off.

“I thought we were treading water, at best,” Fletcher said of his frame of mind late last season. “In order to compete, both in the short and long term, we needed to make moves.”

The Burns deal netted him a lot of future assets, plus an immediate impact winger in Setoguchi.

“By trading Brent Burns, who was clearly our most marketable commodity, and a great player, we got the opportunity to get three young, quality assets for one player, and we felt in our position we had no choice to make that deal,” said Fletcher.

It surprised no one that the Wild traded Havlat; it was a move both the player and team were happy to support. The Czech winger just never fit in well in Minnesota, and after his agent publicly complained about his ice time under former coach Todd Richards last season, you knew his future with the Wild was in doubt. Heatley didn’t have a strong postseason with the Sharks, so they were willing to move him if it meant upgrading their speed on the wings.

“It’s not often you trade a 30-year-old All-Star, left shot, right-winger for a 30-year-old, left shot, right-winger,” Fletcher said with a chuckle. “It was purely a hockey trade.”

Heatley had balked at a trade to Edmonton a few years ago after asking for a trade out of Ottawa, but Fletcher knew the winger was OK with Minnesota.

“I had discussions with [Senators GM] Bryan Murray a few years ago about Heatley and there was never any suggestion at that point that it would be an issue if there were a trade with Minnesota,” said Fletcher.

In the end, both clubs addressed their needs; and in a salary-cap era when trades are more difficult to pull off, hats off to both GMs for finding a way.

“I have great respect for Chuck,” said Wilson. “He shared his position with us and what he was trying to accomplish. He was very open about it. These deals helped both organizations.”

Heatley leads the Wild in scoring with 10 points (5-5) in 14 games.

“He’s worked hard, he’s a plus player, we’re seeing a player that’s getting more and more comfortable with each game and he’s starting to get more and more scoring chances and starting to get more and more chemistry and cohesion with his linemates, which now are Mikko Koivu and Guillaume Latendresse,” said Fletcher. “I fully expect once we get to the 20-25 game mark, he’ll be an even more comfortable player than he is now.”

Overall, however, the Wild still only rank 26th in the NHL in goals per game. Their winnings ways are largely from their second-best defensive record.

“We expect more and we need more from out top two lines on a consistent basis,” said Fletcher. “The biggest issue so far has been the power play [ranked 25th]. I liked what I saw Tuesday night in Calgary, but our power play overall has been below average. We’re going to need to score more goals to continue to compete with the best teams in the West. No question.”

ESPN LOADED: 11.11.2011
ANAHEIM, Calif. — Though the Ducks’ losing streak reached six games Wednesday with a 4-2 loss to the Nashville Predators at the Honda Center, they’re starting to learn a little bit more about themselves.

Some of the younger players are getting a chance to step up, gaining valuable ice time with key veterans injured or underperforming.

Rookie Devante Smith-Pelly, just 19, scored his first career goal and received power-play time late in Wednesday’s loss. It was a deflection goal off his leg on a Cam Fowler shot in the final minute of the opening period.

"I thought that’s where he’s played in junior hockey — in front of the net," coach Randy Carlyle said of Smith-Pelly’s net-crashing background.

Rookie Peter Holland, 20, finished the night with a +1 and appeared comfortable with the pace of play. The coach like what he sees out of the Ducks’ 2009 first-round pick.

"Peter Holland is a talented player," Carlyle said. "It's not a question of if he’s going to play in the NHL, it's a question of when. And when is right now. He's getting an opportunity. He's going to play some minutes, going to play on our third line.

"Hopefully he brings his "A" game, because we saw his skill set, we saw his ability, his size and we just think that there's some maturation as a player. Developing into an NHL player is what we're looking for, and we're going to give him an opportunity to do that."

Meanwhile, some veterans are struggling or out with injuries.

Bobby Ryan turned the puck over twice on the power play as part of an 0-for-3 night.

Jason Blake (severed forearm tendon) and George Parros (detached retina) are sidelined indefinitely with injuries, depriving Anaheim of two popular, emotional locker room leaders.

But in the overall picture, the locker room features a strong veteran presence and a group of promising youngsters.

Anaheim fans — and Carlyle — can hope that the young talented players will learn from the older group and will be capable of filling in when needed.

"Regardless of who’s in our out, us young guys are here just to provide energy night," Smith-Pelly said.

It's not just filling minutes of ice time that the younger players are looking to take advantage of. Aware there will be growing pains along the way, Carlyle sees an opportunity for them to become more vocal and assertive both on the ice and in the locker room.

"I can show you faceoff after faceoff where [Ducks opponents'] feet are supposed to be behind the line, and it doesn't happen," Carlyle said. "But if our young guys say anything, then they seem to get their P's and Q's straightened out by the veteran officials as [in] 'Keep it quiet, rookie, do your job."

"To some degree, I think that's unfair, but we have to find a way to go through those things. Those are things that happen to all young players in the league. There's a learning curve and there's an experience factor that takes place."

Fowler, one month shy of his 20th birthday and in his second NHL season, understands that there's enough positive things happening with the Ducks. There's no need to start hanging heads and questioning themselves.

"I don't think it's a confidence issue," said Fowler, who had 10 goals and 40 points as a rookie. "It's more of executing our game plan to the best of our ability. It's obviously something we're lacking right now. We just have to go back to work tomorrow and be ready for Vancouver on Friday."

NOTES: With the Ducks on the power play and carrying the momentum in the second period, Martin Erat drew a controversial penalty shot — which he converted to put the Predators up 3-1— when he was lightly slashed by a backchecking Lubomir Visnovsky. Said Carlyle: "Obvioulsy I have a biased opinion on if it should have been called or should not have been called. If they're going to call penalty shots for people slashing the stick, pushing on the hand and not hooking, then there'll be a lot more penalty shots in the league this year." ... Each member of the Andrew Cogliano / Saku Koivu / Teemu Selanne line was pointless and a -3 ... The Ducks will be host Military Appreciation Night on Friday at Honda Center. The Veterans Day event partners Anaheim with four non-profit groups in a fundraising venture: Operation Homefront, Green Beret Foundation, Defending the Blueline and Military Warriors Support Foundation. players will wear camouflage jerseys during warm-ups and use camouflage stick tape throughout the game. For more information, visit anaheimducks.com.

FOXSports.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
ANAHEIM, Calif. — Though the Ducks’ losing streak reached six games Wednesday with a 4-2 loss to the Nashville Predators at the Honda Center, they’re starting to learn a little bit more about themselves.

Some of the younger players are getting a chance to step up, gaining valuable ice time with key veterans injured or underperforming.

Rookie Devante Smith-Pelly, just 19, scored his first career goal and received power-play time late in Wednesday’s loss. It was a deflection goal off his leg on a Cam Fowler shot in the final minute of the opening period.

"I thought that’s where he’s played in junior hockey — in front of the net," coach Randy Carlyle said of Smith-Pelly’s net-crashing background.

Rookie Peter Holland, 20, finished the night with a +1 and appeared comfortable with the pace of play. The coach like what he sees out of the Ducks’ 2009 first-round pick.

"Peter Holland is a talented player," Carlyle said. "It’s not a question of if he’s going to play in the NHL, it’s a question of when. And when is right now. He’s getting an opportunity. He’s going to play some minutes, going to play on our third line.

"Hopefully he brings his "A" game, because we saw his skill set, we saw his ability, his size and we just think that there’s some maturation as a player. Developing into an NHL player is what we’re looking for, and we’re going to give him an opportunity to do that."

Meanwhile, some veterans are struggling or out with injuries.

Bobby Ryan turned the puck over twice on the power play as part of an 0-for-3 night.

Jason Blake (severed forearm tendon) and George Parros (detached retina) are sidelined indefinitely with injuries, depriving Anaheim of two popular, emotional locker room leaders.

But in the overall picture, the locker room features a strong veteran presence and a group of promising youngsters.

Anaheim fans — and Carlyle — can hope that the young talented players will learn from the older group and will be capable of filling in when needed.

"Regardless of who’s in our out, us young guys are here just to provide energy night," Smith-Pelly said.

It’s not just filling minutes of ice time that the younger players are looking to take advantage of. Aware there will be growing pains along the way, Carlyle sees an opportunity for them to become more vocal and assertive both on the ice and in the locker room.

"I can show you faceoff after faceoff where [Ducks opponents'] feet are supposed to be behind the line, and it doesn’t happen," Carlyle said. "But if our young guys say anything, then they seem to get their P’s and Q’s straightened out by the veteran officials as [in] ‘Keep it quiet, rookie, do your job.’

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FOXSports.com LOADED: 11.11.2011
Daniel Alfredsson is a funny guy. He has to be considering the date he’s set to return after suffering a concussion over a week ago against the Rangers. It’s shaping up that Alfredsson will be back tomorrow night for Ottawa in Buffalo against the Sabres.

Tomorrow just happens to be November 11, 2011. 11/11/11 if you’re writing that down on a school test or signing a contract. Alfredsson of course also wears the number 11. Somewhere there’s someone that saw the Jim Carrey movie 23 and they’re having an awful flashback to having seen a terrible movie.

For Ottawa, they’ll be having flashbacks to having their captain back on the ice and trying to be an offensive force for them once again. With four goals and three assists this season in 10 games, there have been glimpses of the old Alfie out there already. They’ll have to hope his concussion recovery went perfect so as to not hamper the soon-to-be 39 year-old’s game.
Taylor Hall, Tyler Seguin

If you’ve missed the fever pitch that was the Taylor Hall vs. Tyler Seguin debate that raged before the 2010 draft, today is your lucky day. With the Oilers in Boston to take on the Bruins, we’ll get to relive the fun of the debate all over again by seeing the two top picks from that draft face off against each other.

The difference between when they faced each other last season and this one is that they’re both finally primary players for their teams. Seguin has evolved into one of Boston’s best scoring threats. With eight goals and seven assists, he’s the Bruins’ top guy in points. Not bad for a 19 year-old kid on the defending Stanley Cup champions.

Hall, meanwhile, is picking up where he left off last season and now he’s teamed up on a line with his fellow youngsters in Jordan Eberle and 2011 top pick Ryan Nugent-Hopkins. While Nugent-Hopkins is getting all the headlines this year (he’s second on the Oilers in scoring), Hall continues just roll along and do his thing.

While the Oilers and Bruins will forever be compared thanks to these two players thanks to wondering if they each made the right choice in the draft, they’re both at least making sure their teams aren’t having any regrets for the time being. Here’s to hoping the kids put on a show tonight.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 11.11.2011
By now you already know about how the Flyers opted to counterattack the Lightning’s 1-3-1 defensive alignment. By not attacking it all and stalling with the puck in their own end, the Flyers managed to create a fevered debate about who is right and wrong in this whole situation and the truth is everyone should be shouldering the blame.

Guy Boucher’s strategy is nothing new by him. He’s used the 1-3-1 since he’s coached in juniors and it frustrated the hell out of teams there to the point they’d do the same thing the Flyers did. Obviously, the critics of his defensive scheme are many. Chris Pronger wondered aloud (very loud) after the game why anyone would pay to see something that wasn’t hockey.

Even Boucher doesn’t have a supporter in legendary coach Scotty Bowman. Bowman was in attendance for last night’s display of civil disobedience and tactical play and felt that the league has to do something about Boucher’s scheme capping off his thoughts saying, “This used to be the fastest game on ice.” That’s big talk coming from the coach who used the “left wing lock” to shut teams down.

Boucher’s scheme runs sour because his 1-3-1 setup doesn’t have the lead forechecker do any pressuring of the puck carrier at all. Instead they sit in the neutral zone and wait, clogging things up and making it difficult to break through. By not challenging the play, that takes the spirit out of the game. Laying in wait is a perfectly legal strategy, but it’s a brutally boring one for what’s meant to be an exciting game.

source: The Flyers aren’t blameless here though. Peter Laviolette is the first coach to seemingly take a stand on things and while he says his own attack scheme is based on having a forechecker pressure the play, that’s a coy explanation for actively causing a disturbance. By not bearing down and forcing Tampa to action, the Flyers take even more blame in this by making a game-slowing defense into a game-stopping situation. Famed coach Roger Neilson would’ve been proud of Laviolette’s curious stand.

Because of that, the threat of killing the pace of the game will make the NHL Board of Governors have to discuss things at the GM meetings next month. The last thing the league wants is a return of the “dead puck” era and see their product ground down into a mind-numbing bore fest.

Every team traps in their own different ways so blaming that in general is wrong. Regardless of who you support in this debate, the NHL will be forced to craft an answer for how to handle this.
Joe Pavelski is a guy that everyone can like. He shined for America in the Olympics, he’s always the clutch guy for the San Jose Sharks, and now he’s even going to help you find your lost dog.

Such is the case for a little dog name Cocoa that was lost and away from her home. As CSNBayArea.com’s Kevin Kurz finds out, Pavelski was more than happy to help the little guy find his way back to his owner with some assistance from his own dog, his wife, and their babysitter.

Pavelski’s dog had a surprise visitor when running around their backyard and it turned out to be the same dog that was on a missing poster given to their babysitter just a few days before that. Sure enough, they called the number on the flyer and Cocoa and their owner were reunited.

If a story like that isn’t cute enough and cool enough to warm up your heart this morning, I don’t know what to tell you. If you’d like to see adorable photos of the dog and of Joe Pavelski and his wife with the happy little guy, checking out the dog owner’s blog is where you’ll get your “Awww!” for the day.

And now for Joe Pavelski’s next trick he’ll either save a kitten from a fire or just win the Sharks the Stanley Cup, both would be truly miraculous occurrences.
If you think the Toronto Maple Leafs are worried about James Reimer, there’s no way they can compete with the worries of his mother.

Dave Feschuk of the Toronto Star caught up with Marlene Reimer to find out how her boy is doing in recovering from what the Leafs are saying are whiplash effects. Reimer has missed the Leafs’ last eight games and their hot streak has gone away with Reimer’s health. Is it whiplash though? Mrs. Reimer says she’s worried it’s a concussion.

“That’s the frustrating part for us — not knowing what it is, and why they’re not calling it a concussion when they say ‘concussion-like symptoms,’” Marlene Reimer said. “Like, how is that not a concussion? … The initial test showed him to be clear of a concussion. But as it goes on, it’s kind of mystifying. He’s okay some days. And some days he’s definitely not okay.”

If there’s one thing the Leafs and anyone in hockey should know it’s to not upset mom. You know how a mother gets when she’s worried over her child and you can’t blame her in this instance especially since it wouldn’t be his first concussion. Reimer’s first came when he was just 16 years-old.

The other side of things here is that she’s also a mom and not James’ doctor. Whether or not Reimer is concussed that’s up to the Leafs to disclose it. For now we wait to hear what Reimer’s status is and when he’ll get back, but the Leafs better step on it, you don’t want to see mom when she goes from upset to angry.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 11.11.2011
PHT’s Morning Skate takes a look around the world of hockey to see what’s happening and what we’ll be talking about around the NHL world and beyond.

Jeff Miller of the Orange County Register adds some fuel to the Ducks-Preds rivalry after a 4-2 Preds win via Twitter saying, “Keep it classy, bumpkins.” (@jeffmillerOCR)

Tyler Dellow is on the job again. This time he discovers a court case about former NHL'er Garrett Burnett getting busted for steroids. Georges Laraque would like to talk to him. (mc79hockey)

Chicago’s John Scott is still looking for someone to dance with. Dance with their fists that is. (ESPN Chicago)

Andrei Markov is hitting the road with the Canadiens. No, he’s not even close to playing. (Sun Media)

The Bruins are wise to the Oilers’ success so far this year. Good thing or else they might get run out of the barn. (Edmonton Journal)

Matt Carkner is skating again for Ottawa but he’s not close to returning and getting rough with opponents. (Senators Extra)

Colin Fraser’s controversial route to Los Angeles via semi-bogus trade from Edmonton finally comes to life as he’s set to join the lineup. (L.A. Kings Insider)

Steve Ott isn’t hitting the road with the Dallas Stars. A little less aggravation for their opponents’ fans will be nice for them. (Dallas Morning News)

New Blue Jackets forward Mark Letestu is thankful for his time in Pittsburgh. Hope he took a lot of pictures, chances of joy in Columbus are pretty low. (Empty Netters)

Mike Cammalleri is confident the goals will come in Montreal. He’d better hope so or else it’ll sound like, “Et le BOOOOO!” up there. (Montreal Gazette)

After clearing waivers, Mattias Ritola is apparently taking his talents to MODO in the Swedish league. (Lightning Strikes)

Finally, check out Nashville rookie Craig Smith getting tricky with Jonas Hiller and banking one in from behind the goal line. (NHL)
The Kings are looking for everywhere for offense—literally, everywhere

Mike Halford
Nov 10, 2011, 7:10 PM EST

With just 12 goals scored in their last six games, the Los Angeles Kings are looking for added offense.

Just not sure they’re looking in the right places.

Prior to tonight’s game against Vancouver, Kings head coach Terry Murray said that Trent Hunter will be back in the lineup for the first time in 11 days and that Colin Fraser will make his Kings debut after being out for six months. They’ll replace Kevin Westgarth and Brad Richardson, once again shaking up L.A.’s bottom two lines. Jarret Stoll will center Kuye Clifford and Hunter while Ethan Moreau will center Trevor Lewis and Fraser.

“Quite simply, we’re looking to get some scoring going here, get some depth,” Murray explained to LA Kings Insider. “Hunter is a guy who, historically, has provided some scoring in the league. He’s got a heavy shot. He can give us second and third opportunities just by getting the puck on net with that heavy shot of his. We hope that we can recover some of those loose pucks and that good things will happen.”

“Historically” is a good way of putting it with Hunter, because it happened a long time ago. After scoring 20-plus goals in two of his first three years, he’s spent the last few seasons injured (with decreasing goal totals.) Hunter’s scored just 25 times in his last 138 games.

As for Fraser — can’t imagine expectations are high. He’s scored 16 goals in 224 career games and is a bang-crash energy guy at best. That said, he couldn’t produce much less than the Kings’ other fourth-liners: Moreau, Lewis, Richardson, Westgarth and Hunter have combined for a measly four points this year, all of them assists.

The Kings are dangerously close to being the most top-heavy team in the NHL. Almost all the offense is coming from Anze Kopitar, Justin Williams, Mike Richards, Dustin Brown and Simon Gagne — the blueline production has been minimal (Jack Johnson and Drew Doughty have just 11 points between them) and secondary scoring from the bottom-six forwards nonexistent.

Remember, this is a team that lost 75 points from last season in Wayne Simmonds (now with Philly), Michal Handzus (now in San Jose) and Alexei Ponikarovsky (now in Carolina). That production isn’t easily replaced — something the Kings are starting to figure out.
The National Hockey League has released its official ballot for the 2012 All-Star Game. It includes 127 players — 18 goalies, 36 defensemen and 73 forwards — with voting set to begin on Monday, Nov. 14.

And when voting begins on Monday, you'll have the opportunity to send three members of the Columbus Blue Jackets to Ottawa for all the festivities!

Rick Nash, Jeff Carter and RJ Umberger all made the ballot. You can make a case for Nash being there because he leads the team in scoring. You can make a case for Carter because he’s been an All-Star before. And you can make a case for Umberger because…the league had a quota for guys named RJ? That’s all I got.

See, Umberger’s not just having a bad year. He’s having a terrible year (1G-4A-5PTS, minus-2) on a terrible team. He’s currently being outscored by two CBJ defensemen: Aaron Johnson (who is four points away from tying his career high of 10) and Grant Clitsome (hehe, Clitsome.)

I’m all for equal representation at the All-Star game. I also realize this might be Columbus' lone highlight of the season (the Blue Jackets will be in highlights, of course, like Jamie Benn’s goal.)

But aren’t there some deserving guys that got left off the ballot?

Yep, sure are.

With that said, here are PHT’s All-Star Ballot Snubs.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins: This may be intentional as there are no rookies on the ballot. (Last year the All-Star weekend featured a YoungStars game between rookies and sophomores, though Carolina’s Jeff Skinner got to compete in the big game.) RNH has 6G-6A-12PTS — more than Nash and Los Angeles’ Mike Richards.

David Legwand: Point-a-game player (14PTS, 14GP) for the fifth-place team in the West. Tied for 22nd overall in league scoring. Plays 19 minutes a night. NB: Despite being 13 points clear of Columbus, Nashville has the same number of players on the ballot.

Marc-Andre Bergeron: Bergeron leads all NHL defensemen in scoring. This requires no further explanation.

Jimmy Howard: Jimmy’s 6-3-1 so far with a 1.79 GAA. Jimmy’s save percentage is .928. Jimmy doesn’t understand why he’s not one of 18 goalies nominated. Jimmy definitely thinks he should be there over Jaroslav Halak. Jimmy’s actually okay with this snub, though. Jimmy might take the family on vacation during the break. Jimmy’s been looking at places in Maui. Anyway, good talk. Jimmy’ll see you around.

Niklas Backstrom/Josh Harding: Minnesota has the league’s second-lowest GAA — shouldn’t at least one of its goalies be on the ballot? If I had to pick, I’d probably go with Backstrom because he’s played more (nine starts to Harding’s five) and his stats are pretty solid: 2.05 goals-against and a .926 save percentage. Maybe Harding just canceled him out of the equation.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 11.11.2011
Dustin Penner is the Charlie Brown of Los Angeles. In a city filled with sunshine, there’s always a rain cloud hanging over his head.

Case in point: Helene Elliott of the L.A. Times just tweeted a scoring change that took away one of Penner’s two assists in Tuesday's 4-3 win over Nashville. Penner got the first assist on Simon Gagne’s game-winning goal and was originally credited with the second assist on Mike Richard's marker. But the Richards assist has since been awarded to Kings D Willie Mitchell — leaving Penner with one point on the night, not two.

And as Elliott notes: "[This] means Penner did not have first multi-point game as a King. Tonight will be his 33rd game with Kings."

Granted, this a pretty small issue. Insignificant even. If you were to ask Penner about it, he'd likely reply with "We got the two points, so I’m okay with getting just one," or some less-clever banality (mine was rather clever.) Players are supposed to give the impression they're not concerned about individual statistics, even if they are.

But this isn't so much about numbers — it's about breaks, and how Penner can’t catch one. The good almost always involves some kind of bad.

I mean, consider what Kings GM Dean Lombardi said about him earlier this week. He praised Penner for working hard, getting chances and making an effort…by saying this:

"Hey, you’ve just got to keep working through it. This is a guy who has done it before. We’ve got to find a way to get it out of him," Lombardi told Rich Hammond of LA Kings Insider. "The one thing, to his credit, he’s not in elite shape but he certainly made the effort to get in average shape."

Nice compliment. Ivan Lendl thinks that was a solid backhand.
Leafs fans, rejoice – James Reimer should be playing hockey in no time.

Reimer’s agent, Ray Petkau, told TSN that Reimer (concussion symptoms…but not a concussion) passed his baseline testing “with flying colors.”

Presumably that’s a good thing and not, “He got off the couch and saw flying colors.”

Petkau also gave the franchise a vote of confidence for the way it’s handled the young goalie’s injury.

“We are 100 per cent confident the Leafs are handling this situation well and that includes James, his family and all involved,” he said.

I gather the “his family” part was in response to Mother Reimer’s earlier comments.

There’s still no timetable set for his return. (Tired of reading that sentence yet, hockey fans?)

The Leafs are in St. Louis tonight. They host Ottawa and Phoenix on Saturday and Tuesday, respectively.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 11.11.2011
CNN/Sports Illustrated / VIEW FROM THE ICE Andy Murray is hardly singing the Blues at Western Michigan

Darren Elliot

So, Ken Hitchcock replaces Davis Payne behind the bench in St. Louis and one career coach is back in the NHL, where most who step behind the bench aspire to ply their trade. But there are only 30 such jobs in the league, so head coaching lifers go where the next opportunity/challenge presents itself. Some, like Hitchcock, get multiple chances at the NHL level to make a difference in various cities. Others never make it back or simply choose another direction. And while their coaching journeys are not intertwined directly, this tale has a distinct Blues thread running through it.

Hitchcock replaced the man who replaced Andy Murray -- a vagabond himself who is now a first-year NCAA coach at Western Michigan University. Last weekend, his fourth-ranked Broncos (who are 6-1-3 overall, 4-1-1 in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association, as of this writing) traveled to Ann Arbor to take on Red Berenson's third-ranked Michigan Wolverines. The two teams didn't disappoint, splitting the weekend series, with Murray's charges winning in dramatic fashion, 3-2, by virtue of a goal-mouth scramble marker in the final minute of game one.

On-ice drama aside, the meeting between two former St. Louis Blues coaches -- Berenson likewise coached them, winning the Jack Adams Award as the NHL's coach of the year in 1981 -- was the first ever at the collegiate level. Berenson took over at his alma mater in 1984 and has been there ever since, running one of the most successful programs in the nation. His is a different story than most because Berenson was a pioneer as a college player making the NHL ranks back in the '60's. After playing 987 NHL games, he took a conventional path into coaching as a retired player by joining the Blues' staff as an assistant. Six year later, he broke from convention again and his tenure began at Michigan.

Murray's route to becoming a college bench boss was more circuitous, including tours with the LA Kings and assistant duties with the Hershey Bears of the AHL, which led to the same role in the NHL with the Philadelphia Flyers and later the Minnesota North Stars and Winnipeg Jets. Murray has international experience on his resume as well. He's coached in Switzerland on two different occasions and headed up Canada's national team program from 1996 to '98.

If that isn't varied enough, Murray has also coached school-based teams before: in the late seventies at Brandon University and one season at Shattuck St. Mary's prep in Minnesota, the post he held before the Kings gave him his first NHL head coaching job.

His move from prep to the NHL certainly was more unique than his ending up at Western Michigan after the NHL. When pressed, Murray confessed, "Coaching college hockey was always on my bucket list. I've always lived life to try to do it all. Well, here I am."

In Murray's case, it isn't as if U.S. college hockey was foreign to him. All three of his children played it: Brady at North Dakota, Sarah at Minnesota-Duluth, Jordan at Wisconsin, and all are now playing professionally. As Murray puts it, "I put it out there that coaching college was something that appealed to me. When Jeff (Blashill, WMU coach) took the assistant coaching position with the Detroit Red Wings, things began to happen. Some former players of mine from the NHL approached me to gauge my interest (in Western Michigan). But Jamaal Mayers (a WMU alum) was the one who said 'coach, we need you.' That was it."

And that's it: Another stop along the way in a career of giving it his all in trying to do it all. After all these varied years of experience, are there any surprises for Murray at this level?

"No, not really," he says. "My kids prepared me for all of the 'other stuff' that goes along with coaching a college team. Even with the warning, I'm adjusting to the administrative side of it. But the atmosphere at the games and the commitment of the athletes on and off the ice is truly amazing."

Indeed. This coming weekend's home series against Michigan State (the games are Friday and Saturday nights) are nearly sold out.

The players, too, had to adjust to having a new coach after just one season under Blashill. Sophomore Chase Balisee, who grew up in California, remembers Andy Murray behind the Kings' bench. "It was a shock at first when we heard coach Blashill was leaving. Then it was unbelievable when we found out that coach Murray was coming."

Balisee feels his team has "picked right up the way we finished last season," which saw the Broncos vie for the CCHA title and go on to the NCAA Midwest Regional. "There hasn't been too much that's different. We're just excited for the season."

So too is Andy Murray -- back behind the bench where he belongs. He gets off the NHL coaching carousel that Ken Hitchcock is still riding and the one Red Berenson opted out of oh-so-many years ago. They all have ties to the St. Louis Blues, but the real bond is that all three are doing what they want to do, and for Murray, his lifelong pursuit has him in Kalamazoo with a checkmark beside WMU on his bucket list.

CNN/Sports Illustrated LOADED: 11.11.2011
BOSTON -- We'd like to begin by thanking Philadelphia Flyers head coach Peter Laviolette for the free seminar he conducted Wednesday night in Tampa, revealing to the hockey world this salient fact: The trap is boring.

Where would the game be without Peter Laviolette? No doubt wandering in darkness without a forecheck or a flashlight, forever ignorant of the fact that coaches like Tampa's Guy Boucher value winning over entertainment value.

We can only be thankful that Laviolette had Chris Pronger slow the game down to our level, so the rest of us could recognize what Prof. Laviolette had been able to detect at game speed: That Tampa plays a 1-3-1.

"They have a set forecheck in the neutral zone, so we have a set breakout," Laviolette told reporters in Tampa after Thursday's game. "As soon as we get some pressure, we'll get into our routes. ... They should come after us. Otherwise, we can just stand there."

Well, they CAN just stand there -- if being part of the problem is going to be Laviolette's grand contribution to the game of hockey. But we're not sure how that furthers the goal of scoring, and by extension, winning. (Which, by the way, Philadelphia did not do Wednesday.)

One would think, with a brilliant tactician like Laviolette holding the chalk, the Flyers might be provided with a system of attack that exploited Boucher's risk-averse trap. But perhaps Laviolette's ploy was not aimed at instructing the hockey world on how boring Boucher's game plan is?

Could it be that it was simply an admission that the Flyers coach has no answer for the Lightning's defence?

So, behind the veil of self-righteousness and "keeper of the game" sanctimony, what Laviolette has really admitted Wednesday in Tampa was, "I can't devise a system to beat this system under the existing National Hockey League rules."

Tampa is 8-5-2. So five other guys out there have figured out a way to deal with it, Pete.

Look, no one is standing around in admiration of Guy Boucher this morning. Guys like him, Jacques Lemaire, Ken Hitchcock when he was coaching the obstructionist Dallas Stars... They are, at worst, bad for the game, and at best, conflicting forces.

They sell the game in their own markets, because winning is the best sales pitch -- no matter how it is accomplished. But they do/did so at the expense of the game's greater good. They ruin the game for everyone else, by draining it of its speed and skill.

Lemaire's trap was dependent on obstruction; on "getting a stick on him" as a player made his way into and through the neutral zone.

In response, the NHL spent hundreds of man-hours aimed at devising a rule to outlaw the trap, but was unable to accurately define an "illegal defence" penalty, the way they have in the National Basketball Association.

So instead, the NHL took the teeth out of the old trap by eliminating obstruction and taking out the red line. It has worked well enough, though we knew a time would come that someone like Boucher -- and every other coach in the NHL, because they all trap to a degree -- would find a way to return the game to what Mario Lemieux once referred to as "a garage league."

There are tactics that exist, however, that can pry a trap open far enough for a player to dart through with the puck. Then the pendulum swings, and a group of Tampa forwards who are standing still are apt to take a penalty on a speedy Philly puck carrier.

Score on the resulting powerplay and you've got the lead, and like Tylenol for a headache, the surest way to stop your opponent from trapping is to get ahead of him on the scoreboard.

But, either Laviolette does not have the confidence in his team to use speed and skill to attack the trap. Or (gasp) he hasn't game-planned a way to do it.

The latter is highly unlikely, however. Because the Flyers coach is, as we are all aware, one of -- if not THE -- sharpest minds in the game.

Don't believe it? Just ask him.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 11.11.2011
Before the Sharks traded him to Minnesota on June 24, Devin Setoguchi lived with teammate Torrey Mitchell for four years in San Jose. They knew each other intimately, right down to their underwear size – both large.

Mitchell said he could have sworn over the past couple years he had bought about 15 pairs of those lululemon boxer briefs everyone wears these days, but when he came back to San Jose for the season, he had only three. He called Setoguchi.

"I was like, ‘Dude,’ ” said Mitchell with a smile a couple of weeks ago. "I was like, ‘You stole them. I don’t have any – like, none.’ He claims it’s not [him], but I’m going to check the color when he gets to San Jose and see what color he’s wearing, because I know what color I bought.

Apparently – hopefully – Mitchell was just taking a playful jab at his old buddy through the media ahead of their reunion. Setoguchi half-laughed, half-frowned and wondered about a Gucci watch he was missing.

But that isn’t the only dirty laundry being aired as Setoguchi and Dany Heatley return to San Jose. Setoguchi was stunned when the Sharks traded him shortly after he signed a one-year deal with them. Heatley was stunned when they shipped him to Minnesota not long afterward. Even though they’re doing fine in Minnesota – the Wild is fourth in the West, two spots ahead of the Sharks – they’re still adjusting.

"I’m sure it really stings a bit," said Sharks winger Ryane Clowe of his close friend Heatley. "Just the fact that he loved San Jose so much. He loved the guys. He really wanted to do well here. … We still talk a lot. He enjoys Minnesota. It’s just, it doesn’t matter how much he likes Minnesota. He misses the guys. He loved it here. It’s a transition. Same with Seto."

Setoguchi grew up a Shark. He was drafted eighth overall by San Jose in 2005, and he broke into the NHL in 2007-08. Mitchell said Setoguchi matured more and more each year – if not off the ice, then in the dressing room, learning how to move on from good games and bad games like team leaders Patrick Marleau and Joe Thornton.

"I think he got a lot better with that," Mitchell said, "and now he has to be." In San Jose, Setoguchi was one of the guys. In Minnesota, he’s one of The Guys. He was expected to score before, but instead of a complementary piece, he’s now supposed to be a primary weapon. The 24-year-old has four goals and eight points in 14 games.

"I think it’s a point in my career where I can step up and accept more responsibility as a player," Setoguchi said. "Obviously I’ve got to take on a higher role, a higher responsibility. But as a player, who doesn’t want that? You want to be a more-minute guy. You want to be the guy who gets put on the ice in the last minute. You want to be the guy on the power play to score. It’s been good so far. Just got to keep going.”

Mitchell smiled.

"That’s probably a positive thing, but a little bit more of an adjustment as far as pressure goes for him," Mitchell said. "It’s fine now. He’s gotten off to a good start. He loves it there. But we’ll see in the spring, you know? … He’s definitely one of the guys that’s going to have to step up if they’re going to make the playoffs and they’re going to have success."

Heatley came to San Jose in 2009 after a rocky departure from the Ottawa Senators. A two-time 50-goal scorer, he became one of the Big Three with Marleau and Thornton. He scored 30 goals his first season in San Jose, then dipped to 26 last season, his lowest total for a full season since he was a rookie. More importantly, he scored only five goals in 32 playoff games with the Sharks.

Even though Heatley played through injuries – and was considered great in the room, despite his reputation in Ottawa – the consensus was that he couldn’t skate well enough, especially when the pace picked up in the playoffs. At age 30 – not to mention at his size, 6-foot-4 and 220 pounds – the question was whether he had lost a step or whether he had stayed the same while the rest of the league had gotten faster. He decided to work on his skating. When he was traded on July 3, he had even more reason to do it.

"He was really disappointed last year, and he wanted to put in a good summer and prove people wrong, and I think he was a little bit shocked, like we all were," Clowe said. "I think he has something to prove this year. He heard a lot about that, you know, ‘Dany Heatley, the game has kind of caught up to him.’"

Heatley shrugged it off. He said he has skated more in the off-season as he has gotten older, and he did some power skating a couple of times a week and studied himself on video.

"I wouldn’t say I’m ticked," Heatley said. "I think throughout your career you’re going to have ups and downs. People are going to say good things, and people are going to say bad things. I think the motivation for the summer was more for me, to get back to how I feel I can play."

One NHL scout said he felt Heatley was still a step behind where he used to be. But Heatley said, "I feel I’ve improved there a little bit," and Clowe said, "He looks quick again." Heatley has five goals and 10 points in 14 games, putting him on pace for about 29 goals and 58 points. That’s still down from his former production, but he is playing with a weaker supporting cast and leads the team in scoring.

"Last year was kind of a tough year for him overall," Clowe said. "The first year, he was great. Obviously he had a great season, almost 40 goals again, and that’s the level I still think Heater can get to. He can score 40 goals in this league. I’m sure of that.

You know he’d like to get a couple Thursday night.

FIRST PERIOD

When the St. Louis Blues hired Ken Hitchcock to be their head coach on Monday, Detroit Red Wings coach Mike Babcock found some of the media coverage to be … well, the word he used was "interesting."

"Guys are talking about him that haven’t been involved with him for 10 years," said Babcock, one of Hitchcock’s close friends, who spoke to him as often as five times a week while he wasn’t working. "Now, I’d like to think that someone that didn’t know you for 10 years and then met you today, you might have evolved a little bit. Wouldn’t you have?"

Hitchcock is best known for winning the Stanley Cup with the Dallas Stars in 1999 and nearly repeating in 2000. But listen to Hitchcock in his press conference and listen to Babcock, and Hitch isn’t just the same old defensive disciplinarian. And isn’t it, well, interesting how some of the players with whom he once clashed, like Brett Hull, speak so fondly of him now?

"He’s about what’s going on, what’s current, what’s better, what’s not, how to treat people right," said Babcock, who had Hitchcock on his staff when Team Canada won gold at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. "Hitch is a guy who loves his players. … All the players that played for [Scotty Bowman] said he never talked to them, [but] he loved them. He talked to them lots when he was done coaching, I can tell you that. So sometimes when you’re pushing, their perception and reality sometimes is different."

SECOND PERIOD

But how much of their perception was reality? How much has Hitchcock really evolved?

One Hitchcock story: It was March 26, 2009. The Columbus Blue Jackets were cruising through the third period with a 5-0 lead over the Calgary Flames. Somebody made a mistake with the puck.

"And Hitch was just going bananas behind the bench, just so rattled," said Wings defenseman Mike Commodore, an ex-Jacket. "And I yelled at him. I just told him, ‘Calm down! It’s 5-0! This game is over!’ A little bit more colorful than that. I wasn’t pissed at him, but it was just like, ‘Relax. We’re good. We played well this game.’"

Commodore said Hitchcock didn’t say anything about it afterward. He said Hitch didn’t take things personally and was working on loosening up. The Jackets won that game, 5-0, and went on to the first playoff appearance in franchise history – still the only playoff appearance in franchise history. But 59 games into the following season, Hitchcock was fired.

"Sometimes he gets a little … and I love Hitch, but I mean, sometimes he gets a little wound-up when he doesn’t need to be,” said Commodore with a laugh. "If he can just tone that down a little bit, he’d be fine. He is fine. He’s won 500-and-some games. I mean, he’s a great coach. That was just one
thing. If he would just take a deep breath once in a while and just calm down, I think he would be even better.”

Can he, though? Can a man who turns 60 next month, who has won 534 NHL games his way, really just chill out?

“I think Hitch can chill out,” Commodore said. “Yeah, I do.”

Commodore was smiling as he said that.

“I’m smiling because it’s tough,” Commodore continued. “It’s tough changing. That’s how he is, you know what I mean? … But yeah, as things change, you have to make adjustments, just like a player. I mean, you have to make adjustments as you get older. Not only the game changes, but you change.”

THIRD PERIOD

Bowman said Hitchcock is a good coach who has inherited a good team. He said Hitch has always been an excellent tactician who uses his bench well, someone who is demanding, follows up on every detail and gets the best out of his best players. He said Hitchcock would get the Blues organized and hold them accountable at one end of the rink – but it might not be the end of the rink you assume.

“They’re not going to be one-way players,” said Bowman, the coaching legend who has become a friend and mentor of Hitchcock’s. “I think they need to be pushed a little bit probably on the offensive [end]. Right now they’re not scoring as much as I thought they would, but he’s not a guy that just tries to play defense.”

Can Hitchcock push the Blues into the playoffs? It’s going to be a challenge in the Western Conference, especially in the Central Division.

“It’s kind of topsy-turvy,” said Bowman, a senior advisor to the Chicago Blackhawks. “The West is … I see some teams play, they look terrific. And the next thing you know, you look at their record and it’s not much above .500.

“That division, it’s amazing. You’ve got Mike Babcock. You’ve got Joel Quenneville, Barry Trotz. Now you’ve got Ken Hitchcock. I mean, these are guys who have been coaching, all of them, over 10 years. The most experienced coaches seem to be in the one division. You’re not going to fool many of those guys.”

POWER RANKINGS

TOP 6

Dallas 1. Dallas Stars: Even though Sidney Crosby isn’t coming back from his concussion Friday night, the Stars-Penguins tilt is a marquee matchup. The Stars traded James Neal to the Pens last season and lost Brad Richards in free agency, and look at them now. What a moment for GM Joe Nieuwendyk, who goes into the Hall of Fame as a player on Monday.

Edmonton 2. Edmonton Oilers: Suddenly the Oilers are deep. They keep winning even though not all their young studs are starring. Magnus Paajarvi, 20, the 10th overall pick in 2009, has one point in 13 games this season and was scratched Tuesday night in Montreal.

Pittsburgh 3. Pittsburgh Penguins: At least I had been circling the date in pencil. Now I’ll erase “Nov. 11 against Dallas” as Crosby’s potential return. How about Tuesday night against the Colorado Avalanche? Home game. Day off afterwards. No back-to-back games until Nov. 25-26, in fact.


New York Rangers 5. New York Rangers: Marian Gaborik is hot (four goals and seven points in four games), and so are the Rangers (five straight victories). Defenseman Dan Girardi has stood out while Marc Staal has been sitting out with a concussion. He leads the league in average ice time at 27:59.

Minnesota 6. Minnesota Wild: The Wild has allowed one goal or less in five straight games – all victories. Backup Josh Harding looked great in net, then Niklas Backstrom came back and shut out the Flames. Nice dilemma to have.

BOTTOM 6

Carolina 25. Carolina Hurricanes: Captain Eric Staal is last in the NHL at minus-16. The next-lowest guy is Colorado defenseman Jan Hejda at minus-12.

Winnipeg 26. Winnipeg Jets: Defenseman Dustin Byfuglien had a goal and an assist Tuesday night against the Buffalo Sabres. Will that take some of the pressure off, allowing him to concentrate on his positioning and decision-making? Or will that encourage him to take more chances and lead to more mistakes?

Montreal 27. Montreal Canadiens: Erik Cole is finally giving the Habs what they expected when they signed him as a free agent – size, speed and scoring touch on the wing. Still, the Habs have lost back-to-back games after their four-game winning streak. Better pick it up, assistant coaches.

Anahiem 28. Anaheim Ducks: Corey Perry led the NHL with 50 goals last season – 18 more than he ever had before – and won the Hart Trophy as the league’s most valuable player. Now? He has five goals in 15 games, putting him on pace for about 27, the same amount he scored in 2009-10.

New York Islanders 29. New York Islanders: Love it when a coach says he won’t name names and then all but spells them out for you, like when Jack Capuano pointed to “those guys who were minus-2 and minus-3” after Monday night’s 6-2 loss to the Boston Bruins. Go down the box score, and you’ll find the names Mark Eaton, Milan Jurcina, Frans Nielsen, P.A. Parenteau and Brian Rolston.

Columbus 30. Columbus Blue Jackets: Jeff Carter has missed nine games (and counting) with a foot injury. What if this keeps lingering? Do general manager Scott Howson and coach Scott Arniel keep lingering, too, because they haven’t had all their off-season acquisitions in the lineup?

PLUS/MINUS

PLUS: Are the Bruins back? Although they’re technically still 27th in the league standings, they’re not in my Bottom 6 this week because they’re the Cup champs and have won three games in a row by a combined score of 18-5. The hangover isn’t necessarily gone, but at least the B’s are having a moment of clarity.

MINUS: Want to understand the agony of concussions? Follow the Bruins’ Marc Savard on Twitter. “Can’t sleep again…” “Headaches galore man oh man this weather change is killing me…” “Night everyone I hope I can sleep…” “Headaches are normal part of life know but memory still the scariest thing…”

PLUS: Got to admit it. On some level, I loved the Philadelphia Flyers’ stall tactics on Wednesday night, especially when captain Chris Pronger keptragging the puck in his own zone, refusing to attack the Tampa Bay Lightning’s 1-3-1 if the Bolts refused to attack him. It put the Bolts’ boring system on full display, and Pronger played the villain as he does so well. Want the puck? Come get it, cowards.

MINUS: But in the end, the Flyers looked like the cowards. The Bolts can sit back if they want. It’s up to the Flyers to figure out how to beat the system, and the Bolts aren’t exactly impenetrable – 23rd in goals against. Don’t like the trap? Beat it, score and force your opponent to come out of it to play catch-up. The Flyers took a 1-0 lead but lost in overtime, 2-1.

PLUS: One stat sticks out to Scotty Bowman: Ten goaltenders have save percentages of .930 or better. Eight more range from .925 to .929, “It’s hard to believe,” Bowman said. “It used to be if you were over 90 [percent], you’re doing your job. You get a guy at 93 percent, and he’s ninth in the league. I think a big factor now is the goalies. There’s so many of them. I think they can win games by themselves just about.”

MINUS: It’s natural to compare Taylor Hall with Tyler Seguin as their teams play Thursday night, but it’s silly if you forget the context. Yes, Hall, the No. 1 pick in the 2010 draft, has 25 goals and 51 points in 78 games for the Oilers, while Seguin, the No. 2 pick last year, has only 19 goals and 37 points in 87 games for the Bruins. Yes, Seguin has a ring; Hall does not. But they’re night-and-day different – from their styles to their ice time to their teams’ situations.

PLUS: The Red Wings’ offense has fluctuated. After scoring six goals during a six-game losing streak, the Wings have potted 10 in back-to-back victories. But one constant has been goaltender Jimmy Howard, who has a 1.79 goals-against average and .928 save percentage. He’s more patient and reading plays better in his third season as a starter. “I find myself being aggressive at the right times, instead of rushing out on every single shooter,” he said.

MINUS: Sure, Mark Letestu will get more opportunity in Columbus than he did in Pittsburgh after being traded for a fourth-round pick. But going from the Penguins to the Jackets – from one of the top teams in the NHL to the worst – is about as big a minus as there is.
@COTSONIKA "What's it like in the Jackets' dressing room right now? I can't imagine. And I covered the 0-16 Detroit Lions."

I will never forget walking into the Lions' locker room at Lambeau Field on the last day of the 2008 season as a beat writer for the Detroit Free Press. But as brutal and embarrassing as it was for the Lions to become the first NFL team to go 0-16, at least it was over. The worst part might have been earlier in the season when everyone realized the Lions' promising preseason was a mirage. General manager Matt Millen was fired after an 0-3 start, but that wasn't going to solve much in the short term. The situation was beyond bleak. So many games remained.

The Jackets won't go 0-82. But when I tweeted that Saturday night, they were trailing the Flyers after two periods, 8-0. They looked hopeless, and they had to feel like it. Their 9-2 loss and 2-11-1 record somehow didn't spur major changes this week. But even if Howson and Arniel are canned soon, it's clear this team has deep problems that won't be fixed easily, and there are 68 games to go.

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